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A House of Their Own:
Women and Houses in Henry James's Late 1890s Fiction

A Thesis
Presented to
School of English
University of Kent

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Yasuko Tarui

September 2005



F203861

Abstract

This thesis examines Henry James's late 1890s fiction in terms of the heroines' "search for a home." The works that are analyzed are *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *The Other House* (1896), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *In the Cage* (1898), and *The Awkward Age* (1899). The first purpose of this thesis is to point out how, on a naturalistic level, the heroines suffer from a lack of their own living space, and to analyze the plot of each work as recounting the heroine's search for a home that is safe and permanent. The second purpose is to explain the "spatial implications" of each residence. The rooms and houses serve not only as metaphors of the characteristics of their inhabitants but also emerge as significant narrative presences in their own right.

What becomes clear from these analyses is James's pessimism regarding the women's future, because in the end the heroines are either "homeless" or decide to live somewhere by compromise. It is implied that the root of the problem is the breakdown of family relationships, particularly acute in the tensions between parent and child, and also in the failure of the traditional marriage-plot to offer objectively acknowledged endings and solutions. The only final possession of a house in the works of this period lies in the consciousness of their heroines, who remain consequently vulnerable and unfulfilled.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors at the University of Kent, Mr. Stuart Hutchinson and Mr. Henry Claridge, who were always most helpful. Mr. Hutchinson gave me insightful suggestions about particular points in each chapter, while Mr. Claridge advised me about the structure of the whole thesis. I was very lucky to have two such supportive supervisors. Professor Stephen Clark of the University of Tokyo read my thesis and gave me invaluable advice before submission, and I am grateful for his help. I also would like to thank Professor Kenji Nakamura, of Toyo University, Professor Kazuhisa Takahashi and Mr. Clive Collins, of the University of Tokyo, for their guidance and encouragements. Saeko Nagashima kindly told me useful books to read when I was trying to strengthen my thesis plan. I am grateful to all my friends, both in the UK and Japan, particularly: Akiko Kawasaki, Li Jiang, Yuko Ashitagawa, Christine Tsai and Ari Manggong. Finally, thanks to my family for their support in every way.

Notes

1. James's texts cited in this thesis are those of the New York Edition, except *The Other House*, which was not included in it. Although one of the concerns of this study is the time period when the works were composed, the texts of the New York Edition have been chosen as those to be analyzed.
2. Although *The Spoils of Poynton* was published in 1897, it had been written and serialized in 1896, before *The Other House*, therefore the works are treated in that order in this thesis.

Introduction

It was in the New York Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, in 1908, that Henry James introduced the idea of the “house of fiction”:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. [...] The spreading field, the human scene, is the “choice of subject;” the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the “literary form;” but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. (*Literary Criticism*, 1075)

Intriguingly, we shall observe that “the consciousness of the artist” in the works that will be examined becomes “the consciousness of women.” The women are in the house as characters in James’s fiction, but paradoxically, they are also looking into it as “artists” with a “consciousness.” Their concern as “artists” is how much longer they, as characters, can stay in the house, and they, the “artists,” seem as if they are trying to enter and possess the house. They are also trying to see whether the house finally has an objective reality, or whether it is only in their “consciousness.”

James’s identification with his women characters is a topic that is worth exploring. He might have considered himself as an outsider, looking into and trying to possess England/Europe as a vast, historical “house of fiction” through his imagination. We should consider whether, because of this form of estranged identity, James might have

found himself at home in the female consciousness or in that of feminized, de-masculinized men, such as Ralph Touchett and Lambert Strether. He endowed his women characters with an artistic imagination and a central consciousness, and this factor is crucial in my examination of his works.

James writes that the story inheres in the house, that the “choice of subject” is located within it, and the “literary form,” the window, comes in different shapes according to the intention of the author. The choice of subject and literary form are combined by the consciousness of the author as he or she composes a work of fiction. A subject may be sought within the house but there can be no direct access: the events that constitute it can only be observed through the window. That James uses the metaphor of a house to characterize fiction is suggestive, as the works that are treated in this dissertation are full of such “human scenes” based around English houses, and in some cases, the houses’ gardens.

The “sameness of report” refers to an objective reality, which, as James observes, is more difficult to acknowledge than one would think. After a career of over forty years as a novelist, he has reached a belief that objective realism in the novel is not possible, and the only thing one can be sure of is one’s own “consciousness.” During his middle period, in the 1890s, James starts employing the method of the “centre of consciousness,” where the narrator tells the story through the medium of one central character. If there is only one consciousness that one can be sure of in the world, it is more “realistic” to tell the story by identifying oneself with and observing the events through the mind of that person, than by trying to be all-knowing and objective. James’s view of the world as comprised of endless subjectivities, and his disavowal of objective reality is reflected not only in his methods but also in his themes.

In 1880, in a letter to William Dean Howells, James had written that his next novel, *Washington Square*, was “a tale purely American, the writing of which made me

feel acutely the want of the ‘paraphernalia’” (*Letters*, 268) which then existed in Europe but not in America. By “paraphernalia” he presumably refers to the assumptions one might make about life, which have been prepared by tradition, such as marriage, family ties, art, and culture. However, in his fiction in the late 1890s that I shall discuss, James explores the problem of a peculiarly modern dilemma where such premises no longer pertain. This breakdown of assumptions is the breakdown of objective reality.

To support the philosophical base of my discussion, I shall quote here some lines from *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard:

The house, quite obviously, is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space [...] (3).

[I]magination augments the values of reality (3).

[T]he house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream (6).

It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature and poetry to say that we “write a room,” “read a room,” or “read a house” (14).

Thus the individuals’ thoughts, memories and feelings are concentrated over time in the house, and the house is what most excites one’s imaginative consciousness. If we apply Bachelard’s view of the house to James’s, we can say that James observes the individuals’ thoughts and feelings that fill the rooms of English houses. My view is that the human scenes that James writes about spring from the actual conditions of England at the time he was writing. The novels are therefore as much products of attentive observation as creative invention.

This dissertation examines Henry James’s spatial imagination as defined through his treatment of English houses. In the late 1890s, during the years between his

theatrical failure and the “Major Phase,” James composed novels and novellas particularly about the English subjects, set in and near London. They are: *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *The Other House* (1896), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *In the Cage* (1898), and *The Awkward Age* (1899).

Bachelard argues that the house offers a space of protected intimacy. Contrary to this supposition, James’s houses fail to provide protection, particularly to women characters. These works all have a young woman or a girl as the central character, and each of them is deprived of her own space and is constantly searching for a house of her own. It is this lack of space and vulnerability of women that will be addressed in this dissertation. This subject relates to Virginia Woolf’s famous declaration in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929): “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (6). More specifically, it is asserted that she needs “five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door” (158). James’s female characters have less power and ability than Woolf, who is a professional writer and consciously feminist, but they are related to Woolf in that they are endowed with an artistic sensibility. Thus, in Woolf’s writings, one can see that far from comprising mere “paraphernalia,” women’s possession of their own room is a right that they have traditionally lacked. This is the problem that James takes up in his fiction.

In James’s fiction, the problem of homelessness for women arises through lack of money (the telegraphist in *In the Cage*), property law (Mrs. Gereth in *The Spoils of Poynton*), and defective family relations (Maisie in *What Maisie Knew*). Of these reasons, the one most emphasized by James is the breakdown of family relationships, especially those between a parent and a child and between a husband and a wife. In *The Spoils of Poynton*, behind the housing problems of Mrs. Gereth and Fleda in the foreground is their inability to relate to their family, Mrs. Gereth to her son, Owen, and Fleda her father. In *What Maisie Knew*, Maisie is passed around from one house to

another, and does not have a real home, because her parents do not care for her. A similar situation is observed in *The Awkward Age*, where Nanda is virtually driven away from home by her mother. The heroines also cannot solve their problems through the prospect of conventional marriage. They are never finally united with the men they love for various reasons that attest to that breakdown, such as lack of money (Captain Everard in *In the Cage*), uncertainty of character (the Uncle in *The Turn of the Screw*), problems in morality (Owen in *The Spoils of Poynton*) and lack of morality (Vanderbank in *The Awkward Age*). Moreover, these men somehow suffer from weakness, economically, physically, and morally, and they are no more stable than the women characters.

The alternative suggested by James to the defunct parent-child relationship is a pseudo-parent-child relationship, where a biologically unrelated elder person provides the homeless heroine with a pseudo-parental guidance and invites her to live together with them, such as in the cases of Mrs. Gereth and Fleda, Mrs. Wix and Maisie, and Mr. Longdon and Nanda. Another option that James explores is getting a job, as in the case of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* where she finds a way to live at Bly, at least temporarily, by license. Because of the uncertainty of male-female relationships that James emphasizes, the solution is not marriage, except in *In the Cage*, as it was, for example, in Jane Austen's novels.

Richard Gill in *Happy Rural Seat: The English Country House and the Literary Imagination* writes that James "turned again and again to the English country house, [...] because it meant more than a conventional setting: it was a 'local habitation' for many of his own values; a unifying focus to which his multitudinous impressions of the good life might gravitate and from which, in turn, they might be abundantly released; even, at times, a measure of his own disenchantment and a vehicle for expressing his disillusion" (24). He suggests that "[o]f all the country houses in James, Gardencourt

is perhaps the closest to the ideal” (44). This may appear to be a symbol of the goodness of traditional English life in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), but when we remember that it is owned by an American, we realize that it also reflects the author’s disillusionment with the English society. I share Gill’s view that the country house is an important setting for James because it embodies the characters’ values that are projected onto them. As Gill has shown, James viewed the country house as a reminder of the “great good place,” but also portrayed it with a degree of acerbic realism by showing the breakdown of traditional values and describing defunct families. This thesis will go beyond Gill’s analyses of James’s houses by showing the role of the house as particularly related to family relationships, taking into account not only the country houses but also other forms of residences such as houses and apartments in London, and examining James’s works that have not been discussed in terms of houses, such as *The Turn of the Screw*, *What Maisie Knew*, and *In the Cage*.

As stated above, the women characters are searching for a house of their own. Their parents do not provide them the space they need, neither do the men they love. What finally becomes known from James’s works is the modern loss of objective values, shown both in his reference to the “million windows” from which to view the world, and in the uncertainty surrounding the heroines’ lives and the lack of the objectively acknowledged endings and solutions to their problems. The significant factor here is that James makes the heroine serve as the central consciousness, providing a subjective viewpoint in a world of endless conflict of subjectivities, where one may no longer be able to ascribe objective values to anything. Because the heroine is young, homeless, and vulnerable, she often tends to make up stories about her life, to escape from reality and to fantasize about a better life in the hope of rising in society. Her story is incorporated into James’s story, which we read through her consciousness. Here, we become aware of James’s subtle identification with his heroines. As I have remarked

at the beginning, James possibly placed himself within his heroines' consciousness because of his identity as an outsider, and writing about their consciousness was a way of objectifying his own consciousness.

My central emphasis in this study is the strength of naturalistic elements in these works, and James's empathy with the material constraints faced by his heroines. This critical approach is at a certain distance from the "queer" reading that has greatly influenced James criticism for the past ten or fifteen years, which is concerned with his own sexuality and projection of desire. My stance will bring out his aspect as a writer who is more concerned with contemporary social issues than critics of the queer theory have assumed. The heroines' focalization and consciousness are significant, yet they still continue to be determined by material constraints.

In the opening chapter on *The Spoils of Poynton*, we will see that Fleda Vetch exemplifies the type of heroine explained above. She follows Mrs. Gereth from one place to another because she cannot live at home where she does not have a sympathetic relationship with her father. She produces within her mind simulations of other, better possible forms of life; at one time she dreams about living at Poynton with Mrs. Gereth, and at another about living at Ricks with Owen. The complexity of Fleda's consciousness that is a hybrid of such emotional factors as love, morals, aesthetics, intelligence, hope, disappointment, and envy, adds to the depth of the novel. Various problems about people's relationship to houses are raised, which will be important when considering the other novels in later chapters, such as: what are the reasons for Fleda's homelessness? What is each woman's attitude to art, design of houses, and the spoils? If Poynton burns down with the spoils in the end, what does it imply about the significance of art, property, and living space? Is there a meaning in having taste, if it is largely subjective? What is the relationship between a house and the things in it? What kind of space exists in each house? Which house triumphs as embodying

Fleda's final values?

Chapter two will discuss *The Other House*. Women and houses is also a significant theme in this minor novel, because Rose's murder of Effie is motivated by her desire to secure a home at Bounds. Like Fleda, Rose needs to find a place since her parents have died and she hates her stepmother. Although there is another possible heroine, Jean, who is also looking for a destination, Rose paradoxically has more attributes of a heroine in the very act of failing to find a home. Rose makes an important choice between Bounds and Dennis Vidal's house in Hong Kong, which shall be analyzed in depth. I will look at James's problematic presentation of the British colony as unattractive, which gives Rose a believable reason for rejecting it, and argue that James's "literary exploitation" of Hong Kong is in a parallel relationship to the economic exploitation of it by the British imperialists. Furthermore, the contrast between the newness of Bounds and the oldness of Eastmead will be analyzed. This contrast reveals the characters of Tony and Mrs. Beever, as well as the significance of each place as the setting of the three Acts.

Chapter three will examine a young girl's search for a home in *What Maisie Knew*. In this novel, the lack of a proper residence is expressed by the fact that there is no description of the houses where Maisie stays temporarily. She is brought up in a situation where the private and the public are reversed; her privacy is discussed by the public, and she continues to find strangers invading her house. Her divorced parents take her to different houses, but none of them is a "home" for her, therefore she goes on a search for somewhere free from the traditional forms of household. She wants Sir Claude to be her guardian, but ironically, her desire of a home and his domestic tendencies do not bring them together in the end. Attention will be paid to the novel's extensive allusions to the physical locations in contemporary London, and argue that they attest to the fact that Maisie is very much a product of the public, open space of the

town, all the more since she has been denied a home. I will also point out the significance of Maisie's godmother who leaves her money, giving her the possibility of providing a home for herself and Mrs. Wix.

Chapter four will examine *The Turn of the Screw* in terms of the governess's endeavours to know Bly. The governess's lack of experience will be emphasized, which turns the haunted mansion into a school where she learns about new aspects of life. I shall point out the reversal of roles between her and her pupils that results from their difference in the knowledge of Bly. The governess finds the house suffused with the presence of the "ghosts," and she studies each location of their appearances by going there and sometimes placing herself in the exact spots where they have appeared. I shall analyze her search for the "unknown," at the end of which she grows into a more experienced woman. The significance of each location will be examined. Furthermore, I shall interpret the governess's inability to go on top of the tower as showing her failure to conquer Bly. I will also compare the novel to *Jane Eyre* (1847), and consider the reasons why their respective heroines reach a contrastive ending, despite the similarities in their situation. Both take on their first job as a governess at a country house with an absent master and a ghostly presence, and both are looking for a home. In the two novels' different treatment of the theme of women and houses and of the question of ghosts, we can discover in which ways *The Turn of the Screw* may be considered as modernist and in which others as more traditionally realist.

Chapter five will be on *In the Cage*, and I will explain how the theme of women and houses is related to the question of class in late nineteenth-century London. The telegraphist has complex feelings toward her upper-class customers; she detests them and at the same time envies them. The heroine competes with Mrs. Jordan about which of them has a more intimate relationship with aristocratic people. The expression "the social door" will be important, because, as I will try to show, the

possibility of inter-class socialization is tested in whether the upper-class people will invite working-class people into their houses. The chance of the telegraphist's intimate association with Captain Everard is therefore tested in whether she is allowed to enter his apartment. I will pay particular attention to the contrast between Mayfair, where the Captain lives, and Chalk Farm, where the telegraphist will live if she marries her fiancé. She constantly wonders about where she will find a home as she contrasts the two places. I will also consider the changes that were occurring in class structure, and the distance between them, as can be observed in the novella; for instance the fact that there is no description of the upper-class people's houses because the telegraphist, who is the central consciousness, never enters one.

Finally, in Chapter six, I will analyze *The Awkward Age* by calling attention to the importance of its parallel presentation of city and country houses, as well as Nanda's search for a home. She is deprived of a home because she is silently pressed by her mother to leave the house. Her subsequent search coincides with the process of the disintegration of her mother's social circle. In the novel, three London houses appear—Mrs. Brook's, Vanderbank's, and Tishy Grendon's, and three country ones—Beccles, Mertle, and the Hovel. Although the novel is set mostly in London, especially in Mrs. Brook's drawing-room, Beccles and Mertle are also extremely significant because important events occur there that directly influence the plot toward the determination of where Nanda should go. The contrast between Beccles and Mertle will also be observed, as totally different types of country houses. The ending where Nanda decides to relocate to Beccles with Mr. Longdon is problematic, because while it saves her from homelessness, Beccles appears too "pure" to lead to anywhere. This sense of impasse may be observed in all the novels that I examine in this thesis, and will be revealed as a common problem to James's heroines.

Before examining the novels, I will again consider my topic by taking into

account the ideas of Philippe Hamon, who has written about the relationship between literature and architecture:

For nineteenth-century writers, architecture was not merely the framework or punctuation of a given space or the scenery that served as the backdrop for plot. [...] Rather, it produced, permitted, and concretized not only a concept of history (be it collective or individual) but also, the staging of everyday life and of those rituals which expose social behavior. These rituals are founded on impalpable legal and ethical distinctions expressed through such oppositions as movable/immovable, private/public, sacred/profane, inside/outside, and privacy/exhibition. The act of dwelling involves living within these “distinctions” and inhabiting a system of values. These distinctions make up the preferred material of nineteenth-century literature: on the one hand, manners and morals (*moeurs*), or one’s social relationship to others [...]; and on the other hand, the subject or the self’s relationship to itself through memory and recollection, as embodied in lyric poetry. (4-5)

Hamon gives Balzac and Zola as examples of the writers who dealt with this kind of relationship to society. Balzac and Zola are also known to have influenced James, but James is most often not considered as a “realist,” or a novelist involved with social issues. I wish to contest this view by focusing on young women’s deprivation of their own space in his fiction of the late 1890s. James’s women characters relate to others in their everyday “rituals” taking place within houses, and at the same time are connected to society itself as they tackle the social issue that I call women’s housing problem. For James’s heroines, this is to a large extent a problem of the family, but it also concerns the society as a whole, if we remember that middle-class women did not have a means to obtain a house by work, and they had to rely on marriage as the most

effective means of securing it.

Hamon explains the relationship between the characters and their dwellings in the following manner:

[The] notions of *constraints* and *values* at the foundation of all ideological systems constitute the privileged material of the literary text in general and of the novel in particular. Hence the novel, through its references to architectural articulations, would over and over again put this normative material to narrative use. This is done in two ways. On the one hand, the novel presents its characters' various dwellings as part of a qualitatively oriented itinerary, in other words, as a path leading to social ascension or decline. [...] These various staggered places are given the status of objects to be conquered, defended, destroyed, and known, and therefore acquire the status of objects worthy of attraction or repulsion. Nevertheless, the novel presents the building as a sort of collective actant: a structure that *manipulates* the actors of the story. (32-33)

Hamon illustrates that the relationship between characters and "architectural objects" is reciprocal, and we recognize this kind of mutual redefinition in James' heroines. The most notable example is the relationship in *The Turn of the Screw*, where the governess thinks of Bly as a house to be conquered in her hope of succeeding in her job, gaining confidence to live in a country estate and rising in society, but she is so caught up in her endeavours that she is controlled by the location and its ghostly presences. For the other heroines as well, the house is an object to be conquered, but their desire in turn makes them subject to dominance by the house. In the following chapters, I shall analyze the significance of each house, and how they actually "act" on the characters. For example, Mrs. Gereth is possessed by a desire to make Poynton more beautiful, and even cuts down her living expenses to buy expensive furniture. When she learns that

she must lose Poynton, the disappointment is so overwhelming that she is unable to act rationally. Also, Mrs. Beever in *The Other House* learns about her conservative tendency in her negotiations with the drawing-room at Eastmead; that is, she confirms her belief in the safety of keeping things as they are, as she struggles between her duty and taste in consideration of what to do with the furniture left by her mother-in-law.

Finally, I will refer to Hamon's theory concerning the meaning or function of what he terms an "architectural object" in literature:

For literature or for the literary text the architectural object (in the most general sense: city, garden, house, machine, clothing, furniture, building, or monument) is endowed with a particularly rich and complex semantic status. First of all, it can figure as a *hermeneutical object*: to the extent that it involves an *inside* (always more or less hidden) that necessarily differentiates itself from an *outside* (more apparent, exposed and visible) [...]. [...] [S]trategies for gaining knowledge (*savoir*), strategies for obtaining information by the actors in a story, and strategies for gaining access to truth [...] will naturally be deployed in texts that feature architecture. Secondly, the literary text can apprehend any architectural object as if it were a differential, *discriminating object* that analyzes space through interfaces and proximities or through partitions and contiguities. [...] Therefore, this kind of architectural object easily organizes the strategies of desire and the strategies of intentionality (*vouloir-faire*) of the actors in narrative scenarios. [...] Finally, in the third place, literature could conceive of every architectural object first and foremost as a *hierarchical object*—a system, or better yet, a *system of constraints*. [...] Clearly for literature this kind of architectural object enables the deployment of strategies, of *proficiency* (*pouvoir-faire*) by the plot's

characters in relation to one another. (27-28)

Hamon's theory is useful in my exploration of the meaning of houses in James's fiction. They sometimes help James's heroines in knowing themselves, sometimes expose their desires, and sometimes reveal the difficulties in satisfying those desires. As I will argue in the chapter on *The Turn of the Screw*, Bly functions as the governess's school where she learns about new aspects of life, and about herself. She studies the various locations of the house in order to fulfill her job that was entrusted to her by the Uncle, but the situation turns out to be too difficult to handle, and she realizes the "constraints" that obstruct her desires, such as the "ghosts," the children, and the absent Master. In *In the Cage*, the telegraphist tries to discover her identity by comparing her work-place to the outside world, and Chalk Farm to Mayfair. She seeks to add an aristocratic connection to her identity by entering Captain Everard's apartment, but realizes that she cannot enter it because of the "hierarchy" in the class system that divides him and her. In *What Maisie Knew*, Maisie finds out that she lacks a "home" by the fact that she must visit her divorced parents' houses in turns. She learns that her desire for a residence of her own cannot be realized because Sir Claude, Mrs. Beale, and Mrs. Wix have their own conflicting desires and want to take advantage of her.

I have tried to explain the significance of houses in James's late 1890s fiction and the theoretical framework of my discussion by referring to the ideas of Bachelard, Gill, and Hamon. Bachelard's stance differs from Hamon's in that he presupposes a subjective consciousness whereas Hamon tends to be more structuralist and concerned with architecture as object. I have referred to Hamon's ideas as a starting-point, but I will explore my analyses by employing what may be called a more orthodox sense of character, and emphasizing the characters' desires, as well as other complex feelings, toward houses. Fleda, Rose, Maisie, the telegraphist, the governess, and Nanda—these are displaced young women looking for a place where she should be. They tend to

dream and fantasize about a happier life where they would have the security of their own space. In the chapters that follow I shall bring into focus the central question of whether they will only find a “house of fiction,” a house of their own composition.

Chapter 1

Women's Search for a Home: *The Spoils of Poynton*

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, Fleda Vetch succumbs to Mona Brigstock and gives up Poynton and Owen Gereth. In the end, she is left with nothing—no house, no husband, and no job. Numerous critics have turned their attention to “the things” of Poynton, but I also hope to cast light at its aspects as “a house,” and examine the causes and consequences of Fleda’s loss of it. In the novel, several other properties also appear: Waterbath, Ricks, Fleda’s father’s house in West Kensington, Maggie’s house in a suburb of London, and Colonel Gereth’s house in Cadogan Place. *The Spoils of Poynton* is a novel about houses, and at the same time about the characters’ attitudes toward houses. It reveals the situation of middle-class women, including Fleda, Mrs. Gereth, and Mona, in their search for a residence. I will also compare the features of each house and examine which house it is whose values the novel finally endorses.

(1) Source and Method

What James has called the “germ” of the novel reveals that its plot is rooted in the social problem of women and houses in turn-of-the-century Britain. It is an anecdote recounted to him by a Mrs. Anstruther-Thompson on Christmas Eve, 1893. In Scotland, a young laird on his father’s death inherited a large estate filled with beautiful things, a house which his mother had loved and delighted in living in. She was to move to a small dower-house in another part of the country. When the son married and came with his wife to take possession of the large estate, he found the pictures and other valuable objects gone, removed by his mother. An ugly public scandal ensued, in which the son demanded that the things be returned and she refused. When James

heard this story, he saw in it a subject for his novel, “a situation of the mother *deposed*, by the ugly English custom, turned out of the big house on the son’s marriage and relegated” (Edel and Powers 79). Therefore, the templates for Mrs. Gereth, Owen, and Mona already existed in Mrs. Anstruther-Thompson’s tale, as well as the general plot of the novel. James dug deeper into their characters to create, as he intended, a refined “social and psychological picture” (Edel and Powers 79), a story that has its origins in a particular social problem of the “relegated mother” and that develops into a psychological drama, concerning people’s conflicting emotions toward the houses, things, and each other.

James added Fleda into this picture as the novel’s central consciousness. The story is told by a third-person narrator, but the narration is most often filtered through Fleda, except for the first four paragraphs of the novel which adopt Mrs. Gereth’s consciousness. The transition of point of view starts to occur in the third paragraph, when Mrs. Gereth and Fleda discuss the “dreadfulness” of Waterbath and the conversation is narrated in free indirect discourse, starting with the sentence: “What was dreadful now, what was horrible, was the intimate ugliness of Waterbath [...]” (37). The shift is complete in the fifth paragraph with the sentence: “The next moment she [Mrs. Gereth] rose to her feet, and Fleda could then see her alarm to be by no means quenched” (38). The narrator attributes the cause of this shift to Fleda’s “intenser consciousness” in which “we shall most profitably seek a reflexion of the little drama with which we are concerned” (39), the comparative of “intenser” presumably meaning more than that of Mrs. Gereth.

The intensity of Fleda’s consciousness that is replete with her extraordinary imagination, morality, pride, aesthetic sense and complexity of thought has invited a rich range of response. A number of critics, however, have doubted Fleda’s reliability as the central consciousness. A. W. Bellringer claims that Fleda has “a defect of

understanding with regard to Owen” and that the reader is left uncertain because “James makes the reader share Fleda’s limited consciousness” (193). John Lucas in a counterargument asserts that James “allow[s] us to see Fleda’s interpretation of events as strikingly inventive and untrue, and willfully blind to the obvious” (483). Robert C. McLean also argues that the reader must mistrust Fleda’s reliability since she has desires and ambitions which she hides behind her “moral fastidiousness” (15), and the reader must consequently “rely heavily on objective, provable statements and happenings” (20). Philip L. Greene states that “the implied author of *The Spoils of Poynton* is totally committed to the reliability of Fleda Vetch and that Fleda’s actions, including her secrets and deceptions, are supported by the author as serving a heroic purpose” (361).

These discussions of Fleda’s reliability, most active in the 1960s, are connected to any interpretation of Fleda’s morality and materialism, which then leads on to thematic topics such as her attitude toward the things and houses. Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* has defined the reliable narrator as one who “speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms” (158) of the implied author. A narrator is unreliable if “[he or she] is mistaken, or believes himself [or herself] to have qualities which the author denies him [or her]” (159). Booth says that Fleda is unreliable but she “come[s] close to representing the author’s ideal of taste, judgment, and moral sense” (159). My view is that the narration that is filtered through Fleda’s consciousness is unreliable in the sense that it is largely subjective, and she is mistaken in some critical moments of the novel. However, this does not detract from her primarily moral stature, as I will argue in the next section.

The narration is not impersonal, and it reflects Fleda’s emotions at any particular stage in the novel. This can be observed in the remarks that the narrator makes about Mrs. Gereth, which have clearly been influenced by Fleda’s changing opinions of her.

In Chapter 4, Mrs. Gereth is criticized for being “despoiled [...] of humanity” (58), reflecting Fleda’s irritation at being designated as Owen’s wife. However, one week later, when Mrs. Gereth declares that she will give up Poynton if he will let her have some of its objects, the narrator is more lenient and remarks that “[i]t was not the crude love of possession; it was the need to be faithful to a trust and loyal to an idea” (63) that prompts Mrs. Gereth’s energies. This leniency is due to Fleda’s relief after meeting Owen’s request of persuading his mother to give up Poynton.

The narrator again denounces Mrs. Gereth in Chapter 12, when her relationship with Fleda is most hostile. For example, it is said that Mrs. Gereth “had no imagination about anybody’s life save on the side she bumped against” (126). However, when Fleda learns that Mrs. Gereth has returned the spoils to Poynton without knowing she has sent Owen back, she is overwhelmed by a sense of guilt, and the narrator makes an opposite comment about Mrs. Gereth’s nature: “It was absolutely unselfish—she cared nothing for mere possession. She thought solely and incorruptibly of what was best for the objects themselves [...]” (179).¹ The narrator constantly modifies comments about Mrs. Gereth, reflecting Fleda’s changing opinions of her. These vary because she is always in meditation, thinking about what she should do, while being influenced by her imagination, speculation, affection, and various other feelings. I shall try to show that out of this amalgam of emotions, her paramount criterion of judgment is her sense of morality.

(2) Materialism in Fleda, Mrs. Gereth, and Mona

Before analyzing their situations more closely, I will measure the extent of materialism in Fleda, Mrs. Gereth, and Mona and examine their attitudes toward houses. In the context of this novel, materialism has to do with the desire to own a house and its

furniture. In a more general sense, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, materialism is: “**2c.** Devotion to material needs or desires, to the neglect of spiritual matters; a way of life, opinion, or tendency based entirely upon material interests.” Materialism therefore is the opposite of spiritualism or idealism, and someone who is not inclined to materialism is more likely to sympathize with the immaterial, unworldly, and supernatural. Such a person also places importance on human aspects and feelings. That is, he or she finds it more satisfying to give priority to the mind, to such elements as morality, feelings, and dignity over material needs, such as house, furniture, and money. I shall argue that out of the three main women characters, Fleda is the least materialistic and Mona the most materialistic, and Mrs. Gereth somewhere in-between. I will examine Fleda’s predilection to attach more importance to the spiritual side of things, despite her fine artistic sense and her love of beautiful houses and furniture. This division between the spiritual and the material is similar to that between nature and art. In this division, appreciation of the aesthetics of houses and furniture belongs to the sphere of “art” or the material, as opposed to the elements that are not human-made and unrelated to money, such as human feelings, which belong to the sphere of nature.

Fleda appears in the novel as the only person that Mrs. Gereth has found who shares with her a rare and superior artistic sense. In both, this is mostly concerned with the interior and exterior of houses, such as the choice and layout of furniture and decoration. When she first visits Poynton, Fleda perceives Mrs. Gereth’s regard for the “things.” Fleda observes it with irony, and feels the extent of “the poor lady’s strange, almost maniacal disposition to thrust in everywhere the question of ‘things,’ to read all behaviour in the light of some fancied relation to them. ‘Things’ were of course the sum of the world; only, for Mrs. Gereth, the sum of the world was rare French furniture and oriental china” (49). The narrator distinguishes Fleda as someone who can diagnose Mrs. Gereth’s love of things as “maniacal” and see that her collection

is concentrated in foreign goods. It is said about Fleda that “[t]he museums had done something for her, but nature had done more” (48) and that “[a]lmost as much as Mrs. Gereth’s her taste was her life, though her life was somehow the larger for it” (49). For Fleda, art and life are in different spheres, and she sees the latter as more important.

On the other hand, Mrs. Gereth’s life is referred to as being possessed by or equal to art in several instances. On seeing Poynton, Fleda realizes that it is “the record of a life” (47). Also, Mrs. Gereth pleads with Owen not to take Poynton away from her because it is her life: “[T]here are things in the house that we [she and her husband] almost starved for! They were our religion, they were our life, they were *us!*” (53). Furthermore, when Mrs. Gereth fears the danger of Poynton’s destruction by being mixed with the furniture of Waterbath, the narrator says: “What had her whole life been but an effort toward completeness and perfection?” (66). Therefore, Mrs. Gereth’s life has been targeted toward achieving artistic perfection, whereas Fleda views art and life as separate elements.

Fleda feels this difference between herself and her friend when Mrs. Gereth takes it for granted that Fleda will gladly marry Owen to get Poynton, assuming that the material gains (that is, Poynton) will be considered as more important than the human factor (that is, Owen). It is also true, however, that Fleda becomes so vexed on this occasion because Mrs. Gereth has touched on her own primary desire—Fleda wants to marry Owen, because she is in love with him. To Fleda, Owen has more charm than any precious thing at Poynton: “She thought of him perpetually and her eyes had come to rejoice in his manly magnificence more even than they rejoiced in the royal cabinets of the red saloon” (71-72). The disposition is further stressed at the outset of Chapter 9, when Fleda struggles in her room at Ricks with the temptation to inform Mrs. Gereth of Mona’s condition of marriage, so that Owen will be free: “[O]nce above, where, in her room, with her sense of danger and trouble, the age of Louis Seize suddenly struck

her as wanting in taste and point, she felt she now for the first time knew her temptation” (103). She finds that at a moment like this, the artistic beauty of objects gives way to a more real, tangible, sexual appeal and temptation.

However, the feeling that is strongest in Fleda is not love but morality. In the scene just mentioned above, she overcomes her “temptation” by rationally telling herself that Owen had no right to inform her of Mona’s condition when their relationship had still not been terminated. Fleda feels that even if she gained Owen’s love, she would not be happy unless she had always been morally correct: “There was something in her that would make it a shame to her for ever to have owed her happiness to an interference” (104). She wants to make sure that she is always “straight” (104) and “impeccable” (164). If she were not so persistent in her morality she would have had Owen and Poynton, but she believes almost in a religious manner that there cannot be happiness without morality.

Finally, because Fleda has sympathy for the spiritual side of things, she believes in the symbolism of objects. In Chapter 6, when asked by Owen to pick out a gift at a shop in Oxford Street, she, instead of choosing something expensive and beautiful, asks for something cheap but symbolic. She “consent[s] to accept a small pin-cushion, costing sixpence, in which the letter F was marked out with pins” (75), as an authentication of Owen’s gratitude; because she wants it to be especially dedicated to her, she chooses something with her initial on it.

Toward the end of the novel, a similar situation emerges. Owen now asks Fleda to take an object of her choice from Poynton, and Fleda debates within herself which she should choose and what it might symbolise: “It would be one of the smallest things because it should be one she should have close to her; and it should be one of the finest because it was in the finest he saw his symbol. She said to herself that of what it would symbolise she was content to know nothing more than just what her having it

would tell her” (210). Fleda does not know whether it might embody his love, repentance, regrets, gratitude, memory, or something else, but thinks seriously about it because she believes that an object can, quite apart from its artistic value, possess a spiritual, human value as a “symbol.”

I have argued that although Fleda and Mrs. Gereth share a rare fine taste in art, their attitudes toward nature and art are different: Fleda is more moralistic and Mrs. Gereth more materialist. Patricia Crick interestingly remarks that their aesthetic tastes might also differ: “The late nineteenth-century French impressionist painters aroused much hostility from both public and critics, and were not really ‘accepted’ until the 1930s. Perhaps James is trying to hint that, although Fleda has a feeling for Mrs. Gereth’s old treasures, she is not as exclusively dedicated to the works of the past as her benefactress” (239). Christopher Stuart makes a distinction between the two in this way: “Mrs. Gereth’s love for it [Poynton] is shallower, less idealistic, and more pragmatic. That is, Fleda becomes a more fanatical convert to Mrs. Gereth’s ‘religion’ than Mrs. Gereth herself” (173). Fleda’s ideals develop a religious turn, not because she loves the things ardently but because she muses so profoundly about them. This tendency will also be evident in her sentiments toward Ricks, as we shall see later.

The view that Mrs. Gereth is a materialist who is devoid of human feelings has been widely articulated by the critics. Charles Palliser writes that she bestows “on things the interest and affection which she cannot extend to human beings” (46), and Adeline Tintner agrees: “*The Spoils of Poynton* shows the plastic sense diverted by a mother from her son to the furniture, producing a beautiful house and a boorish son” (“Museum World,” 149). Millicent Bell also asserts that “this connoisseur’s intensest feeling is reserved for the inanimate ‘things’ of Poynton, a fetishism that seems a deflection of ‘normal’ passion in this widow who hardly loves her son” (“Audience,” 224). Philippa Tristram particularly attacks Mrs. Gereth’s immorality in an analysis

designed to demonstrate that Mrs. Gereth has taste but is devoid of morals, Fleda has both taste and morals, and Mona has neither.²

However, I will argue that Mrs. Gereth is not solely a materialist, and that her feelings toward the spoils of Poynton are always subtly entwined with her feelings toward her family. The situation recounted in the novel, that of her being deprived of her home by the Brigstocks is so painful for her because her life had been so easy and happy until two years ago, when her husband died. She had grown to take her happiness for granted: “She had lived for a quarter of a century in such warm closeness with the beautiful that, as she frankly admitted, life had become for her a true fool’s paradise” (41). The narrator explains the three sources of her happiness:

There had been in the first place the exquisite house itself, early Jacobean, supreme in every part; a provocation, an inspiration, the matchless canvass for a picture. Then there had been her husband’s sympathy and generosity, his knowledge and love, their perfect accord and beautiful life together, twenty-six years of planning and seeking, a long, sunny harvest of taste and generosity. Lastly, she never denied, there had been her personal gift, the genius, the passion, the patience of the collector [...].
(41-42)

Mrs. Gereth has now lost the first two elements that contributed to her happiness, her house and her husband. Although he never appears in the novel, he plays an indispensable role in providing the perfection of Poynton and the consequent happiness of his wife. Therefore, Mrs. Gereth’s sentiments toward Poynton are in part motivated by the happy memory of her and her husband’s collective effort in creating its splendour, and a sense of unfairness that she must lose it only because he had died.

Mrs. Gereth’s feelings toward Poynton are also connected to her feelings toward Owen, who, to her great disappointment had never understood its charm. She transfers

this regret into her anger at Mona's ignorance of art which is actually her anger at her son's ignorance of art. This psychology is hinted at in the following quotation:

Nothing so perverse could have been expected to happen as that the heir to the loveliest thing in England should be inspired to hand it over to a girl so exceptionally tainted. Mrs. Gereth spoke of poor Mona's taint as if to mention it were almost a violation of decency, and a person who had listened without enlightenment would have wondered of what fault the girl had been or had indeed not been guilty. But Owen had from a boy never cared, never taken the least pride or pleasure in his home. (43-44)

Mrs. Gereth uses such extreme expressions to attack Mona's supposed ignorance, which in another context might not be regarded as a fault. Deeper than Mrs. Gereth's hatred of Mona lies her irritation that her son has never appreciated Poynton.

Mrs. Gereth has tried to achieve artistic completion at Poynton, but as we have seen, her efforts have not only been motivated by material interests, but have also been affected by her closest emotional bonds. I shall argue further about this problem of houses, family and women in the next section. Let us now discuss the disposition of Mona, whose materialistic tendency is the most eminent.

We have seen that Fleda finds Owen more attractive than Poynton. On the contrary, Mona would not marry Owen without Poynton. She delays her decision to marry him until she has seen the house, by which act Mrs. Gereth and Fleda become aware of her materialism. However, because Mona does not understand Poynton's artistic value, when she visits there she cannot do anything but "[sit] there like a bored tourist in fine scenery" (50). Fleda observes that even her "ignorance was obscurely active" (50). Mona may be ignorant of Poynton's artistic value, but she is wise enough to know that the best reaction in front of the two connoisseurs is silence.

Mona sees Poynton's material value. She makes it a condition of her consent to

marriage, for which Fleda silently blames her: “To have loved Owen apparently, and yet to have loved him only so much, only to the extent of a few tables and chairs, was not a thing she could so much as try to grasp” (105). Fleda is not only irritated at Mona’s materialism but also even more irritated at herself for lacking it, which would have allowed her to gain both Owen and Poynton.

Eventually, Mona does acquire Poynton by marrying Owen. Fleda feels as if she knows why her rival has succeeded: “There was something she had set her heart upon, set her teeth about—the house exactly as she had seen it” (206). Mona felt attracted to it in her own way, and her materialism has allowed her to have Poynton at least until it burns down at the end, whereas Fleda’s morality has made her give it up. However, this is not to say that Mona is to be condemned for her materialism, because she is also being eminently practical. Faced with the housing conditions available to women at that time, Mona’s desire to own Poynton is more natural than Fleda’s will to remain moral.

(3) The “Housing Problem” of Women

In the previous section, I have compared the materialistic disposition of Fleda, Mrs. Gereth, and Mona in terms of their attitudes toward Poynton. We have seen that understanding of its artistic value does not necessarily make them stay there. The desire to reside at Poynton is also more subtly and earnestly connected to the women’s more basic search for a place to live.

Fleda has a serious housing problem, and she feels the anxiety of being a “parasite” throughout the novel. It is this that prompts most of her actions in the plot. She works as a mediator between Mrs. Gereth and Owen because she is desperate to attach some meaning to her position, and she knows that “her own value in the house

was the mere value of a good agent” (57). Her “homeless” situation is revealed near the beginning of the novel:

Fleda, with her mother dead, hadn't so much even as a home, and her nearest chance of one was that there was some appearance her sister would become engaged to a curate whose eldest brother was supposed to have property and would perhaps allow him something. Her father paid some of her bills but didn't like her to live with him. (42)

Fleda is “homeless” and she can only rely on the “possibility” of her sister’s marriage to a curate whose brother is “supposed” to have property and who would “perhaps” let him some of it, which Fleda could hope to have a share in by asking her sister, her sister’s husband, and the husband’s brother. The situation is worded in such a way to emphasize the remoteness of such a possibility. At the outset of the novel her prospect for having a proper place to live is small, which is why she is free to follow Mrs. Gereth’s invitation and start living with her at Colonel Gereth’s house in London.

As Fleda keeps accompanying Mrs. Gereth from Cadogan Place to Poynton and to Ricks, the distressing nature of her position continues to trouble her. She knows that among her acquaintances “her tendency had begun to define itself as parasitical” (60). After three months, she decides that she cannot stand the anxiety: “She grew impatient of her posture at Poynton, privately pronouncing it false and horrid. [...] Fleda became aware of a sudden desire, as well as of pressing reasons, for the cessation of her long stay. [...] Besides, people *were* saying that she fastened like a leech on other people—people who had houses where something was to be picked up” (72-73). Such a tendency is confirmed by her desire to live at Poynton with Mrs. Gereth on her first visit there, as she ponders with regret that “Mrs. Gereth’s remaining would have offered her an apology for a future—stretching away in safe years on the other side of a gulf” (48).

Fleda escapes to her father's house in London, but since it is not her home she cannot stay there long. After Maggie's wedding she rejoins Mrs. Gereth who has now retreated to Ricks with the furniture from Poynton. In the following conversation with Owen her housing problem is again disclosed:

"If you *should* leave my mother where would you go?"

She blinked a little at the immensity of it. "I haven't the least idea."

"I suppose you'd go back to London."

"I haven't the least idea," Fleda repeated.

"You don't—a—live anywhere in particular, do you?" (98-99)

Owen regrets having referred to Fleda's having "no home of her own" (99) in such an unreserved manner. The repetition of her answer emphasizes the "immensity" of her problem.

Mrs. Gereth takes advantage of Fleda's weakness when they quarrel. Her "advantage had become too real" (123) because she both knows that Fleda loves Owen and that she has nowhere to go, other than her father's house if she wants to leave Ricks: "Your father will take you and be glad, if you'll only make him understand what it's a question of—of your getting yourself off his hands for ever" (123). Fleda's homeless situation serves Mrs. Gereth's intention of making her marry Owen.

Fleda does go to her father's house, but staying in London too turns out to be an ordeal, as expected. Here as elsewhere, she feels awkward: "Her present position in the great unconscious town showed distinctly for obscure [...]. [S]he wandered vaguely in the western wilderness [...]. Her only plan was to be as quiet as a mouse, and when she failed in the attempt to lose herself in the flat suburb she resembled—or thought she did—a lonely fly crawling over a dusty chart" (130-31). From Fleda's description we do not feel the presence of any other inhabitants in London, implying a complete lack of human associations. Her comparison of herself to a "fly"

demonstrates her inability to fit into this unsympathetic society.

The impossibility of living with her father stems from the limitation of their relationship. He refuses to spend time with her, leaving her at home. He is a collector of objects, which Fleda despises. Their fundamental lack of understanding is revealed in their mutually unacceptable tastes in art, too. This situation is the opposite of that which emerged between Fleda and Mrs. Gereth, as it was a common artistic sense that united them and that prompted Mrs. Gereth to provide Fleda with a place to stay. Fleda is aware that her poor relationship with her father is not unrelated to this lack: “He was conscious of having a taste for fine things which his children had unfortunately not inherited. This indicated the limits of their acquaintance with him—limits which, as Fleda was now sharply aware, could only leave him to wonder what the mischief she was there for” (131). She feels pressed to leave, and is again visited by the anxiety of homelessness: “Nothing could come next but a deeper anxiety. She had neither a home nor an outlook—nothing in all the wide world but a feeling of suspense” (131-32).

“Suspense” is what governs Fleda’s mind as she is constantly forced to think about her future. As for her immediate prospects, she is in suspense as to whether she should go back to Mrs. Gereth: “If her friend should really keep the spoils she would never return to her. If that friend should on the other hand part with them what on earth would there be to return to?” (132). Wondering about the difficulties facing herself and Mrs. Gereth, she dreams of the perfect solution, by “[losing] herself in the rich fancy of how, if she were mistress of Poynton, a whole province, as an abode, would be assigned there to the great queen-mother” (132). Fleda’s ideal is to secure a husband and a house that she loves, and to live there with Mrs. Gereth who will reign as the great queen-mother and a custodian, also providing her the house that she loves. Becoming “mistress of Poynton,” however, could be achieved if only an “oddity” (132)

like Mona was not there.

For the time being, Fleda exploits “the benefit of having married her sister” (133) and stays in Maggie’s room, made possible because there is one less daughter remaining in the house. Fleda thinks about taking up painting again as a vocation in order to sell her work to make a living, as do hundreds of other women in her position: “[S]he had lately, in Paris, with several hundred other young women, spent a year at a studio, arming herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter” (42). Being homeless, she has felt the need to earn herself a place to live. However, respectable jobs for middle-class women are few, and Fleda knows that even if she made painting her job, she would not succeed, as she is reminded by the small paintings in the window of the art shop, “placed there on sale and full of warning to a young lady without fortune and without talent” (133). Fleda thus views art not only as her source of pleasure but also as a means to earn money.

As said above, Fleda is constantly placed under the anxiety of being homeless, most strongly communicated to the reader in Chapter 13, when she leaves Ricks and stays at West Kensington. After West Kensington, she goes to Maggie’s house, then to Mrs. Gereth’s hotel in London, and back to Maggie’s house, and finally to Ricks, continuing her nomadic or “parasitical” style of living in her search for a place to be. In the final chapter, Fleda goes down to Poynton to find that it has burned down. Stopped from going to see the site, she says: “I’ll go back” (213), which are the very last words in *The Spoils of Poynton*. However, one is made to ask: Where will she go back to? One can only assume that she will spend the night at Maggie’s as planned, and that she will stay at Ricks for some time, but her future after that is unknown. She has failed to find a permanent home, due to her giving up Owen, an act motivated by her morality. The extent of her desire to maintain her morality can be fully understood only if we take into account her great anxiety of homelessness.

Mrs. Gereth also faces a housing problem as she is placed in danger of losing Poynton. English law at that time forbade a widow from inheriting the house of her deceased husband, and the house fell into the ownership of their son, which is precisely the situation that has befallen the Gereths.³ Mrs. Gereth feels the unjustness of this law, for she views Poynton as her and her husband's common property. Fleda shares Mrs. Gereth's sentiment:

[S]he stared, aghast, as it came home to her for the first time, at the cruel English custom of the expropriation of the lonely mother. Mr. Gereth had apparently been a very amiable man, but Mr. Gereth had left things in a way that made the girl marvel. The house and its contents had been treated as a single splendid object; everything was to go straight to his son, his widow being assured but a maintenance and a cottage in another country. No account whatever had been taken of her relation to her treasures [...]. (43)

Mr. Gereth is guilty of leaving the fate of his wife to the "cruel English custom" which would relegate her to Ricks. Carol Faulkner attacks Mr. Gereth for this blindness, and argues that in taking up this issue which was one of the gravest concerns in James's times, this novel is political and feminist. Moreover, it was very uncommon in an English middle-class household for a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law to live together. According to Mrs. Gereth, "a common household was in such a case just so inconceivable that Fleda had only to glance over the fair face of the English land to see how few people had ever conceived it" (45). Mrs. Gereth wishes Owen would marry Fleda because Fleda would allow her to live there, even if it means bending the English custom.

However, the innermost cause of Mrs. Gereth's grief is not the expropriation of the widowed mother or of the inconceivability of a "common household," or even the

hatred of Mona. Again, it is Owen and his treatment of her:

The great wrong Owen had done her was not his “taking up” with Mona—that was disgusting, but it was a detail, an accidental form; it was his failure from the first to understand what it was to have a mother at all, to appreciate the beauty and sanctity of the character. [...] Hadn’t she often told Fleda of her friend Madame de Jaume, the wittiest of women, but a small black crooked person, each of whose three boys, when absent, wrote to her every day of their lives? She had the house in Paris, she had the house in Poitou, she had more than in the lifetime of her husband [...].

(65)

The cause of Mrs. Gereth’s resentment is both social and personal. She protests against the English society for neglecting the housing rights of widows when they are well respected in other countries such as France. She is envious of Madame de Jaume, who has enjoyed a greater fortune after the death of her husband, inheriting houses in Paris and Poitou. But by reading the above quotation carefully, we know that it is more the neglect of her by Owen that she wants to protest against. She is so envious of Madame de Jaume because this lady has had the respect and care of her three sons. Because she wants to appeal to the public against both the social and personal mistreatment of her, she wants to “make Owen and Mona do everything that will be most publicly odious” (65). Nevertheless, Mrs. Gereth’s wish to be sanctified and idolized may well be too demanding for Owen, who was most probably neglected in turn by his mother while she put so much effort into Poynton, as he was growing up.

The housing problem of Mrs. Gereth is foregrounded in *The Spoils of Poynton* because it is what initiates the plot. But unlike Fleda, Mrs. Gereth is guaranteed the occupancy of Ricks, where she settles herself at the end of the novel. The housing problem of Fleda is more severe, as we have seen, because she has not been able to find

a permanent home either through marriage or job. Furthermore, her homelessness is less directly treated in the novel. Her problem would be similarly less recognized by society and therefore more serious, and she finds it harder to appeal it to the public as well as to the reader, than Mrs. Gereth.

Finally, I will touch on the housing problem of Mona in relation to the ending of the novel. She is usually not considered as having a housing problem, but her consistent desire to gain Poynton shows that she is not free from the anxiety of homelessness. As discussed previously, she succeeds in gaining Poynton by marrying Owen. She has seen in Poynton not only a material value but also a permanent home. Her mother accompanies Mona when she comes to evaluate the property, and they work together in pursuing it. Mrs. Brigstock visits West Kensington to “plead with” (153) Fleda, and the next day she goes to Ricks to plead with Mrs. Gereth. There is not much evidence in the text of the nature of the relationship between Mona and her mother. But Mrs. Brigstock energetically endeavours to realize Mona’s marriage to Owen so that her daughter can leave Waterbath and acquire Poynton as her permanent home.

Mona speaks only in one scene in the novel, and her inner feelings are as remote from the reader as they are from Fleda, the central consciousness. The only scene where Mona utters a speech occurs at the beginning of Chapter 4, when she asks Fleda in the garden of Poynton: “Why has she never had a winter garden thrown out? If ever I have a place of my own I mean to have one” (55). Her expression “If ever I have a place of my own” lets us see that she will not have a home “of her own” until she gets Poynton. Mona’s voice is “like the squeeze of a doll’s stomach” (44), and she “belong[s] to the type in which speech is an unaided emission of sound, in which the secret of being is impenetrably and incorruptibly kept” (39). All the more for her lack of communication, Mona’s presence lies heavily on Fleda as she perpetually wonders

about the acts and feelings of her rival. Finally, Fleda concludes that Mona must have suffered even more than herself or Mrs. Gereth during the dispute. It is because Mona had once been “so sure” (203) of marrying Owen and acquiring Poynton, and it must have been “a disappointment” (203) for her to have had to face the danger of betrayal and loss of home. Nevertheless, Mona does not live at Poynton after her marriage, leaving it to the care of the servants. She is only interested in Poynton so far as it offers her a permanent home and frees her from the anxiety of homelessness.

The ending of *The Spoils of Poynton* is one of the most surprising and rapid among James’s novels. On the day it burns down, Fleda goes to Poynton to experience her possession which will be “as complete as that of the others” (210) at least spiritually. For Fleda, the loss of Poynton belongs therefore to the sphere of the ideal, whereas for Mona, it is both immediate and material. The effect this loss will have on the lives of Mona and Owen is substantial. Will they go on traveling abroad especially now that they have no home? If so, their lifestyle will unexpectedly be turned into one similar to Fleda’s, moving from one place to another.

The burning down of Poynton has almost been predicted by Mrs. Gereth as early as in Chapter 2. Fleda says Mona and Owen “wouldn’t after all smash things nor burn them up” (45), to which Mrs. Gereth answers that “they would neglect them, ignore them, leave them to clumsy servants” (45). If the novel tells the process of Fleda’s search for a house, it also recounts a parallel narrative of Mona’s search, acquisition, and loss of one.

(4) The Representation of Houses

Fleda spends time in several houses. None is a permanent home for her, but each is important in providing the setting of each scene and the material from which to

judge the characters. In this section, I will analyze the “space” of each house represented, and show that Ricks evolves into a place whose values are finally most acclaimed. The evolution coincides with the change in Mrs. Gereth’s sentiments, where she learns to part with Poynton and to appreciate Ricks, whose significance in this novel has been much underestimated in past criticism.

The novel opens at Waterbath, with Mrs. Gereth as the central consciousness:

Mrs. Gereth had said she would go with the rest to church, but suddenly it seemed to her she shouldn’t be able to wait even till church-time for relief; breakfast was at Waterbath a punctual meal and she had still nearly an hour on her hands. Knowing the church to be near she prepared in her room for the little rural walk, and on her way down again, passing through corridors and observing imbecilities of decoration, the esthetic misery of the big commodious house, she felt a return of the tide of last night’s irritation, a renewal of everything she could secretly suffer from ugliness and stupidity. Why did she consent to such contacts? why did she so rashly expose herself? She had had, heaven knew, her reasons, but the whole experience was to be sharper than she had feared. To get away from it and out into the air, into the presence of sky and trees, flowers and birds, was a necessity of every nerve. (35)

By reading the incipit, one becomes aware that the “story” of *The Spoils of Poynton* has actually started the day before, when Mrs. Gereth had arrived at Waterbath and discovered the Brigstocks’ bad decoration. It is also at last night’s dinner that Mrs. Gereth has met Fleda for the first time. These two factors trigger the series of events that follow. Mrs. Gereth is seized by a sense of suffocation after one night’s stay at Waterbath. The “ugliness” of the big house is so “sharp” that she must escape into the outside air for “relief.” She has been invited to spend the weekend at Waterbath, but

she is not in the mood to socialize. The fact is that she has ventured into the enemy's territory and therefore is placed at a great disadvantage. The above sentences are worded in such a way to reveal the scope of the psychological and physiological pain Mrs. Gereth suffers from Waterbath's "imbecilities of decoration" and "esthetic misery." The Brigstocks' gaudy decoration serves as a weapon against her. "Why did she consent to such *contacts*? why did she so rashly *expose* herself?" and "To get away [...] was a necessity of every *nerve*" (my emphases) sound as if she has been attacked by some poison or germ that is scattered around the house, to drive her away. Waterbath's decoration is especially effective because Mrs. Gereth is vulnerable to such ugliness, as shown by her eccentric reaction.

The fault of the Brigstocks is that they did not make use of Waterbath's natural advantages, and they added decorations that are glaring and artificial to a house that "ought to have been charming" when Mrs. Gereth "herself, with such elements to handle, would have taken the fine hint of nature!" (35-36). Outside, she finds Fleda and they talk of the dreadfulness of Waterbath:

The house was bad in all conscience, but it might have passed if they had only let it alone. This saving mercy was beyond them; they 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. They had gone astray over carpets and curtains [...]. [...] There was in the elder lady's [room] a set of comic water-colours, a family joke by a family genius, and in the younger's a souvenir from some centennial or other Exhibition, that they shudderingly alluded to. The house was perversely full of souvenirs of places even more ugly than itself and of things it would have been a pious duty to

forget. The worst horror was the acres of varnish, something advertised and smelly, with which everything was smeared [...]. (37-38)

Mrs. Gereth and Fleda call the defect of the house “fundamental and systematic” (37), and declare that the Brigstocks’ lack of taste is innate and their performance voluntary and collective. The result is inevitably dreadful. Instead of leaving it in its simple state, they have filled the place with incongruous and coarse objects, which are more personal than artistic. There is a water-colour picture by a Brigstock and souvenirs from places also brought home by family members. Repulsive draperies, carpets and curtains cover the walls, windows and floors, causing pain to the two hypersensitive women’s sense of sight. But the “worst horror” is the varnish painted over the furniture, causing damage to their sense of smell because of its unavoidable odour. Varnish implies patching up and deceiving, suggesting the Brigstocks’ attempt to conceal their lack of taste. By beginning at Waterbath, the story foretells the coming of war and discloses the particulars of what Mrs. Gereth will be fighting against. It also informs the reader, by her exaggerated description of Waterbath’s dreadfulness, of the extremity of her senses. The scene then moves on to Poynton, her own citadel.

The description of Poynton in the novel is less extensive than might have been assumed. Its atmosphere, however, is conveyed to the reader in Chapter 3. Fleda explores the house, “wandering through clear chambers” and “pausing at open doors where vistas were long and bland” (47). The impression is in striking contrast to that of Waterbath; instead of filling the space with objects, Mrs. Gereth uses it rather freely. This impression is brought forth by such words as “clear chambers,” “open doors,” and “long and bland vistas.” Fleda observes Poynton closely:

While outside, on the low terraces, she contradicted gardeners and refined on nature, Mrs. Gereth left her guest to finger fondly the brasses that Louis Quinze might have thumbed, to sit with Venetian velvets just held in a

loving palm, to hang over cases of enamels and pass and repass before cabinets. 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. (48)

Mrs. Gereth's "record of a life" is richly written in French and Italian, its parts adopting different colours and forms. She has collected rare, old objects from France and Italy. Both Poynton and Waterbath are decorated with objects brought from other places, but the impression is completely different. Whereas Waterbath emphasizes the quantity of objects, Poynton values the quality above all else.

David Lodge explains the source of this difference: "As industrial techniques of mass-production made domestic furnishings and ornaments cheaply and plentifully available, the upper-class could only demonstrate their superior status in this sphere in one of two ways—either by conspicuous consumption of the products of the new technology, or by collecting the artefacts of pre-industrial times and, preferably, foreign countries" (14-15). Lodge asserts that Waterbath adopts the first way and Poynton the second, and that both are targets of irony, the Brigstocks for their vulgarity and Mrs. Gereth for her infatuation with the "cult of antiques" (14). The tendencies of this cult in Lodge's explanation match the disposition of Mrs. Gereth, letting us see that it was a social trend, not only a personal obsession.

Mrs. Gereth has left an open space in the rooms so that one can feel at ease, enjoying the unbroken vista of Poynton. It is airy and bright, the windows leading one out to the English garden. As a fancier of nature, Mrs. Gereth keeps this well-cared-for and at the same time natural and "embracing" (48). The garden is also an important part of Poynton, constituting its outer frame. Mrs. Gereth lets Fleda go near and touch the precious objects, such as the brasses, Venetian velvets, cases of enamels and cabinets, because Fleda's action signifies her appreciation of her own effort.

Not many pictures are hung on the walls; instead, Mrs. Gereth covers them with a continuous line of panels. Her principle in designing Poynton is to create an open space that stretches from room to room, finally extending out into the garden. Beautiful objects and furniture decorate the rooms, but not in a way as to block the vistas.

Poynton's open space is nevertheless replete, full of memories for Mrs. Gereth: "It looked, to begin with, through some effect of season and light, larger than ever, immense, and it brimmed over as with the hush of sorrow, which was in turn all charged with memories. [...] Mrs. Gereth had drawn back every curtain and removed every corner; she prolonged the vistas, opened wide the whole house [...]" (71). Opening wide the house is a way for Mrs. Gereth to stand face-to-face with a space that reminds her of and allows her to cherish the history of each object, in complete contrast to the muddle of items packed into Waterbath.

The one room that is beyond Mrs. Gereth's influence is Owen's, the "one monstrosity of Poynton" (72). Unlike the others, it is closed, offering Owen a chance to be "closeted for an hour" with "men red-faced and leather-legged" (72). The objects in this room are offensive, quite contrary to Owen's personality: "all tobacco-pots and bootjacks, his mother had said—such an array of arms of aggression and castigation that he himself had confessed to eighteen rifles and forty whips" (72). Because Fleda has never entered the room, she relies on Mrs. Gereth's testimony and Owen's "confession" in imagining it. The fact that Owen clutters his room in this fashion is quite intriguing. He keeps the women away and fills the room with "masculine" objects, as if he wishes to be free from the image of being vacillating and powerless before his mother.

We have seen the contrast between Waterbath and Poynton, which forms the grounds for Mrs. Gereth's complaint. Whereas Poynton may be prized for its open

space, harmony of design, and quality and rarity of objects, Waterbath loads itself with a muddle of earthy objects, with discontinuous decorations. Moreover, Poynton coexists with nature whereas Waterbath destroys it. Philippa Tristram has conversely written that Waterbath triumphs over Poynton. She lists the five criteria of taste observed in Victorian novels: restraint from ostentation, actual use of the rooms, neatness that does not extend to spotlessness, comfort, and suggestion of “long association” (189), and judges that according to these criteria Waterbath leads Poynton.⁴ Tristram further argues that the Victorian novelists conclude that taste inheres in a place that can be called a home, and *The Spoils of Poynton* reaches a Victorian conclusion in its implied praise of Ricks.⁵

Before proceeding to an analysis of Ricks, I will refer to Fleda’s father’s house and Maggie’s house. As mentioned before, Fleda’s father has a habit of collecting things, and his sitting-room at West Kensington is full of so-called “junk” objects: “objects, shabby and battered, of a sort that appealed little to his daughter: old brandy-flasks and match-boxes, old calendars and hand-books, intermixed with an assortment of penwipers and ash-trays, a harvest gathered in from penny bazaars” (131). The items are old, ordinary, small, cheap and shabby without material or artistic value, collected for collection’s sake, but at least costing little money. Fleda is conscious that her father censures her for not adopting the same habit: “Why didn’t she try collecting something? —it didn’t matter what. She would find it gave an interest to life—there was no end to the little curiosities one could easily pick up” (131). One senses from this his hopeless sense of tedium. He is bored because he cannot associate with his daughters properly; when Fleda stays at West Kensington he avoids seeing her by going to his club every day. Instead of inviting them to live with him, he fills his house with worthless objects. His habit does seem to proceed from his nervousness with his daughters, whether or not this failure started after his wife’s death.

Fleda is ashamed of her father's house, thus when she meets Owen in front of the art material shop, she hesitates to invite him, even though it is only around the corner. She lets him enter the crammed little room, and among the discordant things she feels even "more disconcerted and divided" (137):

Fleda, with her hideous crockery and her father's collections, could conceive that these objects, to her visitor's perception even more strongly than to her own, measured the length of the swing from Poynton and Ricks; she couldn't forget either that her high standards must figure vividly enough even to Owen's simplicity to make him reflect that West Kensington was a tremendous fall. (139-40)

Fleda becomes nervous about his awareness that West Kensington is an extreme "diversion" (139) and "fall" from Poynton and Ricks. However, it is she who is most conscious and ashamed of the difference.

Maggie is determined not to be ashamed. When Mrs. Gereth visits Fleda at Maggie's house in Chapter 20, Maggie looks at her with a sense of rivalry. Thinking that "Fleda suffered much more than she gained from the grandeur of the Gereths, she had it at least to exemplify the perhaps truer distinction of nature that characterised the house of Vetch" (194). Maggie is less willing to admit that the Gereths are superior because she is less conscious than Fleda about the difference in the quality of their houses. When Mrs. Gereth arrives she is disapproving of Maggie's house, as Fleda had anticipated. Mrs. Gereth "turn[s] her eyes avoidingly but not unperceivingly about her," and "drop[s] an opinion upon the few objects in the room" (194-95) even as she is about to inform Fleda of Owen's marriage to Mona. Fleda, always mindful of what the Gereths notice about the lack of art in the Vetch household, "observe[s] how characteristically she looked at Maggie's possessions before looking at Maggie's sister" (195).

Indeed, Maggie's house is described as being bare. There are only "few objects" in the downstairs room just referred to. The room where Fleda stays is also hinted to be empty, as Fleda "arrang[es] her few possessions in Maggie's fewer receptacles" (156). Lack of things is the characteristic of Maggie's house, quite contrary to her father. Fleda calls it "the mean little house in the stupid little town" (155) and quietly disapproves of it, although Maggie is more advantaged than herself for having a house. Yet Maggie is also not free from dissatisfaction because she has begun to have a "yearning for hotels in London" (168) that will provide some excitement and grandeur to her life. The bareness of Maggie's room is further emphasized in the above scene. Mrs. Gereth blindly looks at the Dutch clock, which is "old but rather poor, that Maggie had had as a wedding-gift and that eked out the bareness of the room" (196). Fleda and Mrs. Gereth feel even more desolate as the "face of the stopped Dutch clock" offers them "a vision of the empty little house at Ricks" (196).

Finally, I shall proceed to an analysis of Ricks, and illustrate that it is the house whose values in the end triumph over those of Poynton, and that it is where Mrs. Gereth who at first has no great expectations of it, eventually finds a home. It is at Ricks that she spends the most time during the period recounted in the novel. She had a supposition that "the maiden-aunt's principles had had much in common with the principles of Waterbath" (64), but when she visits it for the first time in Chapter 5, she finds that it is nothing like Waterbath. In fact, she finds herself comparing it instead to Poynton. Mrs. Gereth's first impressions of the house are negative, her attention being focused on the house's smallness and its rural location. The "small prim parlour" of Ricks has a single plate window, and Mrs. Gereth "hated such windows, the one flat glass sliding up and down" (67). She and Fleda have different reactions to the decoration at Ricks:

The room was practically a shallow box, with the junction of the walls and

ceiling guiltless of curve or cornice and marked merely by the little band of crimson paper glued round the top of the other paper, a turbid grey sprigged with silver flowers. This decoration was rather new and quite fresh; and there was in the centre of the ceiling a big square beam papered over in white, as to which Fleda hesitated about throwing out that it was rather picturesque. [...] On the subject of doors especially Mrs. Gereth had the finest views: the thing in the world she most despised was the meanness of the undivided opening. From end to end of Poynton there swung high double leaves. At Ricks the entrances to the rooms were like the holes of rabbit-hutches. (68)

Mrs. Gereth hates the “windows” and “entrances” at Ricks and calls them “mean,” exposing her haughtiness. The use of double “doors” at Poynton signifies its superiority in financial and dimensional scale. Another element at Ricks that is not found at Poynton is its application of paper on the walls and ceilings. Whereas Mrs. Gereth has affixed panels on the walls at Poynton, the maiden-aunt has covered the joint of the walls and ceiling with a combination of paper, and she has also glued a piece of paper to the beam in the centre of the ceiling. The colours applied are a combination of grey, silver and crimson, and white. The decoration is simple and inexpensive, though they seem quite “new” and “picturesque” to Fleda’s eyes.

Fleda says to herself that Ricks is “faded and melancholy” when there was the danger of its being “contradictious” and “loud” (68) like Waterbath. She puts her impression of the house in the following way and develops a strong sympathy for the maiden-aunt: “The place was crowded with objects of which the aggregation somehow made a thinness and the futility a grace; things that told her they had been gathered as slowly and as lovingly as the golden flowers of the other house” (68). She does not describe the objects of which the place is full, because she gets the impression of their

being “thin.” The decoration has a quality that somehow allows opposite tendencies to coexist, “aggregation” with “thinness” and “futility” with “grace,” freeing it from being muddled or cheap. It creates an atmosphere where one feels at ease. Fleda feels that “[s]he too, for a home, could have lived with them” (68); she begins to see Ricks as an ideal “home,” whereas Poynton is more of a museum than a home.⁶

When Ricks next appears in Chapter 7, all the previous impressions are obliterated by the shock of its being loaded with Poynton’s furniture. From then on Ricks becomes Mrs. Gereth’s fortress where she prepares to be besieged, taking the spoils as captives, as Fleda observes: “What indeed was her spoliation of Poynton but the first engagement of a campaign?” (85). It is in this state that Ricks stays for the most part of the novel. Poynton is vacated, and Fleda finds only “gaps and scars” (85) as she tries to remember its original state. Ricks is also annulled, full of things as it is, because it has lost its atmosphere that attracted Fleda. The maiden-aunt has been “exterminated” (85).

When Owen proposes that he could live at Ricks with Fleda, she finds the proposal perfect: “That solution—of her living with him at Ricks—disposed of him beautifully and disposed not less so of herself; it disposed admirably too of Mrs. Gereth” (101). It is even more ideal than the dream plan conceived earlier, that of her marrying Owen and living at Poynton, with Mrs. Gereth as the custodian. Mrs. Gereth will still be the mistress of Poynton, and Fleda will finally find a “home” at Ricks. The expression “dispose of” is fitting when the situation requires each person to find a place to settle down. However, Fleda cannot accept this “solution” because it does not “dispose of” Mona.

We have seen instances of Fleda’s evaluation of Ricks where she begins to feel more attracted to it than to Poynton. She develops a wish to live there. But it is Mrs. Gereth who settles as the mistress of Ricks at the end of the novel. She recovers the

maiden-aunt's furniture and arranges it in her own way, producing such beautiful rooms that Fleda cannot help declaring: "[T]here isn't a woman in England for whom it wouldn't be a privilege to live here" (201). Fleda invites Mrs. Gereth to listen to the voice of the objects, saying: "Ah the little melancholy tender tell-tale things: how can they not speak to you and find a way to your heart? It's not the great chorus of Poynton [...]. This is a voice so gentle, so human, so feminine [...]" (202). Fleda explains further what is in this space: "It's a kind of fourth dimension. It's a presence, a perfume, a touch. It's a soul, a story, a life. There's ever so much more here than you and I" (203). She maintains that Ricks is superior to Poynton in being haunted whereas there were no ghosts at Poynton, being "too splendidly happy" (203), which was its "only fault" (203). Here, we note most clearly her tendency to philosophize about the space in the house and her belief in the influence of the supernatural forces on the atmosphere of its rooms, which develops a religious aura.

Fleda emphasizes the melancholy human element of Ricks. It is shapeless and indescribable, but it provides comfort and assurance. It is the maiden-aunt who gave this element to the house, and Fleda has no doubt that the maiden-aunt must have suffered greatly: "The poor lady had passed shyly, yet with some bruises, through life; had been sensitive and ignorant and exquisite: that too was a sort of origin, a sort of atmosphere for relics and rarities [...]" (68). The values that Fleda attaches to Ricks are spiritual and philosophical, which are on a separate plane from the qualities that she and Mrs. Gereth enjoyed at Poynton, those of art, taste and grandeur. If Mrs. Gereth is the only woman who finds a home at the end of the novel, one way of explaining it is to see it as a reward for her loss and suffering: having "enjoyed an extraordinary fortune" (41) before her husband's death, she has now known pain, and having learned to accept the values Ricks embodies, she in the end feels that it has "grown submissively and indescribably sweet" (208) round her. An analysis of the different houses has revealed

that the values that are finally endorsed in *The Spoils of Poynton* are those of Ricks, not Poynton.⁷

(5) The House and the Things

The Spoils of Poynton was originally conceived of as a tale called “The House Beautiful,” but when it was serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly* James renamed it *The Old Things*.⁸ The title was finally changed to *The Spoils of Poynton* for the book publication. The original title implies an emphasis on the “house” whereas the second title suggests an emphasis on the “things.” The final title seems to be a compromise in terms of weighing the emphasis between Poynton and its spoils. The present section will examine this question of the relationship between the house and the things.

More critics have written on the things than on the house: for example, Nancy Bentley, Eric Savoy, Christopher Stuart, Fotios Sarris, and Thomas J. Otten. Bentley introduces the ethnographic language of Victorian kinship studies to argue that *The Spoils of Poynton* is about the scandalous attachment between human beings and things, where propertied middle-class people form social, familial relations with inanimate objects. Stuart explains that the novel shows “James’s own anxiety about the seeming collapse of Europe’s high culture” (166), symbolized by the burning down of the art objects which for James mean the “height of human achievement” (172). Sarris states that “Mrs. Gereth’s valorization of Poynton and her own high standards of taste are fetishistic in the Marxian sense insofar as both Poynton and her taste are isolated from the socioeconomic conditions that have made them possible” (56), and further discusses the character of Mrs. Gereth by also applying the psychoanalytical theory of fetishism. Otten points to the “sensuous” (265) properties of the spoils, for they are often being touched, and maintains that the characters’ class and identity are deeply embedded

within the body and are marked by the hand.

Besides Richard Gill, Philippa Tristram and Malcolm Kelsall, among the critics who have taken up the question of the house are Carol Faulkner and Richard S. Lyons. Lyons argues that *The Spoils of Poynton* and James's other works following it deal with the problem of inheritance that is "embodied in a house, an estate, or a family tradition" (62), and the fact that all of them fail shows his disillusionment with English society, and there is no place for Poynton to survive in the present society except in the memory and consciousness of Fleda. Lyons points to James's praise of the English country house, which he believed, should "[represent] a home, a shared life, an achieved beauty valued by a community of taste based on passion, sensibility, and suffering" (63). Faulkner asserts that Owen inherits from his father not only Poynton but also the "laws and the attitudes toward women they encompass" (145) and that we should not dismiss Owen's power protected as it is by patriarchal society. None of the women characters challenge these power relations and they submit themselves to the ugly English custom that prohibits their inheritance of houses.

My position in this chapter, which is to consider Poynton as a "house" and point to the women's housing problem, is therefore more similar to those of the critics in the second group. Criticism focusing on the "house" aspects tend to be more socio-historical and feminist, whereas those centred on the "things" tend to be more philosophical and theoretical. However, as the spoils and Poynton are one, discussion of the things is necessarily meaningful in exploring the question of the house. Let us now examine the characters' attitudes in terms of this relationship between the spoils and Poynton.

The fact that it is the spoils that Mrs. Gereth and Mona fight over adds to their seemingly greater importance than that of the house itself. Mona insists on acquiring the spoils, and her excuse, as Mrs. Gereth guesses, is: "It goes with the house" (44).

Mrs. Gereth also has a strong attachment to the spoils themselves, as Fleda observes: “It was the furniture she wouldn’t give up; and what was the good of Poynton pray without the furniture?” (61). This is supported by her declaration: “I’ll give up the house if they’ll let me take what I require!” (63) and in her act of moving the objects to Ricks. Mrs. Gereth, who has not actually faced the danger of being homeless, has devoted all her passions toward the collection of the objects, and therefore is pained more by losing them than losing the house. Engraved in her memory is “each history of each find, each circumstance of each capture” (71).

It is Fleda who shows a stronger sentiment for the house than either Mrs. Gereth or Mona. After the shock of finding the spoils transferred to Ricks, Fleda’s attention is not directed to the objects near her but it floats back to Poynton; she instantly sees “great gaps in the other house” (80) and “the far-away empty sockets, a scandal of nakedness between high bleak walls” (81). She cannot stand the sight of such a dispossessed state: “[S]he saw Poynton dishonoured; she had cherished it as a happy whole, she reasoned, and the parts of it now around her seemed to suffer like chopped limbs” (85). What has attracted Fleda about Poynton is not so much the beauty of the spoils as the beauty of the house along with its contents. She knows that they are necessary supplements to the house, for it to exist as a whole. The spoils and Poynton are nevertheless physically separable, the former being movables and the latter fixed property. This fact leaves the possibility of some the spoils being saved from the fire, as Fleda asks after them separately as “Do you mean that great house is *lost*?” and “Were they saving the things?” (213). However, the spoils and Poynton perish together, being parts of a whole.

Fleda speaks of a “bond” which is produced from being invited to stay at someone’s house: “A year before the girl had spent a day under her [Mrs. Brigstock’s] roof, but never feeling that Mrs. Brigstock regarded this as constituting a bond. She

had never stayed in any house but Poynton in which the imagination of a bond, on one side or the other, prevailed" (148). Here again, we see Fleda's recognition of Poynton as a domestic space where human bonds are born. As I have argued, when we discuss Poynton it is important to grant its autonomous elements as a house, and not see it only as synonymous with the spoils, which has been a presupposition among many critics. Among the women characters, Fleda has a stronger tendency than the others to view Poynton in this fashion. If Fleda sees it primarily as a house, then Mrs. Gereth sees it as a museum, and Mona sees it as property.

I shall end with a survey of the word "spoils." The items at Poynton are referred to in the novel in various ways such as the things, the objects, and the spoils. It is Fleda who uses the word "spoils." The *OED* gives the first definition of the word "spoil" as: "Goods, esp. such as are valuable, taken from an enemy or captured city in time of war; the possessions of which a defeated enemy is deprived or stripped by the victor; in more general sense, any goods, property, territory, etc., seized by force, acquired by confiscation, or obtained by similar means; booty, loot, plunder." It also gives as the transferred definition of the word: "That which is or has been acquired by special effort or endeavour; esp. objects of art, books, etc., collected in this way." It might have been possible to interpret the meaning of the word in the latter sense, had not the first definition, that of the "spoils of war" been so strong, or had Fleda not referred to the objects as Mrs. Gereth's booty so often. Fleda clearly sees the objects as "the trophies of her friend's struggle" (80): "She [Mrs. Gereth] would have returned from her campaign with her baggage-train and her loot" (132).

The word "spoils" is used in the last half of the novel, after it first appears in Chapter 13, when Fleda meditates: "If her friend should really keep the spoils she would never return to her" (132). Other examples are in Fleda's speech: "to restore the spoils of Poynton [...]" (142), "Of the spoils—?" (192) and in the narration: "If Fleda's

present view of the ‘spoils’ had taken precipitate form [...]” (179). The quotation marks around the word “spoils” in the last example show that it is used with irony. The fact that the word begins to be used in the last chapters of the novel and that it was not in the title when the novel was being serialized might indicate that James thought of applying the word halfway through his composition. The word was applied to add criticism to Poynton’s objects that Mrs. Gereth brought back from France and Italy. This shows that the novel scorns not only the Brigstocks’ vulgarity but also Mrs. Gereth’s devotion to the “cult of antiques” which Lodge has explained. That Poynton is constituted of the “spoils” and serves as a target of mockery for Mrs. Gereth’s excessiveness, fanaticism and materialism is another reason to believe that the novel finally advocates Ricks over Poynton, as I have shown in this chapter.

¹ Richard Gill accepts this quotation uncritically, and interprets it as showing Mrs. Gereth's good will where "she does not serve herself, she really serves the high, demanding aesthetic standard beyond herself" (66). My interpretation, rather, is that this quotation does not represent the narrator's impersonal opinion but is one that reflects Fleda's sense of guilt, which makes her praise Mrs. Gereth in this instance, more than she means to.

² Tristram explains that before the Victorian era, there was a presupposition among novelists such as Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen, that taste and morals come together, and therefore such a character as Fleda, who has both, is rather traditional. Tristram notes the separation of taste and morals in Victorian novels, reflecting "the impact of a new social mobility" (167), and shows that the character of Mrs. Gereth is fairly new.

³ For an account of the history of the law of women's inheritance, see Lee Holcombe, "Victorian Wives and Property: Reform on the Married Women's Property Law, 1857-1882" and Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895*.

⁴ Tristram's historical survey of the problem of what constitutes taste in Victorian novels is interesting and informative. Because taste is subjective and is a complex subject to study, it is more fruitful to analyze what values the novelists historically tend to conceive of as constituting taste, as Tristram has done, than to try to judge the characters' taste according to our own sense of taste. However, the popularity of such books as Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* (1868) shows that contemporary people tended to see taste as something that is acquirable from a manual and objectively estimable. Eastlake writes that his object was "to suggest some fixed principles of taste for the popular guidance of those who are not accustomed to hear such principles defined" (vi), and "if I am thus enabled, even indirectly, to encourage a discrimination between good and bad design in those articles of daily use which we are accustomed to see around us, my object will be attained" (15).

⁵ Tristram writes that in the Edwardian era, another transition occurs and "taste" and "home" now become "incompatible: the bonds of truth which make a home cannot be formed where taste predominates" (196).

⁶ Gill has also written that Poynton is "not so much a house as a museum" (68). He has called Poynton a "palace of art" and Ricks a "house of life."

⁷ Contrary to my view, Gill finally equates Poynton to Ricks. He argues that because it burns down and adopts a charm of something lost, Poynton "should be associated with Ricks" (71). He furthermore writes that "[o]n the level of Christian symbolism," Poynton is "actually 'saved' by being lost" (72), and like Ricks, it becomes a house of life. My view is that Poynton and Ricks are endowed with separate values and remain separate, and Ricks finally triumphs.

⁸ Jonathan Freedman explains that the history of the idea of the "House Beautiful" "suggests the extensiveness of the intersection between the British aesthetic movement and transformations in American interior design" (106). The idea, popularized by such aesthetes as Charles Eastlake, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde, spread to America where, among the upper and upper-middle class people, the notion prevailed that the "'The House Beautiful' was something to be avidly sought" and that "the home itself could and should be seen as a work of art" (106). The original title of the novel presumably derives from the timely permeation of the idea both in Britain and America.

Chapter 2

A Tragedy Occurring between Two Houses: *The Other House*

The Spoils of Poynton is arguably the novel that raises the theme of women's search for a home most distinctively. This chapter shall examine *The Other House*, which is one of James's least well-known novels, and show that the same theme also plays a vital role in the plot of this novel. Behind the murder of Effie, there is Rose's desire to secure a home at Bounds, which she has chosen over another, invisible home in Hong Kong offered by Dennis Vidal.

(1) Dramatic Form and Point of View

The Other House has the characteristic of being in-between a novel and a play. Its history of composition—first written as a play scenario, then turned into a novel in 1896, in the form we read it, and reconverted into a play in 1908—places it in a unique genre of a “play-novel.”¹ Its being a “play-novel” makes it difficult for the author to adopt a centre-of-consciousness viewpoint. Instead, we are given different viewpoints at different times. For instance, Jean is the focalizer in most parts of Chapter 2, and she gives her first impression of Rose in the following manner: “She [Rose] was by no means in tears; but she was for an instant extremely blank, an instant during which Jean remembered, rather to wonder at it, Mrs. Beever's having said of her that one really didn't know whether she was awfully plain or strikingly handsome. Jean felt that one quite did know: she was awfully plain” (6-7). However, the focalizer temporarily shifts to Rose when she conveys her impression of Jean: “It may immediately be mentioned that about the charm of the apparition offered meanwhile to her own eyes Rose Armiger had not a particle of doubt: a slim, fair girl who struck her as a light

sketch for something larger, a cluster of happy hints with nothing yet quite ‘put in’ but the splendour of the hair and the grace of the clothes” (7). Or, when the narrator does not adopt a particular viewpoint, as in most parts of the novel, the narration functions in a similar way to stage directions. The effect of this form of narration is that it gives the reader the impression of watching a play, the narrator describing the characters’ actions and thoughts and explaining to the reader what is happening “on stage.”

In being a “play-novel,” *The Other House* is similar to *The Awkward Age*, which is also dramatic in structure and which also does not adopt a single central consciousness. Nevertheless, *The Other House* lacks the complexity of *The Awkward Age*; the latter novel is much more open to interpretation in terms of the characters’ relationships, actions, and psychology, and the development of the plot. If there is some complexity in *The Other House*, it may be found in the narration in the first few pages of each Book, where the narrator describes the situation of the story.² The narrator gives an introduction to the characters and describes the setting of each Act, or each Book. It is important to notice here that in these passages, the narrator always adopts Mrs. Beever’s knowledge. It is not her viewpoint that the narrator adopts, because she is not there in the scene in action. But the narrator knows her inner thoughts, and gives an introduction based on her knowledge and values. For instance, at the beginning of Book First, the narrator says: “One of them [Mrs. Beever’s impressions] might have been freely rendered into a hint that her young partner was a possible source of danger to her own sex. Not to her personally, of course; for herself, somehow, Mrs. Beever was not of her own sex. If she *had* been a woman—she never thought of herself so loosely—she would, in spite of her age, have doubtless been conscious of peril” (4). From this quotation, we become aware of the complexity of Mrs. Beever’s knowledge of others and of herself. She is the only one who knows of Tony’s “danger” to women, despite his “sociability.” Furthermore, she interestingly

believes that to think of herself as a “woman” is a “loose” understanding of her identity. We know of her as the co-owner of the Bank, and as Paul’s mother, but she refuses to be considered simply as a “woman.” This is why Mrs. Beever deviates from the category of “homeless women” that I examine in this study, and I shall discuss that further later on.

To give another example of the narrator speaking Mrs. Beever’s thoughts, let us observe this quotation from the beginning of Book Second:

She [Mrs. Beever] hated stopping there [Dr. Ramage’s house], hated it as much as she liked his stopping at Eastmead: in the former case she seemed to consult him and in the latter to advise, which was the exercise of her wisdom that she decidedly preferred. 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 is it 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. (74)

In providing a theory of drama and the use of metaphors, this narration has the familiar complexity of a Jamesian narrative, which is absent in most parts of *The Other House*. Mrs. Beever, with her depth, is the most Jamesian character in this novel, and because the narrator bases the explanations of the situation on her knowledge and thoughts, a characteristic complexity is found in the narration at the beginning of each Book. I also need to point out that, because Mrs. Beever’s values are explicitly stated, we appear to be expected to adopt them as the criteria of judgement when we read the story. We identify and sympathize most with Mrs. Beever, and not with Jean or Tony, because we are introduced to Mrs. Beever’s values as the framework from which to judge the subsequent action. Mrs. Beever is important as an observer, although not a direct

participant in the events of the novel, and therefore not a heroine. That role belongs to Rose Armiger, and I shall now examine the reasons why.

(2) Women in *The Other House* and the Search for a Home

Like Fleda, Rose needs to find a home. This springs from the misfortune surrounding her original family: the death of her parents and the presence of the infamous aunt/stepmother, Mrs. Grantham. Rose's unequalled hate of Mrs. Grantham deprives her of a home to return to, and like Julia, for whom "Never was a marriage more of a rescue" (13), she needs to marry in order to secure her own home free from Mrs. Grantham's influence. With this background in mind, Rose's following appeal to Dennis sounds convincingly earnest: "Don't you see what it is for a poor girl to have such an anchorage as this—such honourable countenance, such a place to fall back upon?" (38), speaking of Bounds. Dennis goes as far as to acknowledge the charm of the place: "It *is* a good berth, my dear, and it must be a pleasure to live with such fine things. They've given me a room up there that's full of them—an awfully nice room" (38).

Rose has set her mind on making Bounds her "anchorage;" she wants to stay there as Julia's best friend, and after Julia's death, as Tony's wife.³ It is worth noting that such words as "anchorage" and "berth" suggest the ocean. Rose may be associating herself with a drifting ship, looking for a stable resting-place. However, it is ironic that such terms imply a temporary stopping-place, which foretells that Rose must leave Bounds before long. The association is also significant in the sense that Dennis crosses the ocean twice to propose to Rose.

Chapter 9 is important because it is where Rose officially chooses Bounds over Dennis's house in Hong Kong. Let us observe the scene closely. Dennis encourages

Rose to marry him: “It’s *me*, you know, that you’ve now to ‘fall back’ upon” (43), and emphasizes the stability of life in Hong Kong, saying that the letter from the “governor” “puts us on a footing that really seems to me sound” (43). Dennis stresses the economic security and “liberties” (46) against the precariousness of Rose’s staying at Bounds, declaring: “If Mrs. Bream goes, your ‘anchorage,’ as you call it, goes. [...] One may have the highest possible opinion of her husband and yet not quite see you staying on here in the same manner with *him*. [...] The way therefore to provide against everything is—as I remarked to you a while ago—to settle with me this minute the day, the nearest one possible, for our union to become a reality” (47). Dennis shows the best understanding of Rose’s unstable condition, but it is clear to the reader that she is more attracted to Bounds and so is impervious to the charm of Hong Kong. Rose acts out her indifference by diverting her attention from the letter and looking “anguish[ed]” (44) toward Julia’s room.

It is implied that the letter is written in a bureaucratic language, and its content is only partly revealed to the reader, such as the figure of “five-thousand-and-forty” (46) and “going out” for “two years” (46). These numbers appear arbitrary and distant to the reader, just as what Rose calls the “general attitude” (44) of the letter that is found “between the lines” (44) sounds vague. My point is that the presentation of the letter reveals the author’s indifference toward Hong Kong as well as Rose’s. The charm of Hong Kong, however much Dennis announces his economic success, is not convincingly written; it strikes one as too remote from reality, no more than a convenient location where Dennis may easily make a fortune large enough to match the attractiveness of Bounds, in order to give Rose another choice.

In James’s treatment of Hong Kong in *The Other House*, which became a British colony in 1842 as a result of the Opium War, we may mark a tendency that Edward W. Said has called Orientalism. For English writers during the nineteenth-century, “the

Orient was defined by material possession, by a material imagination” (169), and was “exploited aesthetically and imaginatively as a roomy place full of possibility” (181). Furthermore, Said explains: “In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these” (177). James had never visited Asia; his travels had been confined to the trans-Atlantic and his interests very much within Europe. Nevertheless he “imagines” and “exploits” Hong Kong as an expedient place that enables Dennis to be a “made man” (44), and this attitude accounts for its insubstantial appearance in the novel.⁴

The remoteness is further intensified by the fact that Rose spurns Hong Kong and shows no interest in it. The place is doubly removed from the novel’s reality, firstly by the author’s unconvincing presentation, and secondly by Rose’s rejection. The “reality” always remains within the familiar, immediate world of Bounds and Eastmead. After Rose has refused Dennis, Tony walks into the scene where “Dennis was separated by the width of the hall from [Rose]” (51), but is too preoccupied to notice “the space between them” (51). The “space” is as great as the physical and psychological distance between England and Hong Kong. Therefore, in Chapter 9, Dennis brings up the choice between Bounds and his house in Hong Kong, and Rose chooses Bounds. Whereas Bounds is the setting of the novel and its attractiveness is persuasively conveyed to the reader, Dennis’s house remains distant, imaginary and invisible.

However, in her choice of Bounds over Hong Kong whose economic stability is emphasized, we observe Rose’s tendency as a humanist as opposed to a materialist. That is, she has weighed her love for Tony against the riches promised by Dennis, and has chosen her emotional attachment. The fact that she has rejected another man, Paul Beaver, who seemingly loves her and who is as prosperous as Tony, also shows that she

attaches importance to whom she loves, not who loves her or how wealthy he is. One of the instances where we remark Paul's love for Rose comes in the following quotation: "Paul Beever's little eyes, after he [Tony] appeared, rested on Rose with an expression which might have been that of a man counting the waves produced on a sheet of water by the plunge of a large object. For any like ripple on the fine surface of the younger girl [Jean] he appeared to have no attention" (103-104). Rose is aware of Paul's feelings, and takes advantage of them at once to make Tony believe that she loves Paul, too. Here, we must make note of Tony's reaction. He says: "[N]othing would give me greater pleasure than to see you so happily 'established,' as they say—so honourably married, so affectionately surrounded and so thoroughly protected" (111). This summarizes the all-perfect situation that a woman gains by marrying such a man as Paul. As revealed by such words as "established," "surrounded" and "protected," Tony's speech affirms the recurrent idea examined in this study, that marriage is about securing a house.

In his *Notebooks* entry, James has called Rose the "bad heroine" and Jean the "good heroine." In view of my argument in this thesis, Rose paradoxically has more attributes of a heroine than Jean. Rose tries to secure a home by marrying Tony, but in failing, she shares the fate with the other heroines that I examine, such as Fleda and the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*. The fact that Rose tries to succeed by murdering Effie certainly marks her as more violent, impulsive, and "bad" than any other Jamesian heroine. Her "badness" is perhaps most comparable to that of Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) in that they even go as far as wanting someone else to die. The consequence of Rose's crime is the loss of a chance of marriage altogether, as Dennis declares that in the future, he will do "[e]verything but marry her" (212), and the small possibility of her marriage to Paul has also gone. At the end of the novel Rose is homeless, yet instead of being turned in for her crime, she begins a new journey in

search of a home.

On the contrary, Jean is atypical of James's heroines in that she is offered a residence in two places, Eastmead and Bounds, and finally gains a husband and a home that she loves. Superficially, Jean is similar to Fleda in that both love the men whom they are forbidden to marry for moral reasons—Owen's relationship to Mona and Tony's promise to Julia. Nevertheless Jean ends up marrying Tony when the obstacle that has seemed absolute is violently removed. The fact that the author even uses this violent measure puts her at a great remove from Fleda.

As I have argued before, Mrs. Beever deviates from such a line of homeless women. Her position as the co-owner of the Bank and the mistress of Eastmead is stable. Excepting that aspect, however, she shares many characteristics with Mrs. Gereth. Both are widows, have a son, wish that her son will marry her favourite girl—Jean and Fleda—and both live in a country house. We may say that Mrs. Beever and Mrs. Gereth were born as twins in James's imagination. James wrote the two novels in the same year, and started both with women who share these common characteristics. But James gave them a critical difference—he deprived Mrs. Gereth of Poynton, but endowed Mrs. Beever with what seems to be a permanent possession of Eastmead. Mrs. Beever's stable authority derives from her share in the Bank, inherited from her husband. This position enables her to secure a high income and to enforce her power over her son, which Mrs. Gereth was unable to do.

The fact that Mrs. Beever has a permanent home and Mrs. Gereth does not, results in their different roles in the novels. Whereas Mrs. Gereth moves from place to place, searching for a home, and is a direct participant in the plot, Mrs. Beever is primarily an observer. This is stated in the first sentence of the novel: "Mrs. Beever of Eastmead, and of 'Beever and Bream,' was a close, though not a cruel observer of what went on, as she always said, at the other house" (1). Another instance to note

concerning her status as witness is in Chapter 15, when she becomes furious with Paul for his indifference to Jean. The narrator says that her anger “transferred to him [Paul] the advantage she had so long monopolized, that 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. She hated to perform to Paul as she had made others perform to herself” (95). Mrs. Beever’s ability to enjoy a superior position as a “seer” and “critic” derives from her power as the mistress of Eastmead. Without this, she would be participating and “performing” in the plot in her search for a home, like Mrs. Gereth has done. In this respect, Mrs. Beever and Mrs. Gereth crucially differ.

I have examined Rose, Jean and Mrs. Beever in terms of their relationship to houses, and have shown that Rose has the most attributes of a heroine in that she looks for a permanent home and fails to find one. Her failure is ironically brought about by two of her own actions—rejection of Dennis and murder of Effie. The former is linked to the author’s problematic treatment of Hong Kong as a convenient colony where Dennis makes a fortune, but which is not attractive, giving Rose a believable reason for choosing Bounds.

I shall now proceed to an analysis of the representation and implications of Bounds and Eastmead as the settings for the three Acts.

(3) Bounds and Eastmead

The three Books or Acts of *The Other House* are set in the hall of Bounds, the garden of Eastmead, and the drawing-room of Eastmead. Looking closely at their descriptions reveals the significance of each setting, as well as the characters of their owners, Tony and Mrs. Beever.

In Book First, the hall of Bounds is portrayed through the viewpoint of Jean:

[I]t struck her at first as empty, and during the moment that she supposed herself in sole possession she perceived it to be showy and indeed rather splendid. Bright, large and high, richly decorated and freely used, full of “corners” and communications, it evidently played equally the part of a place of reunion and of a place of transit. It contained so many large pictures that if they hadn’t looked somehow so recent it might have passed for a museum. The shaded summer was in it now, and the odour of many flowers, as well as the tick from the chimney-piece of a huge French clock which Jean recognized as modern. (6)

In the novel, this hall represents the whole of Bounds; the hall and the house are in a kind of synecdochal relationship. The features of the hall revealed by this description are newness, largeness, richness, and friendliness, also very much the attributes of Tony himself. His personal traits are projected on his house because he has made it to suit his liking. The foremost characteristic of Bounds is its newness, as the narrator comments from Mrs. Beever’s viewpoint: “His house was new—he had on his marriage, at a vast expense, made it quite violently so” (3-4). Tony thus has an inclination for change. Mrs. Beever observes that the newness of Bounds includes its inhabitants: “His wife and his child were new; new also in a marked degree was the young woman who had lately taken up her abode with him and who had the air of intending to remain till she should lose that quality” (4). Tony’s inviting Rose to his house is in accordance with its friendly atmosphere as the “place of reunion” and “transit.” The word “transit” implies a temporary place to stay, as well as “anchorage,” and for Rose and Dennis, Bounds is exactly such a place. Jean’s impression of the room as “showy” and “museum”-like reminds one of Poynton, but Bounds and Poynton are totally different, because Tony collects the items that are “modern,” whereas Mrs. Gereth is preoccupied

with “old” things. What is common is the act of collecting, and the fact that it costs a great deal of money.

Just as we perceive Tony’s tendency as a “modernizer” from the description of Bounds, we can also see, from the description of Eastmead, that Mrs. Beever has an opposite tendency as a conservative. The portrayal of her drawing-room at the outset of Book Third is full of such implications:

She had left it, from the first, as it was—full of the old things that, on succeeding to her husband’s mother, she had been obliged, as a young woman of that period, to accept as dolefully different from the things thought beautiful by other young women whose views of drawing-rooms, all about her, had also been intensified by marriage. [...] She had therefore lived with mere dry wistfulness through the age of rosewood, and had been rewarded by finding that, like those who sit still in runaway vehicles, she was the only person not thrown out. Her mahogany had never moved, but the way people talked about it had, and the people who talked were now eager to sit down with her on everything that both she and they had anciently thought plainest and poorest. It was Jean, above all, who had opened her eyes—opened them in particular to the great wine-dark doors, polished and silver-hinged, with which the lady of Eastmead, arriving at the depressed formula that they were “gloomy,” had for thirty years, prudently on the whole, as she considered, shut out the question of taste. (187)

This space represents the whole of Eastmead, as well as the character of Mrs. Beever. I have already discussed her complexity, and it is again recognizable in her attitude toward this room. She has changed nothing there not because she liked it as it was, but because she thought it was her “duty,” and after thirty years, she is rediscovering the

merit of her act. She differs greatly from Mrs. Gereth in placing her “duty” before her “taste.” Mrs. Beever’s judgement of the value of the “old things” is not subjective; her disaffection with them had been provoked by the opinions of “other young women,” and her recent appreciation of them has been induced by Jean. What seems to be subjective is Mrs. Beever’s belief in the safety of keeping the things as they are, unlike Tony who likes to replace oldness by newness, and Mrs. Gereth who keeps adding more things to her room. If Mrs. Beever cannot try new things, at least it is safe to rely on the value of oldness. It is this conservatism that makes Mrs. Beever, in Jean’s words, “so ‘early Victorian’ as to be almost prehistoric” (10). Her attitude toward her room is reminiscent of that of Madame de Vionnet in *The Ambassadors* (1903). Like Mrs. Beever, Madame de Vionnet does not sell or buy any furniture in her room, but she, “beautifully passive under the spell of transmission,” “had only received, accepted and been quiet” (172). Strether notes the sense of history filling this room that has been passed down to her by her “predecessors” (172). The difference is that Madame de Vionnet believes in her attitude, whereas Mrs. Beever only believes in the security which it offers.

Mrs. Beever’s complex feelings toward newness and oldness are also observable in the description of her garden at the beginning of Book Second:

Tony could beat her indoors at every point, but when she took her stand on her lawn she could defy not only Bounds but Wilverley. [...] From May to October she was out, as she said, at grass, drawing from it most of the time a comfortable sense that on such ground as this her young friend’s love of newness broke down. He might make his dinner-service as new as he liked; she triumphed precisely in the fact that her trees and her shrubs were old. He could hang nothing on his walls like her creepers and clusters; there was no velvet in his carpets like the velvet of her turf. (73)

Here, Mrs. Beever admits her admiration for Tony's upholstery. She therefore has an inner sympathy toward newness, but shows an inclination toward oldness on the outside, this time as embodied in her "trees" and "shrubs." Her stance toward her garden is analogous to that toward her room; she does not change it and sustains its continuity.

It is significant that Book Second is set in this garden, because it prepares the reader for the murder of Effie in the river. This garden is the point of transit between Eastmead and Bounds by the "short way," and in Book Second, the characters go in and out of each house and back and forth. Each time Jean or Tony comes from or goes toward Bounds, the river and the bridge are mentioned. James first planned the method of murder to be poisoning, but we may surmise that he changed it to drowning in the river in order to make a more effective use of the setting. The narrator continuously refers to the river as the boundary between the two houses, and the murder occurring there is symbolic as the outcome of the rivalry between Rose and Jean. It is a crime that occurs literally and symbolically between Eastmead and Bounds, because Rose desires to keep Jean out of this boundary. Additionally, the beautiful setting serves to emphasize the brutality of the crime in contrast. Furthermore, by making Rose drown Effie rather than making her poison her, the author conveys the spontaneity of Rose's act.

The fact that the murder occurs outside goes against the common assumption that any murderer would want to prevent the act from being seen. Tony's idea of inside/outside agrees with this notion when he speaks of his belief that his relation with Jean is one of friendship in the following way: "This was a happy, lively provision that kept everything down, made sociability a cool, public, out-of-door affair, without a secret or a mystery—confined it, as one might say, to the breezy, sunny forecourt of the temple of friendship, forbidding it any dream of access to the obscure and comparatively stuffy interior" (118). Tony points out the contrast between the outside

space as bright, open, and public, and the inside space as dark and furtive. It is ironical that Rose commits her most “secretive” act in the outside space where people cross between Bounds and Eastmead, a factor that discloses her impulsiveness. The irony is twisted in the sense that although the murder is committed in the open space, it does not have any witnesses.

I have examined each setting of the three Acts, and seen that each is pregnant with meaning.⁵ The aspect of Tony as a modernist, or a moderniser, is revealed in the newness of Bounds, whereas Mrs. Beever’s conservatism is reflected in the oldness of Eastmead. I will argue now that this distinctive contrast is also consequential in terms of plot. The fact that the novel starts out in Bounds is significant because the events that take place in Book First correspond with the characteristics of the house that I have stated above. Bounds is marked by its modernity; it has “violently” been remodeled by Tony. It is filled with the sense of expectations for change and introduction of something new. It is appropriate, therefore, that Book First introduces Rose to the story. She represents change, and has the power to start and move the plot. She triggers a sensation, the murder of Effie, in a town that is otherwise eventless, and her crime forms the climax of the plot.

The sensation is quickly reconciled in Book Third, and it is again befitting that this is set in Eastmead, a place that works to repel change. Therefore, the nullification of Effie’s murder is processed in the drawing-room of Eastmead. It is Mrs. Beever who stands for preservation of the original state, but in this case Dr. Ramage works as her agent in neutralizing the scandal, as he says: “I represent her” (203). Some critics have argued that the acquittal of Rose makes the novel unconvincing and it is the cause of its failure.⁶ However, by taking into account the spatial tendencies of Eastmead, one becomes aware of another way of interpreting this conclusion. It is true that the dialogues that take place in Eastmead after the drowning of Effie appear unreal,

considering the gravity of what has happened. We may speculate about whether it is related to the absence of a centre of consciousness, and whether that technique could have given the scenes more credibility. It would have given the reader access to the characters' thoughts and not only to their speeches, but the dramatic form that this novel adopts prevents such an application of a central consciousness.

I have examined *The Other House*, and shown that women's search for a home is also a substantial theme in this widely-neglected novel. Although it is generally considered "minor," it is important in confirming my position about James's presentation of women and houses. I have analyzed the motive of Rose's crime particularly as springing from her desire to secure a home at Bounds, which she has chosen over Dennis's house in Hong Kong. James's presentation of Hong Kong is problematic, and his literary use of it is in a parallel relationship to the economic and political exploitation of it by the British government in the nineteenth century. I have also analyzed the passages of description that represent the settings of the three Acts, showing the significance of the opening of the novel in Bounds with the introduction of the newcomer, Rose, and its conclusion in Eastmead where the neutralization of her scandal is processed. In the next chapter, I will continue my examination of women and houses and look at the case of a young girl's search for a home in *What Maisie Knew*.

¹ Leon Edel claims that *The Other House* is modeled on Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, while Oscar Cargill maintains that it has been more influenced by Greek dramas, specifically, the *Medea* of Euripides.

² David Seed points out that there is a gap between this novel's narration and action: "[T]he 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 a growing disparity between the narrative voice and the novel's true subject" (73). I agree with Seed about the "disparity," but I believe this narration is an indispensable part of the novel most of all because it describes the setting of each Book.

³ Priscilla L. Walton argues that Rose's relationship with Julia is homosexual. While Walton's argument is intriguing, one cannot refute the overt signs of Rose's love for Tony which even triggers the murder of Effie.

⁴ Of course, as a fact, British merchants were making profits in Hong Kong. For an account of this history, see *British Imperialism in China* by Elinor Burns. As Burns explains, by the Treaty of 1842, "Britain seized the island of Hong Kong, which formed a vital link in the far eastern trade route, as well as a very important strategic base for further operations in China. [...] In the early period, the main purpose of the British attacks on China was the opening up of new markets for Lancashire's increasing production, enabling the cotton manufacturers to expand their business and their profits. [...] Actually, of course, the manufacturers did not reap the whole of this profit. Merchants, ship-owners, insurance brokers, and financiers all claimed their share (4-5, 7, 9)." The trading situation changed in the 1890s, when *The Other House* is set: "[W]ith the rise of the iron and steel industry in Britain and the close connections between that industry and the Banks, a new need developed. The financial groups which directed the banks required to find investments abroad, while the iron and steel firms with which they were associated needed markets for their products. The Chinese were not in a position to pay for railroads, bridges, and other large-scale enterprises, but they could be forced to assume the responsibility for loans, and the banks in making the loans would insist on contracts being placed with their associated concerns. Thus, in the nineties, the British trading policy (although still continuing in a submerged form) gave place to a policy of the export of capital, the securing of concessions, and the beginning of the industrial development of China" (11). This account lets us see the general system of the British merchants' money-making in Hong Kong. We may be led to imagine that Dennis's business is perhaps related to exporting capital and investing in the iron and steel enterprises in China. Also, we become aware of the considerable part that British banks played, and arrive at the possibility that "Beever and Bream" also gains profits from these transactions. Therefore, the hints of British imperialism are easily found in the novel. My argument is that James uses the topics of imperialism for convenience, without direct knowledge or interest in them, thus producing the effects that I have pointed out.

⁵ Jennifer L. Jenkins writes that "no positive domestic tradition exists in either house" because "Mrs. Beever enforces no codes of morality or tradition. She watches but does not intervene. This absence undermines the cherished Victorian notion of family homes as repositories of tradition, family relics, and multi-generational families. Meanwhile, Bounds, the home of Tony and Julia Bream, is a structure so new as to have no tradition, schedule, or domestic order at all" (167). Jenkins concludes: "By positioning the home as a site of violence and refusing to allow domesticity to function as anything other than empty structure, James redraws not just the dimensions of

domestic fiction, but also those of desire. [...] James makes a start at creating one of [Judith] Roof's 'new scenarios of desire,' one driven by a narrative straining against oedipal, domesticating resolutions" (182).

⁶ For example, Gerard M. Sweeney explains that in James's original plan, Effie is poisoned but recovers, and Rose goes away unpunished. Sweeney argues that "the coupling of a revised center with the original ending" is "both problematic and unsettling" (216), and that this revision is the reason why Mrs. Beever is absent at the ending, because her morality would not have permitted Rose's banishment.

Chapter 3

The Homeless Child: *What Maisie Knew*

What Maisie Knew is, in a way, also a novel about “the other house.” Whenever Maisie is at her father’s house, she thinks of her mother’s house as “the other house,” and vice versa. Her situation deprives her of a proper home. *What Maisie Knew* differs greatly from *The Spoils of Poynton* in that it is not about houses, but about the lack of a house. Maisie stays in numerous houses, but none of them is a “home” for her. This theme is reflected in the fact that there is no description of the interiors of the various houses where she stays temporarily. Maisie is deprived of a home and parental protection, but as she grows older she starts to look for her own family and permanent home, which are free from their traditional forms.

(1) The Reversal of Private/Public Space

If “home” provides the boundary between the private and the public, and the private is inside the home and the public outside, Maisie is brought up in a situation where that relationship is reversed. For, her parents’ divorce proceedings, matters that derive from inside the home, become public and attract the people’s interest. After the first and second trials, “a squabble scarcely less public and scarcely more decent than the original shock of battle” (35) occurs, where Beale and Ida Farange settle on keeping Maisie by turns. The long process is broadcast in newspapers and invites a “reverberation, amid a vociferous public” (36), who are curious about the fate of the famous child. The Faranges provide, outside the house, topics of conversation about their private matters, which originate in the house.

Beale and Ida are characterized in such a way that makes them suitable as

procurers of attention. They have a “social attraction,” and it is “generally felt, to begin with, that they were awfully good-looking” (37). Their beauty makes them an object to be seen, as the narrator says of Ida: “She was a person who, when she was out—and she was always out—produced everywhere a sense of having been seen often, the sense indeed of a kind of abuse of visibility” (38). In one sense, Ida is the object of “abuse” and the victim of too much “visibility.” In another sense, she is its agent and she exploits her own status as spectacle. We may assume that the “abuse” is subjective, and Ida enjoys being out and being seen. The narrator states that during the trials, Beale was “bespattered from head to foot,” and that concerning Ida, people thought that “the brilliancy of a lady’s complexion (and this lady’s, in court, was immensely remarked) might be more regarded as showing the spots” (35). These expressions, too, employ bodily images and convey the idea that while Beale and Ida denounced each other in court, the audience was observing their faces and bodies. Therefore, the divorce proceedings have attracted the public’s attention primarily because of the scandalous nature of the dispute, but the physical beauty of Beale and Ida has also greatly contributed to the publicity.

The Prologue, which recounts the above process, is narrated without reference to Maisie’s point of view. It is firstly because she is too young. Although infant consciousness might have its own intrinsic interest, James chooses to start employing Maisie as the focalizer from Chapter 1, when she is six. Secondly, Maisie will not have been present at the trials, and in order to inform the reader of them, it is more effective to apply an “omniscient” perspective. The use of a different viewpoint from the heroine’s in the Prologue is a device that will be repeated in *The Turn of the Screw*. What distinguishes *What Maisie Knew* from the other works in terms of technique is that we read the story through the consciousness of a very young girl. This novel addresses her perception of deprivation of home and family, and her growing awareness

of the need to search for them. In the Preface, James writes that Maisie is an “ironic centre” (*Literary Criticism*, 1162) because the reader sometimes sees what Maisie does not, due to her age. The disintegration of the family, which is a central theme in this study, is most overtly treated in this novel. The family might be the expected life for any child, but it is not what Maisie knows.

It is probable that her parent’s dispute started not long after her birth, and thus she has never understood the idea of a home as private space. In the world that she is born into, her parents behave not as family but as enemies from outside camps. Outside the house, privacy is even more undermined because Maisie’s status is discussed in court and probed by the public. Maisie conceives of her parents as actors in a play: “Her little world was phantasmagoric—strange shadows dancing on a sheet. It was as if the whole performance had been given for her—a mite of a half-scared infant in a great dim theatre” (39). Maisie is thus born into public space, resulting in her desire to attain a private space that may only be found in the home. This is the search that she undertakes in the narrative.

After her parents’ divorce, Maisie continues to find public space within the house. Her father invites people there who treat her rather violently: “They pulled and pinched, they teased and tickled her; some of them even, as they termed it, shied things at her” (57). This space is always full of the presence of others, as Maisie observes from upstairs: “[T]he staircase, for a little girl hanging over banisters, sent up the deepening rustle of more elaborate advances” (67). Maisie develops a habit of “hanging over banisters when the door-bell sounded. This was the great refuge of her impatience, but what she heard at such times was a clatter of gaiety downstairs the impression of which, from her earliest childhood, had built up in her the belief that the grown-up time was the time of real amusement and above all of real intimacy” (69). This repeated image of “hanging over banisters” is significant. Maisie reveals that the habit relieves her

“impatience” with her father’s neglect of her, and it is as if she is trying to assert her presence through this act. The “banisters” divide downstairs, where the men and women enjoy intimate associations, and upstairs, from where Maisie gets glimpses of the goings-on. The more the adults seem intimate among themselves, the greater her sense of isolation. Although it is not the kind of intimacy that she wants to take part in, she cannot help being exposed to the atmosphere of their gatherings, and she clutches at the “banisters” as if to avoid being drawn towards them.

Maisie wants to stay upstairs, away from the adults: “in these days [she] preferred none the less that domestic revels should be wafted to her from a distance: she felt sadly unsupported for facing the inquisition of the drawing-room” (69). The phrase “domestic revels” is somewhat oxymoronic, pointing to the paradox of the public nature of the house, and always finding strangers partying within its private space.

The word “domestic” is again used in an ironic sense when Ida starts dating Mr. Perriam. Maisie recognizes that “Sir Claude wouldn’t at all care for the visits of a millionaire who was in and out of the upper rooms” (93), and that she is in the midst of the changes in her mother’s personal relations: “She was in the presence, she felt, of restless change: wasn’t it restless enough that her mother and her stepfather should already be on different sides? That was the great thing that had domestically happened” (94). What has “domestically happened” is that her mother’s lover, the person who is most unfit to be in that space, is too often in the house. Consequently, husband and wife are, in Sir Claude’s words, “not together—not a bit” (86). The presence of Mr. Perriam in the house is another factor that works to confuse Maisie about the idea of home as private space.

It is Sir Claude who shows the highest inclination toward “domestic values.” He often visits Maisie and Mrs. Wix in the schoolroom: “[H]e was always smoking, but always declaring that it was death to him not to lead a domestic life” (94). Sir Claude

has told Maisie earlier that he is a “family-man” (72), but “there *are* no family-women [...]”. None of them want any children” (73). The irony of the novel is that Sir Claude’s domestic tendency and Maisie’s search for a private space do not bring them together at the end. Meanwhile, Sir Claude’s wish for such a life is projected on the schoolroom: “He led one after all in the schoolroom” (94), where he has long evening talks with Mrs. Wix. However, Mrs. Wix does not support Sir Claude’s orientation toward the domestic but tries to encourage him to go to Parliament. She tells Maisie that “[t]he life she wanted him to take right hold of was the public” and says: “he can’t live like the lilies” (95). Mrs. Wix fails to recognize that Sir Claude does not aspire to go into the public sphere but wants to live a private life with a woman, and this failure prefigures their break-up.

We have seen that Maisie lives in a condition where the private and public are reversed. She has a public life in the house because strangers often invade her house, while her private life escapes outside because it has been circulated by newspapers and has become an object of widespread discussion. In fact, people continue to follow her privacy even after the court proceedings. Maisie is told by Mrs. Beale, who is still Miss Overmore at this time, that if “Mr. Farange’s daughter would only show a really marked preference she would be backed up by ‘public opinion’ in holding on to him” (47). Maisie is too young to understand it, but this comment shows that the public keeps paying attention to her and holds “opinions” about her which her parents take account of and which influence her life. Furthermore, Miss Overmore tells Maisie that she cannot be sent to a school because as soon as her father “should delegate to others the housing of his little charge he hadn’t a leg to stand on before the law” (56). Beale must house her in order to avoid appearing irresponsible before the law and the public. Therefore, Maisie’s privacy is not only exposed to the public, but it is also determined by public opinion, even after the legal proceedings have finished.

In fact, we may say that the only part of private life Maisie can keep to herself is her inner consciousness. If Maisie is born into a situation where she can find no private space, she eventually goes on a search of a house that might provide it. I will now examine this process.

(2) Maisie's Search for a Home

I shall start by quoting a passage that describes Maisie's situation most clearly. This is the beginning of Chapter 10, before Maisie and Sir Claude start a conversation in the schoolroom:

He was smoking a cigarette and he stood before the fire and looked at the meagre appointments of the room in a way that made her rather ashamed of them. Then [...] he remarked that really mamma kept them rather low on the question of decorations. Mrs. Wix had put up a Japanese fan and two rather grim texts; she had wished they were gayer, but they were all she happened to have. Without Sir Claude's photograph, however, the place would have been, as he said, as dull as a cold dinner. He had said as well that there were all sorts of things they ought to have; yet governess and pupil, it had to be admitted, were still divided between discussing the places where any sort of thing would look best if any sort of thing should ever come and acknowledging that mutability in the child's career which was naturally unfavourable to accumulation. She stayed long enough only to miss things, not half long enough to deserve them. (82)

Maisie's nomadic lifestyle prevents her from having a room of her own. In order to live a free, productive life, she needs to stay in one place where she can base her actions and store her possessions. She is gravely deprived of that right, and the novel

addresses this problem significantly. For, one's accumulation of things demonstrates one's history of life, and the lack of that basic right leads to the negation of one's life. The passage lets us know that Maisie has a desire for possession, but the only thing she keeps out of her own will is the photograph of Sir Claude. Her inability to possess is directly linked to the narrator's inability to describe. Because the things are not there, the narrator cannot describe the room other than by declaring it "dull" and "meagre." Paradoxically, the narrator's renunciation of description is itself a form of description; by the absence of words, the reader may be led to imagine an empty room.¹

Hence, Maisie goes on a search for a permanent home. Because she is too young to live on her own, she looks for a guardian who will provide her with one and live with her. At first, she considers Miss Overmore and Mrs. Wix as possible candidates, but after she meets Sir Claude, her ultimate goal becomes sharing a home with him. Numerous critics have claimed that Maisie develops an incestuous love for Sir Claude, but I believe her foremost feeling toward him is that she sees him as the ideal person to provide her the home and family that she has always craved.²

But first, let us review Maisie's relationship with Miss Overmore and Mrs. Wix. Her first instinct, to rely on a governess for guardianship rather than her parents, occurs early in the novel, when she grows attracted to Miss Overmore: "She had conceived her first passion, and the object of it was her governess. It hadn't been put to her, and she couldn't, or at any rate she didn't, put it to herself, that she liked Miss Overmore better than she liked papa [...]" (47-48). The keyword in Maisie's expectations from her governess is "safety," which is wholly linked to her desire of a permanent home. Maisie needs this sense of security because her parents have never given her the assurance to feel that she can be where she is. In the following instance, Maisie wants to be able to rely on Miss Overmore's "free caress into which her colloquies with Maisie almost always broke and which made the child feel that *her* affection at least

was a gage of safety. Parents had come to seem vague, but governesses were evidently to be trusted” (59). Maisie’s faith in Miss Overmore/Mrs. Beale does not cease until the ending, when she rejects her on moral grounds.

Maisie’s relationship with Mrs. Wix is even more interesting, because it is tighter and more complex. It is significant that Maisie’s first impression of Mrs. Wix includes a motherly image: “What Maisie felt was that she [Mrs. Wix] had been, with passion and anguish, a mother, and that this was something Miss Overmore was not, something (strangely, confusingly) that mamma was even less” (48). It is also safety that Maisie wants from Mrs. Wix, and Mrs. Wix’s degree of safety is augmented by this motherly image: “[S]omehow, in her ugliness and poverty, she was peculiarly and soothingly safe; safer than anyone in the world, than papa, than mamma, than the lady with the arched eyebrows; safer even, though so much less beautiful, than Miss Overmore [...]” (50). Here, Maisie brings up an important comparison between Mrs. Wix and a “banister.” She says: “It was from something in Mrs. Wix’s tone, [...] that Maisie, before her term with her mother was over, drew this sense of a support, like a breast-high banister in a place of ‘drops,’ that would never give way” (50). As we have seen, the “banister” has repeatedly been mentioned in the text as the barrier which Maisie leans on to observe the adults’ gatherings downstairs and which she clutches in order not to fall, and not to descend to the world of dubious adult relations. Maisie’s use of the image of a “banister” shows her view of Mrs. Wix as a strong support who will stand by her.

The motherly image of Mrs. Wix is something that she herself intentionally produces. For, she is looking for a home as well, and wants to join Maisie’s search. Although governesses appear independent to Maisie, actually they are not. Mrs. Wix is as dependent on Maisie as Maisie is on her, but she emphasizes her motherly image to Maisie so that the child will rely on her for pseudo-parental support. Mrs. Wix wins

Maisie's sympathy by talking about her deceased daughter:

[S]he [Maisie] found herself as deeply absorbed in the image of the little dead Clara Matilda [...] as she had ever found herself in the family group made vivid by one of seven. "She's your little dead sister," Mrs. Wix ended by saying, and Maisie, all in a tremor of curiosity and compassion, addressed from that moment a particular piety to the small accepted acquisition. Somehow she wasn't a real sister, but that only made her the more romantic. (48-49)

This passage shows that Maisie imagines herself in other families in order to find a place to belong to. She identifies herself as Mrs. Wix's daughter and as one of Miss Overmore's sisters. Maisie's identification with Clara Matilda happens quickly because Maisie and Mrs. Wix have a mutual need to belong to each other. Although Maisie knows that Clara Matilda is not a "real" sister, she has a predilection to relieve herself of hard reality by escaping into fantasy.

It is most likely that Maisie, at this stage, is not conscious of her escapism. Her relationship with reality and fantasy is an intricate one. The narrator has revealed that Maisie "was at the age for which all stories are true and all conceptions are stories. The actual was the absolute, the present alone was vivid" (42). This quotation may appear contradictory, because the first part points out Maisie's tendency to believe all stories and beliefs true; that is, her inclination to fantasize, while the second sentence discusses her surrender to reality. The apparent discrepancy disappears if we realize that Maisie accepts the actual and the present as "absolute," including the stories and fantasies that she has at that time. She confuses reality and fantasy because she accepts both when they are defined in terms of "that lively sense of the immediate" where "the past, on each occasion, became for her as indistinct as the future: she surrendered herself to the actual with a good faith that might have been touching to

either parent” (42). Maisie’s disposition to leave her fate to the “immediate” derives from the discontinuous lifestyle forced on her by her parents. Its intermittent nature means that she cannot conceive of the past, present and future as connected, and she can only deal with the present. For her, reality and fantasy are not opposite ideas, but rather, the opposite of reality is the past and the future. Therefore, Maisie escapes into the fantasy of an imaginary sister to avoid facing the reality of not having a caring family; for her at this early stage, fantasy and reality exist together in the common sphere of the present, and she is easily and involuntarily led to fantasize.

Concerning Maisie’s perception of time, H. Peter Stowell has commented that it is “measured, not in increments of metric time, but through the shifts and fluctuations of sensations, impressions, and consciousness. As a result, elapsed time in this novel is vague” (189). I agree that this novel is especially concerned with the “present” time, induced by the use of Maisie as the central consciousness.³ This preoccupation with the present may seem to be incongruous, given the title of the novel, *What Maisie Knew*. Nevertheless, this echoes the last sentence of the novel: “[Mrs. Wix] still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew” (266), and the verb is in the past since narration in this novel is told in that tense. This does not, however, contradict the fact that this novel is concerned with Maisie’s present knowledge at each stage in the plot.

Mrs. Wix also has a complex relationship with reality and fantasy. She is “not nearly so ‘qualified’ as Miss Overmore” (50) as a governess, and fiction is the only subject that she is good at. The next passage reveals the complexity of what she teaches:

[Mrs. Wix] took refuge on the firm ground of fiction, through which indeed there curled the blue river of truth. She knew swarms of stories, mostly those of the novels she had read; relating them with a memory that never faltered and a wealth of detail that was Maisie’s delight. They were

all about love and beauty and countesses and wickedness. 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; she made the child take with her again every step of her long lame course and think it beyond magic or monsters. (51)

“Fiction” is a safer ground than the other, more practical subjects for Mrs. Wix, and she lectures about the “truth” in “fiction.” However, in her lessons, it is connected to her real-life story, and eventually her life story comes to precede it in importance. Despite her interest in fiction or fantasy, Mrs. Wix believes that one’s personal narrative is more important, because it is real and more earnest. The “truth” in “fiction” may help her morally, but it does not directly save her from poverty and her housing problem. Therefore, the anxiety of homelessness has influenced Mrs. Wix’s view of this inter-relationship. She reflects this view in her lessons with Maisie, as if to teach the child that she also must learn to distinguish reality from fantasy, and to prepare her for her real search of a home.

Mrs. Wix fights a fierce battle with Miss Overmore over Maisie, but Maisie herself is not so interested in determining who will be her more favourite governess or surrogate mother. For, Maisie is indifferent about who prevails in this rivalry as long as she can secure Sir Claude as her guardian. When Maisie meets him for the first time in the drawing-room of her father’s house, she immediately sees him as the one who will save her from her “fallen state” (70). She happily believes that they belong together: “It was as if he had told her on the spot that he belonged to her [...]. No, nothing else that was most beautiful ever belonging to her could kindle that particular joy” (70). Maisie’s “fallen state” refers to her lack of caring parents and of her having to move from place to place. Maisie’s idea of Sir Claude as belonging to her reflects

her desire that he will finally *stay* with her for a long time as a guardian. This desire naturally leads to her repeated requests that he *live* with her, which becomes her primary goal. Living is staying in one place for a long time and accumulating possessions, something that she has never been able to do before. Maisie first makes this request to Sir Claude in Chapter 10, when she says: “Then we’ll live together?” (86) after he mentions the chance of his breaking up with Ida. But Sir Claude evades Maisie’s request, as he continues to do throughout the narrative.

Maisie is anxious about her own housing problem, but she realizes that Mrs. Wix has a similar, yet even graver problem:

[Maisie] therefore recognized the hour that in troubled glimpses she had long foreseen, the hour when [...] with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all, she shouldn’t know “wherever” to go. Such apprehension as she felt on this score was not diminished by the fact that Mrs. Wix herself was suddenly white with terror: a circumstance leading Maisie to the further knowledge that this lady was still more scared on her own behalf than on that of her pupil. A governess who had only one frock was not likely to have either two fathers or two mothers: accordingly if even with these resources Maisie was to be in the streets, where in the name of all that was dreadful was poor Mrs. Wix to be? (96)

This quotation expresses the strong fear of homelessness felt by both Maisie and Mrs. Wix. The “six protections” are unreliable because they are only temporary. It is interesting to note that “homes” are placed in the same rank as “parents.” “Homes” are personified and “parents” are commodified in effect. Maisie’s condition reveals the dilemma that while one protection may be absolute and reliable, six are as uncertain as none.⁴ Mrs. Wix’s condition is even more severe, because she has been told by Ida to leave. As Maisie notices, Mrs. Wix is keener on receiving protection than providing it

to Maisie. She needs to be with Maisie because it gives her the reason to stay in the house, and because she can search for a home with the child. She thus says that “it would take another turn of the screw to make her desert her darling” (97). We must note here that Mrs. Wix gives the title of the novel that James would write the following year. Both have a governess who is looking for a place to reside. In *The Turn of the Screw*, Douglas says that his story is given “another turn of the screw” (1) and made more intriguing by the fact that it concerns a child. In *What Maisie Knew*, “another turn of the screw” refers to a satisfactory condition demanded by Mrs. Wix that would free her from the threat of homelessness.

Since that “turn of the screw” does not exist, Mrs. Wix joins Maisie’s project to live with Sir Claude. Mrs. Wix introduces this subject to him in the schoolroom in Chapter 12; she makes the “proposal that whenever and wherever they [Maisie and Mrs. Wix] should seek refuge Sir Claude should consent to share their asylum” (98). When Sir Claude protests: “It’s your happy thought that I shall take a house for you?” (98), Mrs. Wix answers: “For the wretched homeless child” (98). She continues shortly afterwards:

“Of course *we* shouldn’t dream of a whole house. Any sort of little lodging, however humble, would be only too blest.”

“But it would have to be something that would hold us all,” said Sir Claude.

“Oh yes,” Mrs. Wix concurred: “the whole point’s our being together.”
(99)

The narrator calls Mrs. Wix Maisie’s “protectress” (99), and she has the child in her arms while she makes these pleas. She is taking advantage of her position to find her own lodging. By calling Maisie a “homeless child” and inviting sympathy, she makes her pupil a cover for her own situation. Maisie observes this exchange with some

coolness, as if she has detected another motive behind Mrs. Wix's protection of her. Any attempt at independent intervention is precluded by Mrs. Wix's claim to take action on her behalf. Maisie imagines watching a football game, and feels "the doom of a peculiar passivity" (101). Some time later, Mrs. Wix restates to Maisie her hope concerning Sir Claude: "Could they but hold out long enough the snug little home with Sir Claude would find itself informally established" (104). From then on, the actions and thoughts of Maisie and Mrs. Wix are directed toward establishing that home. However, there is a gap between their intentions, because while Mrs. Wix aims for a home shared by the three of them, Maisie is only looking for a home with Sir Claude.

The outcome of their search finally becomes clear in Boulogne. This is brought about by Maisie's attainment of moral sense that is guided by her knowledge. The day before she leaves for Boulogne, the narrator comments: "Maisie had known all along a great deal, but never so much as she was to know from this moment on and as she learned in particular during the couple of days that she was to hang in the air, as it were, over the sea which represented in breezy blueness and with a summer charm a crossing of more spaces than the Channel" (162). During her short stay in Boulogne, Maisie crosses the line between ignorance and awareness of the nature of the relationship between Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale. When she has just arrived in France, that insight has not come yet, and her goal is the same, as she asks Sir Claude: "[I]sn't France cheaper than England? [...] Then we shall live here?" (183). When Mrs. Wix arrives the next day her goal is also the same. She pleads with Sir Claude to leave Mrs. Beale and live with her and Maisie: "[W]e'll live together without a cloud" (201). I believe the moment of Maisie's enlightenment occurs two days later, as she waits with Mrs. Wix for Sir Claude's return. The narrator says: "As she [Maisie] was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to

know Everything” (213). Maisie comes to realize what Mrs. Wix means when she says that Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale are “committing a crime” now in being together and that their “immorality” must not be condoned. She used to think that their “freedom” allows them to be together, but she now understands that “this made no difference” (215). What she has gained is sexual knowledge.

Maisie now only accepts Sir Claude as her guardian; she says: “Him alone or nobody” (231), and she declares that Mrs. Wix is “nobody.” This shows that Maisie sees Mrs. Wix no longer as a protectress, but as someone who needs protection like herself. Ironically, the housing plan that Sir Claude finally offers Maisie is incompatible with her newly acquired “moral sense.” He proposes that Maisie live with Mrs. Beale and he will visit them: “Of course it would be quite unconventional, [...] I mean the little household that we three should make together” (247). Maisie rejects Sir Claude’s plan not because of its unconventionality but because of its immorality. Therefore, both Sir Claude and Maisie do not get the home and family that they search for.

When their search ends unsuccessfully, Maisie and Mrs. Wix find each other to live with. They arrive at a pseudo-parental relationship, but it is a peculiar relationship also in the sense that the mother-daughter dynamics are reversed. For, it is implied that they will live on Maisie’s money that has been left her by her godmother. This money is mentioned only in the prologue and the ending, and it serves as a blank during most of the narrative, while Beale and Ida hide it from Maisie. But as Maisie has grown older in the end, the reader rediscovers that money as well as the godmother who had previously been mentioned only briefly in the prologue. She is vitally significant because she determines the beginning and ending of *What Maisie Knew*; she provides Maisie’s name without which the novel cannot begin, and the means which Maisie will live on after the novel ends. In a sense, this godmother is more of a surrogate mother

than Mrs. Wix. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Wix finds herself relying on Maisie, who has grown older and become stronger morally and economically. Their relationship is reversed, a transition that is triggered by Mrs. Wix’s teaching of “moral sense” to Maisie.⁵ Maisie is thus in possession of her own life; in Carren Kaston’s words, Maisie arrives at “an act of self-custody, as she struggles to achieve the ‘imagination in *predominance*’ that will enable her to possess the material of her life in a plot of her own design” (121).

(3) Maisie’s London

What Maisie Knew is exceptionally rich in allusions to physical locations in contemporary London. We find Maisie in Regent’s Park, Kensington Gardens and Earl’s Court, among other locations, where significant events occur. The importance of outside/public/open space in the development of the plot emphasizes the lack of inside/private space, that is, Maisie’s home.

The events that occur in Kensington Gardens and at the Exhibition at Earl’s Court are so schematically constructed that they can be compared in a table in the following manner:

Time	End of June, 1887	End of July, 1887
Place	Kensington Gardens	The Exhibition
The person who takes Maisie out	Sir Claude	Mrs. Beale
The people whom Maisie encounters	Ida with the Captain	Beale with the Countess
The place where each parent was supposed to be	Playing billiards in Brussels	Yachting in Cowes
The colour of each parent’s companion	Fair, white	“Brown”
The impression of each companion	Good, familiar	Bad, strange

The person with whom Maisie converses alone	The Captain	Beale
The place of the conversation	Nearby bench	The Countess's room

The year is presumably 1887, as Paul Theroux has written that the Exhibition opened in that year, when “a London entrepreneur (J. R. Whisley?) turned a piece of waste ground in west London into a permanent fairground and exhibition” (Notes, 272). This is mentioned in Karl Baedeker’s *London and Its Environs*, a contemporary guidebook: “Earl’s Court Exhibition Grounds, with elaborate annual ‘national’ exhibitions, numerous side-shows (adm. extra), bands, etc. Other features are a switch-back railway and a water-chute. Adm. 1s., 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.” (49). Therefore, Mrs. Beale and Maisie have paid 1 shilling to enter the Exhibition, but not the “extra” fees to enter each show, which the narrator says are “sixpence apiece” (142).

These two situations are intentionally made similar, but a close comparison reveals the contrast in some of their aspects and final effects. The settings are different in that Kensington Gardens are much less crowded and more pastoral in atmosphere than the Exhibition site. The narrator says that Maisie’s favourite is Regent’s Park, but Sir Claude takes her to Hyde Park because “this was the direction taken by everyone that anyone looked at” (121). It is implied that Sir Claude chooses Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens in order to avoid others’ attention and the bustle of the city. This is the scenery that he calls “the Forest of Arden”: “A great green glade was before them, and high old trees, and under the shade of these, in the fresh turf, the crooked course of a rural footpath” (122). By imagining himself and Maisie as characters in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, Sir Claude attaches a fantastic image to the setting, but he is suddenly brought back to reality when he spots his wife and her lover. This encounter may appear somewhat implausible because the chances of such a coincidence occurring must have been minutely small. The other meeting at the Exhibition strikes

one as likewise fanciful, because while being in a crowd makes one more likely to be unconsciously spotted by others, it also makes it more difficult for one to find another person. That is why Maisie looks for Sir Claude in vain. The place in front of the Flowers of the Forest appears unreal to Maisie because she finds there “bright brown ladies” who generate “tropical luxuriance” (142), an atmosphere unknown to her. Maisie, instead of acquainting herself with this new aura, immerses herself in the more familiar thoughts of Sir Claude. However, she is soon forced to face this unknown world as she runs into her father with a “brown” lady.

Maisie’s opposing reactions to the Captain and the Countess comprise the greatest contrast between these two scenes, which derives from the fact that the Captain is white and the Countess is dark. This is Maisie’s first impression of the Captain: “His face, thin, and rather sharp, was smooth, and it was not till they came nearer that she saw he had a remarkably fair little moustache. She could already see that his eyes were of the lightest blue. He was far nicer than Mr. Perriam” (123-24). From this description we know that the Captain is white, and we may guess from Maisie’s emphasis on the lightness of his blue eyes that he probably has an even fairer complexion than Maisie. She compares him favorably with Mr. Perriam, her mother’s former Jewish lover. Maisie’s impression continues to be positive as she begins a conversation: “As she met the Captain’s light blue eyes the greatest marvel occurred; she felt a sudden relief at finding them reply with anxiety to the horror in her face. [...] [H]is face won her over; it was so bright and kind, and his blue eyes had such a reflexion of some mysterious grace that, for him at least, her mother had put forth” (126). Maisie thinks that it is “nice when a gentleman was thin and brown—brown with a kind of clear depth that made his straw-coloured moustache almost white and his eyes resemble little pale flowers. [...] [H]e was sunburnt and deep-voiced and smelt of cigars, yet he marvellously had more in common with her old governess than with her young

stepfather” (127). The foremost part of Maisie’s impression of the Captain is the sense of security that he exudes, which is why he reminds her of Mrs. Wix. Although he looks “funny” (127), the overall impression that he makes is very positive because he is in Maisie’s familiar racial group. She uses the same adjective, “brown,” to describe the Captain positively, which she uses negatively to describe the Countess. “Brown” is the colour of the Captain’s hair, and the colour of the Countess’s skin, which makes a great difference to Maisie.

When Maisie sees the Countess at the Exhibition, the “lady was so brown that Maisie at first took her for one of the Flowers” (143). In surprise, she tells Mrs. Beale: “She’s almost black,” (143) to which Mrs. Beale replies: “They’re always hideous” (143). Maisie equates the unfamiliar world of the Countess with fantasy and the Arabian Nights. The Countess’s room is the only one in the novel that is properly described:

In the middle of the small bright room and the presence of more curtains and cushions, more pictures and mirrors, more palm-trees drooping over brocaded and gilded nooks, more little silver boxes scattered over little crooked tables and little oval miniatures hooked upon velvet screens than Mrs. Beale and her ladyship together could, in an unnatural alliance, have dreamed of mustering, the child became aware, with a sharp foretaste of compassion, of something that was strangely like a relegation to obscurity of each of those women of taste. (146)

As much as Maisie admires the room, she is conscious of the strange power of the Countess that can easily overrule her mother and Mrs. Beale. The sense of the fullness of things in the room is brought forth by the way that they are successively mentioned in one long sentence. Its attraction is so overwhelming that Maisie revises her first impression. She declares that she hopes the Countess will turn up, speaking “with an

earnestness begotten of the impression of all the beauty about them, to which, in person, the Countess might make further contribution” (147). However, when she does appear, Maisie feels that her presence quickly “dissipated the happy impression of the room” (157). She utters in her mind these seemingly discriminatory comments: “[S]he was brown indeed. 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. She had a nose that was far too big and eyes that were far too small and a moustache” (156). Maisie de-womanizes and de-humanizes the Countess.

The following passage makes clear that Maisie’s rejection of the Countess derives from her colour: “The Countess stood smiling, and after an instant that was mainly taken up with the shock of her weird aspect Maisie felt herself reminded of another smile, which was not ugly, though also interested—the kind light thrown, that day in the Park, from the clean fair face of the Captain. Papa’s Captain—yes—was the Countess; but she wasn’t nearly so nice as the other: it all came back, doubtless, to Maisie’s minor appreciation of ladies” (157). Maisie calls the Captain’s face “clean” and “fair,” which leads us to see that she perceives the Countess’s dark complexion as crude and uninviting. I believe that the narrator is being ironic in pointing out that Maisie’s preference of the Captain to the Countess proceeds from her preference of gentlemen to ladies. As I have shown above, it comes from the fact that the Captain is white and the Countess is dark. The narrator’s irony is supported by the expression, “doubtless.”

I do not recognize Maisie’s rejection of the Countess and her seemingly discriminatory comments as springing from a conscious racial prejudice; rather, I interpret them as James’s rendition of the straight impressions of a young child who has encountered a person of another race for the first time. As John Carlos Rowe has pointed out, we cannot be sure of the exact ethnicity and nationality of the Countess. She may not be an African American as she is implied to be. But surely she is dark,

which is enough to intimidate Maisie and make her express those negative comments against the Countess. However, all we are provided with is Maisie's opposite reactions to the Captain and the Countess, which are due, we are led to assume, to the fact that Maisie is familiar with the Captain's race but unfamiliar with that of the Countess, and those reactions by themselves are not enough in considering if Maisie, the narrator, or the author is racist. Maisie is reluctant to accept the new world embodied by the Countess, as she turns her head against the Flowers of the Forest when she first passes before the booth, and she summarizes everything which has occurred at the Countess's house as the "Arabian Nights" and devoid of reality. Rowe argues that "issues of race and their entanglement with those of class, gender, and nation are central to any young person's education in the modern world that James evokes in *What Maisie Knew*" (*The Other*, 152). The encounter with the Countess is a part of Maisie's education, and a part of Maisie's London.⁶

The events at Kensington Gardens and the Exhibition are important in the plot because they conclude Maisie's experiences in London. They finalize the break-up between Ida and Sir Claude, and between Beale and Mrs. Beale. The competition over the custody of Maisie that used to be fought between her parents has now shifted to be a conflict between her governesses. These two events serve to free her from her parents, and to enable her step-parents to take her to France for the climax. As I have said above, the fact that these significant actions occur outside, in the open/public space testifies to the lack of Maisie's home, a house that would have served as a central setting for the events/conversations in the novel.

The text makes references to other London places as well. We are told that young Maisie enjoys going out to Oxford Street with Susan Ash, and the "dangers of the town equally with its diversions added to Maisie's sense of being untutored and unclaimed" (69). Maisie compensates for the lack of attention for her in the private

space with the bustle of the public space. Also, we find her at the National Gallery with Sir Claude, looking at religious paintings. The narrator describes how these appear from Maisie's point of view: "They represented, with patches of gold and cataracts of purple, with stiff saints and angular angels, with ugly Madonnas and uglier babies, strange prayers and prostrations" (104). This scene shows in a comical way her encounter with classical art, and her disbelief in the close relationship between mothers and children, and in religion. Religion is clearly not sustaining Maisie any more than James's other heroines. Baedeker's guidebook devotes thirty-three pages to describing every room in the Gallery, and although it is not possible to determine precisely which of the rooms containing religious paintings Maisie and Sir Claude are in, it informs us that the admission fee is 6*d*. On a later day, Sir Claude takes Maisie to lunch in Baker Street. Another significant place is Regent's Park, which Maisie frequents because it is nearby Beale's house where she spends many months.

Still another important location is, of course, Hyde Park. We can observe a correspondence between the novel's description of the park and the guidebook's. Maisie and Sir Claude "[direct] their steps to the banks of the Serpentine" (121), and walk "on the Row and by the Drive" (121) for an hour. When they pass out of the park and enter Kensington Gardens, they feel that "through prepossessing gates and over a bridge, they had come in a quarter of an hour, [...] a hundred miles from London" (121-22). Baedeker writes that "[t]he finest portion of the park [...] is that near the Serpentine, where, in spring and summer, during the 'Season,' the fashionable world rides, drives, or walks" (326-27). The scene is described thus:

In the Drive are seen elegant equipages and high-bred horses in handsome trappings, moving continually to and fro, presided over by sleek coachmen and powdered lackeys, and occupied by some of the most beautiful and exquisitely dressed women in the world. In the Row are numerous riders,

who parade their spirited and glossy steeds before the interested crowd sitting or walking at the sides. It has lately become ‘the thing’ to walk by the Row on Sundays. (327)

These reports help us in imagining the contemporary spatial atmosphere of Hyde Park, and locating Maisie and Sir Claude in the scene. Baedeker continues: “At the point where the Serpentine enters Kensington Gardens it is crossed by a five-arched bridge, constructed by *Sir John Rennie* in 1826. The view from the bridge has ‘an extraordinary nobleness’ (Henry James)” (328). Thus Baedeker quotes James, who incorporates this bridge into his novel.

Furthermore, Maisie attends lectures at University College London with Mrs. Beale. This is her impression of the University:

The institution—there was a splendid one in a part of the town but little known to the child—became, in the glow of such a spirit, a thrilling place, and the walk to it from the station through Glower Street (a pronunciation for which Mrs. Beale once laughed at her little friend) a pathway literally strewn with ‘subjects.’ Maisie imagined herself to pluck them as she went, though they thickened in the great grey rooms where the fountain of knowledge, in the form usually of a high voice that she took at first to be angry, plashed in the stillness of rows of faces thrust out like empty jugs. [...] These weeks as well were too few, but they were flooded with a new emotion, part of which indeed came from the possibility that, through the long telescope of Glower Street, or perhaps between the pillars of the institution—which impressive objects were what Maisie thought most made it one—they should some day spy Sir Claude. (138-39)

This episode uncovers the paradox of a child attending the same lectures as her governess, when their academic levels are so disparate. Although Maisie is eager to

learn, her eagerness continues to be betrayed, firstly because Mrs. Beale gives up instructing her, secondly because Mrs. Wix can only teach literature, and finally because her chance to go to a school is constantly denied to her. Attending the lectures at University College is Maisie's only experience at a "school," but they prove to be too high level for her, and her purpose of going to the lectures soon deviates to spying Sir Claude. Baedeker writes of the University College in the following way: "*Gower Street* [...] contains **University College**, founded in 1828, chiefly through the exertions of Lord Brougham, for students of every religious denomination. It is now a school of London University. A long flight of steps leads to the dodecastyle Corinthian portico fronting the main edifice, which is 400 ft. in length and surmounted by a handsome dome" (272). Its great architecture is a characteristic emphasized by both Maisie and Baedeker.

The other places that Maisie does not visit but which are mentioned are the City, where Mr. Perriam is supposedly "smashed" (123), Harrow Road, where Clara Matilda was run over, and Kensal Green, where she is buried.⁷ Kensington Gardens, Earl's Court, Oxford Street, National Gallery, Baker Street, Regent's Park, Hyde Park, and Gower Street—these are specific places that formed the social world of late nineteenth-century London, as we could observe in Baedeker's accounts. As I have tried to show in this section, the actions of Maisie and the adults around her are locatable in the 1880s London, and Maisie is to a large degree a product of the town, all the more as she is denied the private space within the home. Real, specific locations are adopted for Maisie's story. However real the setting is that James adopts, he has tried to make his narrative unreal; that is, unique fiction. As much as it is easy to identify these locations in contemporary London, it is difficult to find a child who has led such a unique life as Maisie, undergoing such a complex and traumatic family break-up. This uniqueness may be regarded as the crucial test of James's originality.

And the real place details serve to keep the unreal story in a “real” register. The effect of juxtaposing the imaginary events and emotions with familiar settings is even heightened by adopting and giving the reader direct access to Maisie as the central consciousness. Topographic precision is a particular trait of *What Maisie Knew*, although it is also observed to a lesser extent in *In the Cage*. In the next section, I will survey another realistic context for the novel: the history of divorce.

(4) Victorian Divorce and *Maisie*

Divorce starts the plot of *What Maisie Knew*. It takes as its basic premise the great debate on the subject in the nineteenth century, which led to the changes in the system. We will see that it is at the same time the history of women’s fight for more legal rights, and that the attainment of those rights following the 1857 Divorce Act is exemplified in Ida Farange.

The history of divorce in England has been thoroughly related in Lawrence Stone’s *Road to Divorce*. Stone starts by pointing out that although about one third of all marriages end in divorce in present-day England, “[i]t must never be forgotten that England in the early modern period was neither a separating nor a divorcing society” (2). Among the reasons of the rarity of divorce were:

the harsh facts that it was virtually impossible for all but a handful of the very rich to obtain a full divorce with permission to remarry, and that a separated wife faced exceptionally severe penalties. [...] All the income from her real estate was retained by her husband, as well as all future legacies which might come to her. All her personal property, including her future earnings from a trade and her business stock and tools, were liable to seizure by her husband at any moment. She was unable to

enter into a legal contract, to use credit to borrow money, or to buy or sell property. All her savings belonged to her husband. And finally all her children were controlled entirely by their father, who was free to dispose of them as he wished, and to deprive their mother of any opportunity ever to speak to them again. These were conditions which tended to make marital breakdown at the insistence of the wife a rarity, unless her interests had been protected by a carefully drawn up deed of separation. (4-5)

To add to the inequality in the financial conditions and the right to child custody, there was the tendency that adultery, almost always the sole cause of divorce, was seen as a serious crime when committed by a woman, whereas it was regarded much more leniently when committed by a man.

In the mid-nineteenth century, divorce remained extremely rare, and there were only 4 divorce decrees granted in 1851. The expense involved was inordinately high; “[i]n 1846 a civil lawyer claimed that the average cost of a contested separation suit was £1,700” (355). It was the upper-middle-class women who fought for divorce reform, demanding “equal access to divorce on grounds of adultery by either husband or wife” and “the placing of a married woman’s property under her own control” (375). These demands were fulfilled in the Divorce Act of 1857, at least for women with money. As a result, the number of divorces granted increased to about 500 around the turn of the century. The access to divorce was significant, as it “enabled these men and women to remarry instead of living in solitude, concubinage, or bigamy” (387). Moreover, there was a great change in attitudes toward child custody. Although it had been presumed for centuries that the father would receive the custody of children, in 1857, “the new Matrimonial Causes Court was empowered to allocate custody of children in divorce cases, a power which it exercised with extreme conservatism. But in 1873 another act enabled Chancery to award custody as it saw fit, and by 1886 it had become morally

accepted that it was only right to grant custody of young children to their mother” (390).

Therefore, upper-middle-class women had won the right to divorce, property, and child custody through the divorce reform in the nineteenth century. When we read *What Maisie Knew* in the light of this background, we realize how decidedly these changes are reflected in the novel and how fully Ida practices these rights. For, her actions are always paralleled to Beale’s, which emphasizes her equality with him. She exercises her right to divorce with permission to remarry, by divorcing Beale and remarrying Sir Claude. We are not told which of them committed the adultery that brought about the divorce, but we may suppose from the emphasis on their equality that it was both Ida and Beale. Ida possesses her own savings independent of Beale’s, as shown by the £2,600 she pays Beale as the expense of maintaining Maisie after the original trial. Finally, Ida exercises an equal right as Beale concerning the custody of Maisie, by fighting with him to keep her in the first instance, and eventually by forcing her on Beale as he does on her.

These factors reveal Ida as a greatly liberated woman. Also, reading about the contemporary reforms lets us realize that divorce is actually a timely topic, but it is still extremely rare. In 1881, around the time of the divorce of Ida and Beale, 311 divorce decrees were granted, and the divorce rate per 1,000 married couples was as low as 0.07%.⁸ Moreover, many of the couples that divorced were childless. Allen Horstman explains in *Victorian Divorce* that “[i]n 1871, 40 per cent of the [divorce] suits involved childless couples, a marked contrast with the rest of Victorian society” (104). Considering these facts, we come to see how rare Maisie’s case is and why she attracts so much attention from the public.

Such is the circumstance that creates the fate of Maisie recounted in the novel. She is born into a situation where the private and public are reversed, and she is deprived of a permanent home where she can secure her parents’ love, a room of her

own, possessions, and privacy. She thus goes on a search for such a home, and aims at living with Sir Claude. Her quest ends unsuccessfully when her attainment of moral sense prevents her from living with him. However, the ending is positive if we remember that it is hinted that Maisie will live on the fortune left by her godmother. She will win the control of the money back from her parents, and create by herself the home that they denied her. Therefore, in order to find the positive aspect of Maisie's fate, it is vital to rediscover and reevaluate the godmother and her money, whose presence is hidden from the reader during most of the narrative.⁹ In the next chapter, I will examine a much different case of a young woman's search for a home, the case of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*.

¹ H. Peter Stowell has analyzed Maisie's desire of permanence in relation to impressionism: "Like all children, she wishes to find refuge in permanence, while testing the limits of change. [...] What Maisie has learned by the end of the novel is that there must be a balance between change and permanence, relativism and the absolute" (187, 192). While I partly agree with Stowell, my argument, rather, is that Maisie's perception of permanence and change is necessarily linked to the question of where she lives, and throughout the novel she is deprived of a house that gives her such a sense of permanence.

² For example, Paul Theroux declares: "[F]or much of the novel, his [Sir Claude's] relationship with Maisie is plainly sexual and his tone a kind of bantering intimacy with its 'dear boy's' and 'old man's'" (Introduction, 16). John Carlos Rowe writes: "Sir Claude's intimate relationship with Maisie often verges on the erotic, especially as Maisie grows older" (*The Other*, 132). He also points out the various instances when Sir Claude addresses Maisie as if she were a boy, and argues: "Sir Claude is thus either trying to normalize his relationship with Maisie along homosocial lines or trying to accommodate her to the 'delicate homosexuality' often confused with just such homosociality in Victorian culture" (*The Other*, 129). Julie Rivkin argues: "Maisie's desire to go with Sir Claude, and Sir Claude alone, while it seems to restore propriety to the family by rejecting adultery, also removes all prospects for familial propriety forever. One way to put this is to say that she meets his offer of an adulterous family with an offer of an incestuous one" (158). Rivkin's essay includes an intriguing analysis of the third-person narrator as another possible parental figure.

³ While this method makes it difficult to determine Maisie's age at the end of the novel, I take it to be about 12 or 13, in agreement with her attainment of sexual knowledge and sense of economic and moral strength.

⁴ Rivkin explains Maisie's situation in the following way: "Unlike the homelessness of the orphan, Maisie's condition of deprivation is based on an apparent abundance. According to the paradoxical economy that governs these compensatory relations, the more the initial fault is supplemented, the more evident that fault becomes" (130).

⁵ Philip M. Weinstein is more supportive of Mrs. Wix's stability, and writes: "Mrs. Wix, for all her dubious characteristics both moral and emotional [...], will provide Maisie with more security and stability than the two charming lovers" (95). I believe, however, that Mrs. Wix is able to provide stability only while Maisie is young, and at the end of the novel Maisie is stronger than Mrs. Wix.

⁶ Toni Morrison declares that critics generally have ignored the importance of the African issue in literature, and gives the Countess as an example: "It is possible, for example, to read Henry James scholarship exhaustively and never arrive at a nodding mention, much less a satisfactory treatment, of the black woman who lubricates the turn of the plot and becomes the agency of moral choice and meaning in *What Maisie Knew*" (*Playing*, 13). My interpretation is that the Countess is a crucial character in letting us see Maisie's opposite reactions to a white person and a dark person, and this opposition is intentional on the author's part. It is meaningful to compare Maisie to Morrison's *Beloved*. *Beloved* refers to white men transporting slaves across the Atlantic as "men without skin" (*Beloved*, 211). Both children respond to their first experience of people with a different colour from their own.

⁷ Baedeker describes Kensal Green in the following manner: "Kensal Green Cemetery, laid out in 1832, [...] covers an area of about 70 acres, and contains about forty thousand graves. It is divided into a consecrated portion for members of the Church of England, and an unconsecrated portion for dissenters. Most of the tombstones are

plain upright slabs, but in the upper part of the cemetery, particularly on the principal path leading to the chapel, there are several monuments handsomely executed in granite and marble, some of which possess considerable artistic value” (331), and lists the eminent people interred here.

⁸ See the table showing the number of divorces in Stone, pp. 435-36.

⁹ Some critics have written interesting articles on *What Maisie Knew*, although generally unrelated to my argument. For example, Christine DeVine reads the novel in the context of the social purity movement, and concludes: “While his most obvious attack in this novel is on the moral hypocrisy of the middle classes as embodied in Ida and Beale, James’s experimental use of Maisie as center-of-consciousness character and his aligning her with marginalized ‘lower-class’ women, speaks of his concern with the ways in which the public discourse contributes to class othering such as occurred with the social purity movement” (14). In the extensive chapter on *Maisie* in *Versions of Pygmalion*, J. Hillis Miller states: “He [the narrator] gets Pygmalion’s pleasure of knowing through making or of knowing what one has made. If he has not made Maisie, he has given superior words to her experience. [...] The reader then plays the role of Pygmalion to Maisie’s Galatea every time he or she reads the novel and fashions a seemingly living person out of the performative reading of the words on the page” (55). Susan E. Honeymoon explains that children are inaccessible subjects for James, and maintains: “Locating the obstacle to representation in the language gap between adults (writers) and children, James exploits the inaccessibility of childhood to create an ironic center” (69).

Chapter 4

The Haunted House: *The Turn of the Screw*

Academic criticism of *The Turn of the Screw* has been dominated by a debate as to whether the governess is mad and the ghosts are her hallucinations, or whether she is sane and the ghosts are real. This to a large extent was triggered by Edmund Wilson's essay, "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934), in which he argues that "the young governess who tells the story is a neurotic case of sex repression, and the ghosts are not real ghosts at all but merely the hallucinations of the governess" (172). Subsequent commentary was mostly either for or against Wilson's psychoanalytical standpoint. In the 1980s critics began to adopt what may be termed a postmodern view that the debate is irresolvable, and that rather than trying to resolve it criticism should consider its undecidability. An excellent comprehensive overview of the reception of *The Turn of the Screw* has been provided by Peter G. Beidler, so I need not repeat it here.

My ideas in this chapter are inclined towards accepting the governess's madness; rather than trying to prove the madness itself, however, I shall examine what circumstances exist at Bly that might contribute to such a state of mind. The environment at Bly is noteworthy for its grandness and isolation. I shall explain the governess's hallucinations as a consequence of being placed in charge of such a house as an inexperienced young woman, and interpret her encounters with Peter Quint and Miss Jessel as lessons in understanding the house in her efforts to make it her home. She finds Bly suffused with the presence of Quint and Jessel. Their presence symbolizes the unknown, and the governess's search for them is her process of tackling what is unknown to her, at the end of which she grows into a more experienced woman. I shall start, however, by observing the difficult conditions common to Victorian governesses, both fictional and historical.

(1) The Ordeals of the Victorian Governess

The difficulties the Victorian governess suffered because of her position have been accounted for by M. Jeanne Peterson in her essay, “The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society” (1972). The ideal woman at that time was a “gentlelady,” a woman of leisure who did not need to do any household work, and who was supported by either her father or husband. For a lady, therefore, work outside the home for pay was considered out of the question. However, there was one job which a lady was “justified in seeking [...] that would not cause her to lose her status” (6) —being a governess. Peterson writes: “The position of governess seems to have been appropriate because, while it was paid employment, it was within the home” (6), and so could be interpreted as being an extension of a wifely or motherly role.

Peterson’s essay then discusses the elements of the “status incongruence” of Victorian governesses. The position of a governess caused difficulties first of all because its definition was ambiguous, and her employers as well as other employees in the household did not know how to treat her. Then there was the foremost contradiction of her position, which was to receive wages while being a lady. Peterson explains the governess’s status in the following way:

While employment in a middle-class home was intended to provide a second home for the governess, her presence there was evidence of the failure of her own middle-class family to provide the protection and support she needed. The structure of the household, too, pointed to the governess’s anomalous position. She was a lady, and therefore not a servant, but she was an employee, and therefore not of equal status with the wife and daughters of the house. The purposes of her employment contributed further to the incongruence of her position. She was hired to

provide the children, and particularly the young women of the family, with an education to prepare them for leisured gentility. But she had been educated in the same way, and for the same purpose, and her employment became a prostitution of her education, of the values underlying it, and of her family's intentions in providing it. (11)

Therefore there were different kinds of contradictions that the governess's presence revealed—firstly, her middle-class family's failure to provide her with her own house, making her “homeless;” secondly, the “incongruence” of her position, despite being a lady, with regard to that of the other ladies in the house; and finally, the paradox of her being employed to school the female children into leisured ladies, the very status that her own education had failed to achieve for herself. Peterson argues that the emotional difficulties caused by these contradictions trigger abnormal psychology and behaviour, leading to madness. She refers to the fact cited by many other critics writing about the Victorian governess, that “the governess formed one of the largest single occupational groups to be found in insane asylums” (13).¹ This connection between governesses and madness is evidently significant when reading *The Turn of the Screw*. The connection was a historical fact, which Peterson's essay amply confirms.²

One way to evade these problems was to turn the contradiction concerning the “house” around. If the governess's employers were regarded as providing her with a second home, it would allow her to deny that she was professionally employed: “For both governess and employer this constituted what can be called a retreat to a traditional mode of relationship. The governess entered the economic market-place, but the employer tried, in his home, to preserve her gentlewoman's position, traditionally defined in terms of personal and familial relationships and not in the contractual terms of modern employment” (14). Another way of abating discord was to deny the governess's femininity and sexuality, therefore avoiding the possibility of her marrying



or forming a sexual relationship with a male in the house, from outside of her class, whether he be a son in the employer's family or a servant. "Thus one of the stereotypes of the ideal governess came to be a homely, severe, unfeminine type of woman" (15), who would not cause the problem of an inter-class relationship in the household. However, these denials of course were not fundamental solutions for the governess's "status incongruence."³ Peterson's essay ends with a note that a feminist movement that would be able to confront these contradictions did not occur until the end of the century.

A history of the fictional rendition of the governess in the Victorian novel has been given by Patricia Thomson in *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal* (1956). The governess was an extremely popular figure in Victorian fiction.⁴ Thomson writes of the conventionality of this character:

An allusion to a governess in a novel was as sure to arouse a stock, emotional response in the minds of the readers as a reference to death. Everyone was familiar with her conventional attributes. She was bound to be a lady—preferably the daughter of a clergyman; she was always impoverished, unprotected, and, by virtue of her circumstances, reasonably intelligent and submissive. (39)

Each novelist usually added some individual traits to this type. Thomson explains that the first Victorian novel about a governess was Lady Blessington's *The Governess* (1839):

The pattern of *The Governess* was one which became, in its broad outlines, more and more familiar in succeeding novels. The beautiful young heroine, Clara Mordaunt, is left destitute by the bankruptcy and suicide of her father and is forced to seek a post as a governess. In the four situations she fills before she is rescued by an offer of marriage from a lord and a legacy

from a relative, she experiences all the miseries peculiar to the governess' lot. (44)

The Governess was followed by Harriet Marineau's *Deerbrook* (1839), Rosina Bulwer's *Very Successful* (1856), Charles Dickens's *Miss Pinch* (1843), and Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* (1844). Thomson notes that the governess in *Amy Herbert*, Miss Emily Morton, served as a model for many succeeding novels, and she was a "paragon"—: "beautiful, shy, religious, high-principled, gentle" (46).

Thomson marks 1848 as the year of revolutions in the history of the governess novel. It is also the year of European revolutions and uprisings, a coincidence presumably intimated by Thomson. In that year, Queen's College was founded in London to provide education for governesses, and W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) had recently been published. Becky Sharp and Jane Eyre were new women with a spirit of independence, earning their own living as governesses. Thomson indicates that contemporary writers on women's education, such as Lady Eastlake, tended to view *Jane Eyre* as having a dangerous impact on governess readers, because Jane "indulged herself in passions, emotions and resentments that were the privileges of the upper class" (47), when governesses had the tradition of being submissive. Jane was more dangerous than Becky because, whereas Becky is intended as a mean and villainous character, Jane is principled. Her plea for recognition of the individual spirit and equality distinguished her from the heroine in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) who merely asked for an improvement in the governess's working conditions. Becky, Agnes and Jane shared the characteristic of not being beautiful, which was new, asserts Thomson, because up to then the cause of the governesses' suffering had been attributed to their beauty. *Jane Eyre* provides an especially important subject of comparison to *The Turn of the Screw*, as I shall show at length later.

According to Thomson, there occurred no new movements in the governess novel between 1848 and 1873, and the heroines in the succeeding novels fell into one of the three main types—the type of Miss Emily Morton, Miss Becky Sharp, and Miss Jane Eyre. One of the daughters of Becky Sharp was Miss Gwilt, in Wilkie Collins’s *Armadale* (1866), who shared her villainous disposition. Jane Eyre’s successors were “engrossed in principle and passion” (50), and evidently influenced by Jane’s declaration of love to Rochester, these governesses started to articulate their love. One example was Chatty in *The White House by the Sea* (1857) by Mrs. Betham-Edwards. The third type of governess-heroine, who is gentle and submissive, was still the most popular, and she is found in the novels of Mrs. Henry Wood, Charlotte Yonge, and Anne Thackeray. Thomson declares that although there did not emerge a new type of heroine after the revolutionary year, 1848, the heroines overall came to be allowed more expression of feelings.

I have briefly summarized the histories of the governess, both real and fictional, leading to *The Turn of the Screw*, by referring to the works of Peterson and Thomson. It is difficult to estimate to what extent the fictional governesses are true reflections of the real ones, but it is useful to turn to both of them as we begin to consider the heroine of *The Turn of the Screw* and place her in historical context.

Both Peterson and Thomson emphasize an essential factor in the lives of Victorian governesses: the only way to escape the various difficulties the job entails was marriage. Peterson writes:

[A] mode of coping with the dilemmas of incongruent status was, simply, escape. This might take the form of a governess’s day-to-day isolation from the family circle, either by her choice or theirs, in order to avoid for the moment the stress of conflicting roles. The more permanent way of escape for the governess was to leave the occupation entirely. But for a

woman without means, the only way out was marriage. (15-16)

Thomson states, when discussing higher education for governesses: “Lectures to Ladies, Latin, wax-flowers—all these were only in the nature of temporary opiates to deaden the senses of the governess to the misery of her situation. She was still firm in her conviction that her only true escape, her one hope of happiness on earth, lay in matrimony” (43). In the governess novel, many heroines actually do marry to escape their situation and reach a happy ending, the most notable example being Jane Eyre. Thomson points out the problem that arises from a governess marrying her master as treated in the novels: “There is considerable disparity of opinion in the novels as to whom a governess may, with propriety, marry. The danger of her forming a *parti* with a younger son is constantly referred to and, while some objected to such a match on financial grounds, others expressed disapproval of her marrying out of her class” (52). This issue of the governess “marrying out of” her occupation and class is important in *The Turn of the Screw*, as will be discussed later.

When we start to consider the heroine of *The Turn of the Screw* in this light, we realize that she is very much like the popular type of Victorian governess. She is a lady, daughter of a clergyman, impoverished, beautiful, submissive, and intelligent. It is as though James intentionally characterized his heroine to fit the type, in order to test what kind of story would arise when a typical governess-heroine was placed in an atypical setting. The characterization of the governess seems to go back before Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp, to Emily Morton. It may be seen as part of James’s more general approach to Europe as a repository of types, who would provide him with established and familiar characters for his novels.⁵

The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is undoubtedly a suffering figure. We have seen that it was a tradition in the governess novel that she suffers. I shall examine in this chapter to what extent the causes of suffering of the governess in *The Turn of the*

Screw are common to other Victorian governesses, and to what extent they are due to her own particular circumstances at Bly. The three kinds of “status incongruence” that Peterson shows do apply to the governess of Miles and Flora. The first is the absence of a home. She has sought this post because her father cannot support her. She is “the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson” (4), and she has left her first home in Hampshire to seek an alternate one at Bly. The fact that she tries to make Bly her second home because she cannot stay at her first is significant. The second is that the governess cannot identify herself with anyone else at Bly. She feels inferior to Miles, Flora, and their uncle because they are her employers, and she also distinguishes herself from other employees in the house such as Mrs. Grose because she is a lady. However, her working environment vitally differs from ordinary cases in that the children’s parents are dead and their uncle is perpetually absent. Therefore she is placed at the head of the household and is granted much more authority than she anticipated. Finally, an anxiety about the quality of education she can provide the children is constantly with her, most explicitly expressed in the quotation: “He [Miles] was too clever for a bad governess, for a parson’s daughter, to spoil” (37). This problem of the relation of children’s and governess’s education will be discussed in the next section.

The plight of Maisie’s governesses, Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix, has already been discussed. Their problems were not told from their point of view, but in *The Turn of the Screw*, the reader is exposed to the governess’s consciousness and her affliction is brought to the foreground. We have surveyed here that the idea of the governess as a suffering figure is rather traditional. If the suffering itself is not new, there are other elements in *The Turn of the Screw* that make the story original, and they will be analyzed in the ensuing sections.

(2) The Ordeals of the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*

Life at Bly is an education not so much for Miles and Flora as for the governess. It is full of new experiences for her: her first job, and her first time living in a large house. Her first few weeks at Bly, before the sighting of the “ghosts” begins, abounds in references to “first” and “new” events. An important example is the mirror in her room: “The large impressive room, one of the best in the house, the great state bed, as I almost felt it, the figured full draperies, the long glasses in which, for the first time, I could see myself from head to foot, all struck me” (7). The heroine thus sees the reflection of her whole figure for the first time at twenty. Seeing herself has to do with knowing herself; she gains an instrument for self-awareness, the mirror, for the first time. The large room that she is provided with is also significant in the context of my arguments. The heroine must not have had her own room at her first home, and so lacked the privacy essential for self-knowledge. However, the room at Bly is not “a room of her own” for two reasons; Bly is not her house, and she has a roommate, Flora.

The governess is awed by the great size not only of the mirror and her room, but of course of the house itself. She finds herself not fascinated but intimidated by it, feeling “a slight oppression produced by a fuller measure of the scale, as I walked round them, gazed up at them, took them in, of my new circumstances. They had, as it were, an extent and mass for which I had not been prepared and in the presence of which I found myself, freshly, a little scared not less than a little proud” (9). All these impressions come from the fact that these are first experiences for her. Writing many years later, she recognizes that “to my present older and more informed eyes it would show a very reduced importance” (9).

Meeting the innocent-looking Miles touches her heart. The beauty of the children is another discovery for the governess, and it leaves her for the moment off-guard. She

refers to the first few weeks at Bly as lessons not for the pupils but for herself:

Lessons with me indeed, that charming summer, we all had a theory that he was to have; but I now feel that for weeks the lessons must have been rather my own. I learnt something—at first certainly—that had not been one of the teachings of my small smothered life; learnt to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature. (14)

The governess feels a whole new horizon of life and possibilities opening up for her. She adopts here a Romantic view of nature, appreciating its importance for the development of her mind. Her mentality is that of a student, someone eager to learn aspects of life hitherto unknown to her. There develops a strange reversal of roles between the governess and her pupils that lasts throughout her stay at Bly; she becomes the student and Miles and Flora her teachers. James thus adopts the “type,” that of the governess and children, and twists it to effect a reversal. This occurs at first as a result of the difference in the knowledge of Bly. Whereas the governess lacks any experience of living in a large house in general, the children are absolutely at home there. Flora shows the governess around the house, “step by step and room by room and secret by secret” (9). In contrast to her confidence, the governess is scared about the house: “Young as she was I was struck, throughout our little tour, with her confidence and courage, with the way, in empty chambers and dull corridors, on crooked staircases that made me pause and even on the summit of an old machicolated square tower that made me dizzy” (9). By being at Bly, the governess is at a disadvantage; and her constant feeling of inferiority to the children makes her prone to be a learner rather than an instructor.

The reversal of roles becomes complete when the children start to speak from

Chapter 10 onwards. One easily overlooks the fact that they only gain their voice in the second half of the narrative. The first instance of Flora's speech occurs in Chapter 10, when the governess returns to her room after the third sighting of Quint and finds Flora's bed empty. Flora, coming out from the back of the window-blind, says: "You naughty: where *have* you been?" (40), teasingly speaking as if she were a teacher to her student. Here, the governess forgets that she has the right to scold Flora for hiding behind the curtain. She cannot question her pupil about her behaviour, and instead finds herself explaining her own behaviour.

The first instance of Miles's speech occurs in the following chapter, when he escapes into the garden after midnight. The governess asks him why he did it: "I can still see his wonderful smile, the whites of his beautiful eyes and the uncovering of his clear teeth, shine to me in the dusk. 'If I tell you why, will you understand?' My heart, at this, leaped into my mouth" (45). When Miles tells her gently and sweetly that he did it in order for her to think him bad, the governess tries hard to refrain from crying. She struggles against the realization that the children have tricked her and that they are more than a match for her. In this conversation, she is extremely disturbed, whereas Miles is calm and gentle.

From these instances onwards, the voices of Miles and Flora are recorded in the narrative. Contrary to the image of innocence often attributed to them, their manner of speech is not childlike. Miles insistently calls the governess "my dear," as observed in their conversation on their way to church in Chapter 14. He says: "Look here, my dear, [...] when in the world, please, am I going back to school? [...] You know, my dear, that for a fellow to be with a lady *always*—!" (53). The governess writes that she welcomed this form of address: "His 'my dear' was constantly on his lips for me, and nothing could have expressed more the exact shade of the sentiment with which I desired to inspire my pupils than its fond familiarity" (53). However, the governess's

allusion to Miles's use of "my dear" emphasizes his extreme precocity and patronization of her. It has the effect of making the governess feel subordinate to him, allowing him to play the role of the teacher. Miles takes advantage of her subsequent agitation to take control of the dialogue. The governess writes: "Oh but I felt helpless! I have kept to this day the heartbreaking little idea of how he seemed to know that and to play with it" (53). In the conversation that ensues, Miles demands his uncle's intervention to bring about his return to school, and as good as threatens the governess that he will be "bad" if she does not support him. The effect of Miles's speech is so great that the governess loses the strength to go into the church. In the churchyard, she becomes afraid that the children will again scold her about not entering, and imagines them saying: "What *did* you do, you naughty bad thing? Why in the world, to worry us so—and take our thoughts off too, don't you know?—did you desert us at the very door?" (56). To avoid this reprobation, she feels an urge to get away.

In other conversations between Miles and the governess as well, he speaks in ways that are either patronizing, commanding, or threatening. In Chapter 17, when he catches the governess standing outside his door at night, he again demands condescendingly: "Well, what are *you* up to?" (60). When the governess asks him what he is staying up to think about, he answers in an un-childlike way: "What in the world, my dear, but *you*?" (60). Such examples of Miles's speech are, indeed, many, and they continue until the very last scene, where he loses physical strength and can no longer take command of the conversation. The absence of the children's speech before Chapter 10 serves to postpone the completion of the reversal of roles between the governess and the children in the impressions of the reader. This possibly had started to occur immediately after the governess moves into Bly and meets the children, but it only becomes apparent in the narrative as a result of the children's gaining speech.

The reversal of roles is associated with the question of who possesses control.

The governess is granted “supreme authority” (5) at Bly by the Uncle. It is much greater authority than most governesses are given, because in ordinary cases the pupil’s parents would be ultimate arbiter. Because of her inexperience, the governess is unable to cope with her excessive authority, which is eventually ceded to the children, along with the status of a teacher. A potential contrast emerges here between the governess and Queen Victoria. The contrast may be called one between a governess and a governor. At the time of the tale’s composition, Victoria was the Empress of India, where the Uncle’s parents went and died. The governess also tries to rule Bly as a little colony with the authority granted to her, but eventually fails.

The academic ability of Miles and Flora also makes the governess feel unsure about her position as a teacher. They display to her “from the first a facility for everything, a general faculty which, taking a fresh start, achieved remarkable flights” (37), and because of Miles’s “perpetually striking show of cleverness” (37) she feels that he is “too clever for a bad governess, for a parson’s daughter, to spoil” (37), and that he should really attend a school to receive an education worthy of his competence. When Miles and Flora perform “the dizziest feats of arithmetic,” the governess writes that they are “soaring quite out of my feeble range” (63). When, on the final day of Miles’s life, the governess at last gives up her teaching position and lets him free, she feels a “queer relief—I mean for myself in especial—in the renouncement of one pretension, [...] the absurdity of our prolonging the fiction that I had anything more to teach him” (77). Her inexperience makes her acutely conscious of the children’s apparent competence, and she suffers from lack of confidence accordingly.

I have so far discussed the psychological difficulties of the governess—bewilderment of living in a large house, inability to sustain a teacher’s role and authority, humiliation of occupying a student’s role enforced by the children’s speech, lack of confidence in the quality of education she can provide the children—all of which

are rooted in her lack of experience. Despite her difficulties, the governess has a strong sense of duty, and believes that she must heroically fulfil her responsibilities that were granted her by the Uncle. Sometime after her sighting of Quint begins, we find her fascinated by this challenge: “I was in these days literally able to find a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of me. I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen—oh in the right quarter!—that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed” (27). Her use of the word “heroism” is curious because it is a predominantly male term. It is in contrast with another word she uses—“girl.” It seems as though the governess’s strong sense of duty has allowed her to rise above the sexual distinctions, instead of only remaining a “girl.”

My position is that the governess’s sightings of Quint and Jessel are her hallucinations caused by the sufferings inflicted by her position, escalated by her sense of responsibilities. The governess’s ghostly experiences are therefore best regarded as effects of her circumstances; that is, being placed in charge of Bly as an inexperienced young woman. Bly is her workplace, a temporary residence, and her school where she learns about new aspects of life. I shall now examine the manner in which the house is dominated, for the governess, by the influence of the unknown, in relation to each instance of Quint and Jessel’s appearance.

(3) The Location of the Apparitions

The governess sees the ghosts eight times in total; she sees Quint and Jessel each four times. Following is a summary of her sightings in chronological order:

Name of Apparition	Location of Appearance	Direction of the Governess's View	Indoors or Outdoors	
			Governess	Apparition
Quint 1	Top of the tower	Upward	Out	Out
Quint 2	Outside of the dining-room window	Level	In	Out
Jessel 1	The other side of the lake	Level	Out	Out
Quint 3	Staircase landing	Downward	In	In
Jessel 2	Lower steps of the staircase	Downward	In	In
Jessel 3	Schoolroom desk	Level	In	In
Jessel 4	The other side of the lake	Level	Out	Out
Quint 4	Outside of the dining-room window	Level	In	Out

Quint and Jessel thus appear in various parts of Bly, both indoors and outdoors, and upstairs and downstairs.

Bruce Robbins, in his insightful Marxist reading of the tale, has explained the third appearance of Quint and the second appearance of Jessel, which both happen on the staircase, in terms of class conflict. He writes: "Each makes a carefully staged entry 'below' the governess on the staircase. In a society which routinely referred to class difference in terms of 'upstairs' (the domain of the masters) and 'downstairs' (the domain of the servants), these staircase scenes are heavily charged with the symbolism of hierarchy" ("Unfinished History," 289). Robbins quotes the scene of Quint's disappearance: "I saw the figure disappear; [...] I definitely saw it turn, as I might have seen the low wretch to which it had once belonged turn on receipt of an order, and pass, with my eyes on the villainous back that no hunch could have more disfigured, straight down the staircase and into the darkness" (40), and argues: "The adjective 'low' makes a connection between their physical positions, higher and lower on the staircase, and their moral or class positions. Quint has been trying to rise, but the governess sends him back down where he belongs. It seems clear that, in class terms, this is a tiny allegory of frustrated upward mobility" (289). About the scene of Jessel's appearance,

Robbins explains: “Here the ghost is not rising. Sitting on ‘one of the lower steps’ and with a body ‘half-bowed,’ she suggests on the contrary someone who has descended. All of this would correspond to how the governess sees her predecessor’s social transgression: Miss Jessel has ‘lowered’ herself by falling in love with a servant” (289). Robbins’s interpretation underlines the significance of these locations in relation to the governess’s contemptuous attitude toward Quint and Jessel. Her physical location above the apparition as indicating her inward superiority might also apply in the cases of Quint’s second and fourth appearances, when he looks into the dining-room window. Here, although the eye level of Quint and the governess is more or less the same, Quint is standing below her because the terrace is at a lower level than the ground floor at Bly. However, Robbins’s theory is only partly sufficient because we need other explanations for the other cases, where the governess sees Quint on top of the tower and Jessel on the other side of the lake and in the schoolroom.

After the two sightings on the staircase just referred to, the governess tells herself this about the location of the apparitions: “They’re seen only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places, the top of towers, the roof of houses, the outside of windows, the further edge of pools; but there’s a deep design, on either side, to shorten the distance” (47-48). The governess fears that Quint and Jessel will eventually come closer to reach the children. However, we must not overlook the fact that she does not fear going closer to the apparitions herself. In her will to protect the children and desire to find out the unknown, the governess goes to search for them in the house every night. Simultaneously, this search is a search for her own identity. And at some critical moments we find her placing herself in the spots where Quint and Jessel have appeared. The result, interestingly, is her physical identification with them. It is necessary because she can only know Bly by knowing Quint and Jessel.

A distinct example is when the governess runs after Quint after he appears outside

the dining-room window. Without knowing why, she imitates his actions and makes herself equal to him:

It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room. As if, at this moment, to show me exactly what his range had been, Mrs. Grose, as I had done for himself just before, came in from the hall. With this I had the full image of a repetition of what had already occurred. She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of a shock that I had received. (20)

The repetition becomes more complete with the involvement of Mrs. Grose to play the role of the terrified governess. By repeating Quint's actions the governess identifies herself with a ghost. Her performance scares Mrs. Grose as Quint scared her. On that night, the governess again compares herself to Quint when she realizes that for Mrs. Grose "I was queer company enough—quite as queer as the company I received" (24).

The governess's identification with Jessel is even more significant in that it involves their competition over their professional role at Bly. It first occurs in an odd manner when, after the first appearance of Jessel at the lake, the governess realizes that her own eyes are similar to Jessel's "such awful eyes" (31). The governess emphasizes to Mrs. Grose about the wickedness of Jessel's gaze, and finds that her own eyes are likewise wicked as Mrs. Grose "stared at mine as if they might really have resembled them" (31).

The crucial instance of the governess placing herself where Jessel appeared occurs on the day of going to church. Her affliction then reaches one of its peaks, and she sets her heart on fleeing from Bly. What induces her to change her firmness of mind is her rivalry with Jessel that becomes evident after their identification with each other. This is how the governess recounts the event:

Tormented, in the hall, with difficulties and obstacles, I remember sinking down at the foot of the staircase—suddenly collapsing there on the lowest step and then, with a revulsion, recalling that it was exactly where, more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women. At this I was able to straighten myself; I went the rest of the way up; I made, in my turmoil, for the schoolroom, where there were objects belonging to me that I should have to take. But I opened the door to find again, in a flash, my eyes unsealed. (56-57)

Thus the governess physically places and postures herself as Jessel has done in her second appearance. This identification appears unintentional on the part of the governess, yet placing herself in the spot of Jessel's appearance and playing her role is an essential part of her own search for the unknown and for herself. Its happening on the staircase is significant because the stairs involve an upward and downward movement. As Robbins has argued, they may sometimes be the bridge between classes, connecting or separating the domains of the masters and servants. In this case, the stairs signify for the governess the division between herself, the "heroic" governess and Jessel, the "dishonoured" (57) one. The governess is disgusted to find herself identifying with her predecessor who had had an improper sexual relationship with Quint, and is reenergized to get away and climb up the stairs to the schoolroom which she believes she is licensed to inhabit with honour.

However, when she reaches the schoolroom she finds Jessel sitting at her desk, making her third appearance. This time it is Jessel who juxtaposes herself with the governess, sitting at her desk and using her pen and paper. Thus the distinction that the governess is keen to make between herself and Jessel becomes indefinite; both of them appear to possess equal authority. The result is their competition over the seat:

Dark as midnight in her black dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted indeed I had the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the intruder. It was as a wild protest against it that, actually addressing her—"You terrible miserable woman!"—I heard myself break into a sound that, by the open door, rang through the long passage and the empty house. (57)

In this powerful moment of the novel, all this juxtaposition, identification and competition occur in the governess's consciousness, and these phenomena derive from her mental state. This includes a pitying aversion to her miserable predecessor, the resolve that she must surpass Jessel in her ability as a governess, and the fear that she might actually be inferior and her position will be taken away by Jessel. What is also present in her mind as a more tangible source of anxiety is her homelessness, and the awareness that, if she loses her job, she will also lose a place to live. By having Jessel as her rival whose housing situation must have been similar, the governess is reminded of her need to secure an abode and to secure it from Jessel. Consequently, she forsakes her desire to leave Bly and her ordeals. The competition between the governess and Jessel over the right to stay at Bly reminds one of that between Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix over the right to stay with Maisie as her governess. The four governesses all search for a place to belong to.

I have argued that the governess's consistent tendency to place herself at the location of Quint and Jessel's appearances is a sign of her attempt to find out the unknown whose sense dominates Bly. This process entails on several occasions her identification with the ghosts. Such endeavours to learn about the house constitute the utmost form of her education, because for her, maturing as a governess requires the

ability first of all to feel comfortable at the house, to feel confident about being there, and ultimately conquering it, making it her own.

The governess's will to approach Jessel's place of appearance again manifests itself when she goes to the lake to look for Flora. As if guided by her sixth sense, she is drawn to the site of Jessel's first appearance. She does so because she needs to know the unknown, to solve its mystery. The governess's actions prompt the fourth sighting of Jessel, as she appears on the other side of the lake. This would have been an ideal opportunity to solve the mystery of the apparitions because it is the only occasion of her sightings when she is with other people. However, solving the mystery becomes even more difficult for her when both Flora and Mrs. Grose declare that they do not see what she sees on the other side of the lake.

We have observed the governess's willingness to visit the sites of the ghosts' appearances: outside the dining-room window, the staircase, and the lake. Her physical location is juxtaposed to that of Jessel most exactly when Jessel sits at her desk in the schoolroom. However, there is one place at Bly where a ghost has appeared and the governess refuses to go to: the top of the tower. The governess makes her only trip there when Flora takes her there on her first morning at Bly. As I noted earlier, the governess is intimidated by many parts of the house whereas Flora is confident. She is scared of the "empty chambers," "dull corridors," "crooked staircases," and most of all, of "the summit of an old machicolated square tower" because it makes her "dizzy" (9). The governess does not overcome her fear of heights, and other consequences of climbing the tower. As a result, she cannot go and look down on Bly. This epitomizes her inability, until the end of her stay there, to rule over Bly, to have the house under her power.⁶

Since she cannot look down from the top of the tower, all she can do is look up towards it, as she does at Quint's first appearance. This is the only instance involving

the ghosts where her view is upward. It is evidently related to the fact that it is also the only time where she mistakes the apparition for the Uncle. On this occasion the governess calls to mind the Uncle's face, wishing he could see how adequately she is discharging her duty. Then she spots Quint whom she takes for the Uncle at the top of the tower, looking down at her. These upward and downward visions result from the governess's unconsciousness that tells her the Uncle is the Master of the house. Nevertheless, the governess feels that the height of the downward vision is extravagant even for her employer and superior: "[Y]et it was not at such an elevation that the figure I had so often invoked seemed most in place" (15). The governess describes the tower in the following manner:

This tower was one of a pair—square incongruous crenellated structures—that were distinguished, for some reason, though I could see little difference, as the new and the old. They flanked opposite ends of the house and were probably architectural absurdities, redeemed in a measure indeed by not being wholly disengaged nor of a height too pretentious, dating, in their gingerbread antiquity, from a romantic revival that was already a respectable past. I admired them, had fancies about them, for we could all profit in a degree, especially when they loomed through the dusk, by the grandeur of their actual battlements [...]. (15)

The governess tries to depict the towers favourably, but we can discern that she abhors them. Her real motive is that they are "architectural absurdities," but in her effort to make Bly her home she brings herself to thinking that she "admires" them.

Mark Girouard in *Life in the English Country House* notes that the fashion for building towers in country houses "started in the late fourteenth century, reached its height in the fifteenth century, and lasted well on into the sixteenth century" (73), which allows us to surmise that Bly is a medieval house. Girouard explains that their "aura of

power and luxury led to towers still being built when they had ceased to have a military function” (69). He writes: “[O]ne can still envisage how liberating it must have been in medieval castles and fortified houses, where windows were either very small or looked inwards onto enclosed courtyards, to climb up above the courtyard roofs and look out through a spacious window to the surrounding countryside” (69). The fact that the governess does not revisit the top of the tower evidently shows that she is unable to appreciate this sense of liberation and power and luxury that comes from climbing up the tower. These associations are a privilege that ought to be enjoyed by the owner of the house, and the governess’s inability to participate in it is a sign that she has not “mastered” Bly—in both senses that she has not yet studied and learned it and made it her own, and that she has not qualified as a substitute “master” for the absent one.

Girouard illustrates that towers in medieval houses appear either “symmetrically or asymmetrically, [b]oth arrangements traceable back to military origins” (69).⁷ The towers of Bly are asymmetrical, as the governess recounts, and they have been built at different time periods, making each “new” and “old.” However, this distinction means little to the governess because she is overwhelmed by the general aura of age of both of them. The “romantic revival” that she mentions presumably connotes this fashion for military designs and the turn back to past times, in which she herself apparently takes little or no interest.

The “battlements” are an indispensable characteristic of the towers. The governess emphasizes them by various terms: “machicolated,” “ledge,” and “crenellations.” These are popular features of the towers of churches and country houses, originally used in fortified buildings for military purposes and later adopted in church and country house towers as decoration. The governess, unfamiliar with such designs, deems them unnecessarily decorative. According to the *Classic Dictionary of Architecture*, a battlement is: “a notched or indented parapet originally used only on

fortifications and intended for service, but afterwards employed on ecclesiastical and other edifices and intended for ornament only” (35). And machicolations are: “openings formed for the purpose of defence at the tops of castles and fortifications, by setting the parapet out on corbels, so as to project beyond the face of the wall, the intervals between the corbels being left open to allow of missiles being thrown down on the heads of assailants” (150). The battlements, while being decorative, still retain their military image and potential utility.

It is presumably this image of aggression that intimidates the governess. Befitting this image, the encounter between Quint and the governess generates an intensity reminiscent of a combat or a duel. The governess recalls the scene:

He was in one of the angles, the one away from the house, very erect, as it struck me, and with both hands on the ledge. So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place—passed, looking at me hard all the while, to the opposite corner of the platform. Yes, it was intense to me that during this transit he never took his eyes from me, and I can see at this moment the way his hand, as he went, moved from one of the crenellations to the next. He stopped at the other corner, but less long, and even as he turned away still markedly fixed me. He turned away; that was all I knew. (16-17)

Quint, as if guarding the house from an “assailant,” allows the governess no chance for actions. His fixing stare and his hands serve as shield. His hands, placed on the “crenellations” in a threatening manner, function as substitutes for the missiles that were dropped through them to ward off an outsider. Thus the governess loses this duel after letting Quint paralyse her, and she also allows the formation of her image as an outsider. This scene, at the start of which the governess is hopeful for her success, ends with her

sense of defeat, anticipating her later ordeals.

The governess makes one more reference to the tower later in the narrative, on the night of Miles's escape. The governess decides that Jessel is in the gardens communicating with Flora, and chooses a downstairs room on the corner of the tower from which to catch them together:

There were empty rooms enough at Bly, and it was only a question of choosing the right one. The right one suddenly presented itself to me as the lower one—though high above the gardens—in the solid corner of the house that I have spoken of as the old tower. This was a large square chamber, arranged with some state as a bedroom, the extravagant size of which made it so inconvenient that it had not for years, though kept by Mrs. Grose in exemplary order, been occupied. I had often admired it and I knew my way about in it; I had only, after just faltering at the first chill gloom of its disuse, to pass across it and unbolt in all quietness one of the shutters. (43)

The governess writes that she “admires” this room, but we need to understand this evaluation in terms of her overall response to the tower itself. She does not find the room inviting because of its “extravagant size,” “inconvenience,” “chill gloom of its disuse,” and its extreme orderliness. It is a room dominated by emptiness and lack of human presence. However, she needs to tackle and accept this room if she is to find a home at Bly.

The governess looks outside the window:

The moon made the night extraordinarily penetrable and showed me on the lawn a person, diminished by distance, who stood there motionless as if fascinated, looking up to where I had appeared—looking, that is, not so much straight at me as at something that was apparently above me. There

was clearly another person above me—there was a person on the tower; but the presence on the lawn was not in the least what I had conceived and had confidently hurried to meet. The presence on the lawn—I felt sick as I made it out—was poor little Miles himself. (43)

A unique vertical positioning of the characters develops here, where each is placed on four different ground levels. The governess on the ground floor looks down at Miles on the lawn, as Miles looks up above her, and Flora on the first floor looks down at Miles, creating an intersection of visions.

Top of tower	Unknown
First floor	Flora
Ground floor	Governess
Gardens	Miles

The governess writes that Miles is looking up at someone on the tower, but if asked, Miles would say that he was looking up at where Flora was, because they planned his escape together. The governess does not ask him who is on the tower, nor does she look up there to check herself. Thus she chooses to keep the mystery of the presence there unknown. To the governess, the top of the tower represents a domain she cannot uncover, unlike the other places at Bly where she tries to do so.

I have tried to explain the particular locations of Quint and Jessel's appearances in terms of the governess's endeavours to know Bly. She is full of a desire to find out the truths of Quint and Jessel especially in their relation to Miles, because their mystery haunts the house which the governess cannot make her own until she solves it. In such endeavours, she visits the sites of their appearances, studies the locations, and tries to know the ghosts by identifying herself with them. The only exception is the top of the tower where she refuses to visit; her failure to climb there attests to and results in her ultimate failure to conquer Bly.

In the next section, I shall further my arguments by comparing *The Turn of the*

Screw to another governess story, *Jane Eyre*. More about the governess's endeavours and failure to conquer Bly will be revealed by placing her experiences alongside Jane's, whose circumstances are in some ways similar but who reaches a contrasting outcome.

(4) *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw*

James has not written on *Jane Eyre*, but by placing Charlotte Brontë's governess novel alongside *The Turn of the Screw*, one becomes convinced that he must have both read and been powerfully influenced by it. Critics of *The Turn of the Screw* have not written enough on this relationship, which I here propose to explore more deeply.

After her first sighting of Quint, the governess wonders: "Was there a 'secret' at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?" (17). "A mystery of Udolpho" evidently refers to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, and the next allusion to an insane relative probably refers to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, but it is likely that the story is set some twenty years earlier, as observed by Michael Mason in his notes to the novel. *The Turn of the Screw* is set about fifty years prior to the year of its composition, if we are to assume that Douglas's storytelling takes place at about the same time as James's composition. There is a long interval of forty years between his first acquaintance with the governess and his storytelling, and another ten years between their meeting and the governess's experiences at Bly, because Douglas is about twenty years old when he meets the governess, who is ten years his senior, and she was twenty years old when she came to Bly. If we take these facts into account, we are led to conjecture that the events at Bly take place shortly before 1850, and shortly after the publication of *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's novel became an immediate bestseller, so popular that the second edition was published the following year. It is most probable that the

governess had read *Jane Eyre* before taking the job at Bly. She might have identified herself with Jane as a governess roughly the same age as herself. If we thus assume that the governess has read *Jane Eyre*, her allusion to Bertha Mason quoted above becomes understandable.

There are various analogies to be drawn between Jane's experiences and those of the governess. Both involve a mystery at a house and the question of ghosts. Jane tries to solve the mystery at Thornfield, just as the governess tries to solve the mystery at Bly. The mystery at Bly is the haunting presence of Quint and Jessel, and the mystery at Thornfield is the identity of the madwoman, Bertha Mason, camouflaged by Grace Poole. Jane repeatedly refers to "a mystery at Thornfield; and [...] from participation in that mystery, I was purposely excluded (188). [...] [M]y mind had been running on Grace Poole—that living enigma, that mystery of mysteries (228). [...] What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? —What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?" (237). Jane tries to make Thornfield her own home, as the governess tries to make Bly hers. Solving the "mystery" at Thornfield is essential in order to realize her hope, as is proven when its answer turns out to be Rochester's insane wife, whose presence makes Jane's hope impossible.

It is important to note that just as much as Jane tries to solve the "mystery," Rochester tries to keep it a mystery, a secret, and in an unreal sphere. This may be observed in the conversation between them after Bertha's intrusion into Jane's room the night before their wedding. Jane says: "[E]ven you cannot explain to me the mystery of that awful visitant" (318). Rochester replies: "And since I cannot do it, Jane, it must have been unreal" (318). There are numerous indications in the text that associate Bertha with a ghost, of which Rochester is the greatest advocate. He calls Thornfield

Hall “haunted” (338) by her. It is his wish that she were already dead, which prompts him to make these associations. Another indication is when Jane describes Bertha to Rochester as “[f]earful and ghastly” (317). This is the only instance in the novel where Bertha’s physical appearance is closely observed, and we are given from it an image of her as a human being resembling a ghost. Devoid of any ability to assert her own presence, and treated as a burden from the past by her husband, Bertha, while living, is given the attributes of a ghost.

A crucial association of Bertha with a ghost is made in the following description of the third story rooms of Thornfield, where she lives:

[S]ome of the third story rooms, though dark and low, were interesting from their air of antiquity. The furniture once appropriated to the lower apartments had from time to time been removed here, as fashions changed; and the imperfect light entering by their narrow casements showed bedsteads of a hundred years old; chests in oak or walnut, looking with their strange carvings of palm branches and cherubs’ heads, like types of the Hebrew ark; rows of venerable chairs, high-backed and narrow; stools still more antiquated, on whose cushioned tops were yet apparent traces of half-effaced embroideries, wrought by fingers that for two generations had been coffin-dust. All these relics gave to the third story of Thornfield Hall the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory. (121)

The detailed description of the third story rooms at this early stage in the novel anticipates the significance later attributed to that place. Jane’s description emphasizes its age, where history has been accumulated by the muddle of furniture used in different periods. This emphasis on the antiquity of the house allows us to suppose that Thornfield Hall possibly dates from a similar time period as Bly. The description also conveys its spookiness, especially by the reference to the “fingers” that have become

“coffin-dust.” Mrs. Fairfax says: “[I]f there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt” (121). Jane then asks: “So I think: you have no ghost then?” (121) to which she replies: “None that I ever heard of” (121). It is important to remember this conversation between Mrs. Fairfax and Jane; although *Jane Eyre* is not a ghost story, the interest for ghosts is there. Furthermore, Jane expresses the strangeness of these rooms, with the chests that look like the Hebrew ark because of the unfamiliar carvings on them. The third story rooms, with their oldness, ghostliness, and strangeness, represent in total what is unknown to Jane. This culminates in the rooms’ inhabitant, Bertha.⁸

I have called attention to the various instances where the text associates Bertha with a ghost. As such, her being is analogous to that of Quint and Jessel, because, they also symbolize the unknown for the governess. However, the two novels differ critically in their treatment of the theme, in that *The Turn of the Screw* keeps the truth of Quint and Jessel unwritten and unsolved, opening way for two kinds of interpretations, whereas *Jane Eyre* discloses the truth of Bertha and places her in a “real” register. In other words, *Jane Eyre* is realist in its treatment of the ghost, and *The Turn of the Screw* is both realist and surrealist, depending on the reader’s interpretation. *Jane Eyre* denies the existence of ghosts by revealing the identity of Bertha as a living human being. Her humanness is eventually asserted even more strongly in the sense that it prevents Jane’s marriage to Rochester.

The question of ghosts has also been treated earlier in the novel, where young Jane fears an encounter with Mr. Reed’s ghost in the red room at Gateshead. Here, the ten-year-old Jane believes in the possibility of ghosts, but the text denies it by treating Jane’s fears as childish silliness. Jane tells Mr. Lloyd: “I was shut up in a room where there is a ghost” (31), but Mr. Lloyd dismisses Jane’s appeal by saying: “Ghost! What, you are a baby after all!” and calling it “Nonsense” (31). This is how Jane recounts her

horror in the red room:

[A]t this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred; while I gazed, it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern, carried by some one across the lawn: but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. (24)

Young Jane is frenzied with the fear of a ghost, but grown-up Jane rejects any such possibility by realistically postulating the cause of the beam. *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw* are similar in that both heroines try to solve the mystery at the house where they reside as governesses, and the mystery at both houses involves the question of a ghost. However, they are vitally different in their final treatment of the theme of the unknown, letting us see the originality and modernity of James's novel.

Another aspect of the novels instructive to compare is the idea of climbing up to the top of the house as a sign of conquering it. As we have seen, the governess is unable to climb up the tower at Bly due to her fear of heights, which symbolizes her failure to have the house under her power. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's version of this act forms an intriguing contrast. As the governess is guided to the top of the tower by Flora, Jane is taken to the roof of Thornfield by Mrs. Fairfax:

I followed still, up a very narrow staircase to the attics, and thence by a ladder and through a trap-door to the roof of the hall. I was now on a level with the crow-colony, and could see into their nests. Leaning over the battlements and looking far down, I surveyed the grounds laid out like a map: the bright and velvet lawn closely girdling the grey base of the

mansion; the field, wide as a park, dotted with its ancient timber; the wood, dun and sere, divided by a path visibly overgrown, greener with moss than the trees were with foliage; the church at the gates, the road, the tranquil hills all reposing in the autumn day's sun; the horizon bounded by a propitious sky, azure, marbled with pearly white. No feature in the scene was extraordinary, but all was pleasing. (122)

Jane takes her time overlooking the view surrounding Thornfield. She enjoys it, and feels empowered by having the land, as far as she can see it, under her observation. She simultaneously responds to many colours included in the scenery. Her vision is likened to that of the birds that are free to fly anywhere and take in the panoramic view from high above. These feelings of delight and confidence are clearly lacking in the governess. Jane is not afraid to lean over the battlements to look far down, yonder and above. As she takes in the entire landscape, she imagines a map of the colony surrounding Thornfield, which she feels herself conquering by her vision.

We are told that from then on, Jane occasionally takes a trip to the battlements by herself, an act which the governess avoids doing. From the following quotation, we find that the idea of climbing up to the rooftop and looking out over the fields is indeed connected to an ambition for power:

[N]ow and then, when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when, [...] I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out far over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line: [...] then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen. (125)

Glancing over from the roof allows one to see the fields stretching out from the house,

but for Jane, it conversely shows the limit of the vision because it makes her wonder what is beyond the horizon. Her ambition for power stretches not only out of Thornfield but even beyond the furthest environs of it. On the other hand, the governess is too preoccupied with the events inside Bly to imagine the world outside it, a factor adding to her stress and introversion.

We should never forget that another woman climbs up to the battlements of Thornfield: Bertha. Her act is significant after we have considered the implications of the rooftop. Jane hears the innkeeper's account of Bertha's death:

[S]he was on the roof; where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off: I saw her and heard her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long, black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed Mr Rochester ascend through the skylight on to the roof: we heard him call "Bertha!" We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled, and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement. (476)

If we interpret Bertha's act in terms of the housetop, we come to see that she stands on the battlements to realize her ambition for power, her unattainable desire to be the mistress of Thornfield. By dying in this manner and having it witnessed by others, Bertha is at last able to claim her presence and to complete the symbolic picture—that of standing on top of the house and reigning there as Mrs. Rochester. Her waving and shouting, too, constitute an appeal for recognition. Another consequence is the danger of falling and inevitably dying, which is what the governess fears at Bly. The rooftop allows one to conquer the house, but it also entails danger because if one falls, one must die and give up the hope of being the mistress of the house forever, as was the fate of Bertha.

I have so far contrasted Jane's experiences to those of the governess and found mostly differences between them, which lead them to their divergent endings. Jane is more confident of her place at Thornfield than the governess is of hers at Bly. Whereas the governess finally cannot solve the mystery of the ghosts, Jane finds out the truth about Bertha Mason, who dies to enable her to marry Rochester. Nevertheless, Jane's life poses the fundamental problem shared by James's heroines: homelessness. In fact, being an orphan, her problem is more severe than that of James's heroines until the concluding parts of the novel, but her confidence and spirit of independence keep the reader from appreciating its severity. Even more than that of James's heroines, Jane's life is dominated by a search for a home.

In the novel, we find Jane living in six different places—Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End, the cottage in Morton, and Ferndean manor house.⁹ The sense of searching for a house that suits her is strong in her. When she is at Gateshead where she finds herself “a discord” (23), she is anxious to grow old enough to leave it and go on the search for a more desirable home. About Gateshead, young Jane tells Mr. Lloyd: “It is not my house, sir; and Abbot says I have less right to be here than a servant. [...] If I had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman” (32). Her traumatic experiences at Gateshead make her determined to find a house where she belongs.

Lowood appears at first far from being hospitable, but at the end of eight years she finds that it has become “in some degrees a home to me” (98). This probably derives from the fact that she discovers her vocation at Lowood—teaching. Her vocation is the means by which she can move on to a different house and lifestyle, and satisfy her spirit of independence. Jane decides that it is time for her to move on: “What do I want? A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances” (100). For Jane, moving to a different house means moving on to another stage in life,

because her life evolves around where she lives and her happiness is subject to the conditions she finds there. On the night before going to Thornfield, she feels: “A phase of my life was closing to-night, a new one opening to-morrow” (104), conforming to the idea of the crucial importance of one’s house. Her expectations are high for the life beyond Lowood:

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out. There were the two wings of the building; there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two: how I longed to follow it further! (99)

This passage reminds us of the time when Jane looks over the surrounding fields of Thornfield, toward the horizon. This description lets us know that Lowood is surrounded by small mountains, whereas Thornfield is situated on open fields. We are not given such description of the surroundings of Bly, because the governess does not look out on them, as Jane does, confirming her introverted tendencies, and the concentration of her attention.

When Jane moves to Thornfield, she develops a strong love for the house and for Rochester, but the prospects of Thornfield becoming her home seem remote while she believes that Rochester will marry Miss Ingram. In the following quotations, we become aware of Jane’s desire for a permanent home and her anxiety of homelessness, the emotions that we have observed most markedly in Fleda Vetch. As Jane returns after attending Mrs. Reed’s funeral, she deliberates: “I was going back to Thornfield: but how long was I to stay there? Not long; of that I was sure (273). [...] I felt glad as

the road shortened before me: so glad that I stopped once to ask myself what that joy meant: and to remind reason that it was not to my home I was going, or to a permanent resting-place” (274).

After Jane becomes engaged to Rochester, the reader is made to believe that Thornfield will be Jane’s home. However, Brontë doubly prevents it from becoming so, firstly by disclosing the presence of Bertha, and secondly by making it burn down in the end. The implications of Thornfield’s destruction will be examined shortly afterwards. What should be noted as original in *Jane Eyre* in its treatment of women’s search for a home is that Jane experiences literal homelessness. After fleeing from Thornfield, Jane wanders aimlessly for four days, spending the first two days on the coach and the next two around Whitcross. She demonstrates what happens to a young woman when she undergoes actual homelessness: she starves and loses all physical strength, and almost dies before being saved by the Rivers. Although Jane insists that homelessness does not make her “a beggar” (381) or any less of a lady, she admits to the Rivers: “I dread another essay of the horrors of homeless destitution” (390).

Jane is braver or more impulsive than any of James’s heroines to have undertaken that essay. She has left Thornfield without having found another place. She explains her state to St. John: “Not a tie links me to any living thing: not a claim do I possess to admittance under any roof in England” (387). He exclaims: “A most singular position at your age!” (387). This derives from her singular bravery, but the positions of James’s heroines are fundamentally not so different, because they, too, have not found a house of their own. Jane lodges with the Rivers at Marsh End, from where she continues her search for a home. She soon finds one in Morton, which she describes in the following manner:

My home, then—when I at last find a home, —is a cottage: a little room with white-washed walls, and a sanded floor; containing four painted

chairs and a table, a clock, a cupboard, with two or three plates and dishes, and a set of tea-things in delf. Above, a chamber of the same dimensions as the kitchen, with a deal bedstead, and chest of drawers; small, yet too large to be filled with my scanty wardrobe [...]. (401)

Although Jane calls the “cottage” her home that she has found at last, she describes it in a way that somehow lets us predict that it will only be temporary. The two rooms are so simply decorated that she can list all the contents in a short paragraph. The description gives the impression of the cottage being like a hotel, rather than a permanent home. This impression is confirmed when Jane renews her search for a home, and quest for Rochester.

When Jane rediscovers Rochester, she finds him blind and Thornfield Hall burned down. This makes one speculate about the reason why Brontë prevents Thornfield from becoming Jane’s home. On one level, the fire at Thornfield brings about Bertha’s death, making possible Jane’s marriage to Rochester. On another level, it tells us an aspect of the novel’s positions about houses. Let us recall the inn-keeper’s account of the fire: “Thornfield Hall is quite a ruin: it was burnt down just about harvest time. A dreadful calamity! such an immense quantity of valuable property destroyed: hardly any of the furniture could be saved” (473-74). The destruction of Thornfield bears a close resemblance to that of Poynton. In both cases, the heroine hears of the destruction of the house from a third party, as the novel approaches its ending. However, the reactions of the heroines differ in that whereas Fleda despairs over the loss of Poynton, Jane feels more relieved to hear of Bertha’s death and Rochester’s survival than grieved over the loss of Thornfield. Consequently, the home Jane finally arrives at is Ferndean manor house. It receives a brief description toward the finale of the novel:

The manor-house of Ferndean was a building of considerable antiquity, moderate size, and no architectural pretensions, deep buried in a wood.

[...] He [Rochester] would have let the house; but could find no tenant, in consequence of its ineligible and insalubrious site. Ferndean then remained uninhabited and unfurnished; with the exception of some two or three rooms fitted up for the accommodation of the squire when he went there in the season to shoot. (478)

What is the significance of Ferndean becoming Jane's long-sought home instead of Thornfield? Whereas Thornfield is fully-furnished and filled with valuable property, Ferndean is only partly furnished and suitable for a small number of inhabitants who do not mind living in seclusion. In the chapter on *The Spoils of Poynton*, I have brought up the idea of weighing the importance between "houses" and "things." One who lays more importance on the former appreciates a house as a place of living rather than as a museum of valuable objects. The burning down of Thornfield with its property points to the novel's advocating the house over the things. At Ferndean, Jane and Rochester find peace in a simple life together, not surrounded by beautiful objects but depending on the presence of each other. The fact that Thornfield's fire causes the loss of Rochester's eyesight also suggests the novel's tendency to downgrade the importance of property, because he can no longer appreciate the objects.

I have explained the process of Jane's search for a home, and shown that its conclusion maintains the significance of a house as a living space. This conclusion accords with James's overall treatment of the theme, as he depicts young women trying to secure a permanent home. Nevertheless, *Jane Eyre* differs vitally from James's novels in that Jane gains a fortune left by her uncle, marries Rochester and finds a permanent home, whereas James's heroines do not. I shall now examine this discord by bringing once again *The Turn of the Screw* into focus.

The governess may have felt this contrast most acutely, if we assume that she has read *Jane Eyre* and compared her lot to Jane's. Jane is more successful as a governess

because she has her pupil under her authority. She is respected by Adèle, and the reversal of teacher-student roles does not happen between them, as we have seen it in *The Turn of the Screw*. Jane's confidence is observed in her speech, such as: "I love Thornfield: —I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life, — momentarily at least. I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright and energetic, and high" (283). This is in striking contrast to the governess's state of mind that we have examined. If she had read *Jane Eyre* and seen Jane as a model, she must have been irritated that her life at Bly was going so much less well than Jane's. As we have seen, the governess is perplexed by the excess authority she is granted by the absent master, while being unable to exercise her authority over Miles and Flora. In the case of Jane, the presence of the master helps her to keep her authority in balance, for she is under his control while having her pupil under hers.

The greatest contrast the governess may have felt between herself and Jane has to do with their feelings toward their masters. We are told that the governess is "in love" (2) with the Uncle, but she is forced to repress her emotions because of his absence and indifference. On the other hand, Rochester stays at Thornfield after finding Jane there, and they fall in love. Jane writes of her love for Rochester despite the difference in their positions: "[T]hough rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (199). Jane believes in her equality of mind to Rochester, although aware of their difference in class, and this parity is her grounds for marrying him. Mrs. Fairfax tries to warn Jane of the unconventionality of such a match: "Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" (298). Mrs. Fairfax serves as a spokeswoman of the common attitude against a marriage between a master and a governess, a problem that I have referred to in the first section.¹⁰ However, Brontë reduces its unconventionality by

making Jane an heiress. When she returns to Rochester, a reversal in their positions has occurred, and she has gained enough independence and wealth to make him feel obliged to her for agreeing to marry him.

Earlier, I have argued that their treatment of ghosts distinguishes *Jane Eyre* as realist and *The Turn of the Screw* as modernist. On the theme of marriage, however, one must say that *Jane Eyre* is far from being realist, and *The Turn of the Screw* persists in being realist. By realist I mean that the author portrays the women's difficult conditions as found in contemporary society, without exercising the authorial privilege of preparing a happy ending for the heroines. Jane's luck is two-fold, for she inherits her uncle's fortune, and she marries Rochester, therefore gaining two ways by which she can obtain a house. With the fortune she is able to provide for herself, as she tells Rochester: "If you won't let me live with you, I can build a house of my own close up to your door" (483). As I have shown in the first section, the governesses' marrying their masters, and their marrying out of their occupation and class, was a problem both in Victorian society and novels, because it happened too rarely to save the governesses, and because if it did occur, it posed the controversy of inter-class marriage.¹¹ *The Turn of the Screw* is extra-realist concerning this problem, in that it prevents the possibility of marriage from the beginning, by pronouncing the master's absence and forbidding the governess to contact him even in an emergency. The effect of this extra-realism is in reminding the reader of women's actual housing problem.

I have discussed *Jane Eyre* at length in order to examine the features of *The Turn of the Screw* that become illuminated by comparison. Jane and the governess find similar situations when they come to Thornfield and Bly: the first job as a governess at a mansion with an absent master, that is haunted by a ghostly presence. However, the two novels develop in contrasting ways, letting us see that *The Turn of the Screw* is original in allowing opposite interpretations concerning the ghosts, and that it remains

realist concerning the women's search for a home. Jane's long journey toward Ferndean has revealed that such a search indeed existed. Finally, by comparing it to Brontë's treatment of the theme, we have observed that James's position in the problem is to represent it in an objective, realistic manner. In the next section, I shall conclude this chapter by considering the ending and prologue of *The Turn of the Screw*.

(5) The Ending and Prologue

The strangeness of the final chapter of *The Turn of the Screw* lies primarily in Miles's sudden weakening. His subsequent death is even more mysterious and unrealistic than the presence of Quint and Jessel, because the novel allows a reading that refutes the presence of the ghosts, but it does not allow us to refute the fact of Miles dying. Critics have interpreted it in various ways; for example, some have seen it as a murder by the governess, others as a death from shock, and others as redemption from an evil influence.¹² No interpretation seems convincing while we are unconvinced of the reality of the death itself, but we can only accept it as the culmination of the governess's plight at Bly.

In the final chapter, the governess regains her authority over Miles as he grows weak. This is the chapter of revelations, for the governess succeeds in making Miles confess about the mysteries that have haunted her, and the questions of the missing letter and Miles's expulsion from school are answered. They are resolved rather too easily, and the answers turn out to be simpler than what we have anticipated. Having read the novel from the point of view of the governess, we have somehow identified with her psychology and expected more dramatic answers from Miles. While the content of what Miles said at school to "those he liked" is unknown, the unexpected innocence of his answers leads the governess to this realization: "I seemed to float not

into clearness, but into a darker obscure, and within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent what then on earth was I?" (83). This quotation is crucial as an indicator either supporting the governess's madness, or her complete misunderstanding of the ghosts' influence on the children.

Readers of *The Turn of the Screw*, after reading it once, are most likely to read it again, in order to understand it better. Those readers return to the prologue, and are startled to find a scene that is so remote from the tension that governs the ending. It is distanced from the conclusion temporally and spatially; it is set fifty years later in a country house that is not Bly. The only factor connecting the ending and the prologue, as Shoshana Felman has pointed out in "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," is fire: the fire in which Miles burns the stolen letter, and the fire around which the people gather in the prologue.¹³ Out of the people assembled at this house, only Douglas knows about the events at Bly, and the others encourage him to tell the story merely to satisfy their curiosity. There is a great gap between their easy ignorance and the second-time readers' knowledge of the governess's story.

Let us examine the incipit of *The Turn of the Screw*:

The story had 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 till somebody happened to note it as the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child. The case, I may mention, was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion—an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also herself,

before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shocked him.

(1)

The “story” which starts the novel is not that of the governess but an unrelated one told by Mr. Griffin. Its function is to induce Douglas to produce his own narrative. The difference of this story from that of the governess also contributes to the remoteness that the readers feel. Nevertheless, it is their similarity that prompts Douglas to remember the governess. He categorises his tale as a ghost story because his sympathy with the governess makes him believe that she actually encountered ghosts. It is also this identification that makes him juxtapose the little boy with Miles and his mother with the governess, because the governess did believe that Miles saw Quint, and she also did want to fill the role of his mother.

Douglas provides a favourable opinion of the governess: “She was the most agreeable woman I’ve ever known in her position. [...] [W]e had, in her off-hours, some strolls and talks in the garden—talks in which she struck me as awfully clever and nice” (2). His impression of the governess is much removed from the readers’ response to her at the end of the novel. Some critics have cited Douglas’s praise of her character as the reason for us to believe in the reality of the ghosts, but Felman warns that the “narrative authority” (131) with which Douglas endows the governess due to his admiration for her is illusory and misleading. However, his praise of her hints at the possibility of her growth during the ten years after leaving Bly. If it was her naivety that made her suffer from lack of confidence at Bly, it is her ten years of greater experience that makes her confident, “agreeable” and “clever” as the governess of Douglas’s sister. Moreover, his praise testifies to her transformation from a woman who admires a man in vain to a woman who is admired; in other words, she has changed from a subject to an object of love.

A fact worth recognizing is that there is a reference to six houses in this short

prologue. The houses are mentioned in this order: the first house where Douglas's storytelling takes place; the second in Griffin's ghost story; the third where Douglas meets the governess; the fourth, the Uncle's house in Harley Street; the fifth, the Hampshire vicarage where the governess comes from; and finally Bly. Each reference is supposedly necessary to prepare the reader for the rest of the novel that is set solely in Bly. The Uncle's London residence is "vast and imposing" (4); it is "a big house filled with the spoils of travel and the trophies of the chase" (4). This brief description is enough to explain his absenteeism. It is likely that the Uncle is absent not only from Bly but also from his house in London, because most of the time he travels abroad and hunts in the countryside. He uses it to store and display his things, and does not think of it as living space. Therefore, the house is similar to Poynton in its functions. The other houses, except the vicarage, are presumably country houses similar to Bly. The old house where the storytelling takes place is large enough to accommodate all the people gathered around the fire, and the ghost appears in Griffin's tale in "just such an old house" (1) as the one where it is told. An effect of this repeated reference to houses is in reminding the reader of the temporal and spatial span covered in the novel, both before and after the events at Bly, and especially the interval of fifty years between what is narrated and the time of storytelling. Another effect is in exposing the smallness of the vicarage in contrast to the other houses. In the enumeration of the six houses in the prologue, the vicarage gives an impression of discrepancy, foreshadowing the governess's feeling of being herself an outsider at Bly.

I shall finally comment on the first-person narrator in the prologue. It is meaningful to note that just as much as the narrator trusts Douglas, he also mistrusts the women present at the house. His misogyny is most explicitly conveyed when he writes: "The departing ladies who had said they would stay didn't, of course, thank heaven, stay [...]. But that only made his little final auditory more compact and select, kept it,

round the hearth, subject to a common thrill” (4). The narrator portrays the women as unintelligent people who blab in a superficial manner, and is relieved that the group who hears Douglas’s story is predominantly male. The reason for his misogyny is difficult to specify, but the effect of his manner of describing the women is that it emphasizes the governess’s gravity and introspective tendencies by comparison.

The narrator is probably a writer of some sort, who is interested in Douglas’s story. He has sufficient imagination to guess the governess’s feelings for the Uncle, and it is to him that Douglas entrusts his manuscript. He entitles the tale “The Turn of the Screw” and publishes it in the form that we find it. Two theories arise here about the identity of the narrator. One is that the narrator is James, and he wrote the prologue, added it to his deceased friend Douglas’s manuscript, and published it under his own name. The other theory is that James conceived of the governess’s tale, invented Douglas and the narrator as characters in his novel, and published it as a novel by himself. The actual case is, of course, the second theory, but the first theory remains intriguing as a possibility. If we accept the former possibility, it then means that every character in *The Turn of the Screw* is real and the governess’s tale is not fiction but an actual experience. We must ask ourselves: if the governess’s experiences are not fictional but real, does it change our interpretation? It probably will not affect mine largely, because I have developed a standpoint that is realist. This meta-fictional inquiry is intriguing as an extra thought as we conclude our survey of the novel.

The fact that we can for once imagine the governess’s experiences as possibly real is a part of James’s technique that I have already discussed. In my reading of *The Turn of the Screw*, I have emphasized its realism, and argued that the governess sees the hallucinations of Quint and Jessel because of the difficult conditions she finds at Bly, and that those were common to the vast majority of Victorian governesses. During her several months’ stay, she undergoes new experiences and Bly becomes the place of her

education where she tackles the unknown, symbolized by Quint and Jessel. Her attention is focused on Bly, as she explores it and learns to deal with the new aspects of life it offers, most importantly the experience of living in a great house as a governess. Her efforts end in failure, as Flora falls ill and Miles dead, and Bly becomes nothing but a “haunted house” for her. However, her education at Bly proves essential to grow into a more experienced, confident, and attractive woman that Douglas knows.

¹ For details, see Table of “Selected Former Occupation of Female Lunatics Compared to Total of Each Occupation in Population, England and Wales (1861)” in Hughes, p. 206. According to this table, there were 136 female lunatics who had formerly been governesses, comprising .55% of the total population of the occupation. This percentage is much higher than that of other occupations such as musician, schoolmistress, servant and charwoman.

² See also the account of the governesses’ emotional breakdown, in Hughes, pp. 161-65.

³ Peterson also lists two other solutions promoted at that time: employing foreign governesses in order to avoid the status incongruence of an English governess, and encouraging English governesses to emigrate abroad.

⁴ Peterson, referring to the 1851 Census, states that there were about 25,000 governesses in England in 1851. The popularity of the governess as a character in a novel is excessive when one considers that “there were over 750,000 female domestic servants, not to mention women employed in industry” (4).

⁵ James writes in *Hawthorne* about the richness of types and subjects in Europe: “It takes so many things, as Hawthorne must have felt later in life, when he made the acquaintance of the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle—it takes such an accumulation of history and custom, such a complexity of manners and types, to form a fund of suggestion for a novelist” (*Critical Muse*, 132).

⁶ Edmund Wilson famously interprets the tower as signifying the phallus.

⁷ Girouard describes the two types of military origins: “irregular circuits of curtain walls following the contours of a naturally strong position,” producing a “dazzling if disorganized effect” (69), and “great regular layouts on artificial moated sites,” designed to dominate the enemy “by a combination of the latest technology and overawing symmetry” (69). The towers of Bly are irregular, but instead of being circular, they are square.

⁸ Michael Mason interestingly points out that Charlotte Brontë mistakes the position of Bertha on two occasions in the four printings of the novel during her lifetime. Brontë writes that Bertha is on the second story instead of the third. The result is that even without the author’s knowledge, Bertha acts like a transparent, transposable ghost and comes near Jane.

⁹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* discuss Jane’s long journey as a “pilgrimage toward selfhood” (367) and point out the significance of the names of these places, but they emphasize more on Jane’s moral growth and do not examine the process as particularly a search for a home.

¹⁰ Mrs. Fairfax is an enforcer of class system at Thornfield. She says of the servants: “Leah is a nice girl to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can’t converse with them on terms of equality: one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one’s authority” (112). Mrs. Fairfax advises Jane to keep a distance from the servants, as well as from Rochester. Mrs. Fairfax is of equal position to Jane because she, too, is a lady and a dependent. Jane appreciates her company: “I felt better pleased than ever. The equality between her and me was real” (116). Therefore, Jane does not suffer from not having another lady of similar status in the house, as the governess does. Although Mrs. Fairfax and Mrs. Grose are both housekeepers, Mrs. Fairfax’s literacy allows her to be of equal status to Jane.

¹¹ Mary Poovey in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* analyses the implications of Jane’s marriage. She states that Jane’s

marriage is subversive in that it negates the difference between the governess and the wife, and the assumed similarity between the governess and the lunatic or the mistress.

¹² See Beidler, "Critical History," pp. 141-44.

¹³ Felman explains the complex relationship: "[I]n the center of the circle [of listeners], in the center of the frame, fire and story's content seemed indeed to act as foci—as *foyers*—upon which the space both of narration and of reading seemed to converge. But through Miles's gesture of throwing the governess's letter into the fire, the *fire inside the story* turns out to be, precisely, *what annihilates the inside of the letter*; what materially destroys the very 'nothing' which constitutes its *content*" (147).

Chapter 5

Houses and Class: *In the Cage*

In the Cage is unique among James's novels and novellas because it has a heroine who is a working girl. It is most manifestly about class differences as observed from that perspective. In this novella, the question is intriguingly correlated with the subject of houses, both physically and metaphorically. Houses not only indicate class status, but they also provide sites where the possibility of inter-class socialization is tested.

(1) The Heroine's Attitude toward the Upper Class

The unnamed telegraphist-heroine has complicated and strong emotions toward the upper class. Her attitude toward her customers from that stratum is a mixture of hate and envy. She testifies on several occasions not only that she hates her customers but also that she enjoys hating them. For her, "the fascination" of working at Cockers is "a sort of torment," but one which "she liked" (317).¹ It is a "torment" because seeing the leisured-class extravagance before her eyes makes her acutely aware of "the immense disparity, the differences and contrast, from class to class" (323). She describes this in the following way: "What twisted the knife in her vitals was the way the profligate rich scattered about them, in extravagant chatter over their extravagant pleasures and sins, an amount of money that would have held the stricken household of her frightened childhood, her poor pinched mother and tormented father and lost brother and starved sister, together for a lifetime" (324). She makes an effective use of adjectives in this description, calling every noun related to the rich "profligate" and "extravagant," and putting adjectives that recall misery and poverty before every noun related to her family. As seen in the example just quoted, the heroine often adopts a

language of comparison to describe the difference between the rich class and her own, and the comparison is always based on money.

However, she is also helplessly curious about the rich people because she lacks an immediate knowledge of what their luxurious lives are like. She often wishes in vain that she could have been one of them: “She quivered on occasion into the perception of this and that one whom she would on the chance have just simply liked to *be*” (325). Therefore, the heroine’s opinion of the upper class is a complicated mixture of hate, curiosity and envy. What she tells Mrs. Jordan of her feelings toward her customers is another illustration: “I hate them. There’s that charm! [...] They’re *too* real! They’re selfish brutes” (331). The telegraphist wants to boast to Mrs. Jordan of her firsthand knowledge of the rich. Pamela Thurschwell has shown that around the turn of the century, “intimacy comes to be mediated through tele-technology” and “new communication technologies such as the telegraph and the typewriter are instrumental in creating transgressive fantasies of access to others who would be otherwise inaccessible” (5). As Thurschwell argues, the telegraphist’s sense of intimacy with the aristocracy acquired through her job is illusory. She does not know her customers apart from their behaviour at the post office, and remains ignorant of what goes on at their homes. The desire for this knowledge contributes to her curiosity, although she hides it behind her hate. Tzvetan Todorov has written that in *In the Cage*, “[w]e can see only appearances, and their interpretation remains suspect; only the pursuit of the truth can be present; truth itself, though it provokes the entire movement, remains absent” (*Poetics*, 151-52). The “truth” of the lives of her upper-class customers dwells in their homes, and that is what the heroine is ultimately seeking.

The heroine mentions to Mr. Mudge about her masochistic hate of the rich: “What I ‘like’ is just to loathe them” (334). Her repeated reference to her “liking” hating the aristocracy is peculiar indeed. Perhaps it provides a sense of revenge. Yet she also

seems to camouflage her envy and admiration of the rich; perhaps she does not hate them but admires them. Her feelings anyhow are not so easily determined; for, she does express her hatred on one hand as in the above quotation where she compares affluent people with her own poor family, and on the other she adores Captain Everard, to whom she confides about her pleasure in hating the rich. To his surprise, she tells him that the “attractions” of Cockers are the “horrors” of the rich class and seeing “[y]our extravagance, your selfishness, your immorality, your crimes” (353), and that she “like[s] them” and “revel[s] in them” (354). Because admiration can lead to envy which can then lead to hate, these feelings are correlated in themselves. The girl’s complex mixture of emotions in her dealings with the rich is an important factor throughout the tale, until she learns to resolve it at the end.

The heroine’s position toward the rich is divided between her male and female customers. She adopts a double standard whereby she is harsher toward her female customers. Among them “there were those she liked and those she hated” and the latter are the “brazen women” whose “squanderings and graspings, whose struggles and secrets and love-affairs and lies, she tracked and stored up against them” and whom she wanted to “betray, to trip up, to bring down with words altered and fatal” (324). While there are other women whom she would like “to help, to warn, to rescue, to see more of” (324), she is hostile toward those whom she hates. She has a rule of “making the public itself affix its stamps, and found a special enjoyment in dealing to that end with some of the ladies who were too grand to touch them,” which “brought her endless small consolations and revenges” (324). The telegraphist feels avenged by placing such grand women under her power, even if only temporarily, because she also prides herself as a “lady,” and despises being thought of as below the upper-class women.

However, she finds comfort and interest in her gentlemen customers, and is lenient toward them. She admits that she “herself a little even fell into the custom of

pursuit in occasionally deviating only for gentlemen from her high rigour about the stamps” (325). In her belief, gentlemen “had the best manners” (325), and she “could envy them without dislike” (325). This double standard derives from the fact that, while gentlemen provide a chance for her to marry into high society, ladies only generate envy for their wealth or a sense of rivalry in their common pursuit of the gentlemen. William Veeder attributes the heroine’s misogyny to her anger at the alcoholic mother who failed to nourish her: “The heroine focuses on women because their very gender elides them with a pinched mother, while their upper-class status allows envy to be vented as well” (267).

Other critics have emphasized the heroine’s desire to please rather than her anger at the upper class. Heath Moon brings up the heroine’s loyalty toward Captain Everard and writes that she “harbor[s] fantasies of being the object of special recognition, noticed for exemplary dedication, since [...] loyalty to the gentlemanly class is inseparable from romantic school-girlish yearnings” (33) and that her “romantic Toryism” (31) should not be overlooked because of her imaginative tendencies. Jill Galvan argues that the telegraphist tries to distinguish herself from other working-class women by forming a unique relationship with her rich customers and working as their spirit medium. She tries to overcome the resentment of class disparity by “spiritualizing the moneyed class and envisioning her power to experience their thoughts” (301).

Eric Savoy and Andrew J. Moody have provided interesting historicist interpretations of the telegraphist’s relationship with her upper-class customers by employing the idea of “blackmail.” Savoy cites a contemporary scandal, the Cleveland Street Affair of 1889, in which a telegraph boy disclosed having had sexual relations with upper-class men for which he was paid, and which aroused fear among upper-class customers about the “sexual knowledge embodied in [the post office’s] employees”

("Queer Effects," 290) and the consequent threat of blackmail. For these reasons, as Savoy explains, the telegraphist must have been a great threat to Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen. Savoy also relates to Oscar Wilde's trials to further explain the susceptibility of contemporary homosexual men to blackmail, and conjectures that James "contained his anxiety by displacing it into a heterosexual register in 'In the Cage'" (296). Moody indicates that worker discontent among the women post office workers was strong in the 1890s, which increased their willingness to engage in blackmail. Moody argues that "[b]y ignoring what was traditionally the upper-class's exclusive right to privacy, the telegraphist experiences power over that class" (61) but that her inability to understand Captain Everard's secrets and her decision to respect the anonymity of her customers reveal James's intention to "[recreate] a British telecommunication system that does not threaten upper-class privacy" (55).

As these critics have shown, the central issue of *In the Cage* is the heroine's relationship with her upper-class customers. I shall discuss this issue from a different angle—I shall examine the heroine's desire to enter Captain Everard's home, and interpret her failure as indicating her distance from his class.

(2) Mrs. Jordan and the "Social Door"

The heroine's dealings with Mrs. Jordan allow an interesting comparison of their respective attempts at mixing with the upper class. They see each other as an equal. Both are from the working class, both earn a living from a job, both have suffered from poverty after the death of the breadwinner of the family, Mrs. Jordan her husband and the telegraphist her father, and they share similar feelings toward the upper class, those of envy, curiosity and admiration. Mrs. Jordan hopes to marry Lord Rye, as the telegraphist has fantasies of becoming intimate with Captain Everard. Because they

are equals, they have a strong sense of rivalry between them. The younger woman concedes Mrs. Jordan's "distinct rise in the world" (328-29) and feels "with a twinge of her easy jealousy" (329) that her job in floral decorations may be ranked higher than her own because "[a] thousand tulips at a shilling clearly took one further than a thousand words at a penny" (329).

The two compete, especially in their connections with the rich people. Mrs. Jordan emphasizes her knowledge of the "homes of luxury" where she goes to arrange flowers, about which the girl must feign her knowledge because she has never been to one. But she herself boasts of her knowledge of the rich people's secret communications: "Their affairs, their appointments and arrangements, their little games and secrets and vices—those things all pass before me" (330). What is contested and put to the test is the extent of immediacy in their relationships with the aristocracy.

Mrs. Jordan's attempt at winning their intimacy seems promising enough because she physically enters their houses, as she tells her younger friend of "the way she was made free of the greatest houses—the way [...] she felt that a single step more would transform her whole social position" (316). She believes: "[A] door more than half open to the higher life couldn't be called anything but a thin partition" (316). This sentence, before it was revised in the New York Edition, used to read: "[T]he social door might at any moment open so wide" (*Complete Tales*, 142). The key word is "social." To be able to "socialize" with the upper class people means to mix with them by going beyond class boundaries, to know them personally. Mrs. Jordan hopes that, having entered the aristocrats' houses physically, she will also soon be able to enter them symbolically when the "social door" opens, and have intimate human relationships with them. When encouraged by Mrs. Jordan to join her profession, the younger woman asks exactly this: "But does one personally *know* them? [...] I mean socially, don't you know?—as you know *me*" (328). To this Mrs. Jordan replies, somewhat

unconvincingly: “But I *shall* see more and more of them. [...] We have grand long talks” (328). Despite her hopes, Mrs. Jordan knows the poor prospects of her overcoming class differences and the aristocrats’ taking her in as their own. Even as she visits the houses of luxury and sometimes sees the inhabitants, she is socially and psychologically distanced and isolated.

Toward the end of the novella, a slump occurs in Mrs. Jordan’s business when the inhabitants of the homes of luxury go on a summer vacation and the houses become empty. The telegraphist, on hearing the ups and downs of Mrs. Jordan’s life, rightly attributes the cause to the condition of the “social door”:

This our young woman took to be an effect of the position, at one moment and another, of the famous door of the great world. She had been struck in one of her ha’penny volumes with the translation of a French proverb according to which such a door, any door, had to be either open or shut, and it seemed part of the precariousness of Mrs. Jordan’s life that hers mostly managed to be neither. There had been occasions when it appeared to gape wide—fairly to woo her across its threshold; there had been others, of an order distinctly disconcerting, when it was all but banged in her face. (373)

This description explains Mrs. Jordan’s expectations of socialization and at the same time her anxieties about the wealthy people’s elusiveness. The extent to which the “social door” is ajar measures her expectations and anxieties.

In the end, Mrs. Jordan confesses to her young friend her conclusion that the “social door” will not open after all. Instead of marrying Lord Rye she will marry his doorkeeper, whom the young woman recognizes sardonically: “Mr. Drake then verily *was* a person who opened the door!” (378). Mrs. Jordan has arrived at this ironic conclusion after realizing that socialization is not possible; the divide between the upper

class and the working class cannot be bridged. The same realization has come to the heroine as she learns from Mrs. Jordan that Captain Everard will marry Lady Bradeen and that he has only her riches to live off because he is broke. The fact that this information has reached her via Lady Bradeen, Mr. Drake and Mrs. Jordan explains how far she has been from winning a personal, intimate relationship with Captain Everard. Because the “social door” will not open for her as well, she finally becomes resigned to marrying Mr. Mudge, a man from her own class.

The reference to the door has occurred in another instance in the story. Mrs. Jordan and the heroine first knew each other as a neighbour when each family was in its poorest state. At that time, Mrs. Jordan, “across the sordid landing on which the opposite doors of the pair of scared miseries opened and to which they were bewilderedly bolted, borrowed coals and umbrellas that were repaid in potatoes and postage-stamps” (327). What is significant is that their “doors” did open toward each other, unlike those of the aristocrats, because they are equals. Their equality is also expressed by the fact that they exchanged items of equal value, “coals and umbrellas” for “potatoes and postage-stamps.” This comparison of each other’s items to balance between them differs sharply from the various equations made by the heroine between the value criteria of the rich and the poor, such as when she compares the aristocrats’ “compliments and wonderments and vain vague gestures” in their telegrams against “the price of a new pair of boots” (324). Therefore, the door functions in this novella as a measure of distance between individuals; it only opens toward someone who already belongs to the same social group.

(3) Changes in Class Structure

The heroine does not wish to admit it when she is still influenced by her fantasies

about Captain Everard, but Mr. Mudge is a man full of future possibilities. She acknowledges his potential success at his trade, but cannot help being attracted to the more mysterious and luxurious charms of the Captain. The telegraphist states her acknowledgement of her fiancé's abilities in several instances. First, she gives as the reasons of her engagement to him the "evident sincerity of his passion" and the prospect that "he would build up a business to his chin, which he carried quite in the air" (333). Also, as she observes with scorn Mr. Mudge's minuteness when they plan a holiday to Bournemouth, she recognizes his "mastery of detail that was some day, professionally, to carry him far" (345). Furthermore, she alludes to his "latent force" (357) by which he is still able to impress and surprise her. She cites the incident of his stopping a fight started by a drunken soldier at Cocker's, and his withholding the news of his promotion at Chalk Farm until the end of their vacation in Bournemouth as the instances that confirm this quality.

Mr. Mudge is therefore full of positive and active possibilities. He promises to rise in society with the profits earned from his business, which will provide his future wife with a higher social status and economic stability. He has already picked out a house for them, and by his detailed plan of going to Bournemouth he succeeds in persuading his fiancée, who has "not been out of London for a dozen years" (344), to vacation out of London. Mr. Mudge has energies that Captain Everard and other members of the upper class have now lost.

When asked by Mr. Mudge why she postpones her transfer to Chalk Farm, his fiancée says: "Where I am I still see things" (334) and explains: "Talk of the numbers of the poor! What *I* can vouch for is the numbers of the rich! There are new ones every day and they seem to get richer and richer" (335). This reference fits Mr. Mudge rather than Captain Everard whom the telegraphist has in mind, but neither she nor Mr. Mudge is aware of the actual economic conditions of the aristocrats. Mr. Mudge

shows interest in his fiancée's account of the economic state of the rich people at Cocker's, because as a grocer he needs to make sure that they have capital that will revitalize the economy. Though unsure about their future prospects, he hopes such a cadre "that Providence had raised up to be the blessing of grocers" (335) still exists: "He liked to think that the class was there, that it was always there [...]. He couldn't have formulated his theory of the matter, but the exuberance of the aristocracy was the advantage of trade [...]. It was a comfort to him to be thus assured that there were no symptoms of a drop" (335). However, there are "symptoms of a drop," whose evident example given in the novella is that Captain Everard "has nothing" but "his debts" (381).²

Heath Moon writes that James's major fiction of the late 1890s concerns itself with "the slow decline of this class into the modern era" (19). At the time of Jane Austen, the problem of the gentry's losing moral sensibilities had been resolved by their harmony with the middle class and the "creation of a hybrid class" (21), but this resolution no longer functions in turn-of-the-century England. Jill Galvan also attests to the descent of the upper class by pointing out that the word "apparitions" is used in this novella to denote the aristocrats and argues: "In the manner of ghosts, these individuals personify a past that yet asserts itself in the present: they are visible reminders of the age-old principles of class and community inherited by late-Victorian London" (298).

Concerning the aristocrats, Mrs. Jordan says: "They *are*, in one way *and* another, [...] a tower of strength" (374). Her younger friend does not quite comprehend this point: "[A]s the allusion was to the aristocracy the girl could quite wonder why, if they were so in 'one way,' they should require to be so in two" (374). The exact reference of Mrs. Jordan's point is hard to grasp, but it suggests that the "strength" of the aristocracy is no longer absolute but needs deferential description to allow it to preserve

its mystique. As discussed earlier, “symptoms of a drop” in the aristocracy’s power are insinuated in *In the Cage* as well as the rise in the power of the working class. But the changes in each class as they happen are not directly observable by the other class, as the economic and social state of Captain Everard is not marked by the working-class heroine, because of the social gap that exists between them.

Mrs. Jordan informs the heroine of another group of individuals who are gaining power and wealth. She calls them City gentlemen, who are her important customers: “There was a certain type of awfully smart stockbroker—Lord Rye called them Jews and bounders, but she didn’t care—whose extravagance, she more than once threw out, had really, if one had any conscience, to be forcibly restrained” (373-74). According to Mrs. Jordan, the Jewish stockbrokers spend heaps of money on flowers not out of “a pure love of beauty” but as “a matter of vanity and a sign of business” and as one of the “weapons” to “crush their rivals” (374).³ Although Mrs. Jordan calls them gentlemen, they are a distinctly different group of people from the upper-class and upper-middle-class gentlemen. This new group has gained power and wealth comparable to those of the upper-class gentlemen. Mrs. Jordan refers to their wives as also comparable to the upper-class ladies: “They were not quite perhaps Mrs. Bubb or Lady Ventnor; but you couldn’t tell the difference unless you quarrelled with them, and then you knew it only by their making-up sooner” (374). The identity of the upper-class ladies with the wives of stockbrokers also proves their similarity in economic status, but those wives’ “making-up sooner” possibly derives from the fact that they earn a living from business. Mrs. Jordan’s reference to the Jewish stockbrokers and their wives as “gentlemen” and “ladies” validates the power they were gaining at this time and which made them indistinguishable from the traditional upper-class gentlemen and ladies. An overlap in wealth between different classes was occurring. Jewish businessmen, as well as Mr. Mudge, had “latent force.”⁴

(4) Upper-Class and Working-Class Homes

Unlike in *The Spoils of Poynton*, the interiors and exteriors of houses are scarcely portrayed in *In the Cage*. However, housing issues are mentioned and treated as important throughout the plot. In Chapter 1, it is stated as a premise of this novella that the customers of Cockers live in “the cream of the ‘Court Guide’ and the dearest furnished apartments, Simpkin’s, Ladle’s, Thrupp’s” (314) in Mayfair. The heroine, who lives with her drunken mother, can get “cheaper lodgings” and more “space” (353) if she moves from Mayfair to Chalk Farm. Housing is inevitably related to money and class, and its price depends on location as well as spaciousness and the quality of furniture and material.

Captain Everard lives in Park Chambers, and the heroine takes a circuitous route to pass this fancy apartment on her way to and from work. She stops before Park Chambers to “[reflect], as she looked up at their luxurious front, that *they* of course would supply the ideal setting for the ideal speech” (340). The heroine’s admiration of the Captain is closely linked with her admiration of his dwellings. The attractiveness of the Captain is enhanced by the luxuriousness of Park Chambers. Also, by being his home, the Chambers add another charm to him when she envisions him there. As she looks up at the Captain’s windows on the third floor, she imagines him in his room, either asleep in bed or dressing for dinner, because that is how she attains a personal picture of him. Her innermost desire is to enter his rooms, so as to achieve an intimate relationship with him.

That is what fills her mind on the night she finally encounters him in front of his apartment. At the outset of this one and only meeting with the Captain outside the cage, the telegraphist decides that he must have “wonder[ed] if he could properly ask her to come in” (346), and meditates “whether people of his sort still asked girls up to

their rooms when they were so awfully in love with other women” (347). It remains an open question of whether she would really go into his rooms if asked (which she insists that she would not do); what cannot be doubted is her desire to do so. This desire is analogous to Mrs. Jordan’s wish to “socially” enter the houses of luxury, to form a personal relationship with the members of the aristocracy. However, against her expectations, the heroine finds herself and the Captain walking away from his home, toward Hyde Park: “[T]hey presently moved, with vagueness, yet with continuity, away from the picture of the lighted vestibule and the quiet stairs and well up the street together” (347). This is when she realizes that his door will not open toward her and she will not be asked to enter Captain Everard’s personal space after all: “She had already a vision of how the true answer was that people of her sort didn’t, in such cases, matter—didn’t count as infidelity, counted only as something else” (347). As was the case with Mrs. Jordan, the failure to enter the house of the rich has forced the heroine to finally admit the social gap.

In the Park, the telegraphist refuses to disclose to the Captain where she will go after her transfer. She says: “too far for you ever to find me!” (352) and “quite out of *your* way” (353). The telegraphist here has in mind not the physical distance between Mayfair and Chalk Farm but the social distance. Working in Mayfair, in the midst of her envy and hate, she is still able to “thrill with a sense of the high company she did somehow keep” (342) through her reading of the telegrams and feels a distinct possibility of entering the high society. She will go to Chalk Farm because she has understood that the possibility does not exist. The distance between Mayfair and Chalk Farm epitomizes the insuperable distance between classes.

The language of comparison is again used to describe this distance. The heroine constantly compares one with the other in order to figure out which place works more ideally for her pursuit of her desires. The most important factor is that she and her

mother can “save on their two rooms alone nearly three shillings” (315) if she moves to Chalk Farm. For Mr. Mudge, the transfer to Chalk Farm has meant a “removal to a higher sphere—to a more commanding position, that is, though to a much lower neighbourhood” (315). Concerning the heroine’s work, changing to an office in Chalk Farm is “a transfer to an office quite similar—she couldn’t yet hope for a place in a bigger—under the very roof where he [Mr. Mudge] was foreman” (315). In economic contexts, “money was flying” in Mayfair whereas “it was simply and meagrely nesting” (335) in Chalk Farm. Mr. Mudge acknowledges that “[t]he air felt that stir [...] much less at Chalk Farm than in the district in which his beloved so oddly enjoyed her footing” (335). These comparisons serve as hints from which the reader judges the distance between the two areas, which the heroine is so concerned about.

Here I shall briefly refer to the social history of Mayfair and Chalk Farm. Mayfair is the very prosperous area to the east of Hyde Park and west of Soho, loosely enclosed by Regent’s Street, Piccadilly, Park Lane, and Oxford Street. It did not grow out of a village, but it grew as the site of a fair, first held in 1688 by the grant of King James II. It came to be called Mayfair because the fair was held annually in the first two weeks of May. It was so successful that by 1700 shops had been built to be let to the fair traders, and much of the land had been covered within a few years. The place was rapidly developed into a residential area, and the fair was discontinued in 1809 after it met opposition from the landlords. Henry James lived in Mayfair from 1876 to 1885. His rooms, which he rented for two-and-a-half guineas a week, were on the first floor of a “small four-storied Georgian house” (Hyde 6), now demolished, located at 3 Bolton Street. He quite enjoyed living in Mayfair, and he employed his direct knowledge of the place in writing *In the Cage*.⁵ Chalk Farm is located approximately 4 km to the north of Mayfair, with Regent’s Park between them. During the seventeenth century, the area consisted of farmland, pasture and woodland, and houses were scarce. The

place was originally called Chalcot which in Old English means a cold hut, and eventually Chalcot's Farm became Chalk Farm. The soil is heavy clay, not chalk.⁶

In *In the Cage*, the homes of luxury in Mayfair appear in Mrs. Jordan's speech but their interiors are not portrayed in the novella because the heroine, who is the central consciousness, never enters one. The knowledge is kept from the reader as it is kept from the heroine. The lack of description points to "her ignorance of the requirements of homes of luxury" (327) and the "cold breath of disinheritance" (327) she feels about them. However, the idea of the "homes of luxury" is significant in the story because it is central to the heroine's and Mrs. Jordan's attitudes toward the aristocracy. The future house of Lady Bradeen and Captain Everard is briefly mentioned by Mrs. Jordan; she tells the heroine that their domestic space will be ruled by the Lady. She says that the Captain will have no "authority" in the "domestic arrangements, things in the house" because "nothing in the house is his" (381). He will move into the house inhabited by Lord Bradeen before his death, and the authority toward the house as well as the domestic arrangements will belong to the Lady. It will be a female-dominated house, as those of the heroine and Mrs. Jordan are to a lesser extent also likely to be.

The heroine's apartment is also never portrayed, but Mrs. Jordan's lodging in Maida Vale receives a small description. On the November afternoon when the heroine visits her place, there is "a thick brown fog and Maida Vale tasted of acrid smoke" (374). She enters the dark, empty room: "The brown fog was in this hostess's little parlour, where it acted as a postponement of the question of there being, besides, anything else than the teacups and a pewter pot and a very black little fire and a paraffin lamp without a shade. There was at any rate no sign of a flower; it was not for herself Mrs. Jordan gathered sweets" (375). The bleakness of this room is emphasized by such features as: the smell of "smoke," shroud of "brown fog," absence of furniture and objects apart from the basic things, lack of decoration, and of natural light. Flowers

would add more color to this room that is dominated by brown and black, but Mrs. Jordan does not buy them for herself presumably because they are costly and because she sees them only as merchandise, distinguishing between public and private spheres. The barrenness of the room is further expressed by the withholding of any mention of it or the things in it by the narrator during the long conversation that ensues between the heroine and Mrs. Jordan. It is drawn as a fitting place where revelation comes to the heroine and she regains a sense of reality:

They sat there together; they looked out, hand in hand, into the damp dusky shabby little room and into the future, of no such very different complexion, at last accepted by each. [...] [W]hat our heroine saw and felt for in the whole business was the vivid reflexion of her own dreams and delusions and her own return to reality. Reality, for the poor things they both were, could only be ugliness and obscurity, could never be the escape, the rise. (379)

“Reality” does not involve escape from their class or a rise into the upper class. However, for them it is not as ugly and obscure as that which they have renounced, and their future is more attractive than this room, because each is going to live in her own house after marriage.

Having one’s own house is extremely important so as to avoid homelessness and parasitism, which was the fate of Fleda Vetch. Only too conscious of this fact, the heroine says: “We shall have our own house, [...] and you must come very soon and let me show it to you” (380). To this Mrs. Jordan immediately replies: “*We* shall have our own too, [...] for, don’t you know? he makes it a condition that he sleeps out” (380), and declares that their insistence on having their own house is the reason why Mr. Drake has changed his master from Lord Rye to Lady Bradeen. Mr. Mudge has insisted on their own house, too, and he has chosen “a sweet little home” (357) through

which he guides his fiancée in his talks “from garret to cellar” (367). He impresses her by procuring in the house a “niche” for “that dingy presence” (367), freeing her mother from the threat of homelessness as well. Using such derogatory terms is extremely crude, whether they be regarded as Mr. Mudge’s words or the heroine’s, but it points to the narrow margin by which her mother has escaped homelessness. Granted the extent of the danger of such a situation which the female characters of James’s novels treated in this dissertation face, the ending that the heroine and Mrs. Jordan have reached is a very happy one.

(5) The Cage

I have discussed the physical and metaphorical functions of houses in this novella in the context of class differences, and finally I shall analyze another kind of indoor space: the cage. Nicola Nixon argues that this is James’s antithesis to the romantic prison praised in Oscar Wilde’s “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” written in 1897. She writes that by portraying the cage naturalistically as a class barrier, James frees the heroine from the folly of the Victorian notion that young women should read only romantic fiction to preserve their innocence. The portrayal of the cage is indeed naturalistic, as I shall observe shortly.

Being the heroine’s workplace, the cage is where she spends half of her time and where she wonders about her identity in relation to her upper-class customers. The incipit of the novella reveals her wish to find her identity:

It had occurred to her early that in her position—that of a young person spending, in framed and wired confinement, the life of a guinea-pig or a magpie—she should know a great many persons without their recognising the acquaintance. That made it an emotion the more lively—though

singularly rare and always, even then, with opportunity still very much smothered—to see any one come in whom she knew outside, as she called it, any one who could add anything to the meanness of her function.

(314)

The telegraphist compares herself to an animal being shut up in a cage. Calling her office a cage is her own idea; none of her friends does so, and she does not use this word either when she converses with them. The term is only used by the narrator within the consciousness of the heroine. A cage commonly refers to a barred enclosure where a bird or a beast is kept, and also to a prison. At the post office the telegraphist constantly feels herself encaged and lacking a human, personal identity. She has an acute sense of the “outside” as a place where she will be freed from her confinement and where she has a possibility of being endowed with a recognizable identity. Recently, critics such as Sally Ledger have pointed out the publicity surrounding the post office in fin-de-siècle London, and the danger of the body of a female worker exposed to the public gaze to be likened to a prostitute. This is, of course, an identity that the telegraphist would wish to avoid.

This image of the cage’s stifling enclosure is further brought forth in the following description:

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 a 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 them by their names. (314)

The post office is separated from the grocery by “a frail structure of wood and wire” (314), and the cage is additionally enclosed by the “transparent screen.” Furthermore,

the sounder is “the innermost cell of captivity, a cage within the cage, fenced off from the rest by a frame of ground glass” (318). Despite the layers of barriers that distance the telegraphist from outside, she is exposed to the smell of gas and the numerous items from the grocery. The reference to her keen nose furthers her image as an animal. Therefore, the cage is depicted as a space that is secluded from outside by multi-barriers, and the telegraphist views the outside as where she will be recognized as an individual. The gap between this space and outside is emphasized by the telegraphist’s inability to tell the weather, “speaking of the stuffy days as cold, of the cold ones as stuffy, and betraying how little she knew, in her cage, of whether it was foul or fair” (338).

The heroine becomes attracted to Captain Everard because she wishes to see him as someone who comes from outside and recognizes her, and who will add to her identity. This desire fills her mind, as she wonders about “the possibility of her having for him a personal identity that might in a particular way appeal” (322), so that he might add an aristocratic connection to her identity. Outside is where she sees such a “possibility” might exist, thus she passes Park Chambers every night, hoping to meet him. When she slips into the hall of his apartment and finds his name on the board, she becomes excited with a sense of meeting him there out of the cage: “It was as if, in the immense intimacy of this, they were, for the instant and the first time, face to face outside the cage” (340). On the night when she finally succeeds, what governs her mind is again the thought about her identity outside the cage, “the idea that she might be, out of the cage, the very shopgirl at large that she hugged the theory she wasn’t” (347). That of the “shopgirl” is far from the identity that she seeks, although she is never sure in the course of the novella what it is that she should identify herself with.

Therefore, *In the Cage* tells the process of the nameless heroine’s search for her identity through her comparison of various places—the cage against the outside world, Mayfair against Chalk Farm, and Park Chambers against Mr. Mudge’s little home.

The identity that she finally discovers is that of a housewife, Mrs. Mudge, living in a small house in Chalk Farm with her grocer husband and alcoholic mother, and belonging to the working class. She will resign from work after marriage, as it was the official policy of the Post Office in the late nineteenth century that “married women should not be appointed and single women should resign on marriage” (Daunton 220). The heroine makes a final assessment and decides that Chalk Farm is more desirable than Mayfair for her particular identity: “[T]he circumstance that, [...] [Mrs. Jordan’s] interests would still attach themselves to Mayfair flung over Chalk Farm the first radiance it had shown. Where was one’s pride and one’s passion when the real way to judge of one’s luck was by making not the wrong but the right comparison?” (380). Failing to enter Park Chambers has taught her that she has no choice other than to be content with this identity that she has found.

¹ The quotations from *In the Cage* are taken from *Selected Tales* (2001), unless otherwise indicated.

² For a detailed account of the fall of the British aristocracy, see David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*. Cannadine explains that the 1880s was “a troubled decade” (25) for the aristocrats, when their power was severely challenged economically, politically and socially.

³ There is an account of the history of the Jewish people in London by Beatrice Potter in *Labour and Life of the People, Volume 1: East London*, edited by Charles Booth. Potter’s account mostly concerns itself with the description of the Jewish Community of the East End which is poor, but the account reveals that the rich Jewish people whom Mrs. Jordan refers to are descendants of the successful Jews who were originally restricted to the neighbourhood of Houndsditch, immediately to the east of the City, and who eventually “moved westward” (564).

⁴ We can recall Mr. Perriam, Ida Farange’s Jewish lover. It is a case of the mixing of a middle-class woman and a Jewish businessman. We may imagine Maisie’s and the telegraphist’s search for a home occurring simultaneously in contemporary London.

⁵ *Hotel, House and Apartment Advertiser*, a contemporary periodical, lists advertisements for houses and apartments for rent, and lets us see the rent of some dwellings in London. 15 September, 1902 issue gives the following advertisement for an apartment in Mayfair: “Bachelor’s Chambers—Oxford Mansion, Oxford Circus. All modern improvements and thoroughly up-to-date. Coffee room and smoking lounge. Meals at moderate tariff. Rents £90 per annum, including attendance.” £90 per annum is slightly cheaper than James’s rent at 2 and a half guineas a week. These rates are presumably not so different from what Captain Everard paid for Park Chambers.

⁶ The appendix to Charles Booth’s *Labour and Life of the People, Volume 2*, provides useful data for comparing Mayfair and Chalk Farm. It illustrates what kinds of people inhabit the area by street, and lists the population classified by their income. According to Booth, between 1887 and 1889, the total population of Mayfair is 31,316, of which 832 (2.7%) live in poverty and 30,484 (97.3%) in comfort. The total population of Chalk Farm is 29,282, of which 5,259 (18%) live in poverty and 24,023 (82%) in comfort. The very high percentage of the people living in comfort shows that Mayfair is the most wealthy area in London, but compared to the average of the whole of London, whose population is 4,209,170, of which 1,292,433 (30.7%) live in poverty and 2,916,737 (69.3%) in comfort, Chalk Farm is a comparatively wealthy area, too.

Chapter 6

City and Country Houses: *The Awkward Age*

So far this thesis has examined James's five novels that are connected by the central and recurrent idea of women's search for a home. The theme was first raised in *The Spoils of Poynton*, where Fleda enacts the search by moving from place to place; in *The Other House*, it emerged as the cause of Rose's crime; the primary narrative motivation of *What Maisie Knew* is a child's pursuit of a home; the motif also determines the governess's education in *The Turn of the Screw*; and *In the Cage* emphasizes the class dimension of a similar quest by the heroine. In this final chapter, *The Awkward Age* will be read as a kind of sequel to *What Maisie Knew*, because Nanda is driven away from home by her mother, and her family is disintegrated, as was the case with Maisie; only, Nanda is older than the child-heroine of the novel.

The Awkward Age is about Nanda's search for a home as it coincides with the breakdown of her mother's social circle. According to what Vanderbank and Mitchy tell Mrs. Brook in Book Ninth, the breakdown is finalized by Mrs. Brook's summoning Nanda back to Buckingham Crescent from Beccles, on the night of Tishy's dinner party. Mrs. Brook's act only serves to underline the inevitability of Nanda's final departure from Buckingham Crescent. It causes the others to leave her, too. The disintegration of Mrs. Brook's group is linked to her failure as a mother.

In the novel, three main country houses appear—Beccles, Mertle, and the Hovel, and three main London houses—Mrs. Brook's, Vanderbank's, and Tishy Grendon's. James's writing about country houses is well-known, but what should be noted in *The Awkward Age* is the parallel presentation of country and city houses as important sites for the development of the plot and Nanda's search. In fact, set primarily in London, this novel is more about London houses than country houses. However, country

houses play essential roles in that the crucial events that directly affect the plot take place at Mertle and Beccles, as will be observed later.

(1) Three London Houses

Buckingham Crescent is the central setting for the novel. The many scenes set in the house serve to emphasize Mrs. Brook's presence and Nanda's absence. Despite the fact that Nanda has finally left the school-room at nineteen and made her debut in her mother's drawing-room, we do not find her there. That is the impression the Duchess has received: "When is Nanda ever here?" (53). Nanda spends more time with Tishy than with her mother, because she has silently been ordered by her mother to stay away from home. Mrs. Brook herself is not free from the threat of homelessness. Feeling that Nanda's presence endangers her position as the mistress of Buckingham Crescent, Mrs. Brook does not mean it when she says: "Nanda has stepped on the stage and I give her up the house" (166). Also, although Mrs. Brook tells the Duchess: "I've given her a room of her own—the sweetest little room in the world" (53), she makes sure that Nanda understands that it is only a temporary one.

Harold is even more of a threat, because, if Mr. Brook dies, he will inherit the properties, as we have seen in the case of the Gereths' Poynton. In this sense, Mr. Brook plays a crucial role, although he strikes the reader as an insignificant character. Mrs. Brook's disgust with Harold is not separate from this threat that he implies, and she is undisguised when she declares to him: "I wish to heaven you'd get out of the house" (43). Harold's rejoinder is a telling commentary on his mother's disposition: "You're always wanting to get me out of the house. I think you want to get us *all* out, for you manage to keep Nanda from showing even more than you do me. [...] At any rate it's as plain as possible that if you don't keep us at home you must keep us in

other places” (44). As Harold points out, Mrs. Brook is anxious to keep her children from showing up in Buckingham Crescent and to find what can be called a “hiding place” for them. For Harold on this occasion it is Brander, and for Nanda it is Tishy’s house. She has two more children, a boy and a girl younger than Nanda, whom she manages to hide completely from the other characters as well as from the reader. The absence of Mrs. Brook’s children from her drawing-room brings out her own presence there, as recognized in the numerous scenes of conversation she has with her visitors. It is worth noting that the only time that Nanda is in Mrs. Brook’s drawing-room is in the third section of Book Sixth, when she is told by her mother to go away to Beccles as soon as possible. Nanda is present in every place described in the novel except for her mother’s drawing-room, first appearing in Vanderbank’s house in Book Third, and later in Mertle (Book Fifth), Beccles (Book Seventh), Tishy’s house (Book Eighth), and her sitting-room (Book Tenth).

Therefore, the most significant feature of Buckingham Crescent is the dominating presence of Mrs. Brook which she strives to sustain. It is fitting that Mrs. Brook enters the novel at the outset of Book Second as she enters her drawing-room, because the centre of the novel’s world inheres in this room. We enter this world as Mrs. Brook crosses the threshold to find the room invaded by Harold. The room contains “a beautiful old French secretary, a fine piece of the period of Louis Seize” (39), which Mrs. Brook uses to store some cash. The “bunch of keys dangling from the secretary” (39) that Mrs. Brook cautiously takes into her pocket symbolizes the control of Buckingham Crescent that she endeavours to hold onto. Nevertheless, the fact that Harold has taken five pounds and two sovereigns from the “secretary” shows the uncertainty of her grip on the “keys,” both of the desk and of the house.

The sense of uncertainty and melancholy governing Mrs. Brook’s mind is conveyed in the following paragraph:

She turned away with impatience and, glancing about the room, perceived on a small table of the same type as the secretary, a somewhat massive book with the label of a circulating library, which she proceeded to pick up as for refuge from the impression made on her by her boy. He watched her do this and watched her then slightly pause at the wide window that, in Buckingham Crescent, commanded the prospect they had ramified rearward to enjoy; 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—one of the private pictures that in London, in select situations, run up, as the phrase is, the rent. (40)

Desperate to escape the threatening impression of her son, Mrs. Brook seeks solace in her room, first taking up the book and then looking out the window. Her chain of actions is characterized by restlessness, fruitlessness and thoughtlessness, giving us a rather different image of her. Her room does not help her to escape Harold's influence. The library book does not retain her attention, and the view from the window is not reassuring. The description of the house's back takes on a somewhat sarcastic tone, listing gloomy, crude images that the Brooks "enjoy" at a high rent. We are given a scene where various parts of buildings are crowded into a closed space. It provides only an obstructed view. The adjectives "smoky," "spotty" and "opaque" emphasize the grayness of the scene, further emphasized by the rainy weather. Despite its unattractiveness, having a view is precious in London, and it is significant that James provides this description of the small space outside Buckingham Crescent. It will serve as an object of comparison to the gardens of country houses in later chapters.

It is not exactly clear if the Brooks own or rent Buckingham Crescent. My position is that they own it, as the Gereths do Poynton, and the important factor is that Mrs. Brook wants to hold on to it as Mrs. Gereth does Poynton. The narrator

comments that the view “runs up the rent,” but the phrase is being used only in a general sense. Mr. Longdon asks Van: “But a house in Buckingham Crescent, with the way they seem to have built through to all sorts of other places—?” (10), suggesting that it must be costly; thus Mrs. Brook maintains the house at a high expense.

Mrs. Brook’s room is described in greater details when the Duchess checks Mrs. Brook’s furniture as soon as she enters the room:

Mrs. Brookenham knew perfectly the meaning of this glance: she had but three or four comparatively good pieces, whereas the Duchess, rich with the spoils of Italy, had but three or four comparatively bad. [...] The Duchess was a woman who so cultivated her passions that she would have regarded it as disloyal to introduce there a new piece of furniture in an underhand way—that is without full appeal to herself, the highest authority [...]. (48)

The power relations between these women as well as their economic conditions are revealed here. The Duchess relies on her better furniture to assert her superiority over Mrs. Brook, who acquiesces in these relations at least superficially. However it is Mrs. Brook who is the centre of the social circle; she attracts Vanderbank and Mitchy to her room, whereas the Duchess only has Lord Petherton. The expression “the spoils of Italy” reminds the reader of Mrs. Gereth. Although the Duchess’s house is never portrayed, we may assume some aspects of its interiors. Despite being filled with “spoils” they are lacking the taste displayed at Poynton. By calling the Duchess’s furniture “spoils,” the narrator implies her vulgarity, and the falsity of her claims to being foreign. The Duchess’s competitive attitude toward Mrs. Brook derives mostly from the fact that each wants Mitchy to marry her daughter.

Another significant place in Buckingham Crescent is, of course, Nanda’s sitting-room that appears in the final chapter. It is located on the second floor, above

Mrs. Brook's drawing-room. It is the room of Nanda's own which she has been afforded after the night of Tishy's dinner party, and which she is at her leisure to enjoy—except that it comes with a time limit, which is when Nanda decides to leave Buckingham Crescent permanently. In Book Tenth, we find her on the day she makes the decision:

She was in unusual possession of that chamber of comfort in which so much of her life had lately been passed, the redecorated and rededicated room upstairs in which she had enjoyed a due measure both of solitude and society. Passing the objects about her in review she gave especial attention to her rather marked wealth of books; changed repeatedly, for five minutes, the position of various volumes, transferred to tables those that were on shelves and rearranged shelves with an eye to the effect of backs. She was flagrantly engaged throughout indeed in the study of effect, which moreover, had the law of an extreme freshness not inveterately prevailed there, might have been observed to be traceable in the very detail of her own appearance. "Company" in short was in the air and expectation in the picture. The flowers on the little tables bloomed with a consciousness sharply taken up by the glitter of nick-nacks and reproduced in turn in the light exuberance of cushions on sofas and the measured drop of blinds in windows. The numerous photographed friends in particular were highly prepared, with small intense faces, each, that happened in every case to be turned to the door. The pair of eyes most dilated perhaps was that of old Van, present under a polished glass and in a frame of gilt-edged morocco that spoke out, across the room, of Piccadilly and Christmas, and visibly widening his gaze at the opening of the door, at the announcement of a name by a footman and at the entrance

of a gentleman remarkably like him save as the resemblance was on the gentleman's part flattered. (491-92)

The narrator implies that Nanda has stopped going to Tishy's place since she has been endowed with this room. She has acquired her own domain and provisional independence within her mother's house, where she has a chance to reflect on herself. She has decorated the room in a way that both Vanderbank and Mitchy find impressive, and she has filled it with things that are associated with her search for self—many gifts from Mr. Longdon and many photographs of the people she has known. He has sent her the books “in the loveliest bindings, the most standard English works” (459) and the flowers from his garden in order to impart his values to her, but on this occasion we find her using them as decoration and for “effect.”

Nanda has constantly rearranged the position of her things, and she wants her visitors, especially Van, to see the changes. It is as though she tries new arrangements in her room in order to discover new aspects of herself, and to refute her belief that she lacks “what's called a principle of growth” (214). Presumably, Nanda does not only use the things as decoration but also takes in their content; that is, she reads the books and appreciates the flowers. She is able to compare Mr. Longdon's classical texts to those that she is used to seeing in the house, such as the volumes that Mitchy sends her and the French book that Van lends her mother. As for the flowers, she tells Van: “[Mr. Longdon's] garden's like a dinner in a house where the person—the person of the house—thoroughly knows and cares” (496). Nanda explains to Van that the flowers have been nurtured by Mr. Longdon's dedication and faith, showing her understanding of his moral values.

Another aspect we must take note of in this paragraph is the “personification” of photographs by the attribution of human traits. Van's is the most prominent of them all, with its wide-opened eyes and the golden-rimmed leather frame. The impression that

it makes is so powerful that it takes on a life of its own, as a separate entity dwelling in Nanda's room. The fact that Van's photo is the most conspicuous is a measure of Nanda's feelings for him. However, there is no interchange between image and original, despite Van's blabbering comments on her other objects. This gap between the representation and the actual man symbolizes her unrequited love. Personification of photographs is a phenomenon that has also occurred in Van's own room at the outset of the novel, which will be discussed shortly.

It is ultimately the uneasiness about this unreciprocated emotion that triggers Van's restless, endless comments on Nanda's room. To avoid talking about her, he talks about her possessions. Van goes on to say:

“Flowers and pictures and—what are the other things people have when they're happy and superior?—books and birds. You ought to have a bird or two, though I dare say you think that by the noise I make I'm as good myself as a dozen. Isn't there some girl in some story—it isn't Scott; what is it?—who had domestic difficulties and a cage in her window and whom one associates with chickweed and virtue? It isn't Esmeralda—Esmeralda had a poodle, hadn't she?—or have I got my heroines mixed? You're up here yourself like a heroine; you're perched in your tower or what do you call it?—your bower. You quite hang over the place, you know—the great wicked city, the wonderful London sky and the monuments looming through: or am I again only muddling up my Zola?” (495)

Jean Frantz Blackall has written an intriguing article on these literary allusions in Van's speech, which explains that Esmeralda is the heroine in Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and that Molly, the heroine in Thomas Nelson Page's *Two Prisoners* also shares Nanda's conditions, being “lamed, imprisoned, and motherless” (“Literary Allusion,”

184), and with “only alleviation to her loneliness” being “the view from her window” (183). Blackall concludes: “[Van’s] seeing Nanda perched up there makes him uncomfortable. Like the word ‘superior,’ it intimates that Van both looks up to Nanda and is conscious of her being better than he, which Mrs. Brookenham is not” (193). While I find Blackall’s perspective illuminating, I disagree with some points of his argument. I do not see Nanda as being confined to this room, because she is free to decide when to leave it, and moreover, her mother silently presses her to depart before long. Rather, I see Nanda as using it as a space to reflect on her past in Buckingham Crescent and her future in Beccles. The numerous objects in the room are tools for this self-examination.

That Nanda has found consolation in the view from the window as Molly has done is also doubtful, because this vantage is not attractive, as we have observed earlier. Nevertheless, the fact that the room is on the top floor is full of implications. By being placed above her father’s room on the ground floor and her mother’s on the first, Nanda has become less easily accessible to Van. Two weeks earlier, he decides not to go up to Nanda’s room after talking to Mrs. Brook in her drawing-room. When Mrs. Brook learns that Van has left presumably without making an offer of marriage to Nanda, she pointedly observes: “He changed his mind out there on the stairs” (450). Talking to her mother and climbing the stairs have made Van realize, that in order to make an offer of marriage to Nanda, he would have to overcome the “hurdle” of Nanda’s “modernity” which he finally cannot accept. I do not share Blackall’s view that Van sees Nanda as superior; rather, I believe that he condescendingly disapproves of her. His praise of her in the above speech derives from the awkwardness of having rejected her. Therefore, her upstairs room does not cause him to recognize her superiority but instead to realize his final disaffection towards her. By calling her a “heroine,” Van distances her from himself. However, as he says, Nanda “hangs over” London from her room to

observe the city that has made her a “modern daughter” who “knows everything.”¹ This vantage-point over London is also significant for her self-retrospection, not because the view is good, but because it is bad. Such is the room where Nanda spends the final five months at Buckingham Crescent—a room full of books, flowers, photographs, and with a restricted, muddled view of London—a room where she learns to come to terms with herself. On this note I will leave the examination of Buckingham Crescent and proceed to another London house: Van’s.

On the night of the novel’s opening, Mr. Longdon meets Van at Buckingham Crescent. Nevertheless, the author does not yet describe Mrs. Brook’s house and chooses Van’s residence as the setting for the first chapter. These sections provide us with preparatory information about the characters, as Van explains them to Mr. Longdon by referring to the photographs. The foremost feature of Van’s rooms is the abundance of things, which are of two kinds: practical and reminiscent. As a competent civil servant, Van has heaps of paper related to work; his table is “covered with books for which the shelves had no space—covered with portfolios, with well-worn leather-cased boxes, with documents in neat piles” (126). The narrator sums up the scene: “The place was a miscellany, yet not a litter, the picture of an admirable order” (126). The state of his things gives us a clue about his character as a cautious man who sticks to order and principles.

The inclination towards reminiscence is observable in Van’s “many, too many photographs” (8). The first one that Mr. Longdon notices is that of Van’s mother, whom the old man used to admire. It is important to note that Mr. Longdon says: “I don’t make you out in her yet—in my recollection of her, which, as I told you, is perfect” (7). This missing link between Van and his mother will eventually turn into one between Van and Mr. Longdon. Van develops a strong interest in Beccles and Mr. Longdon whose “action had already been, with however little purpose, to present the

region to his interlocutor in a favourable light. Vanderbank, for that matter, had the kind of imagination that likes to *place* an object, even to the point of losing sight of it in the conditions; he already saw the nice old nook it must have taken to keep a man of intelligence so fresh while suffering him to remain so fine” (6). Van has a longing for such a life that Mr. Longdon has led; in fact, he is the greatest advocate of the values embodied by the latter: “[H]e found himself wanting to get at everything his visitor represented, to enter into his consciousness and feel, as it were, on his side” (8).

Mr. Longdon is linked to Van’s past in that he also used to know Van’s sisters Mary and Blanche, now known as Nancy Toovey, and brother Miles, although he did not know Van himself. That a boy named Miles appears again is curious indeed. This Miles is reminiscent of Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* in that he is also clever, and has died young. He is significant because he used to be attached to Mr. Longdon, showing the distance from Van, who was away at school, in comparison. Mr. Longdon remembers Miles well: “He used to talk to me—I remember he asked me questions I couldn’t answer and made me dreadfully ashamed. But I lent him books—partly, upon my honour, to make him think that as I had them I did know something. He read everything and had a lot to say about it” (21). Despite his admiration for Mr. Longdon, Van later accepts with regret that he cannot be like him, and he cannot connect to him in the way Miles did and Nanda does, through the loan of books.

Van and Mr. Longdon discuss Aggie and Nanda while looking at their photographs. Aggie’s is “a small photograph with a very wide border of something that looked like crimson fur” (16), and “little Nanda was in glazed white wood” (17). Mr. Longdon examines each portrait: “He took her [Nanda’s photo] up and held her out” (17), and “He took up little Aggie, who appeared to interest him [...]. [...] He laid little Aggie down” (22-23). We should notice that Aggie and Nanda are here being commodified as images. This personification of photographs takes a different form

from that seen in Nanda's room. Whereas Van's photo there adopts its own life and perspective, Aggie and Nanda's photos remain passive, as objects to be studied by the men, and dominated by the male perspective.

Julie Rivkin has argued that *The Awkward Age* reveals issues related to the production of virgins and their problematic identity in the "representational economy" of contemporary London. She analyzes the frames of Aggie and Nanda's photographs in the following way:

On the one hand the frames keep the virgin away from contact or circulation and emphasize that her value resides in her inaccessibility, but on the other hand the frames put the virgin into the hands of her consumers and hint that her value derives from their appraisals. [...] The crimson fur proleptically defines the virgin as the scarlet woman she is constituted to become. Supposedly defined by her untouched and untouchable condition, she is nonetheless packaged to be handled. Nanda's frame of glazed white wood, clearly less appealing to the touch, has the converse effect of rendering her value as virgin more subject to question; although the glazed white wood suggests something chaste, hard, inviolable, the virgin who can never be touched does not work as a virgin at all. (177-78)

Rivkin's interpretation of the frames is highly persuasive. Her reading of the two men's conversation as estimating the girls' value as virgins is one way of explaining the male-dominated perspective that the novel's opening sections adopt, and helps to account for both the personification of the photos and commodification of Aggie and Nanda.

The function of Van's rooms is not only to offer the setting for these male-dominated opening sections but also to provide a place for the first meeting of Mr.

Longdon and Nanda in Book Third, which is also the first appearance of Nanda in the novel. This way, the reader becomes acquainted with her through the impressions of Mr. Longdon. The old man's emphasis on her striking resemblance to Lady Julia endows her with a special ability to co-exist in the past and the present. Mr. Longdon speaks as if Nanda were the reincarnation of her grandmother: "It's *she* again, as I first knew her, to the life; and not only in feature, in stature, in colour, in movement, but in every bodily mark and sign, in every look of the eyes above all—oh to a degree!—in the sound, in the charm of the voice. [...] She's *all* Lady Julia. There isn't a touch of her mother. It's unique—an absolute revival" (144). Through this resemblance, Nanda is given access to a life in the 1830s. Van readily agrees that her facial features go back to that decade: "It isn't a bit modern. [...] It's a face that should have the long side-ringlets of 1830. It should have the rest of the personal arrangement, the pelisse, the shape of bonnet, the sprigged muslin dress and the cross-laced sandals. It should have arrived in a pea-green 'tilbury' and be a reader of Mrs. Radcliffe" (145-46). Van's conviction that Nanda is old-fashioned shows the gap he feels between her face and her character as a "modern daughter." As we may notice from this remark, he has a longing for values and appearances from that period when Mr. Longdon lived as a young man. This is externalized in the design of his rooms. Although he lacks the means to buy expensive furniture and must use his private space to store documents from work, he still keeps them in a way that appeals to Mr. Longdon and Nanda. When asked by Van: "Do I look like a 'great' one?" (15), Mr. Longdon "again embrace[s] the room" and says: "Oh dear, yes!" (16). Likewise, Nanda expresses her fondness for the rooms. When she visits Mr. Longdon for the first time, she "[gives] her attention all to the place, looking at the books, pictures and other significant objects, and especially at the small table set out for tea" and says: "Isn't it charming here?" (132). The fact that Van's rooms are approved by Mr. Longdon and Nanda, the two

epitomizers of traditional values, in turn confirms his belief in those values. Moreover it is here that Nanda's old attributes are discovered by Mr. Longdon. However, despite the tendency to reminisce apparent in his interest in Mr. Longdon and in the features of his room, Van lacks the ability to stimulate connections back in time. Unlike Nanda, he is unable to prompt Mr. Longdon to remember the past. He does not resemble his mother, once admired fervently by Mr. Longdon who notes "There's a link missing" (222) between mother and son. Van is of the same kind as Mrs. Brook who fails completely to remind Mr. Longdon of Lady Julia. This link between Mr. Longdon and Nanda and the gap between him and Van lead to Van's rejection of Nanda. Whereas Mr. Longdon learns that times have changed and "accepts" Nanda "as different" (213) from Lady Julia, Van finally cannot accept the "modern" side of her. Nanda and Mr. Longdon review this contrast between Van and himself at the very end of the novel. Nanda says:

"Everything's different from what it used to be."

"Yes, everything," he returned with an air of final indoctrination.

"That's what he ought to have recognised."

"As *you* have?" Nanda was once more—and completely now—enthroned in high justice. "Oh he's more old-fashioned than you."

"Much more," said Mr. Longdon with a queer face. (544)

From the analysis of his rooms we see that Van's status as "old-fashioned" persists from beginning to end. Unlike Mr. Longdon, he is unable to adjust his principles, and this difference results in their final separation.

I now direct my attention to the house of Tishy Grendon. Book Eighth, which takes place there, is considered by many readers as the climax of the novel, not only because all the main characters gather there, but also because it reveals what has become of Mrs. Brook's social circle since the marriage of Mitchy and Aggie, which

has initiated the group's breakdown. The fact that this dinner party is held at Tishy's place, instead of at Mrs. Brook's, Mitchy's, or Van's, where they used to meet, is itself testimony of its disintegration. By being held at such a venue, the meeting occurs in an atmosphere where the characters are more apt to act in an unpredictable or unprecedented manner.

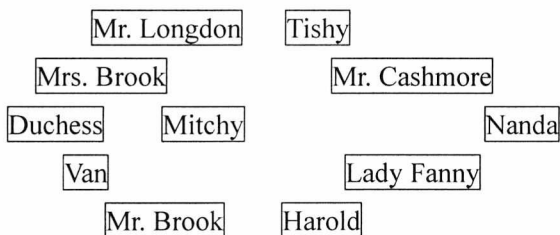
The description of Tishy's two drawing-rooms reveals this aura of irregularity:

There was nothing indeed but Mrs. Grendon's want of promptness that failed of a welcome: her drawing-room, on the January night, showed its elegance through a suffusion of pink electricity which melted, at the end of the vista, into the faintly golden glow of a retreat still more sacred. Vanderbank walked after a moment into the second room, which also proved empty and which had its little globes of white fire—discreetly limited in number—coated with lemon-coloured silk. The walls, covered with delicate French mouldings, were so fair that they seemed vaguely silvered; the low French chimney had a French fire. There was a lemon-coloured stuff on the sofa and chairs, a wonderful polish on the floor that was largely exposed, and a copy of a French novel in blue paper on one of the spindle-legged tables. (383)

A sense of chaos prevails in the opening paragraph. The footman is "insincere," and "blushes for the house" (383). Tishy is not there to welcome her first guest, and her husband is away altogether. There is no telling who the other guests might be and when they will turn up. The narrator sarcastically calls the rooms "elegant," "sacred," "discreet" and "delicate," when they are evidently garish and unrefined. The description gives a sequence of colours, implying a chromatic surplus or inharmoniousness. Also, the rooms are suffused with fire and electricity, adding a dazzling effect. There is a succession of "French" things, which in this novel are

synonymous with pretension and immorality. Tishy's rooms are completely different from Mrs. Brook's or Van's, and the acerbic tone probably reflects Van's impressions as he observes the rooms. The irregular tendency is further emphasized by the fact that the "beautiful clock on the mantel [is] wrong" (384), which perplexes him.²

This chapter is the indubitable climax of the novel because it describes the last instance of the group's gathering before its final disintegration.³ Tishy has inadvertently succeeded in assembling even more people than Mrs. Brook had ever done on other occasions. At one point in the fourth section, they form a symbolic "circle" (423) with Mitchy as the "conspicuous attractive centre" (423). From the narrator's description of the position of each person we can tell that the lay-out looks something like this:



This distribution is quite irregular, one lacking in any kind of consistency. Husband and wife are separated. Each has desires which do not match those of the others and which will fail to produce anything. Mr. Cashmore keeps beside Nanda whom he has a fancy for, and his wife, Lady Fanny, is next to Harold who is her lover. Nanda is too far away from Van to attract him, who in turn is too indecisive to go near her or Mr. Longdon. Mr. Brook remains oblivious to his wife's or any one's woes and desires. Mr. Longdon is too distanced from Nanda to tell her his thoughts about this gathering. And Mitchy, having loved Nanda in vain, is in the "centre," unable to relate to any one whatsoever.

The Duchess says: "As nobody else will now arrive it would be quite cosey if she [Tishy] locked the door" (423). She speaks as if she laments the collapse of the

“circle.” This remark also anticipates the private and improper nature of the conversation that its members are about to have, which turns out to be the affair between Aggie and Petherton, who are in the next room. It seems fitting that they take up a subject that most directly concerns Mitchy, who is in the centre, but it also painfully concerns the Duchess, Aggie being her daughter and Petherton her former lover. The fact that a mother and a daughter share a lover, and that the affair is in process in the room adjacent to the drawing-room where it is simultaneously being discussed, points to the chaotic situation.

The sense of confusion, immorality, and decline that governs these rooms is symbolized by Van’s French book, which has traveled among the three London houses that I have discussed, originating in Van’s room, loaned to Mrs. Brook at Buckingham Crescent, and taken to Tishy’s by Nanda. It is allegedly a “bad” book, and the route of its travel shows how immorality is circulated. The attitude of each character involved toward it corresponds to his or her attitude toward such conduct. Mrs. Brook confirms its badness and reluctantly admits having read it. Nanda says that she has read it but that she cannot tell if it is bad or not. Aggie is extremely curious and wants to read it. Van remains indecisively unconcerned. This incident has revealed that he, despite his idealistic values, does not try to challenge immorality but takes part in it. Nanda’s writing Van’s name on the book can be interpreted as showing her reproof that he himself should feel responsible for starting a circulation of immorality before criticizing her for being “modern.” Her view, that one cannot objectively determine if something is immoral, is an interesting one. She takes a somewhat philosophical stance on the issue, as if challenging the attitude of her mother and Van, who claim to know what immorality is, declare its badness, yet leave open every likelihood that they are themselves participating in it. This contradiction is directly linked to the problem that will be taken up later, that of the possibility of adultery between Mrs. Brook and Van.

I have so far analyzed the three London houses, and observed the world that has nurtured Nanda. At Buckingham Crescent, Mrs. Brook endeavours to maintain her position as the mistress of the house, and keeps her children from showing in her drawing-room. If she fails as a mother, and eventually as the centre of this social circle, she succeeds at least in retaining her house. At the end of the novel Mr. Brook is alive and well, and we are given no reason to doubt that Mrs. Brook's reign will continue in her drawing-room. She finds a new companion in Aggie, who now frequents her room for "help" (522). Mitchy reassures Nanda that Mrs. Brook will always have her saloon: "The generations will come and go, and the *personnel*, as the newspapers say, of the saloon will shift and change, but the institution itself, as resting on a deep human need, has a long course yet to run and a good work yet to do. *We* shan't last, but your mother will, [...]" (523). Mrs. Brook's role in satisfying individuals' need to gather in her room is so impressive that she somehow does not make us register her fear of homelessness.

If Buckingham Crescent is Mrs. Brook's house, it is not Nanda's, and the fact that she appears in her mother's drawing-room only once reveals how much she is made to feel not at home there. During the last five months she spends at Buckingham Crescent, Nanda is allowed to have a provisional room of her own on the top floor. She keeps changing the arrangement of her possessions in an attempt to discover new aspects of herself and to reflect on herself.

We have seen from an analysis of Van's rooms that he has an admiration for the values from the past. However, unlike Nanda and Mr. Longdon, Van lacks the ability to connect back in time; he can only exist in the modern world, like Mrs. Brook. We have observed in Tishy's house an air of irregularity, an atmosphere which prompts the actions that comprise the climax. The members of Mrs. Brook's circle accumulate in Tishy's drawing-room to form a symbolic "circle" where they have a final conversation

before their break-up. A sense of chaos, immorality and decline governs this space, marking the end of Mrs. Brook's group which is finalized when she requests that Mr. Longdon return Nanda to Buckingham Crescent. A very significant feature of *The Awkward Age* is the parallel presentation of city and country houses, to the latter of which I now shift my enquiry.

(2) Three Country Houses

Just as there are three different kinds of London residences, there are three distinct types of country houses in *The Awkward Age*. Beccles is a traditional estate occupied by a prosperous owner, who believes in the goodness of the countryside. Mertle is rented by young nouveaux-riches to have pleasure and freedom outside the city. The Hovel is owned by the Brooks for investment. The contrast between Beccles and Mertle will be particularly important.

The description of Mertle in the opening paragraph of Book Fifth is a rather misleading one. It is portrayed, through the first impressions of Nanda, not as an abode of immorality, but as a picturesque, peaceful place that is free from stain:

The lower windows of the great white house, which stood high and square, opened to a wide flagged terrace, the parapet of which, an old balustrade of stone, was broken in the middle of its course by a flight of stone steps that descended to a wonderful garden. The terrace had the afternoon shade and fairly hung over the prospect that dropped away and circled it—the prospect, beyond the series of gardens, of scattered splendid trees and green glades, an horizon mainly of woods. Nanda Brookenham, one day at the end of July, coming out to find the place unoccupied as yet by other visitors, stood there a while with an air of happy possession. She moved

from end to end of the terrace, pausing, gazing about her, taking in with a face that showed the pleasure of a brief independence the combination of delightful things—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, of wood-walks rustling in the afternoon breeze and stretching away to further reaches of solitude and summer. The scene had an expectant stillness that she was too charmed to desire to break; she watched it, listened to it, followed with her eyes the white butterflies among the flowers below her, then gave a start as the cry of a peacock came to her from an unseen alley. It set her after a minute into less difficult motion; she passed slowly down the steps, wandering further, looking back at the big bright house but pleased again to see no one else appear. If the sun was still high enough she had a pink parasol. She went through the gardens one by one, skirting the high walls that were so like “collections” and thinking how, later on, the nectarines and plums would flush there. She exchanged a friendly greeting with a man at work, passed through an open door and, turning this way and that, finally found herself in the park, at some distance from the house. It was a point she had had to take another rise to reach, a place marked by an old green bench for a larger sweep of the view, which, in the distance where the woods stopped, showed in the most English way in the world the colour-spot of an old red village and the tower of an old grey church. (203-4)

This is Mertle as Nanda sees it before she finds corruption following the arrival of other visitors: a large white stone house, probably of classical, symmetrical style with a high terrace providing an overlooking view of a series of square gardens. Mertle is rich in natural surroundings, more artificial nearer the house and wilder further from it. Both

the building and the gardens are square-shaped, and surrounded and “circled” by the panoramic view, the round “horizon” of woods. The squares are also encircled by the shade of the sun from above. The two elevated views Nanda enjoys, one from the terrace and another from the bench in the park, contrast with the vantage from her room in Buckingham Crescent. Whereas the latter is muddled and near, the former at Mertle are spread out, distant, and green.⁴

This is the moment when Nanda discovers the pastoral, which she finds fascinating. She is in an adventurous mood because it is her first time to visit Mertle, and she has come here by herself. She especially relishes the stillness and solitude, as if already aware that this beauty will be ruined when the other members of the group arrive from London. Nanda displays her appreciation of “old” things, the “old rooms with old decorations” and “old gardens” in “old walls.” The repetition of the adjective shows that she does not know any other, more specialized terms to describe the setting. Nanda does not have the connoisseurship of Fleda Vetch, but shares her admiration for art and things with the aura of history. She also differs greatly from the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* in being able to enjoy the picturesque scenery from an elevated position.

Nanda’s observation of the butterflies, flowers, peacock, and the fruit plants adds to the pastoral effect. The mention of the gardener is somewhat curious. He has presumably been hired by the owner of Mertle, not Mitchy, and is different from Mitchy’s “pleasant servants” (497) at Mertle whom Van praises. When we consider that Mr. Longdon later criticizes the owner of Mertle for being unprincipled, the gardener’s “friendliness” seems contradictory. A final point about this long quotation concerns itself with the expression “the most English way in the world.” It is unlikely that the expression is Nanda’s, because, in order to tell the “Englishness” of scenery one must have seen those of the other countries and compared them. We are not told

whether Nanda has been abroad. I believe that James's viewpoint is reflected here, and he had a clear image of a typical English village seen from afar, when he wrote this sentence. The American author is enlightening his young English heroine about what English countryside is like, and she employs this knowledge as she searches for a place to reside in the course of the novel.

The Eden-like state of Mertle begins to shatter when Nanda's solitude is broken by the arrival of Van, who says that he has stayed at Mertle before but cannot remember whom he stayed with: "But it's a charming sign of London relations, isn't it? —that one *can* come down to people this way and be awfully well 'done for' and all that, and then go away and lose the whole thing, quite forget to whom one has been beholden" (205). Van reveals the function of Mertle as a pleasure house rented to nameless people for superficial social contacts that produce no lasting impressions. The countryside and country house are exploited as a refuge from the restraints of the city, without being appreciated in their own right by the participants: "[T]heir minds are an equal blank. Do they even remember the place they had?" (207).

Not only the tenants, but also the owner of Mertle is faceless. Mr. Longdon is especially critical of this lack of personality and attention on the part of the owner: "[W]hat are people made of that they consent, just for money, to the violation of their homes? [...] To whom in point of fact does the place belong?" (219-20). Mr. Longdon believes that houses should be inhabited by an owner who has a recognizable identity and who looks after the property. Nanda shows more tolerance for the country house as an investment when she says: "But haven't people in England always let their places?" (219). Mr. Longdon concedes that the idea of letting houses goes back a long time, England being "a nation of shopkeepers," but repudiates the custom as "vulgar" (219). He likewise criticizes those who gather at a house in such a manner, saying: "Now this sudden invasion of somebody's—heaven knows whose—house, and our

dropping down on it like a swarm of locusts” (219). This situation is called “madness” (223). At this point the polarity between Mertle and Beccles materializes within his mind, and he invites Nanda to Beccles: “[C]ome down to Suffolk for sanity. [...] I want to show you what life can give. Not of course, of this sort of thing. [...] Of peace” (223). It seems that Mr. Longdon condemns the landlord not so much for letting the house but rather for remaining uninterested in who rents the house and what goes on there, as long as he receives the money.⁵

We have seen the change in the description of Mertle as it corresponds to the accumulation of the guests. When Nanda observes the place as yet unoccupied by the others, she finds it bright, orderly, peaceful and beautiful. As she is joined by Van and then by Mr. Longdon, the house is revealed to be the scene of superficiality, immorality and “madness.” If its environment is as pleasing as Nanda initially finds it, it must be the people who either enhance its values or degrade it, as is implied in the next section when we find the party in progress the next day:

It was that beautiful hour when, toward the close of the happiest days of summer, such places as the great terrace at Mertle present to the fancy a recall of the banquet-hall deserted—deserted by the company lately gathered at tea and now dispersed, according to affinities and combinations promptly felt and perhaps quite as promptly criticised, either in quieter chambers where intimacy might deepen or in gardens and under trees where the stillness knew the click of balls and the good humour of games. There had been chairs, on the terrace, pushed about; there were ungathered teacups on the level top of the parapet; the servants in fact, in the manner of “hands” mustered by a whistle on the deck of a ship, had just arrived to restore things to an order soon again to be broken. There were scattered couples in sight below and an idle group on the lawn, [...]. (233-34)

The narrator describes this “madness” in a conversely formal manner. The numerous guests move apart to do what they like in a careless and insincere fashion. The terrace is compared to the deck of a ship, where one can observe the others playing in the garden, as if swimming in the sea. The mood alternates between chaos and order, the former caused by the guests and the latter by the servants. The unproductiveness of this relay is another aspect of the nature of this gathering.

It is on this terrace that the Duchess proposes to Mr. Longdon to take an action that will develop the plot. It is to “bribe” (251) Van to marry Nanda, a stratagem which Mr. Longdon decides to execute that very night in the smoking-room. This causes Van to earnestly consider marrying Nanda, a decision that he has avoided facing, and subsequently to choose to reject her. In the smoking-room, both Van and Mr. Longdon stress how befitting it is to have had this special conversation at Mertle. Van says that this is an appropriate site for confessing a “secret” which “at this witching hour, in this great old house, is all my visit here will have required to make the whole thing a rare remembrance” (261). Mr. Longdon in turn concedes that this subject “has finally glimmered out a little in this extraordinary place” (264). We need to consider the features of Mertle that induce this dialogue. It is in the countryside, away from both the bustle of London, which might have made them more prone to talk, and from Mrs. Brook, giving them the freedom to discuss this subject. Furthermore, the indecency of the gathering at Mertle has shocked Mr. Longdon, which has allowed him to introduce a bold topic.

“The smoking-room” at Mertle is designed in such a way as to allow Mr. Longdon and Van to alter their respective postures according to the situation of the conversation. It is described as “not unworthy of the general nobleness, and the fastidious spectator had clearly been reckoned on in the great leather-covered lounge that, raised by a step or two above the floor, applied its back to two quarters of the wall

and enjoyed most immediately a view of the billiard-table” (259). The narrator refers to the “nobleness” of Mertle, once more recognizing the fact that the building itself is grand and refined. The floor of this room is on two levels, allowing one to command an observatory position while the other moves about restlessly. In this conversation, the one who must speak in an awkward position stands on the lower ground, while the other waits with ease. It is Mr. Longdon who is uneasy and disadvantaged in the beginning, and he fumbles with the billiard balls and his glasses when Van, “perched aloft on the bench and awaiting developments, had a little the look of some pre-possessing criminal who, in court, should have changed places with the judge” (259-60). However, the situation is reversed when Mr. Longdon starts to question Van about his feelings for Nanda. Van now comes down by the billiard-table, and Mr. Longdon “had mounted to the high bench and sat there as if the judge were now in his proper place” (267). It is from this position that Mr. Longdon discloses the critical proposition. In this instance Van is at a disadvantage because he is unable to decide whether or not to accept the deal offered to him by Mr. Longdon.

Such is the situation in which this important step in the plot is taken in the billiard-room at Mertle. We have closely looked at the descriptions of this country house, and seen that the narrator, especially through the impressions of Nanda, expresses the stateliness of the house and the beauty of its surroundings, much more positively than customarily assumed. Then Mertle is invaded by Mitchy’s guests, and their ill-mannered behaviour downgrades the quality of the house, as observed most keenly by Mr. Longdon. What becomes clear from the reading of Book Fifth is the idea that the immorality of individuals exploits the values of the country house, whereas the building and the environment, including the employees, are meritorious. We shall now move on to Beccles, where another significant development in the plot is induced.

The first section of Book Seventh has perhaps consciously been likened to that of

Book Fifth. We find Nanda talking to Van in the garden of Beccles, and are led to compare it to the first scene at Mertle. The setting is described in the following manner:

Mr. Longdon's garden took in three acres and, full of charming features, had for its greatest wonder the extent and colour of its old brick wall, in which the pink and purple surface was the fruit of the mild ages and the protective function, for a visitor strolling, sitting, talking, reading, that of a nurse of reverie. The air of the place, in the August time, thrilled all the while with the bliss of birds, the hum of little lives unseen and the flicker of white butterflies. (333)

We notice that the "garden" of Beccles is described in a similar way to that of Mertle. Nature is beautiful, mild and reassuring. A contrast to Mertle is that Beccles is situated on the plains of Suffolk, and lacks the hill from which Nanda enjoyed the prospect of woods and another village. We are given an image of a huge flat ground whose end is somewhere beyond the horizon. Nanda and Van sit "on the large flat enclosed lawn" (333), and their conversation where Nanda talks about herself, her family and Mr. Longdon is, on the surface, not so unlike the previous one at Mertle. The difference is in the psychology of Van, because this time he has Mr. Longdon's offer of a dowry in mind, and he studies Nanda as a possible target for marriage.

Let us continue with the description of the house:

Beyond the lawn the house was before him [Van], old, square, red-roofed, well assured of its right to the place it took up in the world. This was a considerable space—in the little world at least of Suffolk—and the look of possession had everywhere mixed with it, in the form of old windows and doors, the tone of old red surfaces, the style of old white facings, the age of old high creepers, the long confirmation of time. Suggestive of panelled

rooms, of precious mahogany, of portraits of women dead, of coloured china glimmering through glass doors and delicate silver reflected on bared tables, the thing was one of those impressions of a particular period that it takes two centuries to produce. (335-36)

This passage is told through the consciousness of Van, as he observes the exteriors and imagines the interiors with admiration. He repeats the word “old,” as Nanda has done in the case of Mertle. As much as he admires the place, he is also overwhelmed by the weight of tradition. Whether or not Van can enjoy the atmosphere of Beccles, as Nanda has learned to do, is a factor that determines his chance of identifying with Mr. Longdon, but he later decides with regret that he is not attached to Beccles enough to marry Nanda. This scene closes in the same way as in Mertle, as Mr. Longdon comes out of the house to fetch them.

The similarities of Mertle and Beccles end when we begin to see the contrast in the way each owner treats the house, from the second sections onwards. Whereas the owner of Mertle lets it to party gatherers and leaves the servants to look after the house, Mr. Longdon lives at Beccles and considers the house as a proof of his way of life.⁶ This is felt strongly by Mitchy as he observes the drawing-room:

The favouring rain, the dear old place, the charming serious house, the large inimitable room, the absence of the others, [...] the sense of these delights was expressed in his generous glare. [...] [H]e measured the great space from end to end, admiring again everything he had admired before and protesting afresh that no modern ingenuity—not even his own, to which he did justice—could create effects of such purity. The final touch in the picture before them was just the composer’s ignorance. Mr. Longdon had not made his house, he had simply lived it, and the “taste” of the place—Mitchy in certain connexions abominated the word—was just

nothing more than the beauty of his life. (348-49)

In this Book, we do not find Mr. Longdon in action at Beccles; instead, we learn about his way of life through the impressions of Nanda, Mitchy and Van. Mitchy examines Beccles in its entirety as his vision zooms in from larger to smaller spaces: the rain, place, house, and room. Mitchy praises the estate most of all because it shows Mr. Longdon's personality and it has nothing pretentious, forced, or materialistic. Beccles is a house whose value increases by being lived in by an owner who leads a moral, "beautiful" life.⁷ I have pointed out at various stages in this dissertation that these novels sustain the idea of a house as living space where one finds a "home." Beccles appears as the perfection of that idea. Mitchy says that it should be a "wonderful theme for discourse in Buckingham Crescent—so happy an exercise for the votaries of that temple of analysis" (349). The ideal world of Beccles is so removed from that of Buckingham Crescent, that it even seems unreal, and becomes an object for "analysis." We are led to ask: if Beccles is an idealized place that is removed from the real world, will Nanda be happy there? I shall raise this question again in the next section.⁸

A factor we must note about this scene in the drawing-room is that another stimulus for the plot occurs here. In this case it is Nanda's request to Mitchy to marry Aggie, which Mitchy accepts. This development is vital because it contains Mrs. Brook's desire to make Mitchy marry Nanda, and her desire to remain as the centre of her circle. Nanda is able to make this move because being at Beccles frees her from her mother's influence.

We have so far examined three London residences and two country houses that appear in *The Awkward Age*. Since most parts of the novel are set in houses in the capital, it is more concerned with the London society of Mrs. Brook than the countryside of Mr. Longdon. We can say that the novel is about the breakdown of Mrs. Brook's social circle and of her relationship with Nanda. However, the events that

trigger that collapse take place in the countryside. If Mr. Longdon had not offered Nanda's dowry to Van at Mertle, and if Nanda had not induced Mitchy to marry Aggie at Beccles, nothing would have happened and the situation would have remained at a stalemate. At country houses, Mrs. Brook is unable to exert her influence, and the events that defy her desires occur. This parallel presentation of London and country houses is essential for the development of the plot in *The Awkward Age*.

Finally, we need to consider the third country house—the Hovel, which appears as a blank in the novel. It is never represented; it is only mentioned. Although the Hovel does not affect the plot, it is mentioned because it is an important part of the Brooks' finances, and it shows the role of the country house as investment. The Hovel is explained by Van as "an ugly little place in Gloucestershire—which they sometimes let" (9-10). The "Hovel" is a strange name; it makes us assume that it is intrinsically "ugly" and "little," as Van says.

There is an interesting exchange about the Hovel in Book Sixth. Mrs. Brook tells Van: "[W]e've let the Hovel again—wretchedly, but still we've let it—and I go down on Friday to see that it isn't too filthy. Edward, who's furious at what I've taken for it, had his idea that we should go there this year ourselves" (281). This lets us know that the Brooks not only let the house, but also that at least Mr. Brook considers it as their second home. It is Mrs. Brook who rejects the plan to spend the summer there and insists on letting it. She is more dedicated than the owner of Mertle in that she goes there herself to check if the house is in sufficiently good condition. Van replies to Mrs. Brook: "[T]hat fond fancy has become simply the ghost of a dead thought, a ghost that, in company with a thousand predecessors, haunts the house in the twilight and pops at you out of odd corners" (281-82). Mr. Brook's happy design is turned into a "dead thought" by his wife, and we are told that Buckingham Crescent is full of such "thoughts." This illustration lets us know that the couple are perpetually in

disagreement, and the feeling of discord that pervades the house troubles Mrs. Brook, without her husband being aware of it. Their difference of attitude toward the Hovel is one of the crucial indicators of their relationship.

(3) Nanda's Search for a Home

Nanda Brookenham needs to search for a home because the chance of staying at Buckingham Crescent has been declined by her mother, as I have previously discussed. In the novel, two possibilities are explored as to where she should go: to marry Van, or to retreat to Beccles with Mr. Longdon. The latter option is not an easy decision for Nanda. She hesitates until the last few pages of the novel, despite her fondness of Beccles, and Mr. Longdon's promise that he will "take her in as she is." The reason for this prolonged equivocation possibly has to do with the state of Beccles as too "pure." Living permanently there seems too removed from the real world, and it does not seem to produce or lead to anything. While this ending saves Nanda from homelessness, it does not guarantee her happiness as a young woman.

Finally, I shall discuss the possibility of marriage between Nanda and Van. What strikes me as odd about this novel is that Mr. Longdon tries to make Van marry Nanda, despite the suspicion of an adulterous relationship between him and Mrs. Brook. It is the Duchess who informs Mr. Longdon of the possibility of such a relationship. She says that Mrs. Brook prefers Mitchy as Nanda's husband because "she wants 'old Van' herself" (253). When Mr. Longdon asks what she means, the Duchess says: "Supply any sense whatever that may miraculously satisfy your fond English imagination" (254). Mr. Longdon chooses not to use his "imagination." On that night, when Mr. Longdon asks Van about the relationship, the young man evades the question by saying: "The meaning of it [...] is—well, a modern shade" (274). Mr.

Longdon permits this evasion by replying: “You must deal then yourself, [...] with your modern shades” (274). The narrator comments: “He spoke now as if the case simply awaited such dealing” (274). The novel does not tell us whether adultery actually happened between Mrs. Brook and Van, but it leaves that possibility open. I find Mr. Longdon’s attitude incomprehensible, in that he believes the problem is a matter of interpretation, and the truth does not have to be known. He tells Van that he wants Nanda to marry because he “want[s] her got out [...] of her mother’s house” (272). If Nanda marries Van while even the possibility of adultery remains, her house will inevitably be haunted by her mother’s presence.⁹

Therefore, Nanda’s search for a home is deemed to be difficult. She wants to marry Van, but is finally rejected. Even if she had succeeded, she would still have had to fight against her mother’s influence permanently. Her search leads her to Beccles, but as I have argued, this conclusion is not totally positive; it may even be called reactionary. Nanda’s decision is comparable to Maisie’s, in that she leaves her biological parents to live with an old, unrelated guardian. Louise K. Barnett has written on James’s “persistently negative presentation of blood ties and his consequent creation of surrogate figures to assume the traditional obligations of kinship” (140). She gives Maisie, Nanda, and Daisy Miller as examples to support the contention that: “James’s fiction provides, in short, a complete spectrum of negative possibilities whose underlying constant is the tragic paradox that blood relations are both essential and unreliable” (144). I agree with Barnett that by describing the heroines who suffer from failed kinship, James declares the importance of proper bonds that would have protected them. The fact that Nanda’s choice to go to Beccles appears as an imperfect solution to her problem is possibly linked to the idea that even a benevolent guardian cannot provide the same happiness that has been denied by the parents.

However problematic the ending of *The Awkward Age*, it has been reached by an

extremely effective parallel presentation of city and country houses. The novel is mainly concerned with the process of the disintegration of Mrs. Brook's social circle. Three London houses are depicted to convey the sense of chaos and immorality that shocks Mr. Longdon. However, in order to develop the plot and change the situation that is at a stalemate, the author introduces two episodes that occur in country houses, where the other characters take actions that undermine Mrs. Brook's desires. The features of Mertle and Beccles have been observed, with particular emphasis on their architectural excellence that is subject to the owners' care, and on the atmosphere that frees the characters from the influence of Mrs. Brook. *The Awkward Age* is structured according to this parallel existence of city and country houses. The events that happen in the country trigger the breakdown of Mrs. Brook's circle in London, which in turn results in Nanda's relocation to the countryside.

¹ It appears contradictory that Nanda loves Van despite her knowledge of his insincere tendencies and the possibility of his adultery with her mother. Merle A. Williams writes on this problem: “Nanda lays claim to complete knowledge of the convoluted plots, plans and aspirations of her associates, yet she deliberately fosters a blindness to Vanderbank’s misdemeanors, since contemplating the facts might damage her faith in him” (262). Williams argues that it is Nanda’s own form of innocence that allows this contradiction; she writes: “Nanda’s innocence is special and ethically original because it not only transmutes, but also transcends, familiar and culturally acknowledged categories” (261).

² Elizabeth Owen, in her informative article, discusses the social background to *The Awkward Age*. She writes that of the rooms described in the novel, Tishy’s is the most modern, and it “reflects the breakdown of tradition”: “Mr. Longdon’s Suffolk home has oil lamps and candles, but paneled walls, mahogany, portraits, and silver inherited from two hundred years of family stability; Mrs. Brookenham buys her furniture, a few pieces of costly fashionable Louis Quinze; Tishy’s Grendon’s drawing room, with its silvery French walls and fireplace, L shape with one end for private goings-on, and the new electric lights kept few and well shaded—as this light was thought to be harsh on make-up—by pink and lemon silk lampshades, is the most modern, luxurious, and suggestive setting in the book” (71).

³ William F. Hall analyzes the novel as a portrayal of the times, and writes of the features of contemporary London society as in the following: “The marks of the resultant society were leisure, an aimless pursuit of pleasure, and an inordinate preoccupation with wealth. Most of its members were essentially powerless, and yet as a body the society they formed had immense power either to raise the individual to an influential position or to crush him completely. Their power was all *social power*” (32). This idea of “social power” is effective when considering Mrs. Brook’s circle. The members have united to have collective power, or to exert power on someone within the group, although they are powerless as individuals. The social power of Mrs. Brook has been enabled by her influence on Van and Mitchy.

⁴ The name “Mertle” is presumably taken from “myrtle.” The *OED* defines it as “a shrub growing abundantly in Southern Europe, having shiny evergreen leaves and white sweet-scented flowers, and now used chiefly in perfumery. The myrtle was held sacred to Venus and is used as an emblem of love.” Its white flowers and green leaves match the appearance of the estate, with a white house and green surroundings, but there is an irony in the fact that the myrtle is the symbol of sacredness while Mertle is in corruption.

⁵ Mr. Longdon’s lament for the loss of the traditional country house is analogous to the attitude taken in W. B. Yeats’ “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931.” Coole Park is Lady Gregory’s estate in Galway, Ireland. The following is the penultimate stanza:

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,
And every bride’s ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
We shift about—all that great glory spent—
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent. (276)

Therefore, other writers have also faced the question of the collapse of tradition as they enter modernity, the question of the awkward age. This subject is also reflected in T. S.

Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

⁶ Richard Gill discusses the contrast between Mertle and Beccles in the following way: "[D]espite this appearance of beauty and order Mertle really represents the vagrant, aimless ways of those in her mother's circle. [...] One of the charms of the place [Beccles] is that, unlike Mertle, it does provide a sense of genuine continuity and established custom" (84-85).

⁷ H. K. Girling points out that the word "beautiful" is repeatedly used to describe Mr. Longdon, but that the ascription is also given to Nanda and Mitchy. Girling argues that the word "wonderful" adopts a different meaning in this novel and it signifies the opposite of "beautiful," and it is applied to Mrs. Brook.

⁸ Owen points out that Beccles is also idealized in the sense that its richness seems unreal when one compares it against the actual conditions of Suffolk estates at that time. She reveals that there was "forty-one per cent fall in farming rents between 1894 and 1898," and that "some old Suffolk estates were up for sale in the 'nineties" (72). Owen comments: "[A]s if to suggest James's recognition of a certain mythical quality in a later generation's concept of mid-Victorian virtue, the contemporary exactitude of the novel is deliberately abandoned" (72).

⁹ James W. Gargano offers a much different interpretation of this problem. He writes: "Longdon's attempt to rescue Vanderbank and Nanda precipitates Mrs. Brook's counter-plan for Nanda's salvation from Vanderbank" (274). Gargano insists that the relationship between Vanderbank and Mrs. Brook is not "an adulterous alliance" but "an attachment which cannot be precisely defined" (278), and Mrs. Brook tries to save Nanda from Van whom she knows to be insincere. My view is that while the novel does not let us determine the existence of adultery, it clearly leaves the possibility, and that possibility should be considered to explain why Mrs. Brook tries to prevent Nanda's marriage to Van.

Conclusion

This study has mainly been concerned with three goals. One is to highlight the “housing problem” of James’s heroines. They are constantly fighting against “the anxiety of homelessness” and looking for their own space where they can stay permanently. The plot of each novel and novella has been explained as recounting the process of their search for a home. Another goal is to examine the “spatial implications” of each house that appears in the works. These descriptions have been analyzed to foreground what kind of “space” exists there, and how it generates metaphors that serve to characterize their inhabitants. Their ideas and personalities are reflected in the design of their rooms, houses and gardens. As Madame de Merle says in *The Portrait of a Lady*, “one’s house, one’s furniture, one’s garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive” (223). In other words, this study is concerned with relationships between women and houses that are both social and personal, or psychological.

The final goal is to describe what we may find out from the analyses produced in the first two tasks. We have noted the helpless pessimism that seems to surround the heroines’ future. In the end, Fleda, Rose, and the governess are homeless; that is, we are not told where they will go, or whether they have the prospect of ever finding a home. We could perhaps envisage greater hope for Maisie in that she is left with an inheritance, yet she has already been morally deprived even at such a young age. The telegraphist finds a small house in Chalk Farm, but only after her dream of living in Mayfair has been shattered. Nanda ends up in Beccles, after being turned away from her parents’ house, but her union with Mr. Longdon appears to be the most reactionary among her alternatives, and it does not seem to lead to anything. We note the particular kind of irresolvable situation that all these works end in.

What do we make of this pessimism? We recognize James's inability to provide a solution. He does not believe in any forms of life that are available to his heroines. He clearly implies that the root of the problem lies in the breakdown of family relationships. This deficiency in the parent-child relationship is most overtly portrayed between Maisie and her parents, and between Nanda and Mrs. Brook. Hostility also exists in the relationship between Fleda and her father, and between Rose and her stepmother. The bond between the telegraphist and her mother is a curious one because we are told that her mother is alcoholic. Nothing of the governess's parents is mentioned except that her father is a parson. All we can be sure of about the telegraphist's mother and the governess's father is that they are not in any position to help their daughters in their search for a home. We have also seen problematic relationships between mother and son; Owen takes Poynton away from Mrs. Gereth, and Paul Beever cannot assert himself before his domineering mother.

The breakdown of the family shows the loss of the most basic values. James's works in the late 1890s depict the changing values in the modern world, where fixed assumptions no longer pertain, as may be seen in the absence of objectively acknowledged endings and solutions. This is directly linked to the fact that the heroines' stories are told from their viewpoint; for, what replaces objective values is subjective consciousness. As James has written, the "house of fiction" has "a million" windows, of which each heroine's consciousness is one.

And we have found out that the "house" for the heroines is indeed a "house of fiction," because they do not arrive at a house as any concrete, permanent place to stay, but can only imagine it and own it through their consciousness. The most symbolic example is Fleda's spiritual possession of Poynton at the end of the novel, which she says is as "complete" (210) as any other person's ownership of a house. The other heroines also imagine their dream home with the powers of imagination that James

ascribes to them. Rose fantasizes about living at Bounds as Tony's wife; Maisie envisions a house to be shared with Sir Claude; the telegraphist fancies living in Park Chambers with Captain Everard in Mayfair; Nanda imagines sharing a home with Van; and in the governess's case, Bly might even be said to have *become* her consciousness.

In this thesis, the difference between a "house" and a "home" has not been formally defined. In one context, a "house" is a building, whereas a "home" is a "house" to which one attaches tender feelings, such as love, family, security, and permanence. While it is valid to say that James's heroines are looking for a "home," it is also true that they suffer first of all from the lack of a "house." To make a distinction, the search for a "home" comes after the pursuit of a "house" has been fulfilled. However, the terms have been used interchangeably because their ideas are not always indistinguishable, and the search for a "house" and a "home" may sometimes occur simultaneously. Moreover, almost all the buildings that have been examined in this study are "houses" rather than "homes," and I want to stress that a "house" is just as interesting and important as a "home" as a theme.

Philippe Hamon has written about the relationship between language and fictional houses in the following manner:

[W]riters often tended to identify the various sites of their fiction as *sites where language was on show*, or as a series of small theaters, differentiated both by custom and by language. The *bedroom* became the site for confiding secrets or for domestic squabbles, where husbands and wives made "scenes;" the *library*, the place for reading, [...]; the *kitchen* or the *pantry* was the place where orders were given and gossip about the master dished out; the *threshold* and *vestibule* were the places for announcing guests or for ritualized salutations; the *balcony* provided the place for public harangues; the *study*, or the poet's *mansard*, the place for writing;

the *courtroom*, the place for performative language; the *workshop* or the *street*, the place where advertisements are written or cried out; the *salon*—[...]—the place where the voice was “staged” and where gossipers and chatterers carried on multiple conversations. In a novel the sites of the city and the rooms of the house are but specialized *parlors* (*parloirs*) that rehearse and distribute lists of the major functions and social usages of language. (44-45)

This account makes us realize the extent that James’s language is concentrated in the drawing-room and the sitting-room, or the “salon.” In the works that have been analyzed, there is no “balcony,” “courtroom,” and certainly no “kitchen.” There is one scene in *The Awkward Age* that takes place in the “library,” and the first Book of *The Other House* is set in the “vestibule” of Bounds, but they function in the same way as the drawing-room. Contrary to Hamon’s idea that each part of the house has a different function for the performance of language, James’s residences do not assign different functions to different rooms. It is because in James, language tends to be of a uniform “kind,” induced by the use of the young, middle-class heroines as the centre-of-consciousness. We may say that these works are less “polyphonic” than the nineteenth-century French novels that Hamon investigates. The most important “theatre” in a Jamesian house is the drawing-room, where the characters have conversations that are as effective as actions in moving the plot.

The six works that have been examined have some important similarities. One is that they are all set in turn-of-the-century England, and this is the period when James is particularly concerned with “English” subjects. He concentrates on English characters and locations, and does not include American or European subjects as he does in other works. This is significant because it allows one to see what James views as particular problems in contemporary England, as it approaches the twentieth century.

It is also important to remember that his viewpoint as an outsider and expatriate American is reflected here. Another common factor in these works is that they all have a young woman or a girl as the heroine. Examining these works lets us know how James addresses and defines the problems surrounding young English women. These have crucially to do with lack of their own space, and of a house. The house is a meaningful topos because it is what the women seek, as well as where their family relations are founded, and therefore from which they initially emerge.

Furthermore, the period 1896-1899 is consequential precisely because they anticipate James's "Major Phase" and his maturing into a modern novelist of the twentieth century. In the novels following this period, he returns to the International Theme, and finalizes the centre-of-consciousness technique. The period preceding the "Major Phase" is significant because it is when James starts employing this technique, and the works that have been analyzed in this thesis have the formal complexity that anticipates its consummation. It is also during the writing of *What Maisie Knew* that he starts dictating to a typist. Although these works are complete in themselves, they also prepare James for the "Major Phase" in terms of themes. It is because he makes the most of what he has acquired from his investigation of "English" matters in these works when he goes back to the International Theme and writes about the encounters between European/English and American characters.

This period is meaningful in still another sense. It is during this period that James undertakes his own search for a home, and finds one in Rye, Sussex. As Leon Edel explains in *The Treacherous Years*, James's "decision to take Lamb House on a long lease [...] was a reversal of all that he had done in the past. He had been from the first a footloose American in Europe; his expatriation had been in part a revolt against embeddedness. The lodging house, the foreign *pension*, the hotel had been his way of life for the greater part of a quarter of a century—or at least until he had committed

himself to De Vere Gardens in 1886” (200-201). James first sees Lamb House in the summer of 1896, and grows extremely fond of it. In September 1897, he signs a twenty-one-year lease, in which he is to pay £70 a year. He moves into the house in June 1898, and it is there that he writes *In the Cage* and *The Awkward Age*. In 1899, James decides to purchase the house for £2,000, following the death of the landlord, and in a letter to his brother William, he writes that he wept “tears of joy at the thought of acquiring this blessed little house so promptly and so cheaply” (*Treacherous Years*, 318).

It is interesting that James’s own search for Lamb House and his composition of works that are concerned with heroines searching for dream houses take place in the same period. However, whereas Fleda moves from place to place out of necessity, James does so by choice, and when he decides to obtain a permanent house in order to prepare for old age, he is able to rent and purchase Lamb House with the money that he has earned by writing. The difference derives primarily from the difference in their gender. Whether or not he is overtly conscious of this and what he thinks about it cannot be determined within the scope of this thesis, but it is an extremely intriguing line of enquiry.

Hamon declares: “[R]eaders, once they have closed the book, are [...] free to remember anything of what they have just read. Yet it would probably be easy to confirm that the selective and anthological memory of the average reader retains above all the architectural spaces or objects present in nineteenth-century literature” (5). This idea demonstrates how central described spaces are to our reading of the novels. To list some of the houses that have been analyzed: Poynton, Waterbath, Ricks, Bounds, Eastmead, Park Chambers, Mrs. Jordan’s lodging in Maida Vale, the “Cage,” the Countess’s house, Bly, Buckingham Crescent, Tishy Grendon’s house, Vanderbank’s house, Mertle, and Beccles. These houses are sometimes metaphors of the

characteristics of their inhabitants, objects of women's desire, sites where family relations are nurtured but also where they break up, places from which women are driven away, places from which they want to escape, places where they work, places where the characters converse, form relations, are reunited, are broken up, and learn about themselves, and finally, these are places where not only the imaginations of the heroines dwell, but also those of the author and his readers, ourselves.

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