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The Social Education of Imagination in *What Maisie Knew*[*]

The Jamesian imagination has been scrutinized thoroughly in the 1960s and 70s. Today the topic is no longer in the focus of critical interest, as scholars' attention has shifted to issues like gender, race, culture, history, politics and power instead. Still, I would like to reconsider the possible value of imagination for reading James *today* in *What Maisie Knew* because to me the concept of imagination seems instrumental for reading the novel. The most obvious question to ask in connection with *What Maisie Knew* is "What is it that Maisie knew?" One possible answer is to say that Maisie undergoes a rigorous social education and acquires the selfish manners of her elders.[1] Another possible answer is to say that she acquires a moral sense whereby she is able to differentiate social interactions and decide if they are good or bad.

These two answers are in opposition: the negative pole of the opposition is social skills in themselves, the positive pole of the opposition is social skills with an additional moral sense. I suggest that we consider a third answer to "What is it that Maisie knew?": that Maisie learns to imagine in the novel. In this sense, imagination would involve both a practical knowledge of social skills and the ability to step back and differentiate social interactions according to some, possibly a moral, sense. In this way the previous two answers are seen not as opposing tendencies but as aspects of the same phenomenon. My hypothesis is that instead of "what she knew," one should ask: "how she got to know" her world—and the concept of imagination helps us study the new question.

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[*] This paper was read at the 2002 International Henry James Conference in Paris.

[1] The question of "What Maisie Knew" is characteristic of the novel's early reception, Jean Frantz Blackall states in his bibliographical reading of *Maisie*. See "The Experimental Period," in Daniel Mark Fogel (ed.), *A Companion*..., 164. The negative readings of Maisie's experience claim that she loses her intellectual innocence in the course of the events, while positive readings argue that she remains innocent among her elders.

There is a tendency for asking the "How Maisie knew" question in connection with Maisie's story, too. Jean F. Blackall sums up this trend as concerned with how Maisie acquires knowledge. The answers are various: Maisie learns behavioral patterns and tests words in action, this process is associated with "both the readers' experiences with engaging with the text and the author's practices and attitudes in creating it."[2] When trying to explain the educational process in the novel from the perspective of the general Jamesian model of understanding, the description of the character's experience should be contrasted to that of the artist-narrator and the addressed reader position, too. The role of imagination in the novel, therefore, is displayed in three sections. The first considers the problem of imagination in the novel, the absence of the term but the presence of the faculty. The aim of this section is to account for the investigation of "imagination" in the novel. Then, the second section reconsiders the processes of experience in which imagination plays a part by focusing on the alterations of Maisie's social and imaginative skills. Here the aim is to compare the education of social skills and imagination to see the nature of the relation between them, to consider the problem of her moral sense in relation to her faculty of imagination. The third section attempts to describe the phenomenon labelled "imagination" in the novel and bring out the problematic status of the narrator in its execution. The aim here is to sketch a model of the Jamesian imagination and its execution at work in *What Maisie Knew*.

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[2] *Ibid.*, 164-165. To make the story explicit: Geoffrey D. Smith explains the behavioural patterns acquired in his "How Maisie Knows: The Behavioral Path to Knowledge" *Studies in the Novel* 15 (1983), 235. For Tony Tanner Maisie becomes a metaphorical artist who needs to be detached from the world to have a true vision of it *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature* (Cambridge, CUP, 1965), 308. For William L. Nance Maisie is able to create her own fiction agains the romance of desire "*What Maisie Knew*: The Myth of the Artist" *Studies in the Novel* 8 (1976), 88. Merla Wolk stresses the parallel between Maisies quest of knowledge and the narrator's one, and the narrator is the best mother figure for Maisie in terms of allowing her a free play of the mind "Narration and Nurture in *What Maisie Knew*" *The Henry James Review* 4 (1982-83), 204. Juliet Mitchell claims that Maisie's development is that of the artist "*What Maisie Knew*: Portrait of the Artist as a young girl" in John Goode, ed. *The Air of Reality*..., 169. Kenny Marotta compares Maisie's relation to language in the novel is similar to James's in his essay "The Question of our Speech" "*What Maisie Knew:* The Question of Our Speech" *ELH* 49 (1979), 502. Randall Craig argues for Maisie's effect on other characters and on readers alike, they should all replicate her skills. "'Read[ing] the unspoken into the spoken': Interpreting *What Maisie Knew*" *The Henry James Review* 2 (1980-81), 209. Marjorie Kaufman shows how the parallel extends to James' biography, his times in Boulogne. "Beside Maisie on that Bench in Bouloge" *The Henry James Review* 15 (1999), 258.

IMAGINATION

The story of Maisie's education is not explicitly connected to the education of her imaginative faculty. The occurrence of the term "imagination" is not as frequent as it was, for instance, in *The Portrait of a Lady*: in fact it appears very rarely. The terms referring to understanding are "consciousness," "knowledge," and "vision" instead. However, the way these terms come up in the text has a strong relevance to the workings of the imaginative faculty. Early on in the story the narrator explains that Maisie was to see more than she at first understood. With a Platonic imagery she is explained how to see *images* in a magic lantern the *vision* of which she is to interpret and *understand* later.[3] So she does "grow sharper" as the gentlemen at her father's house put it (41), and then she finds in her mind a collection of *images* and *echoes* to which attached meanings have been kept for her in the dusk (*ibid.*, emphases mine: please complete quotation). Her sharpening, then, is connected to the interpretation of images and impressions, the work of her imagination.

Another reference to the centrality of imagination is the appearance of the idea of "the inner self" as her most important element early on in the story. Maisie learns to be silent as words begin to have meaning for her, and this makes her conceal her knowledge of others:

> It was literally a moral revolution and accomplished in the depths of her nature. The stiff dolls on the dusky shelves began to move their arms and legs; old forms and phases began to have a sense that frightened her. She had a new feeling, a feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment. (43)

There are two processes working in tandem here: she learns to animate her visions, to imagine. At the same time, she also learns how to conceal this ability and thereby she adds to her own fun. So while she is becoming sharper in understanding her perceptions—[she] "saw more and more; she saw too much" (43)—she becomes more and more dull for the others. So the idea of the inner self is connected both to her ability to interpret her visions and to her concealment of this from the others and her fun that derives from this act of concealment. Imagination, as a consequence, is also a double process that has a function of creating the inner self only in its relation to others from whom it is concealed.

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[3] Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (London: Penguin, 1985), 39, emphases mine. Hereafter all page references will be included within the text, parenthetically, after the quotation.

THE EDUCATION OF IMAGINATION AS SOCIAL INTERACTION IN *WHAT MAISIE KNEW*

Maisie's education of the inner self as concealment is clearly a course in social skills and interactions, and we can examine how her social education is connected to the imaginative production of knowledge. In the introductory part the narrator assures the reader that despite the bad examples of social behavior Maisie encounters she turns out well at the end. So, as far as the narrator is concerned, there is an alteration in the novel and it consists mostly of her acquiring negative social skills, but there is an additional element present that turns the educational process around and subverts it into something positive. In what follows let us have a look at the social and the subversive sides of this change.

Enlarging experience through learning social skills

There are four groups of social skills Maisie acquires that enable her to make out the meaning of situations for herself: pretended stupidity, silence, identification of roles, and analogy. Her first, basic social ability is called "stupidity." When she fully realizes that her parents use her as a parrot with hurtful messages, she begins not to repeat the sentences she is told, but rather forgets everything and, as a consequence, is called an idiot. This creates the feeling of the inner self (mentioned already) because she keeps her thoughts to herself. Concealment is not deception in this system, but the basis of knowledge: what Maisie knows most is what not to take in (43) what not to speak about (45) and what not to ask (54).

Thus, silence becomes her second major skill: she feels silence has a warm and habitable air and she penetrates it deeply (60). Silence is first learnt from Miss Overmore, who rolls her eyes instead of answering a question that should not have been asked (43). Maisie learns to use silence to evade unpleasant situations. Silence, in this way, becomes her critical system: one is silent about matters one knows would cause trouble.[4] This tendency to judge others irritates her mother who suspects its existence and prefers simple and confiding children (45). Maisie learns to interpret silence, too. For example, when Mrs. Wix is silent after Miss Overmore's letter, Maisie knows intimately well what the silence means, so much so that she remains silent about it, too. Also, it is through the use of silence that her perceptions are quickened: she did not put a question about Mamma's absent friend, Mr. Perriam, still she found out the answer to the unuttered question in a week (93). So, strangely enough, Maisie uses the appearance of stupidity as well as silences in order to find out answers to her unasked questions.

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[4] Millicent Bell devotes a whole chapter to an analysis of the importance of silence in Maisie's knowledge. However, this excellent, detailed analysis—more detailed than my own—is not primarily concerned with the social implications of silence as a specific feature in the network of social interactions: M. Bell treats silence as a preliminary to language and narrative. "The Language of Silence," in Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1991), 245, 260.

Part of learning silent knowledge is to acquire the meaning of non-verbal signs. Among these, looks, glimpses and embraces come to the fore. Miss Overmore silently communicated to her the impropriety of her questions with her rolling eyes. Sir Claude, likewise, answers her childish insistence to return and see *her the her father's* with a speaking glance: silently saying that the plea was not decent on her part (87). Looks are expressive of opinion in Maisie's nursery, too, when her Mamma makes her appearance: Mrs. Wix and Sir Claude exchange looks Maisie notices, and Maisie and Wix comment on her mother's statements in the same manner (90). When Sir Claude is in a bad mood, Mrs. Wix and Maisie speak without talking and know Mr. Perriam is the reason of his anger: "as loud as ever compressed lips and enlarged eyes could make them articulate" (94). As for embraces, Miss Overmore-Mrs. Beale tends to embrace Maisie whenever she wants to prevent her from formulating her own opinion (59, 66, 73, 261).[5] Non-verbal ways of communication become conveyors of opinion and intent when propriety necessitates silence.

The way Maisie enacts scenes of ignorance with her doll, Lisette, reflects on the importance of mysteries in her life that result from the silence of others. Maisie takes the role of the ladies in her mother's salon, and Lisette is made to take the role of the ignorant child. Lisette's questions express a darkness of ignorance that makes Maisie shriek like the ladies. Lisette is asking about where Maisie has been, what she did, but her curiosity is rarely satisfied. Maisie, then, is actually imitating her mother's "shading off" into the unknowable. Once she even reproduces her Mamma's sharp reply "Find out for yourself" (55). She is ashamed by both the sharpness and the repetition afterwards. These imitations, at this stage of Maisie's education, show that she is ready to find things out for herself.

Later on, indeed, her skill of silence helps Maisie to learn yet another skill, to make out social situations for herself. She learns to interpret situations by identifying social roles required of her and performed by others. She simply reacts to her surroundings: "these days brought on a high quickening of Maisie's direct perceptions, of her sense of freedom to make out things for herself" (96). When she is taken by her father to the foreign countess's salon, she has the sense that her Papa is asking her to help him, but she cannot put her finger on how she could help. Then she realizes that he wants her to help him appear honourable in the situation—he offered to take her to America, and she should refuse the offer so that he can remain honourable. And Maisie is willing to play along (153). Later on she is able to identify roles played by others, too. For instance, when she sees her mother's smile in Folkestone when she visits them briefly Maisie notices the smile she has for men —Maisie has not seen this smile of her mother yet (169), nor has she noted its effect now visible on Claude himself. Also, Maisie is able to discover lies: she considers each sentence she hears and can tell when Sir Claude lies, despite his perfect acting, because she makes out he has some relation to Mrs. Beale (108).

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[5] Merla Wolk, in her analysis of mother figures in the novel, comments on this function of Mrs. Beale's hugs as signs of her maternal failure. "Narration and Nurture in *What Maisie Knew*," *The Henry James Review* 4 (Spring 1983): 3, 198.

Eventually, Maisie is able to perceive others' roles for others, too. The most spectacular case in point is Miss Overmore, who becomes Mrs. Beale and is transformed from governess to mother, and Maisie, likewise, from pupil to daughter. As a consequence of the shift, Mrs. Beale's relation to Mrs. Wix, the present governess, changes considerably: the former can order the latter around now (222-23). It is obvious that one's position is determined in relation to others, and a shift in position means a shift in each interpersonal nexus. As a negative example of this, Mrs. Wix's improvement of conversation in France does not result in any considerable change because her social position remains essentially the same: a nobody (202), so she cannot have an influence on Sir Claude's actions. Maisie has to realize that identities are to be made sense of interpersonally, and that these relations can change considerably.

The widest range of Maisie's interpretation is analogy, her fourth skill: interpreting the present by comparing it to some memory or image—these are the incidents when she is usually reminded of something. I think this is the skill she makes the most of. She performs simple juxtapositions, associations, guesses, suppositions, comparisons, and is eventualy able to imagine analogies for herself, to read and express "things."

First her analogies are simple juxtapositions of two well-known things. For instance, she compares the "sides" of the conflict among Mamma, Sir Claude, Perriam and Mrs. Wix with the analogy of puss in the corner, a child's game and makes sense of the turmoil of events around her as if these were all arts of the game played (93-94). Later on, she is also able to associate the present and the past in order to enhance details. She remembers past images or experience to understand the present. For instance, when she is visiting her Papa's countess, she brings out the ambivalence of the situation by remembering both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. As the unpleasant side she remembers the story of the hideous old woman who would have liked to be kind to her but could not. As the pleasant side she also remembers the kindness of Mamma's Captain (157). When her father is found to have stayed in London despite her claim to have gone cruising, she realizes the similarity of her move to her mother's failure to go to Brussels. Mrs. Beale changes her appearance in the exact manner of Maisie's mother, too (111). In this way associative repetition has an explanation to many an unexplained event for her.

Eventually, her analogies extend to the area of the unexperienced. For instance, she can compare the attitude of her stepmother, Mrs. Beale, to something she has never experienced: having a sovereign changed and feeling the change was wrong. Also, at the Exhibition she is the participant of rich romance, of the the *Arabian Nights* (145). Moreover, in France she is reminded of the Middle Ages, and misses Wix's historical imagination to feel the same (at last the term appears). All in all, the incidents when she is reminded of something vary in how much of the reminiscences is actual experience. By the end of the story Maisie is clearly able to associate imagined experience and the present in order to interpret it.

The highest point of analogy is when it extends to reading and expressing thoughts through linguistic formulas. I think the social vocabulary Maisie acquires basically shows an analogical pattern because she knows about the usage of these expressions in context and reuses them in contexts she deems analogous.[6] There is a minute regard for the expansion of her social vocabulary in the text, so let us just note some examples. The commonest such expression, characteristically, is to "square somebody": Sir Claude sets the example to express "I mean that your mother lets me do what I want so long as I let her do what *she* wants" (105). Maisie translates the term when Mrs. Beale uses it by repeating Claude's explanation (114), and later Maisie wishes someone had been squared so that she could see Claude again, so she can actually use it well without knowing the conditions of squaring, i.e. what is allowed in exchange for what (139). To "start somebody off" is to make someone laugh through using some tone or expression not expected to be used. For instance, she is worried if Claude is married to her mother with a tone that makes merry (70) among the listeners, as nobody expects her to worry about such matters with such a worried tone at her age. She learns to use the word "pretext," too, to express her own use for Miss Overmore's staying in her father's house. Claude teaches her how to 'put somebody through', *i.e.* make her tell about something she had wished to be silent about. Maisie uses the term 'someone's reputation has suffered' to startle Mrs. Beale to comment that she must have learnt such things at her mother's (112). She also learns to use the expression "being mixed up with" without ever getting to know what she might or might not be mixed up with (141). When she learns the word "compromise," she realizes she has lived with it since her third year (141). She knows that Claude "dodges" out of situations without taking a responsible decision in them (202), and the word "to bolt" is familiar to her through her mother's and father's actions. Miss Overmore "makes love to" Mrs. Wix and her politeness has a certain aim, a pattern to it (221, 231). All these technical terms to describe social interactions are known to Maisie, she uses them in the right interpersonal contexts, still she does this without actually knowing the referential meaning of the phrases.

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[6] In an excellent essay Dennis Foster reads Maisie's education using Lacan's paradigm for the relation of the subject to the other. Maisie enters into the realm of the symbolic, then discovers the relationality of signs, and has an apprehension of what cannot be said. She realizes that character exists in the imagination of the other only, and she knows analysis is always diverted from its path—which is the critical issue of the novel, too. "Maisie Supposed to Know: Amo(u)ral Analysis," *The Henry James Review* 5 (Spring 1984): 3, 207-16.

Her eagerness to take in and learn new terms is apparent in France, where she takes delight in learning French words. She outsmarts Mrs. Wix in this, translates the menu, and enjoys her own proficiency contrasted to the others' incomprehension. She also knows the word "amour" being sung about in the street and wonders if Mrs. Wix does. She expresses her deepest wishes in French at the railway station to tell Claude to get on the train to Paris and bolt from the others in the hotel. Again, she is using words to express her imagined meaning that has not much to do with her actual experience of their meaning.

Imaginative experience

Maisie's four skills: pretended stupidity, silence, identifying roles, and extended analogy help her to acquire knowledge about the situations she is in. From the simple interaction of blocking others' intended pleasures, she gets to the silent or verbal interpretation of scenes through imagined analogies. As for the relation between social interaction and the production of knowledge, it seems that Maisie's growing social abilities foster her more and more tangled view of her world and enable her to make out relations she has no first hand knowledge about.

The production of experience through the use of social skills is epitomized in particular scenes of the novel. Let me focus on two of these to illustrate the dynamics of this experience. In the first such explicit scene, Maisie is contemplating Mrs. Wix's behavior toward Sir Claude early in the story. Wix has just noticed Claude's attraction to Mrs. Beale and warned him of the dangers—parallel to this, Maisie has just noticed a new trait of the lady herself, some dignity in her. The girl speculates about where this dignity may come from and if there are surprises like that to expect form Mrs. Wix. Then Maisie feels she is a spectator:

> So the sharpened sense of spectatorship was the child's main support, the long habit [...] of seeing herself in discussion and finding herself in the fury of it—she had glimpses of the game of football—a sort of compensation for the doom of a peculiar passivity. It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass. Such she felt to be the application of her nose while she waited for the effect of Mrs. Wix's eloquence. (101)

Maisie is present like someone watching a game, she is passive but compensated by the fury of the game. She is separated from the actual event by being the audience. The metaphoric glass wall implies that she can only see the action but cannot interfere with it. The trope of the glass wall separating her from knowledge is used again when she would like to go to lectures but is not taken:

> It was devilish awkward, didn't she see? to try, without even the limited capital mentioned, to mix her up with the remote array that glittered before her as the children of the rich. She was to feel henceforth as if she were flattening her nose upon the hard window-pane of the sweetshop of knowledge. (120)

She strains for knowledge as an outsider through an invisible but hard wall. Paradoxically, however, this sharpened sense of spectatorship is eventually the price Maisie pays for experience: without watching, she would not acquire experience at all.

Another such spectator-scene is that of the train Claude and Maisie do not take to Paris. The context of the scene is the postponed decision on who is to live with whom. Maisie and Claude are supposed to return to Mrs. Beale and Mrs. Wix in the hotel and inform them whether Maisie will remain with the step-parents or live with Wix. But Maisie is unable to make a decision as either decision would mean the end of her and Claude's relationship. So Sir Claude and Maisie expand their morning together until long after luncheon. As if extending a position of spectatorship, Maisie is unwilling to tell Claude anything about what she wants to do, but takes him all over the place testing the limits of his patience. Part of this morning is the scene with the train to Paris not taken. Claude buys eleven papers, Maisie carries three paperback volumes, two pink, one yellow, and they look well prepared for the train to Paris, they ask the porter about the tickets, they should only pay and leave—and the train leaves without them. They hover in the midst of open possibilities, act their roles out partly, only to find themselves spectators[7]—they play their parts to the letter but remain passive.

A bold model of Maisie's education can be sketched on the basis of these scenes. Maisie's mechanical education of social skills is transformed into an attitude of spectatorship. She acquires social skills not only to use them to interpret social situations but also to reflect on them at the same time. I would call this ability an ability to fictionalize. Fictionalizing is an interplay of passivity and involvement. On the one hand, passivity results from the heightened sense of spectatorship, the inability to get involved in situations. On the other hand, involvement is also created, but Maisie can only get at it through passivity and reflection. So Maisie is both an agent participating in a situation and an outsider watching herself as a passive agent who reflects on social spectacles. There is a double sense of selfhood at work in fictionalizing which enables her to create knowledge through the use of her social skills.

Moral sense

An additional feature of Maisie's fictionalizing is her assumed moral sense, as it is difficult to tell if she really possesses one or not. The problem comes up repeatedly in the novel as Mrs. Wix's hobbyhorse; it is an aspect of the general model, and the problem of Maisie's moral sense is recurrent in critical accounts, too. Also, if Maisie's experience is read as an education in social interaction, indeed the nature of the relation between the self and the other is supposed to be a basic feature of her skills.

Mrs. Wix criticizes Maisie's involved passivity as the lack of a moral sense in her. During their stay in France, the governess tries to entice Maisie to manifest a moral sense. However, for Mrs. Wix the only sign of a moral sense on Maisie's part would be her condemnation of the impropriety of the relation between the two step-parents. Mrs. Wix has a very narrow sense of the phrase "moral sense": living in the world of romance, love, beauty, countesses and wickedness (51), she has a melodramatic imagination of right and wrong. As she has a clear-cut idea about right and wrong, she knows the relation between Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude belongs to the latter category. She acts in accordance with her beliefs and would like to save Maisie who clearly lacks these strict standards. She keeps judging the actions of others as she feels her pure moral convictions entitle her to do so.

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[7] Carren Osna Kaston maintains that Maisie learns to speak her visions, but unfortunately she cannot impose them in this scene. In this sense, she is related to Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl* who will learn to articulate and impose, too. "Houses of Fiction in *What Maisie Knew*," *Criticism* 18 (Winter 1976): 1, 36.

Maisie is clearly not convinced she should adopt Mrs. Wix's version of moral sense. She seriously considers the possible actions to take in her new situation under the patronage of her step-parents. She wishes not to be their daughter as a pretext, but rather take Sir Claude as her father only. When this proves impossible through Claude's unwillingness, she opts for the company of Mrs. Wix, the so-called moral choice. However, this choice is not motivated by the supposed impropriety of the step-parents, but by her wish not to share Claude with Mrs. Beale. Mrs. Wix condemns this attitude as part of Maisie's own immoralty learnt from her parents. Meanwhile, Maisie feels her decision has nothing to do with moral sense: moral sense is just one of the things to be asked in the schoolroom as part of her lessons (260)—Wix is only twitching the cord that attaches her to Maisie's knowledge of "more" (212-13), but basically does not understand the motivation of Maisie's actions.

Interestingly enough, different characters name the result of Maisie's social abilities in different ways. First of all, Maisie refers to it as "poetry almost intoxicating" with Claude when she joins him on the balcony after their dinner together, and he is smoking in silence. In another instance Maisie feels she is soon to know All, and Most, when she is with Wix, holding hands, again silent:

> so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which the knowledge should overflow. As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was on the road to know Everything. She had not had governesses for nothing: what in the world had she ever done but learn and learn and learn? She looked at the pink sky with the placid foreboding that she soon should have learnt All. They lingered in the flushed air till at last it turned to grey and she seemed fairly to receive new information from every brush of the breeze. (213)

Beside the apparent ironic tone of the passage, it bears a remarkable resemblance to the metaphoric description of experience in "The Art of Fiction:" as the breeze brushes, Maisie converts every particle of the air into revelation here. In this sense, Maisie's knowledge is deeply imaginative, the knowledge of the power of imagination she has learnt in social contexts. Sir Claude feels the presence of this mystery, too, when Mrs. Wix accuses him of having killed Maisie's moral sense:

> "I've not killed anything," he said; "on the contrary I think I have produced life. I don't know what to call it—I haven't even known how decently to deal with it, to approach it; but whatever it is, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever met—it's exquisite, it's sacred." (260)

What can this unnamed ability in Maisie be? It has clearly been emerging for some time, and its appearances may provide an inkling about its nature. Early on in the story Maisie makes Sir Claude talk nonsense (106), that is she makes him talk about himself in a way that is surprising even for him. Then, in the scene with the Captain in Kensington Gardens, she feels something deep surge up in her, a sorrow for her mother that makes her cry (130). In France, the condemnation she gets from her mother does not disappoint her, as everything around "ministered to the joy of life" (180). Maisie practically makes her elder educated, promotes their development, and not the other way round (212). At the station in Boulogne her fear disappears and she can formulate her plea for Claude (254). She has an awareness of "life" that in interpersonal relations triggers others off their routine and makes her feel and think of others with compassion.

So the likely result of Maisie's education may then be measured not by Mrs. Wix's narrow standards of moral sense in terms of good or bad. Rather, it is an operation of the mind that can be called moral in Maisie's case. Her ability to fictionalize, to use her imaginative faculty in interpreting social situations is practically a sensitivity in producing experience. This sensitivity, in turn, is the sign of the play of her imagination. I think it is appropriate to use James's tenet here about moral sense which lies in the quality of the mind, the sensitivity of the individual's perceptions.[8]

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[8] Merle A. Williams's phenomenological analysis of *What Maisie Knew* contrasts Mrs. Wix's moralistic thinking with Maisie's morality. Moralistic implies glib rule-governed conduct whilst morality is feeling knowingly the operations of personal relationships. Morality in this sense has links to Husserl's notion of phenomenological reduction, as the former is receptiveness, freedom from preconceptions, while the latter lays the foundation of fresh vision. *Henry James and the Philosophical Novel.* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP), 1993, 39, 40, 42. In my terms, it is fictionalizing that has links to reduction, but the direction of my analysis is to point out the links between Jamesian theory and practice, not Husserlian phenomenology and his enterprise, although I fully agree that the connection is there. Tony Tanner points out Wix's incapacity for wonder, but he describes wonder that is Maisie's knowledge as an inclusive, aesthetic ability only. *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety*

THE NARRATOR AS EXECUTOR

The story of Maisie's education outlined so far is complemented by the mediating presence of a narratorial voice in the novel. The narrator introduces the situation through the court's decision at the very beginning, the Preface explains that Maisie's perceptions are to be made clear by a maturer mind,[9] so it seems the narrator's office boils down to the mediation of Maisie's perceptions and one can problematize this process. And yet, the narrator also comments on his inability to convey Maisie's thoughts, as if the narratorial omniscient position was not so secure after all. In what follows, let us look into the controversial duality of the narrator's position in the novel as the way Maisie's experience is executed.

The narrator's omniscient position seems to be unquestionable from the very beginning of the story. Before the first chapter, the narrator provides the frame of the plot and describes the legal terms of the court decision. He objectively reports about the reactions of relatives and acquaintances. There is no proper third person apart from the parents to take on the child, so her position is that of the "deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed" (36): she is wanted for the harm her parents could do each other. The characters are introduced, and the whole storyline is projected: Maisie is to be educated in the opposed principles of the father and the mother, and is to be left alone to learn her own lesson on the basis of these principles. This line of the narrator is taken on when Maisie's subsequent impressions are explained. For instance, when repetitions are noticed by Maisie, the narrator goes on to make an abstract generalization: "That, according to Sir Claude, had been also what her mother had not done, and Maisie could only have the sense of something that in a maturer mind would be called the way history repeats itself" (143). On the basis of these instances, it would seem that the narrator can come to terms with the educational process Maisie is undergoing.

The narrator's position, however, turns out to be less balanced if his comments on his own narration are also considered.[10] After the scene with the

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and Reality in American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 291, 294. Kaston shows that James in the Preface opens up Maisie's experience rather than simplifies it. Kaston, "Houses of Fiction in *What Maisie Knew*," 39.

[9] TC II.

[10] Writing about the improper third person in *Maisie* in her book *The Rhetorical Logic of Henry James* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), Sheila Teahan argues that the narrator's representation is only a poor copy of what is actually happening through figures (50); Maisie's knowledge has no literal term, and the narrator's relation to Maisie is that of catachresis (53). The representational strategy of the text is dual, as it is based on

mother's Captain and the father, in Kensington Gardens and at the Exhibition, respectively, the narrator changes from third person to first person. Firstly, he is telling about two sources of the child's consciousness of a new phase, distancing himself from Maisie's consciousness of the change, and as a result it is no longer the narratorial voice that knows about the new phase only. Maisie is to have her own area of thoughts independent from that of the narrator.[11] Secondly, he changes into the first person to intimate the way Maisie can both understand and argue about the positions of others:

> I may not even answer for it that Maisie was not aware of how, in this, Mrs. Beale fails to share his [...] distate for their little charge to breathe the air of their gross irregularity [...] If Mrs. Wix, however, ultimately appaled, had now set her heart on strong measures, Maisie, as I have imitated, could also work round both to the reasons for them and to the quite other reasons for that lady's not, as yet at least, appearing in them at first hand. (164-65)

This comment is explicitly about the uncertainty[12] of the narrator as to Maisie's realm of knowledge. This is not uncertainty as a result of a slippage of tropes but as that of a direct statement.

The narrator, surprisingly, uses the first person plural in one of his comments, drawing the actual reader into the storytelling. "What she knew,

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Maisie's dependence on tropes and the narrator's incapacity to articulate anything but these figures (60). So the narrator's use of tropes could be another source of arguments for his insecure position.

[11] Merla Wolk claims that the only satisfactory mother figure in the story is the narrator who provides ample space for her in which activity is possible: he is a "good enough mother" in Winnicott's sense. This safe place provides Maisie with the possibility for the "burgeoning" of Maisie's perceptional powers. Wolk, "Narration and...", 203-04.

[12] Barbara Eckstein describes the duality of the third person precise, symmetrical narration and the third/first person, indistinct parody of symmetrical form in the novel that is parallel to what Maisie learns about squaring: in "squaring someone" there is always some contextual residue left that is likely to mar the balance of the contract. "Unsquaring the Squared Route of *What Maisie Knew*," *The Henry James Review* 9 (Fall 1988): 3, 178, 184. Julie Rivkin traces the story of Oedipus in the family narrative and its relation to the authoritative narratorial voice in the novel. She argues that together with the crumbling of the traditional Oedipal narrative and of patriarchal authority in the plot, an ironic mode of presentation is at work in which there will always be a difference between sign and meaning, a questioning of identities (social and gender) that should traditionally be secured by the power of the father. See her *False Positions: The Representational Logics of Henry James's Fiction.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 144-45 and Neil Hertz's "Dora's Secrets, Freud's Techniques," *Diacritics* 13 (Spring 1883): 1, 67. Hertz reads the relation between the narrator and Maisie as a story of unrecognized or refused identification.

what she *could* know is by this time no secret to us: it grew and grew at any rate, the rest of that day, in the air of what he took for granted. It was better he should do that than attempt to test her knowledge" (184). The italics of the original text stress that the knowledge one has of Maisie's knowledge does not concern its actual content but an ability: what she *could* know is unlimited and surprising and not to be determined thematically even by the narrator. Drawing the actual reader into the narration as if this knowledge of the nature of Maisie's knowledge was shared by the narrator and the actual reader puts the narrator into the reader's position: as one trying to understand rather than one trying to explain. Also, the reader is involved in the attempt at deciphering the process of Maisie's transformation.[13] No doubt it is this shift in the narrator's position from omniscient to interpreting that indicates the difficulty of surmounting Maisie's fictionalizing.

You might wonder by now if this bold model of Maisie's ability to fictionalize and its unsurmountability leads us any closer to the role of imagination in the novel. I think this rough model of Maisie's ability to fictionalize is practically the model of what used to be called imagination in the story. Maisie acquires her social skills by being both a participant and a spectator of scenes, she is involved in the events but defends herself by remaining distant, and her experience is that of spectatorship, making things out for herself. In Maisie's case, I think she acquires an ability to fictionalize through the social skills: she learns to produce extra knowledge of social situations. To round off, the ability to fictionalize is a socially creative faculty of hers. The faculty is the source of her moral sense not in terms of the conventional sense of moralistic differentiation between good and bad, but in terms of the ability to experience and understand imaginatively. This special knowledge is conveyed by the growing insecurity of the narratorial voice in trying to grope for the phenomenon.

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[13] Randall Craig argues that Maisie's emerging hermeneutical sophistication is a model for the readers to hermeneutically produce texts, and not to consume them. "Read[ing] the Unspoken into the Spoken: Interpreting *What Maisie Knew*," *The Henry James Review* 2 (Spring 1981): 3, 212.