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Epistemology of the Unspoken: Sex, Secrets and the Child
in Dickens' *Great Expectations* and James' *What Maisie Knew*

by

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ABSTRACT

Secrecy is a primary function of story. While all stories hold the promise of something to be discovered, not all secrets are finally or explicitly revealed but remain in the realm of the unspoken. In the following analyses of *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew*, I examine the narrative strategies of connotation to represent the unsayable and the unspeakable in literature and in history. My approach in examining the epistemological limits of silence within these texts derives from D.A. Miller's work on connotation and Foucault's conception of the function of discourse to produce its silent or repressed subject matter within Victorian conventions of representation. The more exigent aspects of my project are informed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on the politics of knowing, by her inquiry of the category of the "unspeakable" and by Judith Butler's formulation of the productions of the social subject through the normative operations of language.

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DEDICATION

For “the child”
for me, for Curtis
with love

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Introduction

*Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed*

...

*Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence*

- Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," *The Fact of a Doorframe*

An epistemology of the unspoken proposes to offer a reply to the critical question, What can we know about that which is not explicitly said? My interpretations of the *implicit* in the following chapters will not constitute such a reply *per se*, but they will serve to illustrate and inform the more difficult project of interrogating and, in some cases, defining, the limits of knowledge of connotation. Such a project begins with the conception that, since language does not always represent "the representable" (inasmuch as it neither has a one-to-one correspondence to meaning nor is ever free from the politics of representation), we must account for silence.¹ By silence, by the unspoken, I refer to that which is implied in a text but remains un-named and which therefore demands further explication or demands to be understood as something "more" - if only as a signifier which fails to fully explicate all that it signifies or means. As Foucault maintains in *The History of Sexuality*,

silence itself - the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers - is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions

alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within
 over-all strategies. (27)

The un-named thing in a text to which Foucault refers is not an absence (as the quotation from Adrienne Rich in my epigraph suggests). Rather, it is a “thing” *absent*; but its presence can be inferred through its effects on and its relationship with signs which surround and map out its perimeters, a kind of “black hole” in language.² It both effects and reveals the effects of that which is (made) secret.

What the unspoken *means* is of course a different question from that which inquires about its epistemological boundaries. The first is concerned with *content*, the second with *containing*. The unspoken defies singularity of meaning and/or closure - because it fails to disclose its content - but this means only that it cannot be fully or finally known - as one thing. Epistemologically, this ought to pose no problem. The problem is less one of allowing for multiplicity of meaning than of defining the limits which would otherwise allow either for *any* meaning or, at the other extreme, singular meaning. While interpretation is governed by sufficiency of evidence, the singular conviction of what a text’s silences do or do not do, can or cannot mean, represents the outside to the *modus operandi* of connotation. That is, language which is connotative or otherwise unspoken cannot be treated as though it were denotative or spoken. In the connotative moment, as D.A. Miller notes, “affect is evoked [but the language which evokes the affect is] ...evacuated of any substantial content” (*The Novel and the Police* 198). To supply content in such a way as to disavow the unspoken or remove it from its connotative mode is to misinterpret or misunderstand its function. Interpretation of silence must remain within the space that is created, as Miller suggests, between the “allusion” to a thing (or things)

and the “elision” of the *name* of the thing (or things) to which it alludes (Miller, *The Novel* 199). To altogether *not* name is neither necessary nor desirable, since that would be the (unthinkable) end to interpretation; but, where naming is called for or desired, the interrogative element which attends connotation ought to remain intact.

Interpretation of the unspoken’s meaning begins by situating it within the context in which it occurs: textually, historically and in language. My own project accounts for not only the circumstances that the story represents and the entire context in which such description occurs, but for (the fact of) representation itself. It looks not only at the accumulative connotative effects of the particular interpretive trajectories I follow but at the constructedness inherent in narrative itself. This includes primarily the function of “narrative performance,” the manipulation of the presentation of a story through narrative implements which communicates something more than the diction denotes. Such “performance” is achieved through such literary tools as figuration, gesture, repetition, humour, understatement, irony, and the construct of “point of view.” In the texts I examine, these literary devices not only provide secondary or “secret” narratives but are, in fact, signs of the requisite discretion of Victorian respectability.

Standards of “respectable” Victorian literature are evident in *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew* in various forms or conventions. The most salient conventions are the sequestering of the sexual and the center-staging of the moral. As Jon B. Reed reports,

mid-Victorian morals had not only driven the overt mention of sex from the pages of public magazines in the name of decency, but the circumspection resulting from conservative pressure went far beyond the depiction or mention of sex into the habits of daily life.

As a result, the general vulgarity of Dickens's characters was in itself a threat to Victorian decorum. (658)

Reed's representation of the literary and cultural codifications of "mid-Victorian morals" illustrates the historically and culturally determined (but otherwise arbitrary) process by which things come to live under the sign of "the immoral" or "the vulgar." The process by which semantic valuation of signs acquires meaning is transitional and transitory. However, there remains a fundamental logic of semantic differentiation, a binary logic whereby what comes to be considered morally "good" necessitates the structuration of that which is "not good." *Something*, therefore, will always occupy the site of the "bad," the immoral, the scandalous, the unspeakable, the "unrepresentable."

This thesis constitutes an examination of the "unrepresentable" sites which are told implicitly through the narrative voice in *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew*. Primarily, the subject of such an examination is that of "sex" as it is one of the key areas targeted by censorship and relegated to the space of "the secret" within Victorian conventions of representation. While sex is not - and cannot be - named in the texts themselves, my aim is to demonstrate the ways in which sexual content is consistently invoked, not as "sex" *per se* but, in keeping with its connotative mode, as more generally "the sexual" or, even more generally, as "sexualized" or "made sexually implicit" by the writing hand. Whereas Dickens' narrator (Pip) takes the position of self-repression or self-ignorance in order to cover up the sexual or more transgressive secrets his narrative contains, James' narrator participates in the discretionary codes of writing "the sexual" in ways that effect a kind of mockery of such a system. This system is illustrated in *What Maisie Knew*, for example, by the narrative signaling of a character's "small sigh that

mourned the limits of the speakable” (116). Without context, this phrase perhaps does not “mean” very much; but it means abundantly within the (implicitly adulterous) “system of misbehaviour” of the story’s main context. In this specific scene, the “small sigh” occurs when two so-called “couples” seem to have caught each other in differing “improper” relations. This “embarrassing” incident must be addressed - or not addressed - by the characters (and James) within a specific code of silence and discretion. While James here elucidates the fuller ironic meaning of the “small sigh” in relation to the much bigger system that delimits the speakable, his narration delimits the speakable even as it refers to and perpetuates, ironically, that same delimitation. It confirms its own gestural (unspeakable, unknowable) possibilities by explicitly “mourning” (knowingly) its own discursive impossibilities.

I have chosen my two “subjects” - not Dickens or James or their stories, but *their subjects* - “Pip” and “Maisie” - on the basis of the discursive, psychological, sexual and identificatory processes their stories follow, which I believe illustrate effectively the strategies of representing the unspoken with which I am concerned. Pip and Maisie are in various ways two sadly abused children. They suffer enormous atrocities at the hands of their elders including, in Pip’s case, physical, psychological and verbal abuse and, in Maisie’s case, abusive exposure to sexually implicit adult language and behaviour. Their stories follow the psychological effects of their familial circumstances and childhood tribulations and are set in environments marked by poverty, deprivation and, in various ways, depravity. The occupations, yearnings and pursuits that Pip and Maisie take on or have, are figured centrally but implicitly by the psycho-sexual impact of the early loss of both parents which is understood as oedipally-configured. The substitutions of parents for

various parent-“figures” to whom they are handed alters implicitly the normative definitions of conventional family structure such as that delineated by the oedipal narrative; and they open the way for the various unspoken desires, fantasies and identities by which Pip and Maisie are consequently, and tacitly, constructed. In the “coming into being” processes which they undergo, they seek to establish themselves as viable, autonomous subjects in the world, which they understand as the end of the subjections of childhood. Both strive for the power to exercise choice. For Pip, this includes crucially (and ironically) the “choice” to repeat in various ways the violences and violations of his early history in order to move out of the grips of such a history. For Maisie, it means choosing to occupy the same position of power to which she is subjected, by appropriating the same language of (implicitly sexual) power that constitutes her childhood environment. Whereas Maisie strives to *be* in her world, Pip strives to be *something else* in his. Both achieve various degrees of success in these ambitions but they do so not by transcending the world they know, but by *repeating* (over and over) the circumstances, events and language of their early histories by which they are marked.

The trajectory I follow in Pip’s story is that of the ironic process of his striving toward his great expectations of “something else” through precisely the *same* patterns - of violence and subjection - from which such ambition begins. I argue for the presence in Pip’s narrative of an unconscious “will” or compulsion to participate in various transgressions of social norms and taboos, the most salient of which is a masochistic proclivity. This proclivity reflects Freud’s theory of the “compulsion to repeat,” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (605), but differs in its specific positionality of narrative fantasy and/or pleasure. Cathy Caruth’s re-working of Freud’s theory to incorporate the historical

“real” or symptomatic relationship of (experienced) trauma to its (sought or compelled) “returns” also helps to explicate Pip’s tendency to fail at, be beaten at, or be beaten by, the things and the people he wishes to gain or depose. My intention is to examine the function of these “secrets” in Pip’s narrative in relation to, and in order to uncover, the secrets of narrative that Dickens deploys.

The nature of Maisie’s dilemma is presented overtly as a social one, of finding a place (and a family) of her own within a social world which operates within a highly evasive language of knowing. I want to examine the strategies by which James constructs this language as tacitly, but centrally, sexual; and to show the ways in which this “improper” language structures and defines Maisie’s sense of the world and finally produces her *as its effect*. The performative function of (this) language is identificatory for Maisie but, for the narrative voice, it is primarily epistemological in its failures to and preventions from representing the outside world to which it refers. It wavers constantly between defining and producing her as a sexual subject and calling attention to James’ and our own productions or negations of what a child sexual subject might or might not be. This constant wavering results in an anxiety about both the social and, as Ruth Bernard Yeazell suggests, the literary, questions that it provokes and which challenge “the very assumptions of our epistemology” (Yeazell 64).

The focus I take in examining the processes that Pip and Maisie undergo begins with Foucault’s elucidation of the repressed nineteenth-century subject as harbouring (and “exploiting” [*The History* 35]) a sexual secret both about, and from, the individual subject herself or himself. Such a secret came to be concerned in the nineteenth century with not just “what the subject wished to hide, but with what was hidden from himself [including,

for example,]... the principle of a latency essential to sexuality” (*The History* 66). For Foucault, this central, sexual secret is as much volitional as it is compulsory and is, in either case, largely invented and entirely discursive. The unspoken narratives of *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew* seem to reflect the operations of secreted discourse to which Foucault refers. Judith Butler’s elucidation of the normativity of the sexual and gendering processes of the social subject provides a yet more critical and urgent picture of these discursive operations. As Butler emphasizes in *Bodies That Matter*, the individual subject does not exist *separate from* (or prior to) the conventions of language by which she or he comes to be a (social, gendered, sexed) subject. Rather, the set of discursive practices that the (child) subject is born into “operate[s] as its formative precondition” (Butler, *Bodies* 230) which marks it instantly (in fact, in advance) with the conventions of discourse. To speculate about forms or potentials that precede this marking activity is meaningful only in the context of its having to be taken up within an already-existing body of “knowledge discourse.” In the discourse of fiction, we are restricted to understanding a character’s (unspoken, sexual) identities or desires by what we already “know” about what a character’s identities might be. The normative dimension of being (and knowing) which Butler evokes, however, is inclusive of all that is available in such discourse, all that produces for our “knowledge” the discursive system by which a subject comes to “be” and comes to be (as) represented.

The *social* implications of the abuse and neglect to which Pip and Maisie are subjected reflect a developing awareness in the nineteenth century - to which Freud made a vast contribution - of the psychological *effects* of painful childhood experiences. Nevertheless, the narrative delineations of Pip’s and Maisie’s childhood experiences offer

much more than a picture of pain and suffering. Their stories constitute a range of elements which include the tragic, the humorous, the ironic and the desiring. When, in the telling of their stories, these elements begin to overlap in seemingly conflictual or “inappropriate” ways - such as pain and pleasure (in Pip’s story), corruption and desire (in Maisie’s) - their narratives enter new dimensions of meaning which elide “the real” of the child’s suffering in favour of the fantasy of adult narrative pleasures, even of subjection itself. In both Pip’s and Maisie’s stories, it is *irony* which acts most to diffuse the pain that its narrative describes by calling attention to its own narrative implementation and constructedness. Inherently a “knowing” mode, irony plays a key role in the economy of “knowing” performatives by which the unspoken tells a different or contrasting story to the ones that are proposed directly. In Pip’s and Maisie’s stories, narrative irony serves to convey the experiences of their stories while masking and/or disavowing (knowingly) the seriousness of those experiences and finally, to mask the desire that ensues as a result of the narrative operation that those “experiences” produce. Disavowal plays a crucial role in not saying what “should not” be said - by both the narrator and the characters - by participating in the (culturally) necessary and titillating refusal to directly acknowledge the “improper” desires that are signaled in the story. By not naming explicitly the illicit aspects of what their characters do or think or know, the narrator or author forces (and permits) the reader to “understand” those aspects and their implications. The representation of inadmissible subject matter certain of its being understood itself contradicts or, rather, *plays up* the very project of disavowal. It implicates and perpetuates a system of secrecy that seems to suggest something other than the hiding of (or protection from) knowledge. Miller points to such an implication in his question, not “What does

secrecy cover?" but, "What covers secrecy?" (207) which I want to take up explicitly in *Great Expectations* and which will inform implicitly my exploration in *What Maisie Knew* of the function of secrecy in the context of the great "open secret" of misbehavior in that novel. The questions about whom or what secrecy serves, and the nature of its effects, interrogate productively the *structuration* of secrecy as such. They challenge in exciting ways both the social and the narrative function of silence and the wilful aspect of disavowal - the perpetuation of "not knowing," not saying, or outright denying the immoral, sexual, or unspeakable implications of a text's covert subject matter.

Despite strict codes of representation (or perhaps because of them) there are countless signifying practices whereby the sexual, the sexually unspecifiable or unspeakable (or unthinkable) came to be conveyed in the Victorian novel, as I hope to illustrate throughout these chapters. Vulgarity of character, as Reed notes, or sublimating literary conventions (for example, that of the Gothic, on which Sedgwick's work is crucial) are examples of ways of signaling such knowledge or "knowingness" in Victorian texts. However, knowingness about the identity or identificatory possibilities of a subject is always itself problematic. But if it is considered more problematic for a fictional character than a non-fictional character or if either is unproblematized, then a particular set of assumptions about such knowingness needs to be addressed. Knowingness about the "truth" of sex or sexuality is particularly dubious since its place within normative discourses of identity is central. The "truth" of sex principally reflects the particular "truth" or meaning that it is assigned within a particular culture and/or belief system. As in the case of the systematic censorship of explicit sexual content in the Victorian novel, this has particular exigency where silence is mandatory; and even more so where certain

content and/or subjects are “*consigned* to connotation” (Miller, “*Anal Rope*” 123, my emphasis) or are annulled under the performative categorization of the “the unspeakable.” If we accept the validity of the adage, “we find what we are looking for,” then the hermeneutic process of uncovering sex or identity or sexual identity (in fiction or non-fiction) is always suspect, unstable or interlined with ignorance. There always exists the potential for a crisis of interpretation which can erupt under what Sedgwick calls “the pressure of insistence that makes a continuous legibility called sexual knowledge emerge from and take the shape of the furrows of prohibition or of stupor [which] is, most powerfully, *the reader’s* energy of need, fear, repudiation, projection” (*Tendencies* 46). Conversely, the particular *will* to ignorance (or self-ignorance) which Sedgwick conceptualizes in *Epistemology of the Closet* and *Tendencies* leads to an equally valid formulation: we do *not* find what we are *not* looking for. Foregrounding these factors in the interpretive process, of course, at once protects and challenges my own textual “findings” within the texts I examine. However, the contingent and provisional interpretive space that is thereby both opened and circumscribed seems to be a necessary (although indeed perhaps never quite sufficient) queer scope within which a discussion of the narrative performance of unspoken desires can be taken up at all.

My examination of the relationships in *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew* - among story and history and their social, psychological and linguistic *effects* - is an epistemology of the unspoken which I hope will illustrate something useful (or at least something interesting) about the power and efficacy of narrative and of language. As Butler notes in *Excitable Speech*, “we do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do.

Language is a name for our doing: both ‘what’ we do... and that which we effect, the act and its consequences” (8). I want to explore in these two novels the performative power of language to do what it says and, even more so, the symbolizing power of the unspoken to do what it *doesn't* say. By showing how the unspoken refuses to *be* (one thing) but “agrees” to *do* (many things), I am hoping to explicate some of the ways in which identity and sexuality can (and cannot) be written in literature and in history.

Chapter One

Narrative Performance and the Secret in Dickens' *Great Expectations*

"Give me," said Joe, "a good book, or a good newspaper, and sit me down afore a good fire, and I ask no better. Lord!" he continued, after rubbing his knees a little, "when you do come to a J and a O, and says you, 'Here, at last, is a J-O, Joe,' how interesting reading is!"

- Dickens, *Great Expectations*

The difference between narration and narrative performance in a novel is the difference between the story that the novel tells (or what it seems to be about) and *how* it tells or performs this story in ways that reinforce, re-direct, diffuse, interrogate, problematize or *otherwise* tell this story. In Dickens' *Great Expectations*, narrative performance is enacted through the fiction of the first-person, author/ity of Pip who consistently calls attention to his own literary role and to the functions of the literary implements through which he proceeds. Pip is presented (or is presented - by Dickens - as presenting himself) as the author and narrator of the story of his troubled beginnings - his traumas, struggles, failings, punishments - and his idealized expectations of a happy ending. His great ambition is to transcend his impoverished position of blacksmith's boy and gain the prosperous position of gentleman who, through the aid of the fairy godmother, will "do all the shining deeds of the young knight of romance and marry the princess" (228). Entirely conventional, this fantasy acts as a paradigmatic surface or starting point for the little Pip and from which, for the narrating "Pip," a number of other, less

conventional (and, in some cases, unspeakable) stories and fantasies can be “spoken.” The realities and fantasies that work against the young Pip’s idealized expectations neither replace nor provide a more definitive epistemological picture of Pip’s story or character than those expectations but operate in conjunction with them to comprise the complex unfolding of Pip’s identifications. Together they constitute a layering scheme such as Peter Brooks describes in *Reading for the Plot*, whereby “an ‘official’ and censoring plot stands over a ‘repressed’ plot” (117). These “layers of repression” (Brooks 128) are flagged in *Great Expectations* predominantly through repetition. The scenes and phrases that recur in the novel demand a textual archaeology that accounts for the presence and privilege that the narrative hand gives them. Part of my account of those recurrences will offer a picture of Pip’s more secreted character and self-characterizations, desires and identities, and will also illustrate the paradigmatic “plotting” of such (secret) characterizations in the “respectable” Victorian novel.

The “official” or surface plots which Brooks describes are “censoring” ones because they represent plots which are permissible or legible within Victorian codes of propriety and are defined by and against those which are not. They act as models and reminders of normativity itself, in the same way that the gibbets along the river act as a symbolic reminder to Pip and other would-be transgressors of the presence of the law. The way in which this scheme is laid out in *Great Expectations* illustrates Victorian conventions of narrative structuration, that which *can* be presented on the surface and that which can only (or must) be presented tacitly, subliminally or through a repressed schemata. For this reason, the layers of stories that are made secret are themselves subject to a formula or convention of secrecy which is inversely predicated on, and perhaps as

predictable as, the structure of the ostensible fairy tale.

The layered orders within the textual body of *Great Expectations*) reflect and correspond to orders outside that body - such as publishing laws. Prohibitions on the one hand, and privileges on the other - criteria governed both by written law and social or symbolic law - regulate what is morally or ethically acceptable for print, but also what defines a good story and what is simply intelligible to the reader. As Brooks claims, “the nineteenth-century novel in general... regularly conceives plot as a condition of deviance and abnormality... [and that] deviance is the very condition for life to be ‘narratable’” (139). Thus, whatever constitutes “narrative” is invariably negotiated upon and through a number of competing authorities, injunctions, motivations, and desires in order to satisfy publication and cultural restrictions yet also to create a story that entices. *Great Expectations* exemplifies superbly the ways in which certain codes of propriety, morality and (especially sexual) restraint or conformity can be met while providing the inscription of multiple taxons of textual (and sexual) pleasures.

Through its own specific semantic valuation and differentiation, the socio-linguistic determinants of Victorian publishing conditions afford the Dickensian novel a particular site of privilege. But Dickens' novels acquire such a standing not through (or not wholly through) the authority of their moral rectitude, but through their keen observance of and participation in social and literary imperatives which demand that the moral and the immoral be configured in a particular way. Such “respectable” novels are comparatively defined, for example, by the unauthorized literature of the underground, such as illicit pornography. The (perhaps necessarily) anonymous text of *My Secret Life* which Steven Marcus explicates in *The Other Victorians*, for example, fails to comply with the necessary

moral and sexual codifications and is effectively punished with unauthorization - and unauthoredness. While Dickens' novels are authorized and officially authored (and, to various degrees, autobiographical), the ways in which they negotiate, within the textual boundaries, the relationships between the moral and the immoral, the legal and the illegal and the prudent and the prurient, reflect the very social, cultural and legal configurations through which their publication comes to be authorized at all. But the subject material they invoke may not be as far from the illicit as we think.

Nineteenth-century society, as Foucault suggests, "did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition [of sex but] ...suspected sex of harboring a fundamental secret" (69). This secret was seen not only as a secret kept compulsorily between individuals but was a secret from oneself and was, therefore, the object of a great deal of suspicion and anxiety. Sex was thought (and feared) to hold "secret knowledge" of the individual subject - "of that which divides him, determines him perhaps, but above all causes him to be ignorant of himself" (70). The interplay between (self-) knowledge and (self-) ignorance that Foucault elucidates seems to reflect the discursive force that drives the narrative of *Great Expectations*. Pip's narrative constitutes an *ex post facto* confession in which, by his own admission, he can indeed be said to be "ignorant of himself." Emblemized by the obscuring mists of the marshes or "meshes" where Pip is brought up, the narrative network throws a shadowy veil over not only its characters, but its own presentation of its characters and their secrets. Reading the secrets or "*misteries*" that this shadowy mist serves to obscure is the primary hermeneutic and epistemological aim of this chapter. I want to show how Pip's path toward the fulfillment of his great expectations comprises a series of re-enactments of the traumas he sustains during his early years on the

marsh. The taint of criminality to which Magwitch exposes him in the first chapter haunts his “glowing road to manhood and independence” (105). As he tells himself half-way into his (novelistic) journey, “how strange it was that I should be accompanied by all this taint of prison and crime; that in my childhood out on our lonely marshes on a winter evening I should have first encountered it; that it should have reappeared on two occasions, starting out like a stain that was faded but not gone” (260). My aim in this chapter is to follow the path of this “stain” and to analyze the various ways in which Pip’s narrating voice describes and interprets it as a “shadow” and a “contamination” but, above all, as simply something “strange” (260) or something queer.

D.A. Miller maintains that “the social function of secrecy - isomorphic with its novelistic function - is not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal the knowledge of the knowledge” (206), that is, to pretend ignorance, not of the contents of the secret but that there *is* a secret. In *Great Expectations*, it is no secret that there are secrets, but the frequency with which they are referred to in the text seems to function as a performative screen for secrets that cannot be overtly acknowledged or uncovered; at the same time it signals the importance of the role that secrets play. The narrative precludes the comfort of “knowingness” that Miller claims for the characters of *David Copperfield* for whom, for the “readers of the novel, the secret is always out” (Miller 205). In *Great Expectations*, this secret is decidedly *identificatory* - it serves to hide Pip’s (narrative) identity and desire - but can never be said to be fully out. In part, this is so because identity itself can never be said to be fully “out.” But it is also due to a duplicitous narrative voice whose deception is compounded by, and interlined with, *self*-deception which Pip’s admission to, or *un*-deceiving of, only further complicates. As he proclaims,

all other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself. Surely a curious thing. That I should innocently take a bad half-crown of somebody else's manufacture is reasonable enough; but that I should knowingly reckon the spurious coin of my own make as good money! An obliging stranger, under pretence of compactly folding up my bank-notes for security's sake, abstracts the notes and gives me nutshells; but what is his sleight of hand to mine, when I fold up my own nutshells and pass them on to myself as notes! (222)

The "sleight of hand" which Pip admits to engaging implicates his narrative structure in a confessional matrix that constantly enfolds itself in its own pretence. *That* secret, at least, is out. But, if Pip's strategic "sleight of hand" exists for the sake of security, what or whose security is served? If secrecy works also to conceal the knowledge of the knowledge, as Miller suggests, then the action that is being performed in Pip's confession is a further securing of a secret that is something *other* than Pip's own self-swindling. The fact that he can evoke this "secret" only indirectly - through metaphor (notably of money) - reinforces the secretive and connotative nature of his narrative project. The revelation of self-knowledge in Pip's recollection of his deliberate "self-ignorance" desublimates the position of "knowingness" that Pip's narration has thus far invited the reader to take. The reader is compelled to re-assess the modes of knowingness, and to heed the warning that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick expresses in *Epistemology of the Closet* against the "dangerous consensus of knowingness about the genuinely *unknown*" (Sedgwick 45, her emphasis). The reader seems to be implicated then, not only in the connotative possibilities for the

unspeakable, “genuinely unknowable” secrets imbedded in Pip’s narrative, but in the economy of self-deception that the narrative manufactures. Elusiveness itself - of what can be said to be “known” - then, is thereby, uncannily, “secured.”

Repeatedly casting doubt on his own credibility by telling explicit, often highly imaginative lies and by establishing that he is “plagued” with hallucinations and self doubt, Pip foregrounds performatively his own narrative “unreliability.” When convenient or advantageous, the “child” narrator has a child’s mind, caught in a quandary, fraught with uncertainty and naive imaginings. Narrative signalings of his ignorance and his flustered state occur regularly in the early chapters of the text, compelling the reader to wonder what, or how much, Pip knows: when Pip is asked about the other convict by Magwitch, he timidly recalls “what I hardly knew I knew” (19); when he responds to Pumblechook’s demands for answers, he admits, “I was so aggravated that I almost doubt if I did know [the answers]” (65); when Pip describes the details of the “apparition” of the soldiers as they enter his sister’s house, he confesses that “all these things I saw without then knowing that I saw them, for I was in an agony of apprehension” (30); and, when he returns from his first visit with Miss Havisham, he fabricates an elaborate story - to which the narrating Pip draws our attention by parenthetically adding, “(I beg to observe that I think of myself with amazement, when I recall the lies I told on this occasion)” (66). As Elliot L. Gilbert observes, “throughout the novel, words are shown to be deceptive and imprisoning: susceptible to misunderstanding... misspelling and misconstructions [such] as Pip’s ‘BIEve ME inFxN’” (108). Such misconstructions convolute reading and meaning in the novel.¹ Gilbert notes that, in the novel generally, “language is unavoidably an instrument for manipulating reality” (108) and Pip’s tacit signalings and outright confessions of his

manipulating “sleight of hand” ensure that Pip’s story (in fact, insists that it) be read multifariously and with caution. The “agony of apprehension” which Pip claims to be in the throes of, for example, signifies and proffers the felicitous state of, at once, innocence and incapacitation in the face of authority (the law that apprehends) out of which manifold desires are played out and played up. The invocation of this anxious state aids in the alignment and production of the reader’s sympathies with the helpless child-subject against the law. But the confession of ignorance about “the things Pip saw” or “the things Pip knew” signals the narrative constructedness of the dramatization that is enacted, by both (or either) the retrospective Pip and/or Dickens. In other words, the story of the boy Pip is written by the adult hand - in the interest of *adult* narrative and reading pleasures. But the ambiguous nature of Pip’s narration provides the occasions in the text for the inscription and, in turn, the critical interpretation, of the ambiguous identifications which he forges and through (and against) which he is forged.²

*

Pip’s Story

The opening scene of *Great Expectations* sets in motion the text’s discourse of the individual’s coming-into-being as gendered subject marked for the symbolic order. The symbolic order, as Butler reminds us (re-phrasing Lacan), “is understood as the normative dimension of the constitution of the sexed subject within language. It consists in a series of demands, taboos, sanctions, injunctions, prohibitions, impossible

idealizations, and threats” (*Bodies*, 106). The church, the law, and the parent represent the main executors of such laws in *Great Expectations* but the relationship between these separate institutions and the individual subject is multi-directional and ambiguous. In the opening scene, Gothic elements preside, creating within the discourse of subjectivation the element of the terrifying unknown. As Sedgwick suggests, “one of the most distinctive Gothic tropes [is that of] ‘the unspeakable’” (*Between Men*, 94), that is, that which is unspeakable, illegible, or unthinkable within (and through) the legible and legal normative scheme of the symbolic. A remote graveyard, a ghost-like presence, a murderous-looking criminal, pervasive darkness, and an overwhelming sense of isolation - the essence of the Gothic “unspeakable” - produce and inform Pip’s first sense of the “identity of things” (1). Where we meet “the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry” (2) who is Pip seems, at first, an inhospitable world shrouded in a cold veil of mist. The marsh-mist that symbolizes the social, psychological and sexual geography is represented metonymically - and colloquially - as the “meshes” (12) of Pip’s guilt-ridden, post-lapsarian consciousness.³ “Pip,” by virtue of the “seed”- reference in his name, a name he has given himself as though he were the second Adam, appears at first as a Christ-figure. In this church-yard “wilderness,” Pip is set upon a “stone,” he produces “bread” and his body is about to become food (2). But the exegesis of this small seed as the Christ-figure is immediately thwarted by a terrible voice, rising it seems, “up from the grave” (2) itself, which promptly christens him the “little devil” (2). Turned over and over and, in turn, with the institution of the church figuratively turned “head over heels” (15), Pip finds himself (and his story) suddenly in an inverted symbolic world.

The beginning of Pip’s narrative, which represents his beginning as a subject

is, as many critics have noted,⁴ an enactment of the primal scene which is, through the authority of the name of the father, a symbolic set of gendered codifications. Pip comes to “know” his parents as they “lie together” in their grave but he does so only through the words on the tombstone, the meaning of which he cannot comprehend. However, Pip’s act of self-naming and the implicit rejection of his patrimony, as Brooks points out, “already subverts whatever authority could be found in the text of the tombstones” (115). The parents’ respective gender assignments and sexual positions are, however, made clear by the inscription on the tombstones: the mother as “Also Georgiana Wife of *the Above*” (1, my emphasis) in relation to the father above. Pip later recognizes the fuller meaning of these symbolic positions (here in the most religious sense) as problematic, for he admits that he has interpreted “‘Above’ as a complimentary reference to [his] father’s exaltation to a better world; and [he continues] if any one of my deceased relations had been referred to as ‘Below’, I have no doubt I should have formed the worst opinions of that member of the family” (41). According to the symbolic structure he invokes, Pip may have more reason for forming the worst opinion of himself in the sexual (and scriptural) assignment that the convict Magwitch forces on him immediately following this primal scene. Pip is physically overpowered and placed in the “Below” position of the (sexually disempowered) female by the convict⁵ and symbolically forced into a sexually and morally transgressive position. As we will see through the connotative operations that the narrative voice deploys, this opening, violent scene is not only criminal, but homoerotic and cannibalistic; more to the point, it is homoeroticized and cannibalisticized - that is, *made so* by the narrative hand. Pip is planted and repeatedly tilted up and down on the phallicized tombstone and threatened to have his “fat cheeks” eaten (2) by the ghost-like,

father-like figure of Magwitch. Pip explains how this figure “took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could hold me, so that his eyes looked most *powerfully down* into mine, and mine looked most *helplessly up* into his” (3, my emphasis). After a series of questions, Pip tells us, the convict “tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger” (3). Yet, the interpretative interjections Pip supplies to “knowingly” explain the convict’s motivation, “so that...” and “so as to...” alerts the reader to the control of the narrative hand. Repetition, used overtly as a literary strategy in the next paragraph, also implicates that writing hand:

“You get me a file.” *He tilted me again.* “And you get me wittles.”

He tilted me again. “You bring ‘em both to me.” *He tilted me*

again. “Or I’ll have your heart and liver out.” *He tilted me again*

(3, my emphasis).

The repeated act of aggression to which the poor “helpless” Pip is subjected by Magwitch is, ostensibly, Magwitch’s strategy for procuring bodily sustenance. But the dramatization effected through the repetition of *naming* this repeated act tells us about something more than Magwitch’s hunger. The semiotic itself speaks Pip’s narrative desire to repeat the telling of the act. It also implicitly tells a story about the social or cultural exigencies which make necessary and possible the codification of that desire. Repetition always functions to direct the reader’s attention to that which it names and repeats but, in doing so, it cannot escape directing attention to its own function and, in turn, to the symbolic spiral of language which produces (and, as Butler suggests, is itself thereby (re)produced by) the writing/speaking subject. Repetition is required of the narrative to establish a set of codes through which the reader can come to have any understanding at all of the desires

that are not (and cannot be) specifically named. The sublimation of such desires is therefore sustained. Magwitch's repeated "tilting" of him makes Pip "so giddy that [he] clung to him with both hands" (3) then Magwitch "gave [him] a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the church [once more] jumped over its own weather-cock" (3-4). Finally, Magwitch is said to allude threateningly to a "young man" who, by the alluring description the narrative supplies, epitomizes the ravishing, devouring, terrifying beast:

That young man has a secret way pecooliar to himself of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open... I find it wery hard to hold that young man off of your inside.

(4)

Pip's account of the convict's threat is a dramatization of his worst nightmare but at the same time, and perhaps more significantly, his "worst" *fantasy*. Fulfilling the promise made by the Gothic ambient, it captures the essence of the "terrifying unknown," the "unspeakable" and, more importantly, the most secret fears (and feared secrets) about oneself. The increasing penetrative specificity as the passage proceeds marks the secret as sexual. As Sedgwick maintains, the Gothic tradition carries connotative associations with, among other things, "secrets of sexuality... [and] practices that run counter to the official [heterosexual, conventional] version" (*Between Men*, 90). It also has "close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality" (91), signaled in this part of Pip's story by

the “getting at the boy’s inside,” the “tearing him open” and the peculiar adverbial choice for this action, “softly.” As well, the Gothic invokes the oedipal family in relation to “absolutes of license and prohibition... a preoccupation with possibilities of incest; a fascinated proscription of sexual activity; an atmosphere dominated by the threat of violence between generations” (Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 91). In short, it conveys all that is most feared and despised within its culture and is often inscribed, as it is in *Great Expectations* and especially in the above passage, within the space of “the secret.”⁶ The most deeply imbedded content which inhabits the space of the secret represents that which is the most socially and epistemologically unthinkable and feared: the penetration of the male subject.

The “secret” in this passage is invoked through the lingering progression of the syntax and connotative excesses of its diction. Attention is drawn to the importance of the linguistic signifier in the previous paragraph; Magwitch proceeds with “these fearful terms,” and instructs Pip “never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign... or go from my words” and, for good measure, tells him that “that young man hears the words I speak” (4). The connotative force of language and the power of the “secret” (“never dare to say”) are bound up in the symbolic law which compels the one and prevents the unveiling of the other. Even in this primeval setting, Pip is forced to bind himself to the terms presented by the law of the father by taking an oath, “Say, Lord strike you dead if you don’t!” (4). The “pecooliar way” of the “young man” is made more “peculiar” by the fact that the object of his “getting” is not just the boy’s “heart” or “liver” but the “boy” himself, suggesting that the heart and liver of the boy do not serve synecdochally *as* the boy, that the “boy” is, essentially, something, *somewhere*, else. While the image of invasion and

penetration of this “essence of boy” in getting to his “inside” is central to the horror effected by “these fearful terms,” the “secret way” of getting at the victim provokes the most fear and horror and desire in the imagination of the reader (and writer) of such terms, such text. The contingency effected by the repetition of phrases beginning with “may...” (“a boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed...”) and the “hold[ing] back [of] that young man” ensure, and build the tension for, the perpetual deferral of the “secret way” becoming “known.” The contingent phrases also closet the boy behind locked doors, under the covers, in bed, in the cover of safety, comfort and warmth and build up and linger toward the anticipated moment in which the young man “will *softly* creep and creep his way *to him*” (my emphasis). When Magwitch expresses the wish to be “a frog. Or a eel!” (4) a few lines further on, the image of the fear-instilling, phallicized young man that softly creeps and creeps like a sub-human creature returns. Thus, Magwitch’s role in the “horror” story is imbricated in that of the “young man” at the center of that story who is, within Pip’s narrative, Magwitch’s “creation.” Pip’s imaginative “re”-creation of that story implicitly and paranoically produces his own role, within the Gothic tradition, as one in which he “not only is persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to and often under the compulsion of, another male” (Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 91). The narrative builds up to the climactic rupture in which this same young man will finally “tear him open,” conveying the extremity of pain and fear while sublimating a desiring narrative *will* to such pain and fear.

Fundamental to this paradox, and central to the literary implement Sedgwick calls the “paranoid Gothic” - and which she specifically identifies with Dickens and the “image of male rape” (*Between Men*, 193) - is the symbolic operation of not just

homoeroticism, but homophobia. If the space of “the secret” is essentially a space of suspicion or fear that is negotiated around the desire or power inherent in its value *as* a secret, and if that space is a homosexual(ized) one, it follows that the politic being inscribed is potentially both homoerotic *and* homophobic. That Pip’s encounter with Magwitch represents something other than the materialization of his worst nightmare is made evident in this first chapter and is later confirmed through the ironic narrative turn whereby Magwitch comes, finally, to represent the literal “materialization” of all that Pip desires - the wealth of all of his “great expectations.” Even when those expectations are removed, Magwitch comes to represent Pip’s closest acquisition of love and altruism in the novel. The fear and disgust with which Pip associates with Magwitch are, from the beginning, accompanied by something else; for example, in the evening following the “encounter” discussed above, Pip finds himself imagining, “What if the young man who was with so much difficulty restrained from imbruing his hands in me, should [come for him]... tonight instead of tomorrow” (11). Pip’s response to this thought, “If ever anybody’s hair stood on end with terror, mine must have done so then” (11) is significantly and comically qualified by his next response, “But, perhaps, nobody’s ever did?” (11). The *actual* threat that the young man or Magwitch poses is, in the question posed, playfully reduced. Similarly, when Pip ponders the thought that “few people know what secrecy there is in the young, under terror” (13), he adds: “no matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror” (13), implying that his own terror has been less than reasonable or exaggerated. Rather than merely the “mortal terror” with which he claims to be instilled by Magwitch,⁷ Pip also feels a genuine compassion for and devotion to this fellow evildoer whom he affectionately deems “my fugitive friend” (31) and “my convict” (35). Out

on the marshes, he is made to swear to supply Magwitch with “wittles” and promises to bring him “what broken bits of food [he] could” (4). Instead, he delivers “some bread, some rind of cheese, about half a jar of mincemeat... some brandy... a meatbone... and a beautiful round compact pork pie” (14), a formidable Christmas dinner. While constructing his role as fulfilling the promise only out of fear for his life and playing up the horror that Magwitch is said to inspire in him, Pip is *not* very afraid. Throughout the exchange with Magwitch, Pip manages to converse with surprising competence with him. Rather than run off at the first opportunity Magwitch provides (as a seven year old “dreadfully frightened” boy might be expected to do), he watches his assailant with interest. Lingered in a curious state of mind, he wonders, among other things, whether the cattle share his imaginings about Magwitch being a pirate about to hook himself up on the gibbet (5). The overall mood in the first chapter is one of a strange mixture of horror and comic relief.⁸ In fact, the humour woven through the text as a whole (characteristic of Dickens) adds an entertainment value to the narrative voice which renders more innocuous and perhaps more entertaining the loss of expectations that makes up the ostensible story in the novel. Thus, Pip’s ultimate and paradoxical construction of Magwitch as both a figure of his greatest fear and his greatest source of wealth and love, and his implicit deconstruction of his own fears (of, for example, the “young man”), effectively collapses the binary between fear and desire.

Gendering Expectations

As Judith Butler suggests, gendering is contemporaneous with coming into

being as a subject (Butler, *Bodies*, 7); thus, Pip is marked for “maleness” as Pip is marked for subjectivation to his symbolic world. The ways in which he fails to meet this identification, unless hidden (not *from* the symbolic but as a part of the symbolic), are pathologized as transgression or stigmatization, by the world within and outside the text. Mrs. Joe’s scornful derision of Joe’s lack of (manly) assertiveness exemplifies the cultural codings through which such gendering is repeatedly secured and problematized. The phallic power Mrs. Joe yields, emblemized as it is by the whipping cane she uses on both Pip and Joe (curiously deemed “Tickler”) is undermined by her implicit recognition of its misplacement in her - a woman’s - hands. Physical violence is pervasive in *Great Expectations* and is markedly symptomatic of the gendering structures that preside in Pip’s world. Phallic power is violent power violently acquired. Represented by the “Law of England” which, at the end of the novel, is about to put to death its “two-and-thirty” convicts who are “formally doomed” to public hanging (452) and symbolized in its constant threat by the gibbets by which corpses are hung along the river as spectacles of criminality and transgression, power over the body imminently presents itself as a power that is utterly unambiguous. Imprisonment, whipping and capital punishment act as its most powerful and undeniably *present* mechanisms of control. However, these mechanisms function primarily as signifiers of threat within the domain of the higher, symbolic order. The logic of a law which enforces (often physical) submission to its power within a matrix of powers whose social exigencies demand that the male half of its membership resist (or abstain from), *submission* to the phallus, and which, by the logic of patriarchy, *itself* holds the phallic power that seems to threaten it, is a logic caught in a curious and ironic double bind. The interplay of force and voluntarism in each of the two

sets of laws produces its inevitable identificatory extremes: sadists and masochists. In *Great Expectations* however, as Cohen notes, “the *narration* of the [physically violent] battles consistently provides the occasion for the playing out of erotic contact, both homo- and heterosexual, between combatants” (233). As Pip’s own story progresses, it becomes more and more clear that violence, gender, and sex are, for him, inextricably linked.

The horrific details of Pip’s initial encounter with Magwitch, as I have argued, principally represent the narrative performance of Pip’s worst fantasy and most unspeakable desire. Pip is initially cast (or initially casts himself) in the submissive female position in relation to that of the phallic male. In fact, the progression of the plot toward his “expectations” is simultaneous with the progression of Pip’s sexual identity in his attempt to meet the symbolic gendering expectations. Pip’s early passive and masochistic identifications have to be resisted and abstained from in order to meet these latter expectations. Male masochism, as Carol Siegel notes, “is a model of transgression, whose willing inversion of patriarchal values, including a jubilant offering up of the self, could unsettle the dominant discourse on masculinity” (2). Ironically, the moral thread through *Great Expectations* follows Pip’s development as a more *selfless* human being, a moral maturation that seems to work against the masculine role prescribed by the novel’s symbolic world. Siegel maintains that “the literary figure of the male masochist comes to us through the Victorian novel and the language of Freudianism, which have worked together to contain his rebellion within a conservative power structure” (Siegel 2). Certainly the function of the representation of transgression is to mark out the boundaries of intelligibility within which a subject can be said to reside or exist at all. The masochistic performative “underside” of Pip’s story challenges the intelligibility of masculinity itself

within mid-century England's dominant culture. If we consider the bulk of what Steven Marcus in *The Other Victorians* calls "flagellation literature" in which the masochistic ritual is predominantly performed *by* a (female) dominatrix *on* a male, we can see how "intelligibilities" of particular roles might be "otherwise" inscribed into the symbolic order. That they are *not*, represents not (or not just) a suppressive mechanism at work but a mechanism by which "otherness" can sustain the particular linguistic valorization it acquires through the sign of transgression. Pip's masochism is held within the codes and confines of the "secret" in the effort to work the discursive miracle of simultaneously keeping and giving the secret away, while at the same time fulfilling the Victorian reader's (normalized) expectations.

The plotting of Pip's heterosexual normalization represents a channeling in a direction which can be defined or identified only in relation to a channeling in another direction - in keeping with the Lacanian and Saussurean theoretical projects. At the core of the normativizing operation lies the often obscured but elementary function of *choice* - including, oxymoronically, *enforced* choice. Estella, representing the heterosexual "choice" for Pip, is not only *not* Biddy - but *not* Herbert. Pip is presented with the conventional romance plot choices in the text which include the idealized chivalric courtship with Estella, the "princess," and the practical (and maternal) alternative with Biddy. In his initial "choice" of Estella, Pip opts for the inherently masochistic and archaic role of the chivalric, Petrarchan lover destined to "do all the shining deeds of the young knight of romance" (228) before whom he must humbly bow but whom he must never attain.⁹ That this "choice" and the psychological torture resulting from that choice is literally produced at the deliberate, scheming hands of Miss Havisham, illustrates the

normative mechanisms by which (Pip's) desire is constructed.

As it materializes in the text, however, Pip's most consistently physical, happy and *eroticized* relationship is, in fact, with Herbert. Pip meets Herbert in the same unexpected manner in which he encounters Magwitch, which is initiated through a physical and sexualized confrontation and results in a most caring and committed relationship. The sexual connotations surrounding the over-all relationship between Pip and Herbert constitute a sub-text, a textual underground, that is imbedded in the secret and played out through the strategies of narrative performance. In particular, these connotations occupy the sanctioned place of "the inexplicable." In the initial (and unexpected) meeting between Pip and Herbert, a battle scene ensues, shrouded in confusion which is never cleared up or accounted for in the text. As in the opening scene with Magwitch, Herbert seems to appear out of nowhere and Pip is immediately faced with threats to his bodily person, here in the explicit call to physically fight. It is Pip's first visit to Satis House and "the pale young gentleman" (88) who suddenly appears beside him inexplicably desires physical combat with him. Pip's immediate response is to say, "What could I do but follow him?" (88) although his retrospective voice interjects with an acknowledgment of the unlikelihood of this response by admitting, "I have often asked myself the question since" (88). Yet that voice persists with the question, "what else could I do?" (88) and then proceeds with an explanation which implicitly tries to explain (in anticipation of the reader's perplexity) the strange scenario that ensues. Pip adopts the narrative voice of the "helpless" child in a quandary over this odd circumstance as though he were back on the marsh with Magwitch. The latter part of the explanation itself, that, as Pip says, "I was so astonished that I followed where he led, as if I had been under a spell" (88), effectively undermines the

efforts to rationalize Pip's participation. The encounter, which soon becomes definitively homoerotic, fittingly takes place in a carefully chosen "retired nook of the garden formed by the junction of two walls and screened by some rubbish" (89), conveying its closetedness and its association with baseness. Under the spell of Herbert's "unparalleled" manner, Pip tells us he feels "helpless" and "secretly afraid of him" as Herbert "danc[es] backwards and forwards" in an impressive show of "dexter[ity]" (89). The contest begins with Herbert clapping, "daintily" flinging his leg behind him and, with a "bull-like proceeding," having his head "butted into [Pip's] stomach" (89). Pip strikes out at this queer "dainty bull" but, as both boys have "denuded for battle," Pip notices Herbert "eyeing [his] anatomy *as if* he were minutely choosing his bone" (89, my emphasis). As we have seen in other instances, his writing hand is implicated in the "knowingness" about his "opponent's" desire for Pip's bodily substance. The transgression figured in the taboos of cannibalism and homosexuality implicitly written into this scene belongs to the narrative voice. The end of the scene, in which it is Herbert who gets "gored" (92) rather than Pip, figures forth this bizarre phallic contest as Pip's victory - to his utter dismay.

Shocked by his own capacity for violent action, Pip attempts a narrative apology for his part in the duel. "I go so far [he says,] as to hope that I regarded myself while dressing as a species of savage young wolf, or other wild beast" (90), which "hope" suggests that, in fact, he did no such thing. The hyperbolic guilt he expresses for his perceived lack of civility or his animalistic behaviour toward Herbert serves two purposes: it provides a new by-now-typical fantasy of punishment for his sins (which he elaborately indulges in on the next page) and it provides an opportunity for his rejection of the masculine role of the "wild beast." He is, nevertheless, for the moment, involuntarily

installed in that role, for his phallic “prowess” is immediately inscribed into the heterosexual courtly romance plot by Estella. When Pip returns to Estella in the “*court-yard*” (90, my emphasis), he is awarded for his display of manliness - which she has “secretly” watched - with the humble honour of kissing the “princess’s” cheek.

The precipitative violence and sustained erotic language in this battle scene links Pip’s first encounter with Magwitch in the way in which normative sexual inscriptions are laid out. The two scenes are marked and linked connotatively by violent, homoerotic and cannibalistic imagery. The phrasing of certain lines, such as the description of Herbert coming back “up again and again and again” (90) after being hit by Pip, mimics that of Pip on the marshes being “tilted again... and again... and again” (3) by Magwitch. Such mimesis and the similarities in the situations in which Pip “finds himself” effect a return of the repressed in the plot. Although still in the playful and jovial narrative mode (and one that tempts a Freudian “knowingness”), Pip seems also to be signaling the more serious aspect of his tales of violence. Not only a “progressive” (if tentative) step into the symbolic masculine role (in that he physically pummels Herbert), Pip’s battle scene with Herbert re-enacts the trauma of violence that he has been subjected to by Magwitch. This return exemplifies Freud’s work on “the compulsion to repeat... past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 603), although the narration of the story itself constitutes pleasure. Cathy Caruth’s reformulation of Freud’s theory on trauma and repression¹⁰ is yet more productive in analyzing Pip’s returns, specifically with respect to the effects and complications of narratives of trauma whereby the protagonist is caught in a “commonly occurring violence” (6). As Caruth points out, such trauma narratives are not just about the violence of the traumatic

experience; they “also convey the impact of its very incomprehensibility” (6). The narrative element of incomprehensibility that Pip employs informs predominantly the two descriptions of Pip’s unexpected and violent confrontations with a stranger, a male *unknown*. It gestures toward what Caruth calls “the complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (3); in other words, the narrative seems to be compelled by a (not quite realized) historical real but through a psychically-necessary (yet *desiring*) strategy of self-ignorance or repression. As Caruth explains, “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). The haunting ambient of Gothic inexplicability, horror and secret sexuality that permeates the two, paralleled scenes effects the connotative condition necessary for Pip (and the reader) to both “know” and “not *quite* know” what is going on. As it does in much of the novel, violence plays a key role: it represents the inexplicable and unexpected explosion of the repressed energy that, as Reed suggests, “bring[s] to the surface hidden emotional and sexual forces” (670). Thus, the text performatively compresses into intricately-knitted, often obscured layers the complex relations between violence, trauma, identity and sexuality but *always* through narrative strategies that pleasurably compel and problematize its telling.

The repetition signaled in Pip’s exercise of gendering order (or ordered gendering) in the scenes with Magwitch and Herbert reflects the mechanism through which desires and identifications (indeed, bodies) are repeatedly introduced and *produced* in the text. Sex, as Butler maintains, “is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization

through a forcible reiteration of those norms” (Butler, *Bodies*, 1-2). The reiteration of gendered identification is in full operation in Miss Havisham’s repeated command to Pip to fall in love with Estella. She tells him, “Love her, love her, love her!” a triple command which is repeated *four* times in the text (235-6, 239). The effect of the imperative to “love” is not as immediate as it seems, for Miss Havisham has from Pip’s first visit requisitioned Pip’s “love” for Estella, but the way in which that effect takes hold is made explicit. As Pip tells us,

far into the night, Miss Havisham’s words, “Love her, love her, love her!” sounded in my ears. I adapted them for my own repetition, and said to my pillow, “I love her, I love her, I love her!” hundreds of times. (239)

Before we can be entirely convinced of the performative and reiterative wonders that Miss Havisham’s demand and the workings of repetition produce *or* that Pip actually *does* “love her,” the (retrospective, narrating) Pip interjects with a skeptical assessment of his “love.” He knowingly says, “Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions” (239). The disparate convictions held between the younger and the older Pip cast doubt on the effectiveness of the performative operations in question, or rather, confirm Butler’s assertion that such “materialization [or sexual identification] is never quite complete” (Butler, *Bodies*, 2). Nevertheless, Pip’s “love” for Estella eventually does materialize, but it does so precisely in the masochistic way that both he and Miss Havisham have intended. Pip’s “love” for Estella is effectively summed up in the following declaration:

I never had one hour’s *happiness* in her society, and yet my mind all round the four-and-twenty hours was harping on the *happiness* of

having her with me unto death. (297, my emphasis)

Pip's acquisition of happiness through *not*-happiness, or gain through loss, pleasure through pain, attests to his masochistic motivations for pursuing Estella. Estella's consistent sadistic treatment of him provides the greatest lure for his affections. This treatment begins with the moment in which, as Pip tells us, "she slapped my face with such force as she had" (80) in response to his failure to recognize her "insulting" nature (80). Her brutal treatment through the course of their relationship proves effective in producing the martyr of love that has long been Miss Havisham's design for him. In a long-awaited and emphatic declaration of his "love" (appropriately just after the moment when she announces that she will marry Drummle), he tells her, "You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here... you cannot choose but remain part of my character" (358). The dramatic mode and literary connection through which this proclamation is delivered sustains and fulfills Pip's greatest expectations for his relationship with Estella in its "*ecstasy* [and "*rhapsody*"] of unhappiness" (359). Fulfillment of the desire she represents for him culminates, then, precisely at the moment of confirmed un-fulfillment. This "disappointment," however, seems to represent the culmination of every line Pip has *written* and machinated toward in his story thus far.

If one of Pip's "secrets" is his profound proclivity for his own victimization and suffering which he masks in part as a conventional love-story gone awry, then the helpless and physically abused-boy story to which we are introduced in the first few chapters has its own double-function. Jeffrey Berman's observation that "Pip is one of the earliest abused children in literature, and his story demonstrates the dynamics of child abuse"

(125), addresses unimpeachably the surface story that contributes to the Dickensian moral. This story is no less of a morally and socially motivated explication of child abuse, however, if it also serves as a veil for obscuring something more “secret.” If all secrets yearn (or *itch*) to be told, and secrets work in the text to tantalize (or *tickle*) the reader’s imagination, then it is not surprising that “Tickler,” the custom-made piece of cane Mrs. Joe wields to beat Pip (and Joe), wields significantly more symbolic force than it at first appears. The irony and the language of personification with which Pip acquaints us with Tickler and, not “its” but “*his*” (8, my emphasis) intimate acquaintance with Pip’s “tickled frame” (7), does more than deal with the subject of child abuse. It performs the temporary and psychologically necessary elision of that subject in favour of the (adult) psycho-sexual narrative of sadomasochism. Pain, pleasure, mastery and passivity intricately interline the subject of sadomasochism in a sexual “mesh” whose linguistic signifiers, through the necessary effectiveness of the more deeply embedded secret, are very, very elusive.

A boy is being beaten...

In order to read this deeper, darker secret of *Great Expectations*, I want to turn to Steven Marcus’ work in *The Other Victorians* on flagellation literature as it is exemplified by the anonymous writing of *My Secret Life*. Some of the material that Marcus analyzes is highly illicit and explicit; yet, I am convinced that Pip’s fantasies of violence are the more extreme of the two. In the flagellation scenes which Marcus analyzes, “the figure of the female who is doing the whipping is... almost always a surrogate for the mother... the violent phallic mother [who, in turn] is a representation of

a male person, of a father” (258). Pip’s narrative supplies all of the details that parallel this dynamic, for example, in Mrs. Joe’s phallicized, surrogate-mother role. Marcus goes on to note that “the sexual identity of the figure being beaten is remarkably labile. Sometimes he is represented as a boy, sometimes as a girl... [yet] is originally, finally, and always a boy” (259-60), that is, within a nineteenth century literary context. Pip repeatedly implicitly characterizes himself as feminine, but other characters in the text are made out to notice this “complication” in him as well. Another of the passages belonging to the slippery category of “the inexplicable,” and which carries queer connotations for Pip’s sexual identity, is the following dialogue between Mr. Wopsle and Mr. Hubble:

“What is detestable in a pig is more detestable in a boy.”

“Or girl,” suggested Mr. Hubble.

“Of course, or girl, Mr. Hubble,” assented Mr. Wopsle, rather irritably, “but there is no girl present.” (25).

Only Pip is present and he is “the subject” (24) of the conversation. It is the Christmas party and the guests, sadistically enjoying an exaggerated and critical analysis of Pip’s “form,” find him to pose a taxonomic problem as to his animal and his gender. The extended dialogue around the table has Pip silenced and humiliated by the offerings of Pip’s body to the “market,” the butcher having him “*whipped* under his left arm, and with his right he would have *tucked up his frock to get a penknife* from out of his waistcoat-pocket, and he would have shed [Pip’s] blood and had [his] life” (25-6, my emphasis). While the force of the adult’s ironic threats in this dialogue is characterized by brutality, that force is carried *through the diction* - which *Pip* supplies. The narrative control is invoked and punctuated through the use and naming of the parenthetical interjection,

“(‘You listen to this,’ said my sister to me, in a severe parenthesis)” (25). Furthermore, the descriptive resemblance to the scene with the convict (in which threats to cut Pip’s throat, eat his cheeks, get at his heart and liver, and have his life, are explicitly named) implicates the writing hand in the violating, “girling,” disempowering (and disemboweling) subjectivation that the scene describes. Marcus’ acute Freudian and proto-queer final analysis of the dynamics of wilful subjection to “the rod” and other corporal punishments is particularly enlightening for the analysis of Pip’s sexual identities. As Marcus maintains,

the heterosexual relation has been abandoned and a homosexual one substituted for it - the little boy has transformed himself into a girl. Yet this transformation is itself both a defense against and a disavowal of the fantasy it is simultaneously expressing. That fantasy is a homosexual one: a little boy is being beaten - that is, loved - by another man. (260)

The hyperbolic dominance scene in Pip’s first “identity of things” with Magwitch in which Pip, as “autobiographer” writes himself into the passive, feminine sexual role and in which the scene establishes Pip’s love for bondage, and carries through to (and culminates at) the end of the novel, a *love bond* between the two men. Amorous connotations imbue the scene in which Magwitch (now Provis) finally comes forth as Pip’s benefactor, a moment which Pip calls “the turning point in my life” (295):

He came back to where I stood, and again held out both his hands... I reluctantly gave him my hands. He grasped them heartily, raised them to his lips, kissed them, and still held them... [Soon after] he

caught me, drew me to the sofa, put me against the cushions, and bent on one knee before me, bringing the face that I now well remembered, and that I shuddered at, very near to mine. (312... 315)

Although Pip is still repulsed at the criminal, vulgar and sexual tenor that Magwitch embodies, it is not long before he discovers in himself a passionate willingness to do anything to help him. Still the martyr, Pip readily abandons all of his own hopes and expectations in the exigency of the threat to Magwitch's health and safety. Magwitch's eventual death symbolizes a genuine resolution to their plot, an end to Magwitch's role in the recurring cycle of traumatic moments that Pip plots through from the opening pages of the novel.

Although Pip's first "identity of things" is informed by his initial encounter with Magwitch, it is not Magwitch who initiates Pip into a world of violence, but Mrs. Joe. Her practice of bringing him up "by hand" or by implementing "Tickler" forces its way into many of the layers of repressed plots in Pip's story, informing his secrets and anxieties about his gender, sexuality, identities and proclivities. The fact that Pip's first "identity of things" begins with his traumatic moment with Magwitch rather than with Mrs. Joe's "rampages" which (in Pip's history) chronologically precede that moment, hints at the psychological weight these rampages hold for him.¹¹ While a resolution with Magwitch is reached through Magwitch's death, it is only marginally so with Mrs. Joe, whose violent treatment of Pip is punished obliquely - through the complex figure of *Orlick*. Responsible for her death, Orlick inherits the role of violent perpetrator to Pip that Mrs. Joe represents. Orlick has been identified convincingly by a number of critics as Pip's figurative double¹² and his menacing presence parallels that of Magwitch with whom Pip also identifies.

Associated with vulgarity, slovenliness, criminality and sexual deviance, Orlick is easily imagined to signify Pip's worst ("unknown") conception of himself - his most secret, bestial and vengeful self. Julian Moynahan suggests that Pip's most aggressive and ambitious characteristics are "coalesced and disguised in the figure of Orlick" (69) and that "Orlick acts merely as Pip's punitive instrument or weapon" (72); thus, Orlick holds *Pip* responsible for Mrs. Joe's beating and her death. The final episode of physical violence that Pip experiences, the encounter between Pip and Orlick, is a final confrontation with his violent past, a final layer of the repressed traumatic narrative.

The thread of masochism in Pip's story and his identification with Orlick make it difficult to distinguish the punishment Pip receives at the hands of Orlick from self-punishment; and that seems to be finally the point. The hand that writes his perpetrator's hand punishing him is always a hand that must identify at least in part with both positions. Pip constructs himself (both horrifyingly and playfully) as an innocent victim to Magwitch on the marshes, but in the last encounter with Orlick, he carelessly (or, rather, quite subconsciously) puts himself into the hands of his assailant. He has been directed (by whom he does not "know") through "a very dirty letter, though not ill-written" (413) to come alone, in the dark, to the sluice-house, at the limekiln, back on the marshes. This time he does not claim to be "under a spell" as he does when he follows Herbert into battle, in part because he is now an adult. But his rationalization for his compliance to the letter - the hope of obtaining some information regarding Provis - is insufficient for such a risk, almost incredible. What is effected through such (narrative) insufficiency is a particular *will* to the repressed, to its return. The connection in the narrative between this scene and the first in the novel (with Magwitch) is made explicit. Both scenes occur on the marshes,

the site of Pip's identificatory beginnings: the first at the old battery, the second at the limekiln. The space between them, Pip tells us, is "miles apart, so that if a light had been burning at each point... there would have been a long strip of the blank horizon between the two bright specks" (416). Pip highlights these two points in his story because they represent the first and last points in the narrative of the traumatic memories that supply the main energy and substance for his story. Recalling that trauma is "locatable not in one moment alone but in the relation between two moments" (Caruth 133), the space between these two points emblemizes the temporal and spatial plotting in the novel; the "blank horizon" that separates them in the story, the unfulfillment of all of Pip's great expectations. Pip seems to have gained little distance, then, in his plotting to transcend his beginnings.

Ostensibly staged by Orlick, Pip is once more "unexpectedly" captured and held powerless at the peril of an abusive and unpredictable criminal. The eerie, Gothic aura that pervades the opening scene with Magwitch returns, like Pip's trauma, to haunt him in this final confrontation. Isolation, darkness and "the vapour of the kiln [that] crept in a ghostly way towards [Pip]" (418) portend a grave and ominous event. Like Magwitch's "terrible voice" that seems to come out of the graves at the old battery and threatens to "cut [Pip's] throat" and "have his life," the voice of Orlick, who soon *actually* has Pip by the throat, caught in a noose, cries out in the darkened sluice-house, "Now... I've got you" (418). This vulgar, repulsive Orlick whose name (meaning "mouth") epitomizes the devouring, perverse cannibal, aims, he tells Pip, "to have [his] life!" (420). Pip explains how Orlick "leaned forward staring at me, slowly unclenched his hand and drew it across his mouth as if his mouth watered for me" (420). Orlick's imagined appetite

for Pip's body recalls the cannibalistic horror that Pip imagines in Magwitch's threat to eat his "fat cheeks" (3) and Herbert's "eyeing his anatomy as if he were minutely choosing his bone" (89). The "dog eat dog" world that Pip repetitively presents is pronounced by the frequency of animal names given him and other aggressors (and *transgressors*) by himself and by others: "wolf," "dog," "tiger," "savage" and "beast" in all three of these scenes (chs. 1, 11, 53). In this final scene, the bodily contact between the two men, Orlick and Pip, thematically binds the violence, passion and passivity that bounds and torments Pip and continues to spur his narrative:

Sometimes a strong man's hand, sometimes a strong man's breast,
was set against my mouth to deaden my cries, and with a hot breath
always close to me, I struggled ineffectually in the dark, while I was
fastened to the wall. (418)

The focus on Pip's own mouth, on his voice, that Orlick's "strong man's" hand and breast attempts to suppress, pinpoints and emphasizes Pip's struggle as more than a bodily one. It is a *voice* that Pip requires to save his life - physically, he is utterly imprisoned. Mingled and tinged with the hot breath from Orlick's own mouth, Pip's narrative voice is threatened to be consumed by this violent man (his alter-ego) who intends to have his dead body consumed by the flames of the lime-kiln. His efforts to return to and reclaim the trauma of his past through his narrative voice are thus figuratively held back by Pip's unconscious self who wants only revenge for the torment Pip's conscious self has caused him. Pip's burnt arm is in excruciating pain; he tells us that it "felt as if, having been burnt before, it were now being boiled" (418). His pain both threatens to end and further compels the life-force of the narrative hand that depicts this sado-masochistic scenario. Confined by the

strong man's body in this hot, dark, closet-like space where their "history" will be laid out in a dialogue of animal revenge, murder and cannibalism, Pip can only psychologically and symbolically win this struggle. Through his resolution not to act as the passive recipient of Orlick's sadistic intention, to resist him to the end, a "resolution [that, he tells us,] did not desert me, for, without uttering one vain word of appeal to him, I shouted out with all my might, and struggled with all my might" (424), Pip finally puts a clear, strong voice to his own victimization. It saves his life - and promises an end to his *narrative* life. In *this* battle, rather than abandon himself to his "helpless" narrative voice whereby he succumbs to some kind of "agony of apprehension," Pip restrains the narrative play of humour and extended homoerotic and cannibalistic imagery characteristic of his other battle scenes. The scene is made significantly more literal than the other scenes of violence, the threat of death made real. The waning of the narrative performance signals the close of the narrative itself, suggesting the significance such performance plays in Pip's story. The "all I have left to tell" that Pip refers to now, comprises the wrapping up of the story's plots. Having symbolically returned to the scene of the grave (for, in this scene, Pip tells us how "I felt that I had come to the brink of my grave" (420)), Pip has returned once more to his beginnings as a subject and survived for the last time the trauma that acts as the driving force against his life but which, ironically, has also made his life "narrativizable."

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As I have argued, Pip's writing hand is implicated over and over in the experiences of violence and trauma in the novel by the way in which he narratively performs his own will and desire in (and subjection to) the "re-telling" of those experiences. But the narration of, and the narrative performance around, such violence,

explores the pleasures of exploring the narrator's own psychic archaeology, of turning that pain over and over. If such exploration is sadistic or masochistic itself, it is nevertheless in Pip's own narrative hands and constructed on his own narrative terms; it is he who has pleasurable *mastery over* his own sadistically- and masochistically-driven plot, as much so as the anonymous author of the sado-masochistic rituals in *My Secret Life*. The paradigmatic parallels between the sexual exposition of a text such as *My Secret Life* and the narrative of Dickens' text can be explicated through the function of transgressive fantasy. The invention of a fiction for the purpose of the tantalizing fantasy of pleasure and pain, pleasure in pain, is no less the ostensible aim of both projects for their difference in legitimation, audience or forms of expression. In fact, the two texts directly mirror one another in the role that the secret plays in each. To the degree that the "illegitimate" but sexually explicit texts must be secreted underground for "publication," the "legitimate," above-ground texts of the Dickensian sort must force its sexual and transgressive material into the underground of the text itself, into the secret, the repressed. It is to the infinite "knowing" pleasure of the personified secret itself that, in whatever discourse it may find its emergence, in the interest of its *own upkeep*, it is partisan to the enforcement and regulation it sustains from the outside. Its intrinsic dependence on prohibitory regimes ensures that, for the sake of the pleasures it promises, such regimes, in one form or another, will continue to be held in place. The *epistemological* danger of talking about the secret in this (Foucauldian) way is twofold: it carries the potential for, as Sedgwick suggests, a complacency of "knowingness" about the "unknowable" (*Epistemology* 45) contained in the secret and, inversely, a will to ignorance about what *can* be known about its contents. For example, parallels in the psycho-sexual contents between the explicit material in the

text of *My Secret Life* and the secrets in Dickens' text can be identified, but to decide that they are the same is to decide *what each is*.

In *Great Expectations*, the secret is compelled by a connotative force which cannot result in an exegesis that exceeds (or conveys less than) what the connotative mode allows. In other words, it can never become denotative. The fact that, for example, homosexual representation itself is, as Miller suggests, "consigned to connotation," and tolerated only on the condition that it be kept from view, kept secret (Miller, "Anal Rope" 123), at once supplies the possibility and the *impossibility* of knowing its content. It is both the way to and the way *not* to represent such content, the result of which is the uncanny production of what Cohen calls "meaning *as* [the] inarticulable" (237). The same might be said of the return of the repressed itself - which is *itself* a repressed narrative, *not* known by its author. In his own admitted "self-ignorance" and narrative unreliability, Pip performs an (often precarious) balancing act on the tightrope between knowing and not knowing his own will, his own motivation, his own desire. He knowingly performs his "sleight of hand" in order to trick himself into creating the tension (and magic) by which he pulls the reader into the "mesh" of his tortured existence - but over the safety net of the Victorian repressed. But if the Victorian novel itself, as William A. Cohen suggests, "both arouses and coerces its readers' desires" (221), Pip's narrative implies and propagates a particular aspect of the "pleasures" of reading. Enacted and pronounced by the absence of "satisfying" closure in the novel (since Pip fails to attain his place as gentleman and to win the girl, that is, to achieve the conventions of happiness), Dickens ostensibly leads the reader along the painful, plotted path of *only* great "expectations" and *not* of satisfactions or resolutions. He enlists the reader's participation in the repressive, transgressive

layerings of Pip's painful "progression" and implicates the reader in the desire to witness the physical and psychological torment that Pip undergoes. Hence, the production of effects that make the repeated explorations of the layers of a Victorian literary text pleasurable - a text that by definition is deviant, conflictual, painful or traumatic - is inherently an invitation to a deviant, painful, sado-masochistic archaeology.

Chapter Two

Performative Effects and the Child Sexual Subject in James' *What Maisie Knew*

What she had essentially done, these days, had been to read the unspoken into the spoken

There was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision

- James, *What Maisie Knew*

Henry James' *What Maisie Knew* was published in a period of growing social and political concern about the role and the future of the nuclear family in a new and changing capitalist economy. The last three decades of nineteenth-century England were marked by a general movement toward moral reform of individual conduct and, in particular, sexual practice. Central to such reform was the belief in the "necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses" (Foucault 25). Sexual reform included a public advocacy of temperance, of the ideal of abstinence, and of the virtues of traditional family values and gender roles; it consisted of public warnings about various diseases and other ills with excessive sexual activity (especially outside marriage), reinforced emphasis on female sexuality as limited to reproductive and maternal ends, and an enforced silence on child sexuality.¹ Within this "critical moment," James presents the story of Maisie Farange - of a young girl at the centre of a divorce and custody battle; of an ongoing exchange of adulterous discourse and relations amongst the parents and their

various partners (male *and* female) to which the girl is constantly exposed; of a profound absence and indifference of parents toward the child (notably of mothers²); and, finally, of a looming question of the young girl's participation in the world around her and her development of not so much the "moral sense" that seems to be the focus at the end of the novel but, an unspoken (unspeakable) *sexual sense*.

What Maisie Knew represents the per/formative process of a child not only coming into being but coming into *knowing* as a gendered and sexualized subject. Exemplifying Judith Butler's theoretical account of this discursive, performative process,³ Maisie symbolizes a child's body that materializes *sexually* only insofar as she is made a subject through a labyrinth of linguistic signification that precedes her and produces her as its material *effect*. Maisie is compelled to make her way through this "maze" in order to negotiate a position of "knowingness" within the symbolic world she inherits; and she is herself constituted as an epistemological maze, an intricate network of "passages," that the reader is invited to follow in search of an answer to the consequential and titillating question of "what Maisie knew."⁴

The question that the novel's title poses is, fundamentally, a sexual question. It is an epistemological question about the child *sexual* subject in relation to an adult sexual world. It challenges us to examine the categorical distinctions we make between "child" and "adult;" to examine the epistemological gap between speech and knowledge, and knowledge and experience; and to look at the implications of the role of language in these distinctions. Nevertheless, James' circumlocutory narrative style ensures that answers to this question remain elusive. As Ruth Bernard Yeazell suggests, "to allow that style fully to work on us is to find ourselves in a world where the boundaries between unconscious

suspicion and certain knowledge, between pretense and reality, are continually shifting” (3). But this style serves more than to bewilder or irritate the reader (though it certainly does that);⁵ it elucidates and reflects informatively the inconclusive and inchoate nature of a given subject. More importantly, it confirms the precariousness of representing and interpreting (especially a female) child’s sexual coming-into-being (and -knowing) within a Victorian code of silence on female and child sexuality. At once elusive *and* excessive, James’ narrative circumlocution effects the unlocatability of the sexual knowledge of a female child; and it is precisely this unlocatability that, ironically, becomes the “focus” of the text. As Julie Rivkin notes, “rather than presenting ‘knowledge’ as the safe arrival at the right answer, circumlocution... works to extend... the indeterminacy of reference” (136). Such indeterminacy is exemplified by the uncanny “central absence” of the sexual referent that figures predominantly (yet silently) in the novel. By sorting out “the relations of things” (45) and “the particular phenomenon that... she might have called her personal relation to her knowledge” (199), Maisie, like the reader, works to formulate a picture of reality by piecing together the slippery and complex system that is language.

In *What Maisie Knew*, the nuclear family that late nineteenth-century purveyors of moral reform worked to protect is categorically diffused; the social and moral boundaries that define proper conduct and “proper relations” by virtue of class, economics, gender, race and age are repeatedly (and quite casually) transgressed. A system of profound and unspoken sexual “activity” generates the novel’s plot - as one of the adulterous affairs is described in the novel - like a “flourishing public secret” (76). By representing such an immoral “system of misbehaviour” (Preface 3), James inevitably procured a great deal of confusion and controversy over the “*meaning*” of such

representation - in its full moralistic, interpretive and logical sense. The critical reception at the time of its publication was divided between critics who “deplored the choice of subject matter,”⁶ termed it “improper,” “immoral” and “reproachful”⁷ and others who believed that the novel’s aim was profoundly moral, that it constituted in fact a protest against the deeds it represented.⁸ Although the “deplorable” subject matter in the novel constitutes the “secret” that drives the narrative, its “meaning” seems to have been, nevertheless, “understood” - and (it seems) also *misunderstood*. Maisie’s own understanding of the deplorable subject matter is, as Edwin T. Bowden suggests, “confined severely within the limits of what she *could* know” (85). But the question of what she *could* know is fraught with enormous epistemological difficulty - to say nothing of the critical social issues it raises. For what a child *could* know about a particular (sexual) subject without being directly “initiated” - not necessarily into experience, but into knowledge - is finally indeterminable. In view of that indeterminacy, my attention in this chapter will focus on the discursive and performative aspects of Maisie’s process of subjectivation (and of James’ narrative project) which, in any case, define and circumscribe the limits of a subject’s knowledge - and an “object’s” knowability.

The main trajectory of this chapter follows the course of signification that provokes the central sexual question about “what Maisie knows” and, specifically, about what is happening in the relationship that most sparks this question: that between Maisie and her step-father, Sir Claude. From the moment that Maisie is introduced to Sir Claude, by way of a photograph of him which she keeps in the schoolroom as the central influential figure in her “education,” to the end of the story where she attempts to make an “arrangement” with him, the text teases us (through various techniques of “not saying”)

into wondering what is “going on.” The suspicious nature of Sir Claude’s behaviour toward Maisie is captured in her mother’s acute question to him when she unexpectedly discovers them in the park together, “What are you doing with my daughter?” (110). However, Sir Claude proves not to be the only object of “suspicion” in this relationship for, as the narrative (and Maisie’s awareness) progresses, the question of “what Maisie knows” gestures daringly, unequivocally toward a question of what *she* is doing - and what she wants - with *him*.

I believe they are never anything *more than* questions. But from these questions arise a multitude of unspoken meanings that tempt the interpretive process that Maisie learns to do: “to read the unspoken into the spoken” (200). Although such a practice is inevitable in an interpretive project, it seems particularly urgent in *What Maisie Knew* that it not restrict the flow of meaning that James’ language effects. As Lynda Zwinger suggests, there are “consequences of depriving James of the choice to not name. We lose the power of the gesture and the narrative it spawns” (668). We also lose a necessary caution toward the epistemological ambiguity that connotation and gesture ought to secure. If we substitute the word “sex,” for example, for the activity or knowledge that James only sexualizes, we have something different and perhaps something *less than* that narrative. It is precisely this act of sexualizing (the act of writing the sexual and the sexually unspecified) that I want to analyze in this chapter, by examining the ambiguity that attends that act and, above all - its *effects*. This project, then, is an exploration and epistemology of not just what can and cannot be said about “what Maisie knows” but also of the intricate system of signs that James presents, the possibilities and multiplicities of meaning about this question that his evasive language at once invites and disallows, speaks and disavows.

Maisie's story

Unlike Pip's story, Maisie's story is told through a third-person narrator whose depiction of Maisie's "knowledge" is predominantly ironic (which is always a "knowing" mode) and whose relation to his subject is a strange mixture of condescension, comic play, and pathos. The first-person address and the confessional lies, jokes and exaggerations of the "self-author/izing" Pip appear to make him transparent to the psychoanalytic eye; whereas the third-person voice in *What Maisie Knew* has the effect of distancing himself from his subject in such a way as to make of her an object and a commodification for his (and our) amusement. His ironic rhetoric and "knowing" narrative interventions seem to place Maisie (as she is said to feel under the scrutiny of Mr. Perriam's eyes in the schoolroom) as though she were in a "cage at a menagerie" (75). We are invited to scrutinize her "subjectivity" for its hidden meanings and "*full* ironic truth" (Preface 2). This "little unfortunate" (80) begins life as a passive and "boundless receptacle" of "evil" signifiers (19); her chief function is to serve as a "pretext for the system of misbehaviour" (Preface 3) that the adult world (and the novel) comprises - and of which she seems at first to understand nothing. Her *story* is her movement into the active role as an agent of language through which she participates in this same system of signification and misbehaviour - and of which she seems to (and claims to) know "everything."

While Pip is guilty of "self-swindling" by passing off a bad coin to himself and of an otherwise narrative "sleight of hand," Maisie hasn't the author/itative voice for such swindling. Nor does she have the education - the mathematic erudition - for such (self-) deception:

had she ever in her life had a sovereign changed, Maisie would have resembled an impression, baffled by the want of arithmetic, that her change was wrong: she groped about in it that she was perhaps playing the passive part in a case of violent substitutions. (223)

The distorted syntax in this passage frustrates (at least momentarily) the interpretive process (in “proper” syntactical construction, a person cannot be said to “resemble an impression that something is wrong;” s/he either *receives* an impression or *makes* an impression or, if we stretch the grammatical limits, s/he might conceivably “resemble an impression” - but *not* “of something being wrong” - or *of anything*). While confusing (and vexing) to the reader, it is through such grammatical distortion that the narrative voice exercises its own “sleight of hand.” It produces the figuration of - of figuration itself. Here, it does so by straining the limits of meaning (and knowing) by only figuratively “resembling an impression” of what it means and thereby figures a distorted “impression” of his subject matter - in this case, of and about the figure of Maisie. The incoherence of the subject-object relation in the sentence (and in Maisie’s objectified existence in the novel), mirrors Maisie’s ongoing struggle to cohere as a subject.⁹ What is “wrong” or “not proper” is not just the syntax - but Maisie herself. Although she has “grown familiar with the fact of the great alternative to the proper” (37), she is unable to differentiate “properly” between the “proper” and the “improper” in the mysterious “relations of things” that she witnesses.¹⁰ Her early life is summed up in the hyperbolic confusion in the sentence: she is “*baffled by want (or lack)*” just as she is said earlier to be plagued with a “feeling that she [is] deficient in something that would meet the general desire” (16). She “*gropes about*” in confusion and senses that she is only “perhaps playing the passive part” in this

obscure economy of desire. The confusion created by seemingly endless series of “violent substitutions” to which she is subjected in six-month intervals according to the terms of the custody case is compounded by the seemingly endless (and quite “improper”) substitutions of partners and “arrangements” amongst her parents, step-parents and governesses.

Whereas the narrator Pip plays an active part in his own lies and (self-) deceptions and actively seeks to repeat the playing out of a passive role, Maisie receives “the passive part” in “her” story but actively seeks a place in her world as a “free,” autonomous subject. Her course (quite different from Pip’s) is an unequivocal struggle toward “the death of her childhood” (Preface 7), toward the end of the novel, toward the end of her *being* narrated. Early in her life, her only act of agency is playing “dumb,” an act which her parents “embrace” as “her stupidity” but which is her newly discovered choice to be silent, her refusal to be used as a “shuttlecock” for “evil” messages between her divorced parents (19). Instead, she decides that “she would forget everything, she would repeat nothing, and when, as a tribute to the successful application of her system, she began to be called a little idiot, she tasted a pleasure new and keen” (20). Her system of silence is the learned application of the performative system of her world; it is a system that is passed on to her but it is of the sort that her mimicry of it is represented by *not* passing on what she knows. As defined by the symbolic world of the novel, secrecy is her first step into agency; and her “secret” is not only a secret about *what* she knows, but *that* she knows. For the sake of their own convenience, her caretakers are only too willing to equate her silence with *not* knowing. It quite “suits” her mother, for instance, “to convey that Maisie had been kept, so far as *she* was concerned or could imagine, in a holy ignorance and that she must take for granted a supreme simplicity” (164). The project of

interpreting “what Maisie knows” - even at the early stages of Maisie’s coming into being - is treated with narrative irony that foregrounds the precariousness of knowing, conveying, imagining or taking for granted what she knows. Part of the difficulty in deciding this question is that “there had been times when [Maisie] had had to make the best of the impression that she was herself deceitful; yet she had never concealed anything bigger than a thought” (69). As we have already learned, she “makes the best of the impression” of her deceit by enjoying its effects. And while silence has the appearance of passivity, it is finally the “concealed thought,” the concealing of “what she knows” (and all of its attendant “pleasures”) that represents the process into which Maisie emerges as a “free” and fully-empowered agent.

As an individual subject, Maisie “comes into being” through the process of repetition, by reiterating (and perpetuating) the discursive machinery which she is subjected to and made a subject *by*. Her identity is constituted in time through performativity which, as Butler tells us, “must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 2). The “speech acts” that Maisie performs are always reproductions of speech acts that she hears and, as we know from J. L. Austin (and through Butler), such speech acts and their effects are entirely conventional. What marks Maisie’s speech as unconventional is not her participation in this process - for she participates in it with (often embarrassing) precision - but the unorthodoxy of the discourse to which she is exposed and which she, in turn, is hers to repeat. The model of discourse that she “inherits,” while apparently conventional in her small world is, as Sir Claude reminds her, “quite unconventional” and “rather rum” (246) in the rest of world. Unfortunately, it is

only through this discourse (since it is the only one she has) that she can represent herself, her knowledge and her desire. Thus, this “poor little monkey” (12), caricatured to mimic, is “doomed” and set up to be deemed a “little unfortunate” and a “victim” (223) but also, as she learns to mimic more closely the (adult’s) unorthodox language, a number of other “things” (sometimes with joviality, other times not): a “monster” (143), a “devil” (143), “a horrible little hypocrite” (54) and a “dreadful dismal deplorable little thing” (170). For that which she *says* (that is, repeats), she is branded for *being* and - often mistakenly, but by the same logic - for *knowing*.

Like the reader, Maisie does not have access to the specific knowledge of the adulterous or otherwise deviant relations in the novel; what she can see and experience, however, are the *effects* of those relations. Her “education” comprises a metaphysical study in how to “know” what is happening without experiencing it directly and to figure out what her own part in it is without being told. Her “main support” in these challenges, as the narrative voice explains, is

the sharpened sense of spectatorship... the long habit, from the first, of seeing herself in discussion and finding in the fury of it - she had had a glimpse of the game of football - a sort of compensation for the doom of a peculiar passivity. It gave her 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. (85)

She doesn’t know the rules of this “game” or the position she is supposed to play (although she notices herself being cast chiefly as spectator, football, or shuttlecock). She is given an obscured impression of the game, the object of which, she has learned, is itself the

obscuring of a certain “knowledge” or “knowledge effects” - the effects of (unknown) causes which she perceives and understands in relation only to other effects or impressions. But she cannot access this knowledge or “taste” it or experience it first-hand. Instead, she is made to feel “as if she were flattening her nose upon the hard window-pane of the sweet-shop of knowledge” (106). The doors to this “sweet-shop,” like subjects that her mother is said to have slammed in her face like a door (58), are consistently closed to her. However, she is given to understand the associative sweetness of this store of knowledge, which captures her child’s imagination in metaphors of candy and hide-and-seek. She has discovered that “everything had something behind it: [that] life was like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors. She had learned that at these doors it was wise not to knock” (33). This maze of closed doors is revealed to her like forbidden fruit (or forbidden knowledge) that, through the discursive power of “the secret” that the adults (intentionally and by example) communicate to her, she is inevitably (and quite readily) tempted to seek out. It is her first governess, Miss Overmore, who “sow[s] the seeds of secrecy” (20) for Maisie’s eager vigilance and consumption. But, in keeping with (and further perpetuating) the system of signs that pervades the novel, she sows them “not by anything she said” (20) but by *gesture* - in this case: “by a mere roll of those fine eyes which Maisie already admired” (20). This singular gesture conveys for Maisie only a general sense of something secret, something shared, something desired. The vague meanings she attaches to it are a measure of the language and “language effects” which comprise the closed system of communication and meaning she inherits.

The system of communication by which Maisie has learned to interpret such gestures acquires meaning (for her and for us) through the accumulation of “knowledge

effects.” It follows a logic of consistency - based contextually and relationally - and consists of signals or gestures or tones, of voice, of language and of body. The pervasiveness in the novel of such signifiers testifies to their import, yet the narrative voice repeatedly alerts us to their enormous interpretive (and *mis*-interpretive) potential. He indicates how, for example, in her insistence to Sir Claude that Susan Ash be sent on her way back to England alone, Mrs. Wix’s “new tone... could strike a young person with a sharpened sense for latent meaning as the upshot of a relation that had taken on a new character” (182). The imprecision of the conditional, “latent meaning” of the relation of which Maisie can only get the “upshot” is curtailed by the contrasting words “new,” “strik[ing]” and “sharpened” which precisely characterize “the new” Mrs. Wix and her new relationship with Sir Claude.¹¹ If Mrs. Wix’s tone can “strike... a sharpened sense,” the narrator’s own ironic understatement makes clear the certainty of the meaning of *his* (otherwise duplicitous) tautology.

The indirect system of signification whereby tone of voice speaks the meaning and the effects of James’ telling of the story, constitutes the basis of the unspoken. It has endless signifying power but it acquires specific meaning (or specific knowledge effects) through context and patterns of symbolization. The “system of misbehaviour” that constitutes the central context of *What Maisie Knew* is (made to be) understood - *through* the language of the unspoken - to denote a system of devious, immoral and adulterous relations. The sexual element in this system is unmistakable and unavoidable. It is a central element contextually and is signaled consistently through references to “the proper” and “the improper” in relation to the various “relations” of the adult(rous) characters. For example, “little” gestures - silences, looks, and glimpses - are accompanied in the novel

by idiomatic phrases such as “scandalous excesses” (36), “gross irregularity” (155) or (Sir Claude’s) “jesting postponing perverting voice” (241). Maisie’s growing relation to this sexual context occupies the novel’s predominant focus; it figures into virtually every aspect of the narrative. Maisie’s varying degrees of success at “discovering” this absent referent - compelled by the sense of “the enigmatic” that attends it - is itself always marked and mediated by the same language of silence, making it impossible to discover. The allusive information she gathers - for example, the tone that Mrs. Beale uses in alluding to her (secreted) relations with Sir Claude - supplies Maisie not with *nothing*, but with a “dim apprehension of the unuttered and the unknown” (129).

Maisie learns how to interpret the effects of the “unuttered and the unknown” and to reproduce these same effects by acting out for herself its allusive, performative mode of “knowing.” But the most compelling aspect of this identificatory acting out is the performative (re)production of *desire itself*. The effect of the symbolic conventions of a subject’s world is to (re)produce in the subject the desire for that which is marked as “the desired,” the *desirable*. As Heidegger suggests in *Being and Time*, “we take pleasure... as *they [das Man]* take pleasure” (126).¹² In the adult world of secrets that Maisie inhabits, “the desirable” is represented by mystery, intimacy, and the power to have places, things or persons (and “changes”) to call one’s own. Maisie perceives that “the grown-up time [is] the time of real amusement and above all of real intimacy” (48), a time of freedom. She sets her sights on one day having “the power to have ‘changes’... of the most intimate order” (178) as (the more specific) “*they*” have and is highly motivated to press forward into that time - a time which will eventually materialize as what Maisie calls the “great change” (177) in her relationship with Sir Claude. The effect of her customary exposure

to the mysterious “arrangements” that the adults make (and clearly pleasure in), is that Maisie goes through much of her childhood on the “thought of how happy she should be if she could only make an arrangement for herself” (123). At first, she can only understand the meaning of such an arrangement “to the point of knowing it existed and wondering wistfully what it was” (123). When she ostensibly proposes such an arrangement to Sir Claude at the end of the novel, however, it is we who are inevitably left “wondering wistfully” what she knows about what “it” was - or is.

Like any other education, Maisie’s provides her with a set of knowledge that she must take into practice; but the trial and error method often gets her into trouble for the simple reason that hers is *not* like any other education. Its “subjects” do not include, as we have seen, conventional subjects such as mathematics. It includes, rather, studies in the language of seduction, the literature of romance and “love and beauty and countesses and wickedness” (28-9) (signified by French literature¹³) and endless gossip - all of which Mrs. Wix passes onto and engages in with her. But, despite the overwhelming, dogmatic training she receives in these areas of (Mrs. Wix’s) interest, Maisie is yet “equally associated and disconnected” (259) from “amour” and the rewards it seems to promise. It is handed to her, it appears, “like games she [isn’t] yet big enough to play” (17). But her (and Mrs. Wix’s) lack of education occludes her participation in ordinary children’s games and, since she has no exposure to other children, her only occupation is to learn the adult games and find her own place within it. When Maisie plays on her own, she plays with her (French) doll, Lisette, by mimicking the language of the adults around her and passing off that language and behaviour to the doll in order to “reproduce the effect of her own [questions] upon those for whom she sat in the very darkness of Lisette” (33). It is a game

of substitution in which she hands off her own silent role to Lisette and takes on the empowered role of adult - notably, of her mother. Role-playing is a practice at which she rehearses and reiterates (in order to better understand) not only what the adults know but what she herself knows and doesn't know. In the role of her mother, she finds that she is "enlightened by Lisette's questions" (33) - if a little "convulsed by" her "innocence" (33). As the doll is playing herself, it is her own innocent questions by which she is trying to become "enlightened." By imitating her mother and taking on (her own) questions, Maisie attempts to access the (hidden) knowledge that she routinely fails to satisfactorily discover from her mother:

There were for instance days when, after prolonged absence, Lisette, watching her take off her things, tried hard to discover where she had been. Well, she discovered a little, but never discovered all. There was an occasion when, on her being particularly indiscreet, Maisie replied to her - and precisely about the motive of a disappearance - as she, Maisie, had once been replied to by Mrs. Farange: 'Find out for yourself!' She mimicked her mother's sharpness, but she was rather ashamed afterwards, though as to whether of the sharpness or of the mimicry was not quite clear. (33)

The dramatic reproduction that Maisie engages in illustrates the mimetic aspect of the process of coming into being (and knowing) that Maisie undergoes in her progression toward adulthood. It reveals Maisie's character as curious and assertively inquisitive about secrets about family doings - especially her mother - but as *produced* by the secretiveness of her (family) environment. As Maisie, Lisette "discovers a little" - of "what" she doesn't

say but, at the least, of the fact of the hidden knowledge and the promise of more to be discovered. As the signifiers indicate in the above passage, Maisie is cognizant of its associations with the “taking off of things” (the unclothing of the body) and with “absence,” “disappearance,” “discretion,” “finding out” and “shame.” While not explicitly sexual, the sum of these signifiers alludes to a sexual element which perhaps only *seems* to be less closed off to us than it is to Maisie. However, if the code of silence and “discretion” that Maisie cites in her games with Lisette is a closing off of the epistemological limits of the unspoken, it is balanced and put into perspective by the open invitation explicit in her mother’s retort, “Find out for yourself!” This whopping imperative affirms (and further compels) Maisie’s quest for (and questions about) knowledge; for, while it disavows access to the discovery of her mother’s whereabouts, it avows the existence, the discoverability, of a referent to which the elusive meanings that she has, do (or *will*) attach.

Maisie’s role-playing with Lisette calls attention to her peculiar dilemma with her “relation to knowledge” - she is still somewhere on the outside looking in. As her mother’s rejoinder confirms, and “as Maisie put it to herself, she could get nothing by questions. It was in the nature of things to be none of a small child’s business, even when a small child had from the first been deluded into a fear that she might be only too much initiated” (124) - initiated, that is, into (partial) knowledge. She discovers that “things... were in [her] experience so true to their nature that questions were almost always improper; but she learned on the other hand soon to recognize how at last, sometimes, patient little silences and intelligent little looks could be rewarded by delightful little glimpses” (124). She is learning how to access “knowledge” and its “delightful” effects by watching,

reading and exchanging signs rather than asking for their meanings directly. Like the nature of the (empirical) knowledge that, as her mother informs her, she has to find out for *herself*, the system of sign language that she begins to participate in is highly interpretive, highly subjective and very subtle.

The nature of the knowledge that this system contains is also very elusive. Like her mother's low-cut bosom which testifies mysteriously to her being "wanted elsewhere" (70) and which suggests to Maisie the relation of the "the secret" to the un/clothing of the body, it has the elusive sense of secret places, secret desires. Maisie's own ambition, spurred by her need to be wanted - anywhere and by anyone - is to master this system of signs by which she might learn to meet not just her own desire but "the general desire" (which also refers to her lacking body). It is the practice in and *of* secrecy that, according to what she sees, is the key to accessing this elusive place, the same game that she practices with Lisette. She impresses it on herself that there were "things she really couldn't tell even a French doll. She could only pass on her lessons and study to produce on Lisette the impression of having mysteries in her life, wondering the while whether she succeeded in the air of shading off, like her mother, into the unknowable" (33). Pretending secrecy, or having the air of having airs (in her understanding) is her passport into the adult world, into this desirous, "foreign" world of "the unknowable." Maisie's pretense of having such access to the things one can't tell, the unspeakable, the mysterious and the unknowable, implies that "passing" for knowing might serve just as well as "knowing" in accessing the realm of the unknowable - since that is all that she witnesses. Yet the variety of "arrangements" that her mother makes and her mother's challenge to "find out for herself" testify to the reality of something behind, something *to* "the unknowable." In this case,

Maisie's mimicking of the impressions of mystery that her mother gives her may also be a conscious, volitional performance of performativity itself; that is, in "performing" her mother, she may recognize it not only *as* a performance but as a reproducible, reiterable and normative performance which she herself can act out equally well, equally *knowingly*, through practice or experience, or the practice of experience.

As James maintains in the Preface, "small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary" (6). Even when Maisie is quite a bit older (more than half way into the novel), she still "has ever of course in her mind fewer names than conceptions" (154). Maisie's knowledge, according to James' claims, is clearly not reduced or reducible to only *names* or to only the *spoken*. The discrepancy between things which act upon "perception," "vision" and "apprehension" and her producible vocabulary - a discrepancy between the world and language - characterizes any child's experience. However, Maisie's predicament in this regard is particularly urgent since she is given many more signifiers than "usual" and few corresponding signifieds. She finds "in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings [are] attachable - images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't yet big enough to play" (17). Her relationship to language is a cat and mouse game. As Mary Cross suggests, as Maisie "looks at both life and language, what she sees most disturbingly is the gap between what is said and what is meant" (75). The narrator affirms that "Maisie didn't know what people meant" (20) by what they say and this comes as no surprise in a language "game" in which not saying and not showing is the *object*. Nevertheless, it is a

game that she eventually learns to play very well. The challenge in assessing her knowledge, however, comes in distinguishing between what she says and what she knows, between what she merely mimics and what she can be said to understand. The question about what she knows at the end of the novel is a question of whether or not she finds referents to attach to her meanings, whether she bridges the gaps she comes across between signifier and signified. Her practice at “resembling an impression” of knowledge, which we witness in her role-playing with Lisette, suggests that she lacks the information to bridge these gaps. But her false (though successful) claims to knowledge (or ignorance, as the situation requires) testify to a different kind of knowledge, the kind most useful in her world, that of how to make an impression. As Cross notes, “what Maisie knows, eventually, is not some fact or figure but the truth about language” (Cross 75). What she knows is the truth about its *effects*.

“Sowing the seeds” of Maisie’s desire

Maisie’s “education” is the target of much narrative irony because it is so sadly lacking in one way and unspeakably excessive in another as a result of the incompetence and negligence of her caretakers.¹⁴ As her primary educator, Mrs. Wix is responsible for much of Maisie’s distorted sense of “the relations of things.” Not merely defunct as a governess and teacher, her responsibility to Maisie is secondary to her self-interest. The idea of Maisie having a formal education is met by “a secret terror which, like most of her secret feelings, she discussed with her little companion, in great solemnity, by the hour: [a terror of] the possibility of her ladyship’s coming down on them, in her sudden high-bred

way, with a school” (59) - that is, coming down on *Mrs. Wix* with a school. Her sharing with Maisie of her secret terror on this subject is one of many designs she uses to secure her position. From her first day in this position, she strategically captures Maisie’s imagination and sympathy with dramatic stories, beginning with her personal and grievous history and the tragic loss of her own daughter which she graphically recounts for Maisie. She invites Maisie to envision this deceased daughter as the sister she never had, encourages her to fabricate a family tie. As she tells Maisie, this is a game of substitution that is to be kept a secret on the grounds that Maisie’s mother “wouldn’t recognize the relationship” (26) but which we understand (and Mrs. Wix understands) to be manipulative and inappropriate. Maisie is of course quite satisfied that “it was to be just an unutterable and inexhaustible little secret with Mrs. Wix” (26). Secrecy and “the unutterable” become connected for her then with imagined and imaginative definitions of *family*, a game that comes to have “inexhaustible” pleasures. While Maisie recognizes that Mrs. Wix’s daughter “wasn’t a real sister... [Maisie comes to ‘see’ how] that only made her more romantic” (26). This substitution for the conventional nuclear family will soon be reinforced in her mind through the various changes and exchanges in partners that her parents and step-parents make and altogether confirmed in the eventual substitution of both her mother and father for step-parents. These new significations of the family will come to bear heavily on the question concerning her relationship with Sir Claude, namely, the understanding of what constitutes a “real” father.

Maisie’s sense of her own place in the world is tentative from the moment of the custody battle in which she is “divided in two and the portions tossed impartially to the disputants” (11). She looks on at this “new arrangement [which is] inevitably confounding

to a young intelligence intensely aware that something had happened which must matter a good deal and looking anxiously out for the effects of so great a cause” (15). The effect of so great a cause, she decides, is “her own greater importance” (16); however, the ironic narrative voice lets us know (and Maisie eventually come to sense it as well) that such “importance” has a qualifying condition: “the proportionately greater niceness she was obliged to show” (16). It isn’t long before the battle between the parents to *have* her is replaced with the fight to *not* have her. She is then forced into “looking anxiously out for” ways (and people) by which she can obtain a stable family position. She is looking for someone to “save her” (22). Thus, when Mrs. Wix introduces Sir Claude’s photograph to her and describes him as a “perfect gentleman” and as having a “sympathetic face,” Maisie receives this description with a “pleasure” that “agreeably remain[s] with her” (43). Her response to the portrait (of him and that provided by Mrs. Wix) is to “testif[y]... to the force of her own perception in a small soft sigh of response to the pleasant eyes that seemed to seek her acquaintance, to speak to her directly” (43). She silently communicates with him and imagines him as someone who will seek her and save her, which is more pronounced when she first meets him in person. She instantly imagines him as

by far the most shining presence that had ever made her gape, and her pleasure in seeing him, in knowing that he took hold of her and kissed her, as quickly throbbled into a strange shy pride in him, a perception of his making up for her fallen state... It was as if he told her on the spot that he belonged to her, so that she could already show him off and see the effect he produced. No, nothing else that was most beautiful ever belonging to her could kindle that particular

joy... The joy almost overflowed in tears when he laid his hand on her and drew her to him, telling her, with a smile of which the promise was as bright as that of a Christmas-tree, that he knew her ever so well by her mother, but had come to see her now so that he might know her for himself. She could see that his view of this kind of knowledge was to make her come away with him... (49-50)

Maisie's excessively favourable response to him demonstrates, rather, "the effect he produces" on *her* and elucidates her conception of the need for someone to save her from her deprived, "fallen" state. Sir Claude is her knight in "shining" armour - a *prince*. For Maisie, he represents hope, charity, salvation - the essence and "promise" (43) of Christmas. But the wish-list she compiles in her imagination (as the narrator "re"-constructs it) is naturally comprised of the vocabulary she knows, which has a striking resemblance to the language of conventional romance stories, indicated by words such as "shining presence," "gape," "pleasure," "throbbed" and "strange shy pride." While the embellished (and sexualized) language is made to represent her consciousness (and perhaps unconsciousness), James' narrative voice is never quite removed from its telling. Like us, the consciousness behind that telling always already knows more than Maisie and more about her than she does about herself. Thus, the conditional phrase, "as if" (in the line "it was as if he had told her on the spot that he belonged to her"), represents her viewpoint but the narrative over-rides or laminates that viewpoint with a condescending irony in describing her conviction "that she could already show him off and see the effect he produced." The narrator pretends to imitate her thought-process but, at the same time, constructs implicitly and patronizingly that process as the wishful thinking we know it is.

Maisie's plan for Sir Claude - a plan of his plan for her or "her vision of his vision of her vision..." (138-9) - derives from her interpretation of all that he sees, knows and wants. She constructs *his* view as wanting her to come away with him, which prefigures (well in advance) the climactic scene at Boulogne in which she asks him to come away with *her*. Sir Claude fits the description of the ideal hero that has been set for her, as indicated in her perception of the way "he looked at such moments quite as Mrs. Wix, in the long stories she told her pupil, always described the lovers of her distressed beauties - 'the perfect gentleman and strikingly handsome'" (52). Her immediate "recognition" of him as such a man and her consequent expression of her possessive desire for him, however, cannot be assessed outside of the discursive environment that marks him as desirable. Nor can the effect that Sir Claude has on her be assessed outside of its performative context. Her description neither figures nor *pre*-figures her desire for him but is already *pre-figured* (and *pre-configured*) by her "educational" complex. The question of what that desire means or figures *for* her rests on her relative consciousness of the unspoken sexual "sense" to which such normative desires indirectly refer. The most salient marker by which her world measures such consciousness is a dubious, and dubiously presented, marker - that of the child's age.

The claim that what Maisie knows depends on what she *could* know, made by Bowden explicitly but maintained at least implicitly by many critics of the novel and by the characters in the novel, derives, it seems, from two assumptions: that knowledge derives from exposure or experience; and that there is a categorical distinction between "the child" and "the adult," a distinction that relies on a certain correspondence between what a child may know, think or want and the particular stage of development and

consciousness (intellectual, moral, sexual or other) of that child. While the age of a child does not dictate or directly correspond to such a stage, it offers a general measure of it. But such a measure seems useless in gauging Maisie's knowledge since her experience and her education are beyond the range of its conventional measures. We know far less what a child who is exposed to the discursive "knowledge" that Maisie is *could* know. Maisie is said to be "precocious" (32) - that she knows too much too soon - and "to understand much more than any little girl... had perhaps ever understood before" (15). However, she cannot be said to know more than she has seen or heard or otherwise experienced. Therefore, her precocity, like "the theory of her stupidity," does not mean anything outside of the context of the knowledge (and ignorance) that is imposed on her, or of the various interpretations and attributions to which she (and what she knows or doesn't know) is subjected. She can, and does, of course, metaphysically make "new" connections with the knowledge she has; but her knowledge of the central "absent referent" in the novel (which corresponds to the central question of "what she knows") is purely inferential and greatly prone to error, given the obscure nature of the information on which her metaphysics can be, or is, premised.

The boundaries of our own knowing that we can place around Maisie's knowledge (and her desire) are defined by and restricted to the text itself, but they also rely on a cultural system of meaning and conventions of speech to which the text also refers and is a part. Maisie incurs (adult) speech but is missing much of the system of cultural (adult) meaning to which such speech applies; she is too young for her words; or her words are too old for her. She appears to fit into discrete age categories at times and, other times, she seems to bridge or challenge those categories. However, contradictory allusions to her age ensure that we do not know how old she is through most of the novel and this is of

particular significance at the end of the novel when she makes her momentous proposal. We are left to “decide” what *she* could decide (or know or desire) in the absence of that information - even though her age figures heavily in the way in which she is treated - by the narrator and the adult characters in the novel and by the critics.

Maisie is six at the time of the trial in the opening chapter but “a couple of years” have already gone by in chapter two (19). Her age is often directly associated with what she knows or ought to know, as indicated in the conventional phrases, “she was now old enough to understand” (35) and “old enough to choose for herself” (147) or “old enough to enter a little into the ambiguity attending [an] excess” (35). The unconventional nature of her knowledge in relation to her age is reflected in the oxymoronic description of her life “her little long history” (68). Her access to knowledge and experience, as we have seen in her mother’s circumscription of what constitutes “a small child’s business,” is denied in some respects and abundantly granted in others - for “she had been in contact from her earliest years - the sign of happy maturity... with overflowing [adult] cheer” (74). She seems to be (even at a very early age) somewhere between child and adult; in years, she resembles a child; in language, she resembles an adult. Therefore, it is difficult to decide “what she is” or “what she knows” and subsequently she is attributed by the adult characters in the novel with varying age and maturity levels. Her elders refer to her with various names that confuse her age and tease her, as Pip is teased, as being indeterminate in her gender, usually by Sir Claude; she is alternately referred to in the text as “little girl,” “old boy,” “old chap,” “old fellow,” “old woman,” “dear boy,” “young lady,” “old man,” and “old girl.”¹⁵ The confusion in gender and age renders Maisie essentially “queer,” unspecified. Like the names that she is called (“monster,” “victim,” etc.) these

contradictory references reflect the queer symbolic codifications Maisie is given and the particular needs of the adults, according to which, and from moment to moment, they decide what she knows or is. Sir Claude, for instance, has his own interest in seeing her, at times, as a child for whom he can claim “responsibility” (in order to enlist her services) and, at other times, as an equal for whom he is not at all responsible. Although made suspicious by the fact that he seeks her out on his own and in secret from her mother to whom he is recently married, Sir Claude presents himself to Maisie as someone “for her” and implies that she is herself “for him” an opportunity to fulfill his needs as a self-professed “family-man” (52). But he is presented to *us* more specifically as an opportunist who will exploit her, as suggested by Sir Claude’s recognition “that if he was to have the credit of perverting the innocent child he might also at least have the amusement” (77). This means treating as though she were “a man of the world” (65) which fashions her sense of equality with him and the possibility of him treating her as though she were a woman of the world.

An equally significant correlation in the understanding of the signifiers of Maisie’s growth is that between *age* and *desire*. The narrator sets up this crucial connection in chapter one where he explains how Maisie enters into a greater sense of her own autonomy, when “she had left behind her the time when she had no desires to meet” (16). Maisie newly recognizes her desires as something to be actively met. When she meets the “sympathetic-looking” Sir Claude, she thrills at the way that he treats her in a “pleasant fraternising, equalising, not a bit patronising way which [makes] the child ready to go through anything for him and the beauty of which, as she dimly [feels], was that it was so much less a deceitful descent to her years than a real indifference to them. It

[gives] her moments of secret rapture” (65-6). Her willingness to meet *this* desire and her desperation, signalled by her willingness “to go through anything for him,” marks her assessment of him as susceptible to error and, because of what we “know” about Sir Claude’s intentions, signals her own failure to distinguish between “deception” and the “real.” The narrator makes it clear (up until the last chapters of the novel) that Sir Claude’s intentions toward Maisie are insincere and deceitful. Sir Claude has his own motivations for treating her as an “equal” - namely, her loyalties and continued services as a “pretext” for his other ambitions - which he secures through the “rapturous” effect of his “indifference” to her age. On the other hand, Maisie’s “assessment” of him may be deliberately “flawed;” a deliberate (or perhaps unconscious) construction of him as the “real” of her desire. For she has, if only as a fantasy that is played out between them, the impression of “equality” that she desires from him.

Nevertheless, Maisie is aware of the age discrimination by which she suffers a lack of choices; she understands “the imposing time of life that her elders spoke of as youth” (66) as a hindrance to what she might do - for example, for Sir Claude. But she also notices with intrigue and puzzlement a marked discrepancy in age between the various (married, unmarried or imagined) couples, but a discrepancy which is not discriminatory in the same way that she experiences it:

For Sir Claude then Mrs. Beale was ‘young’, just as for Mrs. Wix Sir Claude was: that was one of the merits for which Mrs. Wix most commended him. What therefore was Maisie herself...? ...Yet if she [the pronoun in James’ queer syntax refers to her mother, yet the actual antecedent is Maisie] wasn’t young then she was old; and this

threw an odd light on her having a husband of a different generation... such discoveries were disconcerting and even a trifle confounding: these persons, it appeared, *were not of the age they ought to be*. (66, my emphasis)

The implications of her mother “having a husband of a different generation” clearly contribute to Maisie’s confusion about “proper relations;” while she sometimes seems to have a sense of what “ought to be,” it comes up “disconcerting” when measured against “what is.” This disconcerting discovery informs her own sense of place in such a scheme, as suggested by the question, “what therefore was Maisie herself?” (and, by extension, *for whom* was she?). But she quickly substitutes this question with, “what therefore was mamma?” which demonstrates her view of her own role in the relations of things as an oedipal, substitutive one in relation to her mother. Julie Rivkin argues that “the boundaries of the oedipal scenario which functions to mark the boundary of prohibition are eroded” (135) in the novel; however, Maisie’s relationship with her mother and her desire to become her mother, eventually *for* her (step-)father, follows the conventional oedipal narrative in this regard. But the unconventionality of their relation, and of *Maisie* herself, seems to be “both incestuous and not incestuous at once, undecidably, a confirmation of the oedipal scheme and an abandonment of its logic” (Rivkin 159). Maisie senses that the “commendation” of Sir Claude’s youth has some interesting meanings for her own (commendable) youth and that “mamma” was in fact - well, as she is quick to notice - “it wouldn’t do to talk about mamma’s youth” (66) and not just because she doesn’t have any. It wouldn’t do because the transgressive nature of the age discrepancy between her mother and Sir Claude is a subject for the unspoken.¹⁶ The realization of the various age

discrepancies between her (extended) “family” relations does not lead Maisie through any new “doors” per se or right away, but it (ironically) “clarifies” the confusion about and opens the possibilities for, new meanings that the marker of age (especially *her* age) can, or may not have to, take on.

The implications of Maisie’s age figure strongly in her sense of coming into her own right to make decisions, her “coming of age.” Sir Claude’s treatment of her as an “equal” influences enormously her sense of the arrival at that point in her life as much sooner than she (or we) could have imagined. This treatment, and his open and jovial acknowledgment of it, lends itself to a number of other interpretations. As he says to Maisie, “I’m talking to you in the most extraordinary way - I’m always talking to you in the most extraordinary way, ain’t I? One would think you were about sixty and that I - I don’t know what any one would think *I* am. Unless a beastly cad!” (247). Sir Claude’s “confession” affirms the existence of the particular code of propriety in ways of talking to a child which is based on age - which he admits to transgressing. He tries to minimize his own impropriety by positioning her as the (odd) one whom “[any]one would think” was not a child but he defeats this line of logic in his recognition that, by the same measure, “[any]one would think” him a “beastly cad.” The code is still in place; however, their behaviour will remain (recognized) as errant - through the code of not-naming. If Maisie seems “about sixty,” it is significant that her mother is also said to be “at least sixty” (74). The repetition of the figure “sixty” suggests that Sir Claude talks to Maisie in the same way as he talks to his wife. The parallel is made to seem deliberate not so much by Sir Claude’s awareness (since it is not he who calls her mother “at least sixty” - although she may in fact be sixty) as by the narrator’s conscious construction. The un-named possibilities that the

connections between Maisie and her mother in their relationships with Sir Claude evoke (for us and for Maisie) build the tension that informs their relationship as the narrator develops it through the novel. The end of the story is the end of her childhood per se (as James suggests in the Preface) and that transition is the specific result of the transition in the adult-child relationship that the relationship between Maisie and Sir Claude constitutes. Their relationship functions at a child-adult level even within its construction (by both of them) as equal and mutual, but works toward one in which the conditions are increasingly and decidedly *adult* ones. Maisie signals her awareness of this transition in something he says to her in which she notes that “there was something in the way he said it that made, between them, more of an equality than she had yet imagined; but it had also more the effect of raising her up than of letting him down” (177). While their “equality” is “imagined” by *her*, such imagination is precisely the awareness of other possibilities that is part of the process of maturity that her story describes.

If Maisie is led to believe that her relationship with Sir Claude has future, unnamed (un-nameable) possibilities, she is convinced of this not only because she needs to believe in a secure future with him (or anyone) or only because Sir Claude encourages her to believe it. Mrs. Wix seems to be the initiating force in Maisie’s conceptions about “relationships” but most of the adults send messages to Maisie - of varying sorts and with varying degrees of consciousness - that a “relationship” with Sir Claude is, at the least, not inconceivable. Mrs. Wix explicitly makes Maisie Sir Claude’s equal when she tells her, for example, “if Sir Claude’s old enough to know better, upon my word I think it’s right to treat you as if you also were” (202). Miss Overmore contributes to this equation when she says of Sir Claude, “he’s not my sort, and I’m sure, my own darling, he’s not yours”

(38). The impression Miss Overmore gives her of “what Sir Claude is” indirectly marks his function with a certain exchangeability and an interchangeability in relation to him between Maisie and herself or Maisie and her mother. Maisie’s father implies a similar function of Sir Claude when he refers to him as “your precious man” (142) in the context of the question of how much Sir Claude “likes” her (142). As we know, substitution, the “changing of places” (76) centrally defines Maisie’s life. When Sir Claude arrives to pick her up one day, Maisie, in deciding to perform the role of a “duchess” (to match his nobility - a suggestion made by Susan Ash which Maisie readily takes up) retorts sarcastically, ““And this is what you call coming *often*?”” Sir Claude replies, ““My dear old man, don’t make me a scene - I assure you it’s what every woman I look at does”” (105), suggesting to her the possibility of her being capable of taking on that same (womanly) role to his equally functionary role.

If Maisie’s conception of her relationship with Sir Claude is perhaps given the most compelling contribution by Mrs. Wix, it is not just through the romance narrative she supplies to Maisie through the years, but by her express (re)commendation of him. She impresses upon Maisie the full force of the “charming effect” that Sir Claude has on “ladies” - ladies who “wouldn’t be able to help falling in love with him” (61). Maisie responds ingenuously to this precept with the question, ““And you, my dear, are you in love with him too?” [to which Mrs. Wix replies], ‘Over head and ears. I’ve *never*, since you ask me, been so far gone”” (61). Mrs. Wix’s “bold” (62) confession confirms the inevitability of falling in love with such a man as Sir Claude. It also testifies to the sororal and intimate relationship she has established with Maisie, a bond which reaches new heights in equality a few days later, when Mrs. Wix “turn[s] the tables” on Maisie (but,

“clearly intending a joke”) by asking her, “May I ask you, miss, if *you* are?” (62) The child responds, ““Why *rather!*”” (62). The narrative voice ironically describes the tone of her response as one “as if in surprise at not having long ago seemed sufficiently to commit herself; on which her friend gave a sigh of apparent satisfaction. It might in fact have expressed positive relief. Everything was as it should be” (62). This ironic narrative intervention acts as a guide by which we are to “understand” the exchange we witness as “inappropriate.” Mrs. Wix’s culpability in this exchange is only partly assuaged by her intentions of a joke because we understand the (inappropriate) nature of her relationship with, and influence on, Maisie by the casual, taken-for-granted, tone of the expression of her love. The fact that such an expression, and the exchange as a whole, is *acted out* as a kind of normal and normative development of Maisie’s “love” for Sir Claude does not challenge the real way in which this “love” comes to manifest for her. It merely indicates the degree to which it has yet developed and signals the fact of it being produced, which we have already witnessed in her first meeting with him (where we also witness the more intensely *felt* aspect of his impression on her). The irony with which the narrative voice tells us that “everything is as it should be” relies on the assumption (his and ours) that, again, the adult-child discrepancy makes the exchange unfair and improper. This assumption implicitly calls up a criteria by which we can understand it as such, but is only supplied by the references in the novel to age. But the question of Maisie’s “real” desire is open to the same problems of distinction as that of Maisie’s “real” knowledge - that between what she wants or knows and what she repeats. In this question, we cannot avoid the more troubling question of distinguishing desire, or one’s own desire, from *desirability* itself which is culturally encoded and produced.

Maisie's expression of desire, an expression which the ironic voice cues us consistently to understand as distinct from a desire that she or we might call "her own," represents the accumulation of the language of desire and romance to which she has been exposed. The narrative that she can be said to "construct" around Sir Claude, here explicitly prompted by Mrs. Wix, derives from a greater symbolic system of value and discourse in which Maisie here participates. Sir Claude himself plays an influential part for her in this discursive system by encouraging (and participating in) her pursuit of this romantic narrative. He takes advantage of her willingness to "do anything for him" by using her as a "jolly good pretext" (143) for pursuing his own "love" interest, Mrs. Beale. To secure Maisie's willingness in this role, he embarks on a virtual courtship of her. He takes her out for walks in the park, to the art gallery, to little shops and cafes where they engage in a range of intimate conversation. The narrative voice constructs these scenes with symbols of sex and impropriety (including, for example, the "ugly Madonna" (88), a symbol which has great implications later on in the novel); the narrator creates a mode of romanticism, such as the description of the "rainy day when the streets were all splash and two umbrellas unsociable" (88) which symbolically brings them together under the same "social umbrella" - as in fact "wanderers" (88) or errants. Their conversation takes a turn one day to the nature of his marriage to her mother which, he confesses, has taken on some new "understandings." The way in which Sir Claude describes these understandings leads her to wonder how such an understanding might affect herself - or them. And we are made to wonder about Sir Claude's motivation for sending such implications or for such deliberate misleading. He and Maisie are out on one of their excursions to the art gallery; her mother, we understand, is out seeking yet another

“companion.” Sir Claude explains:

‘... your mother lets me do what I want so long as I let her do what *she* wants.

‘So you *are* doing what you want?’ Maisie asked.

‘Rather, Miss Farange!’

Miss Farange turned it over. ‘And she’s doing the same?’

‘Up to the hilt!’

Again she considered. ‘Then, please, what may it be?’

‘I wouldn’t tell you for the whole world.’

She gazed at a gaunt Madonna; after which she broke into a slow smile. ‘Well, I don’t care, so long as you do let her.’

‘Oh you monster!’ - and Sir Claude’s gay vehemence brought him to his feet. (89)

Sir Claude leads Maisie into wondering what the unspecifiable “it” may be that both her mother and Sir Claude are (separately) doing. The plain answer to this question is that they are both pursuing new relations; but, whereas Sir Claude gives the appearance of pursuing *Maisie*, he is pursuing Mrs. Beale - *through* Maisie. He wouldn’t tell her *either* scheme “for the whole world” and it is precisely his disavowal - his admitted silence - that marks his contribution to the conversation as at once dubious *and* proper. The “couple” paradigm that is evoked in his parallel of what he and Maisie are doing and what her mother and *her* partner are doing, fuels the suspicion about “what they are about together” (240). The association of this parallel of Maisie’s gaze on the Madonna and her “slow smile” effects a symbolic sexualization of the scene, an effect that implicates Maisie in her formidable

approval of her mother doing “it” which stands in for her unspoken approval of letting him (and them) do the same. The oxymoronic description of the “gay vehemence” with which Sir Claude teasingly terms her a “monster” reflects the contradiction in her implicit association with the virgin. She is marked as an “innocent monster” but they are *both* “guilty” - sexualized - *by* association. The associative force of this scene is particularly powerful in view of the significance of the symbol of the “gold Virgin” that figures centrally in Maisie’s final proposal to Sir Claude at the end of the novel. It represents the effect of the deliberate feeding and building up on the part of Sir Claude (and the narrator) of what is unmistakably the development of what we come to recognize as Maisie’s “sexual sense.”

The possibility of Maisie’s being exchanged for or acting out of the role of a “woman” to Sir Claude (in both of their minds) is made more explicit in another intimate discussion they have. Sir Claude confesses that, like Maisie, he is “afraid” of the “charming” Mrs. Beale - not despite but *because* she likes him. Maisie is intrigued by this correlation:

‘Being liked with being afraid?’

‘Yes, when it amounts to adoration.’

‘Then why aren’t you afraid of *me*?’

‘Because with you it amounts to that?’ He had kept his hand on her arm. ‘Well, what prevents is simply that you’re the gentlest spirit on earth. Besides - ‘ he pursued; but he came to a pause.

‘Besides - ?’

‘I *should* be in fear if you were older - there! See - you already

make me talk nonsense,' the young man added. (90)

Maisie's patent expression of her adoration of Sir Claude and its equation with the same adoration of him by Mrs. Beale is placed within an air of "innocence" by the very fact that it is made so openly. However, it is an innocence that is tinged with our *own* awareness of what such a confession could mean on which the narrative voice relies. She can remain innocent in her declaration but we cannot; nor can the narrator or Sir Claude. Sir Claude's indirect suggestion that she *could* be in the same position as Mrs. Beale is less a slip of the tongue - since he has time to hesitate and then decide to finish his sentence - than a deliberate leading on of her fantasy (and ours). The formulaic breaks in his speech say just enough to pique her interest (but not too much) and produce the desired effect of her cuing *him* to tell her what she wants to hear, to finish his sentence. He censures himself *after* the fact by calling his admission "nonsense" but attributes mockingly the blame to her for "making him" get too close to speaking the unspoken. The intimated possibility of the role she could play for him is informed by the intimate tone of their conversation, his hand on her arm (mentioned twice) and Sir Claude's "literally colour[ing]" with the mention of Mrs. Beale "liking" him. These bodily signifiers speak silently the physicality (and sexuality) of this possibility. The condition for such a possibility is, once more, her age.

James maintains a level of uncertainty in the relative culpability of Maisie and Sir Claude in their relationship by portraying Maisie's part in their various intimacies in an air of "innocence" and by giving them both viable "pretexts" for being together. Maisie's motivation for pursuing Sir Claude, although romanticized (and sexualized) to suggest a developing, unconscious sexual awareness, is foremost presented as one of necessity. Her most pressing developing consciousness is of the fact that her parents both

want to be rid of her. To avoid being left “out on the streets” (79) she literally “brings Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude together” as substitute parents for herself. Sir Claude’s part in their relationship is presented as a combination of “guilt” and “innocent fun.” He is guilty of deceptively using her to further his illicit affairs but innocent, it seems, of putting her directly in contact with the sexual element that motivates him in these pursuits. It is James who puts her in “direct” contact with the language of sexual metaphor and, in doing so, he provides clues about the sexual awareness or tension between Maisie and Sir Claude that make us project or wonder about something “else” that is going on in both of their minds. Included in this narrative strategy is the presentation of an element of suspicion by which the other adults themselves seem to wonder about this same question. Mrs. Beale’s immediate reaction when she witnesses their first meeting is to warn Maisie, “I hope you’re at least clear about Sir Claude’s relation to you. It doesn’t appear to occur to him to give you the necessary reassurance” (50). Mrs. Beale immediately recognizes the need of a clear definition of their “relation” and notes Sir Claude’s negligence in providing that definition for her. His apparent indifference to the boundaries that define their relation carries a certain suspicion which resonates through all of their conversations. Maisie’s mother also notices that her relationship with Sir Claude is excessive. She tells Maisie, “you hang about him in a way that’s barely decent - he can do what he likes with you. Well, then, let him, to his heart’s content” (72). Her mother’s abandonment of her daughter - beginning, it seems, with these very words - testify to Maisie’s critical situation. But it also builds up to the moment in which Maisie finds (and puts) herself in a position *to decide* what Sir Claude’s “relation to her” might be.

What Maisie wants

The progression toward the “coming out” which constitutes symbolically the end of Maisie’s childhood takes a critical turn when she crosses the Channel to France with Sir Claude. She discovers that she has made a major “passage” (but an unconscious one since she has slept through it all). She is swept with a feeling of “a great ecstasy of a larger impression of life. She was ‘abroad’ and she gave herself up to it, responded to it” (173). She finds that “she had grown older in five minutes and... literally in the course of an hour she found her initiation” (174) - into the sense of experience. She discovers a new “poetic justice” in being finally

avenged... for all the years of her tendency to produce socially that impression of an excess of the queer something which had seemed to waver so widely between innocence and guilt. On the spot, at Boulogne, though there might have been excess there was at least no wavering; she recognised, she understood, she adored and took possession. (174)

The “queer something” of which she takes possession is decidedly *not* an “innocent” something; and the decisions and speeches she will make from this point in her life are no longer presented in an air of innocence. It is clear that she is no longer behind the glass pane looking out and is in the very thralls of experience of the “outside” world. France itself is figured as an “outside” experience, an experience in excess, the essence of “amour” and the interpretive possibilities of an entirely new system of signification which Maisie is very keen to learn. Because of the degree to which her education has been comprised

of stories of French romance, she is not, or she *imagines* she is not, exactly in foreign territory. In fact, she will come to understand this language in just a couple of days (254). Her own awareness of the sexual element in these new surroundings is not dwelled upon; rather the excessive symbolization of sex in these last chapters serves as the narrative backdrop to the staging of how, in the midst of opportunity, this young girl can be seen as “knowing” the meanings that we know of this symbolization.

Whatever the intentions, pretexts or other practical reasons for Maisie and Sir Claude being together, the narrative unfolding of their relationship carries the unquestionable sense of something more, something other, than conventional (step)father-daughter relations. It more often has the tone and expressive quality of a conventional romantic involvement, as this next scene illustrates. Having brought Maisie to France, Sir Claude decides he must leave for England temporarily (albeit to retrieve Mrs. Beale) and he bids Maisie goodbye in what we can imagine to be the spirit of the French romance stories with which Mrs. Wix has for years filled her imagination:

he opened his arms to her. With her culpable lightness she flew into them and, while he kissed her, chose the soft method of silence to satisfy him, the silence that after battles of talk was the best balm she could offer his wounds. They held each other long enough to reaffirm intensely their vows. (195)

This formidable love scene has a definite air of mutuality, of a dramatic parting of two lovers. Yet it is primarily of Maisie’s making. Constructing her own role here as Mary Magdalene to Christ (thus fulfilling part of her Christmas wish-list), Maisie “produces” his pain, dramatizes her anguish and establishes her own faithfulness and (at least in her mind)

her indispensability to him. The “culpable lightness” with which the narrative voice attributes her “flight” signals her changing role from a victim (of many things but also of fantasy itself) to the author of her *own* fantasies. The “soft method of silence” - the system of signs which she knows perhaps better than any other - is, in her mind, the avowal (one of and *to* silence) of a place in his life - orchestrated, notably, entirely through disavowal. Maisie is figured finally as having come into being as a subject in the language of the unspoken - by which she can create her own story or romance. Her “culpability” in her appropriation of language symbolically marks her as having outgrown her passive position in relation to the language that produces her, which prefiguratively marks the end of her being narrated.

Maisie discovers and devises a number of ways of applying this “soft method of silence” to orchestrate her new relationship with Sir Claude. She creates opportunities to come in close contact with him, for instance, by holding onto a hat she has retrieved for him “so that, united by their grasp of this object, they stood seconds looking many things at each other” (186). She sees in his eyes a new and silent communication between them, sees in them unspecified things that “they gave up to her and tried to explain. His lips, however, explained nothing” (187). What Sir Claude does not explain is an unspoken, perhaps unspeakable, element in their relationship which is impossible to locate only in Maisie’s mind, or Sir Claude’s, the narrator’s or our own. Her perception of how she and Sir Claude “commune in silence” (189) and “inaudibly converse” (197) seems to disavow the perspective of the other. She has the sign of his eye contact but cannot know what it means, only that it produces in her the certainty that it *means* (something) and that it is something she desires. When she will put into words what it means, she will say, “I love

Sir Claude” (265) but she says this “with an awkward sense that she appeared to offer it as something that would do as well. Sir Claude had continued to pat her, and it was really an answer to his pats” (265). She doesn’t quite have the right words to express her desire but she recognizes it as a response to Sir Claude’s hands moving “up and down gently on her shoulders” (265). The expression of her “love” is sourced at the level of the body, her own body, but “love,” she recognizes, only “appears” to be what she means. It is a substitute for “something that would do as well” - the absent referent that she yet has not discovered.

Sir Claude’s continued pats on her shoulders effectively produce Maisie’s desire which she expresses as love and, in coming to “recognize” her desire to *have* Sir Claude for herself, Maisie sees that what stands between her and Sir Claude is Mrs. Beale - an idea which is produced and prompted by yet another suggestion by Mrs. Wix.¹⁷ She begins to devise ways of getting Sir Claude to herself, for example, “to draw out their walk, to find pretexts, to take him down upon the beach, to take him to the end of the pier” (252). She proceeds to take on the active role of courting *him* (to “take” him) while he passively accedes to her desire. Maisie’s developing tendency “to read the unspoken into the spoken,” then, materializes and climaxes in her sudden realization “that the unspoken was, unspeakably, the completeness of the sacrifice of Mrs. Beale” (200). The “unspeakable” sacrifice of Mrs. Beale is itself here “spoken,” named, but only because it is a substitute for something else *not* named. Attachable to the “inveterate instinct” (200) that Maisie is discovering, this “sacrifice” manifests as a substitution in which *Maisie* will find, in her *imagination*, a place to call her own and to assert her own desire. The unspoken meanings of this substitution are conveyed through a number of presentiments of Maisie’s process

of thought. Maisie and Sir Claude make their way to the train station where the opportunity of stealing off together presents itself, not by chance, but by Maisie's own "mental picture of the stepfather and the pupil established in a little place in the South while the governess and the stepmother, in a little place in the North" (253). This mental image is, however, "linked by a community of blankness and by the endless series of remarks it would give birth to" (253) which casts doubt on the question of whether or not she knows what she *seems* to be thinking, for she "links" this imagined "arrangement" with "blankness" and endless signs which are (in our minds) indirectly sexualized through the reference to "giv[ing] birth." While her wish is made clear - she wants to go away with Sir Claude - the narrative hand offers only enough to create the sense of her (apparently unconscious) sexual awareness but draws back from committing itself to (its own) spoken or (her) knowingly specified meaning.

Maisie cannot be any clearer in her wish (and decision to act) when, once "she knew how prepared they looked to pass into the train... she presently [brings] out to her companion... 'I wish we could go. Won't you take me?'" (253-4). Her act of "taking" him manifests as a request for him to take her; but he cannot play his part for her in that act. He smiles with what he presumes to be her innocence in making such a request; he asks if she "really" would come and then he turns white with fear when she responds with the certain affirmative "'Oh yes, oh yes'" (254). The opportunity of "Paris" passes them by as Sir Claude's waits to decide, the porter cries out their fate, "'*Ah vous n'avez plus le temps!*'" (254) and the train moves away from the platform. But Maisie is willing to make her offer more express by telling him she will wait yet a little longer for him. The conditions upon which her offer depends are made symbolically clear. She tells him:

‘I’ll sit on that old bench where you see the gold Virgin.’

‘The gold Virgin?’ he vaguely echoed. But it brought his eyes back to her as if after an instant he could see the place and the thing she named - could see her sitting there alone. ‘While I break with Mrs. Beale?’

‘While you break with Mrs. Beale’. (257)

Paul Fahey who, like many readers (including Yeazell [130]), finds *What Maisie Knew* to be “a very disquieting book” (96) offers his disapproval of the suggestion of the sexual unspeakable, in a 1971 article. He writes,

as recently as 1956 an American critic fancied there was some point in suggesting that Maisie was offering to become Sir Claude’s mistress when she said she would meet him ‘on that old bench where you see the gold Virgin’. I see no point at all in that kind of remark. (96)

The point of “that kind of remark” (to take *Fahey’s* remark seriously) is precisely the attention that the symbolization of the sexual requires and produces - if not for Maisie, for ourselves. Fahey’s own disavowal of the sexual symbolization participates in and furthers the code of silence and disavowal around sex that the novel effects and illuminates. Maisie’s familiarity with the symbolic force of the image of the “Virgin,” her education in (especially French) romance narratives and imagery and her education by Sir Claude in the art gallery lends itself to her understanding of the sexual attachments such an image holds. If she has been given the reason of her youth as the bar to experience, she suggests that she is now “old” enough to make an arrangement with him by the reference to the

“old” bench upon which she will sit for him. What we understand about the passage in which she offers symbolically herself as a virgin to Sir Claude is precisely *that* - what *we* understand. We understand, as James ensures that we understand, the way in which “the gold Virgin” is unquestionably substituted for Maisie by Sir Claude’s eye being brought back to *Maisie* “as if he could see the place and the thing she named [the Virgin] - could see her sitting there *alone*.” She *is* the gold Virgin waiting on the bench for him while, she imagines, he makes himself “free” for *her*. Symbolically - the symbolic context within which the novel is situated - Maisie’s offer “advertises her virginity” (Cargill 258) and by extension offers to “become Sir Claude’s mistress,” as Fahey shuns to suggest.

While Maisie can be said to indisputably, symbolically, make such a proposal to Sir Claude, there is no evidence for her knowing that we could understand her act of making such a proposal to be sexual in nature - or that *she* could. The focus at the end of the novel on the disputed question of her “moral sense” which is elided in favour of the “something still deeper than a moral sense” (261) seems to insist that we see “her wish to be alone with Sir Claude... [as] hav[ing] very little to do with that faculty” (102), or, as the narrator declares: “distinctly nothing - to do with her moral sense” (261).¹⁸ We can “understand” or see how she appears to come into a *sexual* sense; yet, if the discourse of the novel is to govern this question - and it must - its circumlocutory style suggests that the way in which she comes into such being is strictly of the same order - of discourse. The fact that we “know” of a sexual “real” outside of that discourse to which the circumlocution consistently gestures, does not alter this formulation; for Maisie is constructed in discourse *as* discursively produced for our own discursive pleasures in knowing something more, something ulterior to, the discursive. The sexual sense that is

connotatively produced for us provides no evidence to conclude that *she* understands the same - *or* that she does not. We might understand it strictly as unconscious (which, as Lacan suggests, is structured like a language), and which is suggested by the reference to the moment in which Maisie “coloured to the roots of her hair, felt the full, hot rush of an emotion more mature than any she had yet known. It consisted of an odd unexpected shame” (93). The sexual element, signalled by shame in the social code of Victorianism, is sufficiently clear; however, what we can say about it is not that James thereby produces her as a sexual subject, but, through his consistently implicit reference to the sexual, produces her discursively as a *sexualized* subject.

James supplies numerous clues throughout the novel as to how we might finally answer the question of “what Maisie *knows*.” As John C. McCloskey notes, “at least one hundred and ten times, James formally identifies what Maisie knows” (487) but many of these signs of her knowledge are “conventional verbal expression” (McCloskey 488) or, in other words, the performance of the performativity of knowledge or outright deception. Maisie learns that this system of language is a complex game of disavowal - of disclosing something by not disclosing something (else), of disclosing that there is something (undisclosable) to disclose. But this is the very language which describes and defines *her*. The narrator’s ironic wit compounds and further masks the “full ironic truth” of what she is or what she could know in suggesting that “what she *could* knew is by this time no secret to us” (177). The “us” are left to do as the adults do in the novel, to “take for granted” (177) what she knows in which, in the game of secrecy and disavowal in which this young girl’s sexual knowledge is and must be played out (or with) in a text, it is “better... [to] do that than attempt to test her knowledge” (177). We are left to “know” from own (previous)

knowledge to what the signifiers of her knowledge attach. What we know about what *she* could know is referable only to the text itself which comprises a maze of self-referential circles or epistemological dead ends. This maze is defined by the language of performativity by which Maisie is produced *as* a sexualized subject, a language which always leaves us where we started. If her knowledge could be said to reflect her desire, and her desire is normatively produced through the same language with which she must articulate that knowledge - and desire - and if what she *wants* is actually and finally only to *know* - then we are caught, as James' language ensures that we are caught, in an endless epistemological spiral. The self-referentiality by which this system defines itself means that it cannot *mean* outside of or anything more (or less) than its own, unspoken mode of expression. The implicit question in James' title of "what Maisie knows," then, begs its own question. What we can say about what Maisie knows, at the least (and perhaps the most), is that she knows how to participate in the performative, "knowing" mode of not saying whatever it is she might know. Her mastery of the art of the unspoken is made evident solely by her competent participation in its endless forms of not-saying.

Conclusion

Is there more to say about the epistemological limits of the unspoken than to postulate an epistemological certainty of *uncertainty*? My examinations of the unspoken in *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew* demonstrate that the level of certainty about the thing(s) to which the unspoken refers varies vastly from connotative moment to connotative moment. There is little doubt, for example, that the "system of misbehaviour" which comprises the main context in which Maisie is brought up is one of adulterous relations, even though overt mention of adultery is avoided; yet we know nothing substantial about what Maisie knows about this system. As with the deeper secrets of Pip's desires or tendencies which are hidden behind the mask of the unconscious narrative, the reader is denied full access to knowledge. While we cannot finally know the truth of these secrets, connotation provides clues by which we can map out a number of the boundaries of signification through which they are effected. Whereas James uses the ironic and/or condescending narrative voice deliberately to lead us through the endless maze of clues to the unspoken secrets of his text, Dickens sets up the narrative structure as harbouring secrets that we must look for within the self-characterization that Pip himself provides. However, both novels deal seriously with the issues of narration and interpretation that an epistemology of their connotative modes addresses; and both fail - notably - to provide endings with satisfying closure.

The absence of closure on the question of "what Maisie knew" in James' text results in a veritable epistemological anxiety. Yet it seems that the unknowability of what "this little girl" knows or *could* know strikes a critical juncture between knowledge and

experience and their representations in language. As the final sentence of the novel reminds us, there is still “room for wonder at what Maisie knew” (268). What we can know about what Maisie knows is always related to the linguistic operations which characterize her progressions through life, both within the world that the text describes and as a literary function herself. For instance, Maisie knows by the end of the novel that “making an arrangement for herself” through language fails to materially produce such an arrangement, that the experience and the knowledge it promises exist outside the realm of fantasy or language. James’ failure to represent such experience (for any of the characters) within the story calls attention to language’s limited ability to represent an exterior to itself. And it forces us to look at our expectations of story to satisfy the desire for finality and even the nostalgic desire for something more than language can provide, for the promise of something beyond the pane of glass that bars language’s access to experience. If *Great Expectations* has the effect of a realistic account of the trials of childhood abuse and poverty, the language of the “real” of the pain by which Pip’s identificatory processes are marked, can always only *refer* to but never bridge the gap between the word and the “original” experience to which it points.

Although, in escaping the clutches of Orlick, Pip escapes the (self-imposed) clutches of the masochistic narrative and we are left with the sense that he has made his peace with that which compels him to seek paths that are futile and painful, Pip’s failure to meet his “great expectations” is ultimately an end to expectations themselves. Pip’s failure to meet his expectations also constitutes Dickens’ failure to meet the expectations of closure that the conventional aspects of the narrative promise. The irony of Dickens’ re-writing of the final scene in order to satisfy the expectations of his readers and

publishers reveals the pressing desire on the reader's part not just to know what a story is finally about, but for it to correspond to what is expected or already known.

That these subjects themselves can only be taken up in the same language in which they are presented, in the same way that an examination of connotation must abide by the terms that connotation itself sets out, need not lead us into epistemological despair; rather it may free us from the urgency to arrive at resolution and to examine more productively the process of reading (and writing) fiction. The inconclusive or irresolute endings of *Great Expectations* and *What Maisie Knew* remind us that finality of meaning in fiction is always itself a fiction. What is left to say, then, about connotation in these two texts beyond a further evasion of a single denotative meaning is about connotation itself. Although it is necessary to stay within the boundaries of connotation it is possible, as my chapters have shown, to say more than the text says without taking it out of its connotative mode. The difference between connotation and denotation is not just one of diction but of grammar. The choice of words that convey the sense of the thing or things invoked without specifically naming - for example, the choice of the words "sexual" or "sexualized" over the word "sex" - uses language to reflect its intent. To name a thing outright, to choose a noun, for example, is to denote a thing that *is* - that is *one thing*; whereas denotatively "saying" means one thing, connotatively "not-saying" potentially means any number of things. Thus, to epistemologically ascertain the boundaries of a word's connotative possibilities within the context and historical moment in which it is used is perhaps an endless task, but it also reveals the capability of connotative language to performatively *do* or produce its multiple effects in its failure or refusal to close off the circulation of meaning.

NOTES

Notes to Introduction

1. Nicole Bradbury makes the useful distinction between the unspeakable and the unsayable in *Henry James: The Later Novels*. As she suggests, there are “two poles of silence: what must not, and what cannot be said” (17).

2. A black hole is perhaps the most intriguing and exotic phenomenon in space. It is a stellar corpse of a high-mass star which has collapsed on its own gravitational force but which cannot be seen or measured except by the effects of that which it is said to act on.

Notes to Chapter One

1. Dickens also signals the danger of reading with the singular focus that, for example, Joe's practice in reading his name in the "J-O"s takes, as illustrated in the quotation of my epigraph (44). This passage humorously and hyperbolically makes obvious the point that, how we read is always in line with what we “know.” Therefore, the reader is always implicated in his or her own reading of a text - but not only in what the reader *reads* but in what she or he does *not* read.

2. The fraudulent and counterfeit connotative force of the word “forge,” which the text repeatedly plays upon, compounds the suspicion created around Pip's narrative authority and the identities and expectations toward which he treads. As the place of identificatory beginnings for Pip, he recounts how he “had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence” (105). But his subsequent abandonment of the forge darkens the idealization of that “glowing” identificatory process and suggests that the road he now treads - toward “gentle-dom” and toward Estella - may be equally idealized, equally unattainable and as easily abandoned.

3. Allusions to the Bible, Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, for example, intertextually inform Pip's story and act as a literary background for Pip's own psycho-geographical setting, especially with respect to morality and literary convention which Pip's story seems to be defined both within and *against*.

4. See, for example, Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot* 122; William A. Cohen in “Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*” *ELH* 219.

5. Magwitch will later become his self-designated father which suggests (as the recurring taint of criminality in Pip's narrative suggests) that, for Pip, there is much less distance between the religious and the sexual and the moral and the immoral than he would like to believe.

6. Pip is explicitly compelled by Magwitch to keep their encounter a secret and, in fact, Pip keeps that secret from his friends and family for as long as he can, until Magwitch reveals himself as his benefactor.

7. Notably, Pip implies an identification with Magwitch (and the young man) in his admission that "I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the iron leg. I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted" (13; ch. 2). The identification alluded to here is one of criminal association. Julian Moynahan's "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of *Great Expectations*" explores thoughtfully the thread of criminality and the "guilt by association" that run through Pip's story.

8. A certain playfulness also weaves through the syntax; for example, in the line, "when the church came to itself - for [the convict] was so sudden and strong... - when the church came to itself, I say..." (2, my emphasis), where the repetition and the interjection, "I say," effect a kind of familiarity and joviality which further deconstructs and/or contextualizes the horror of the scene.

9. See Jon B. Reed, "Astrophil and Estella: A Defense of Poetry," *SEL* 30, 663-5.

10. See *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism* from which Caruth's text principally derives.

11. When Pip finally and tentatively broaches this sensitive subject with Joe (in the penultimate chapter of the novel), it is passed off by Joe (whose is profoundly implicated in these "rampages" by his role as Pip's guardian) as an "onnecessary subject" (465). This particular subject remains a buried, repressed subject between them - the unspoken - which is consistent with the superficiality of their relationship. The narrator Pip portrays that superficiality with ironic humour not only because of Joe's purported "ignorance" but because of the betrayals, lies and self-ignorance that Pip himself brings to their relationship.

12. See Julian Moynahan, "The Hero's Guilt; The Case of *Great Expectations*," *Essays in Criticism* 10 (January 1960): 69; Helen von Schmidt, "The Dark Abyss, The Broad Expanse: Versions of the Self in *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*," *Dickens Quarterly* (September 1985), 88; and Thomas Loe, "Gothic Plot in *Great Expectations*," *Dickens Quarterly* (September 1989), 105.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics & Society*. 2nd. Ed. (London and New York: Longman, 1989) 13, 31, 41, 42, 81, 106-7.

2. Sir Claude complains that "there *are* no family-women - hanged if there are! None of them want any children - hanged if they do!" (53) His moralistic complaint, like his self-proclamation of a "family man" (52), is ironic since he is as guilty as any of the characters of partaking in morally questionable extra-familial activities.

3. In *Bodies That Matter*, 1995.

4. No critic seems to have attached significance to Maisie's name but it is plausible that "Maisie" refers to "maze" and "Farange" to the "far range" of the labyrinth of (sexual) signification through which she is left to wander.

5. Such distortion leads an anonymous reviewer in the *Edinburgh Review* (January 1903) to deem the novel "a bewildering blur of motive and action which has the same effect of irritation on the mind as an ill-focussed photograph upon the sight" (76). This seems to be a common critical reaction to the "maze" that James portrays.

6. In *Outlook*, LVII (Nov. 13, 1897): 670 (source: Richard Nicholas Foley, 67).

7. In both the *Nation* LXVI (Feb. 17, 1898): 135; and the *Literary World* XXVIII (Dec. 11, 1897): 454-5 (sourced in Foley, 68).

8. One anonymous reviewer in the *Critic*, XXXII (Jan. 8, 1898), for example, deemed the novel to be "a protest against divorce" (21 - in Foley 68). The opposing (and often quite reactive) response to the text is exemplified by Edmund Wilson's claim that James' "purpose" in the treatment of the Maisie's character is to "not merely pity her... not merely adore her... [but] to destroy her or rape her" (in Jeffers, 154). In his Preface to *What Maisie Knew* ten years after its publication, James confirms the moral aim of the novel but it is not clear that he means "moral" in the sense that it is used by such critics here. Rather, the "moral sense" with which James is playing in the novel seems to refer to a kind of maturation process, especially of artistic representation or (for example, a character's) sensibility.

9. Rivkin's chapter, "The Proper Third Person: Undoing the Oedipal Family in 'What Maisie Knew'" in which the "proper third person" refers to "the grammatical term for the narrative strategy that 'adopts' Maisie's point of view but not her voice" (125) explores intelligently Maisie's struggle to cohere and self-identify as an autonomous subject.

10. Further illustrating this point is the moment in which Maisie and Mrs. Wix are discussing the "immoral" relations between Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale and Maisie asks Mrs. Wix, "Why is it immorality?" to which Mrs. Wix responds, "You're too unspeakable! Do you know what we're talking about?" (202). Maisie does not seem to understand the implications of the *adultery* - that is, the *sexual* nature of the relationship - which Mrs. Wix is referring to but, more importantly, she does not understand the difference between proper and improper in relations generally. In other words, she has no "moral" sense.

11. Mrs. Wix has finally (as Maisie is said to do when she begins to assert *her* own power) "come out" (228). This "new" Mrs. Wix is the Mrs. Wix who, if we pay attention to the markers

throughout the novel, has been the latent "immoral" Mrs. Wix - the persistent and rather bitter servant (as seen, for example, in her provision of Maisie with "a vivid vision of every one who had ever, in her phrase, knocked against her - some of them oh so hard!" [29]) whose ambition for freedom and power is directed very much by selfish personal gain - rather than by moral superiority. When she "comes out," she does so in finding that she has gained a certain power and "advantage" over Sir Claude which she immediately goes about exercising (182).

12. "They" refers in Heidegger's text to "the 'who' [who] is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the 'they' [das Man]. In this inconspicuous and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge;... we find shocking what *they* find shocking" (126-7). I take the connection of this Heideggerian notion with Maisie's story from Mary Galbraith, 199. The power and usefulness of the concept of "they" is exemplified frequently in the passing off of responsibility by Maisie's caretakers for the immoral element to which she is exposed and, as Galbraith suggests, also acts as "a direct disclaimer of narratorial responsibility" (199).

13. As Edwin Sill Fussell notes in *The French Side of James*, allusions to France or French literature or history in *What Maisie Knew* consistently suggest "foreign charm" and "romantic real-life attraction" (171).

14. Mrs. Wix "gets around" her own negligence by asking, "It isn't as if you didn't already know everything, is it, love?" and "I can't make you any worse than you *are*, can I, darling?" (61). The narrator explains ironically how

these were the terms in which the good lady justified to herself and her pupil her pleasant conversational ease. What the pupil already knew was indeed rather taken for granted than expressed, but it performed the useful function of transcending all textbooks and supplanting all studies. (61)

Mrs. Wix is clearly the source for Maisie's conception that she already knows "everything."

15. The page references are as follows: "little girl" (11, 15, 28, 52, 96), "old boy" (64, 191), "old chap" (67), "old fellow" (85), "old woman" (95), "dear boy" (102, 177), "young lady" (134, 135, 249), "old man" (69, 105, 238, 244) and "old girl" (247).

16. This is exemplified in Sir Claude's "knowing" comment to Mrs. Beale, "*You* know whom one marries, I think" (53) which refers implicitly to the (unspoken) criteria of money and title in marriage and (silently) contrasts with whom one is "otherwise" involved.

17. Mrs. Wix asks Maisie, "has it never occurred to you to be jealous of her?" [which, the narrator tells us] it never had in the least; yet the words were scarce in the air before Maisie had jumped at them... [and she decides,] "Well, yes - since you ask me... Lots of times!" (213). However, this assertion is qualified by the narrative notation that "the possibility of the idea of jealousy... [is] a possibility created only by her feeling she had thus found the way to show she was not simple" (213). Thus, Maisie's performative acting out of "her sincerity ... of [this] most restless of the passions" (213) stands in for normalized feelings that will surface later as "real" - both of

which can be seen as the effects of normativity.

18. Mrs. Wix accuses Sir Claude of having “nipped it in the bud” (261). She tells him, “You’ve killed it when it had begun to live” (261). “It” refers here apparently (though not explicitly) to Maisie’s moral sense but Sir Claude’s response seems to suggest that what is referred to is less her moral sense than her sexual sense - or that the two are, according to the elusive language which James’ uses, not very far apart in meaning. Sir Claude defends himself by assuring Mrs. Wix, “I’ve not killed anything... on the contrary I think I’ve 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” (261). The “it” that is repeated *seven* times in the sentence has no precise referent although we understand it to be the “central but absent” sexual referent that pervades the novel; that it is not named (yet is nevertheless signalled) illustrates the effectiveness of repetition to invoke the unspoken.

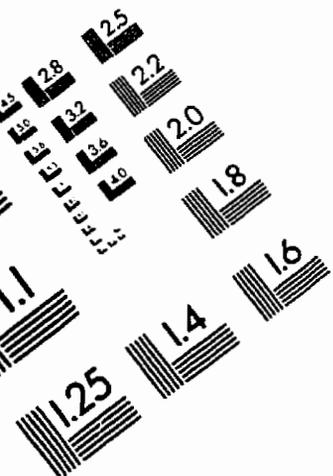
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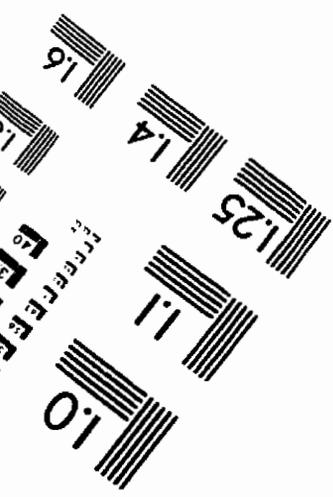
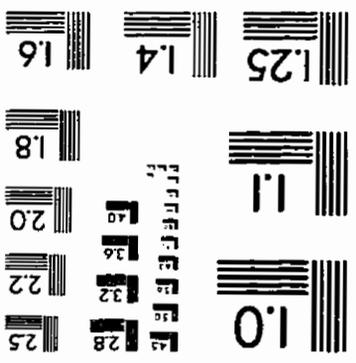
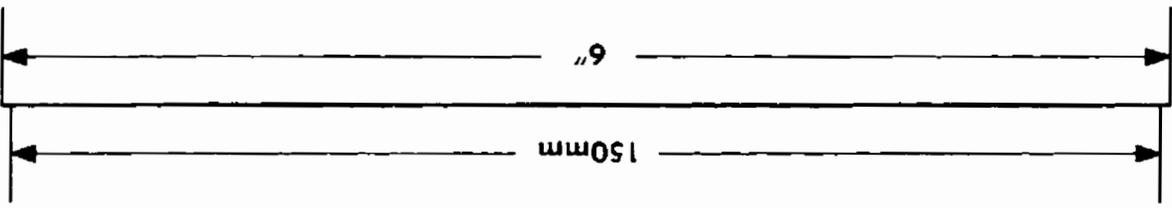
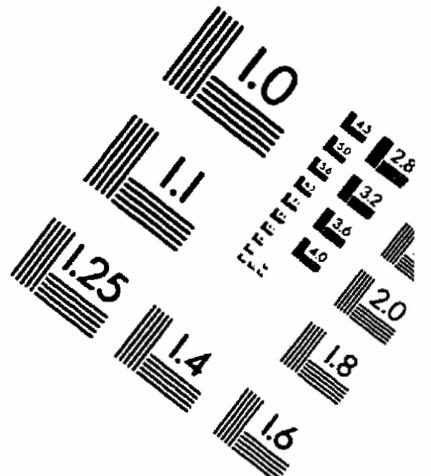
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