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Some Stray Fragrance of an Ideal

Henry James's Imagery for Youth's Discovery of Evil

IN his preface to the New York Edition of the volume containing *What Maisie Knew*, Henry James expressed the development of moral perception in certain of his youngest characters through the image of 'the speculative thread on which the pearls of . . . experience . . . are mostly strung.'¹ The speculative thread, he explains, is the winged intelligence with which these young persons are endowed, an intelligence entitling them to an almost limitless number of moral vibrations. The pearls are their observations, intelligible to them through repetition, of the conduct of their elders, pearls, James qualifies, 'of so strange an iridescence.' Nowhere is their iridescence stranger than in the cases in which the elders are parents, the cases of Morgan Moreen of 'The Pupil,' Maisie Farange of *What Maisie Knew*, and Nanda Brookenham of *The Awkward Age*.

James's subjects, as he set them to himself for the short story and the two novels, vary widely in scope. The idea of 'The Pupil' was suggested to him by a medical doctor with whom he shared an Italian railway carriage. The doctor described to him an American family, 'an odd adventurous, extravagant band, of high but rather unauthenticated pretensions, the most interesting member of which was a small boy, acute and precocious, afflicted with a heart of weak action, but beautifully intelligent, who saw their prowling precarious life exactly as it was, and measured and judged it, and measured and judged *them*, all round, ever so quaintly; presenting himself in short as an extraordinary little person.' Similarly, the situation that became Maisie's was told him at a dinner party at James Bryce's, the story of a child decreed by the divorce courts to spend half its time with either parent, one of whom shortly remarried. *The Awkward Age*, however, was the fruit of James's observation of the English failure to solve the problem of the adolescent daughter too old for the schoolroom upstairs and too young for the talk downstairs, a comedy of manners alien to the French, who

¹The texts used for the present article are those of *The Novels and Stories of Henry James* (London, 1921-23), Vols. 14 and 16, and *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1947).

promptly marry their daughters, and to the Americans, who adapt their conversation to the *jeune fille*.

Like his subjects, James's treatment of the dawning awareness of good and evil in his three young people also varies from 'The Pupil,' first published in 1892, to *What Maisie Knew*, published in 1897, to *The Awkward Age*, which appeared two years later. Ten years before he wrote 'The Pupil,' James spoke of working for the stage as 'the most cherished of all my projects' and 'the dramatic form' as 'the most beautiful thing possible.' But not until 1891, after he had produced an acting version of *The American*, did he undertake playwriting in earnest. For nearly five years he gave himself to the composition of four comedies that did not reach the stage and *Guy Donville*, which did and failed. After the destructive opening night of *Guy Donville*, he did not lament the 'wasted passion and squandered time,' but instead occupied himself with salvaging what he could of his experience of the theatre, as he records in a notebook entry of February, 1895:

IF there has lurked in the central core of it this exquisite truth — I almost hold my breath with suspense as I try to formulate it; so much, so *much*, hangs radiantly there as depending on it — this exquisite truth that what I call the divine principle in question is a key that, working in the same *general* way fits the complicated chambers of *both* the dramatic and the narrative lock: *if*, I say, I have crept round through long apparent barrenness, through suffering and sadness intolerable, to that rare perception — why my infinite little loss is converted into an almost infinite little gain.

In 'The Pupil' James introduces a tutor for the precocious small boy, Morgan Moreen, and through poor Pemberton's vision of the Moreens, Morgan's vision of them is reflected. With *What Maisie Knew* the problem of the capacity of a small child, however intelligent, for interpretation, even for vocabulary, took much more 'doing,' as the many pages devoted to the novel in the *Notebooks* testify. As with Morgan, much is interpreted for Maisie by her governess; in addition, she is the confidante at times of her parents and stepparents; still more, she is present at the revelatory scenes of her grownups. *What Maisie Knew* represents the pivotal point between James's early and later manners. *The Awkward Age* he conceived as a drama, after the manner of the French writer 'Gyp.' He saw the novel as a series of scenes like concentric rings drawn around a central object, the theme. Each ring represented an occasion or lamp that shed light on the theme, and the occasions approximated the successive acts of a play. Nanda's exposure

to the morality of her mother's salon has thus its exposition, its complication, its climax, and its denouement. For this novel James claimed the 'maximum of composition.'

James's 'infinite little gain' as an artist is not to be measured solely by his mastery of scenic presentation: it is equally apparent in the growth of his use of imagery. In the three works that present youth's discovery of evil through the conduct of parents, his primary interest in Morgan, Maisie, and Nanda is their personal relation to their knowledge. Their growing awareness, the moment of full recognition, above all the use they make of moral perception — these stages of the journey from innocence to experience constitute their interest for him. Life for them is 'luxuriously lived' though it be as short as Morgan's, for 'luxury' is measured by the degree of moral awareness. From 'The Pupil' to *The Awkward Age* James's presentation of the cases of these young persons shows the same marked growth in imagery that it does in dramatic technique. Indeed, with *The Awkward Age*, in which the scenic law is absolute, it has become thematic for both the protagonist, Nanda, and the antagonist, the salon and its presiding genius her mother.

I

The images in which Pemberton, young Morgan Moreen's tutor, visualizes the boy's family all characterize their worldliness. They are 'like a band of gipsies,' like 'pickpockets or strolling players,' 'a household of Bohemians who wanted tremendously to be Philistines,' 'a band of adventurers,' 'the great Moreen troupe,' people who 'take snubs as if they were honourable scars,' 'as good-natured as Jews at the doors of clothing-shops'; 'their whole view of life, dim and confused and instinctive, like that of clever colour-blind animals, was speculative and rapacious and mean.' The one recurrent image Pemberton uses pertains to Mr Moreen, who, whatever the current collapse of his system of toadying and lying and cheating, always behaves 'like a man of the world.'

At first the boy Morgan seems to Pemberton 'as puzzling as a page in an unknown language': 'Indeed the whole mystic volume in which the boy had been amateurishly bound demanded some practice in translation.' In time he comes to see that the child simply is preternaturally clever, possessed of 'a whole range of refinement and perception — little musical vibrations as taking as picked-up airs — begotten by wandering about Europe at the tail of his migratory tribe.' The results of

such an education as this with so special a subject as Morgan are 'as appreciable as the marks on a piece of fine porcelain.' Nevertheless, he has still the freshness of childhood, 'his proper playroom of superstitions, where he smashed a dozen toys a day.'

The images in which Pemberton construes Morgan's knowledge of his family's shame are only two in number: 'the little cool shallows that were so quickly growing deeper,' and 'the morning twilight of childhood . . . already flushing faintly into knowledge.' No images of Morgan's relation to his knowledge — a knowledge infinitely fuller than Pemberton's — occur. This relation is presented in dialogue between the tutor and the boy, who reveals it 'with a ring of passion, like some high silver note from a small cathedral chorister.' He further reveals it when, upon the total collapse of their system, the Moreens ask Pemberton to take Morgan. His weak heart cannot stand the violence of his joy.

II

Because *What Maisie Knew* opens with the divorce of Maisie Farange's parents, Beale, 'bespattered from head to foot,' and Ida, her 'complexion . . . more regarded as showing the spots,' the initial imagery in the novel serves the function of characterizing their relations to each other and to Maisie. Six-year-old Maisie is 'a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed.' Her bewilderment is intense:

Only a drummer-boy in a ballad or a story could have been so in the thick of the fight. She was taken into the confidence of passions on which she fixed just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic-lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric — strange shadows dancing on a sheet. It was as if the whole performance had been given for her — a mite of a half-scared infant in a great dim theatre.

Spending one term with Beale, the next with Ida, 'she was the little feathered shuttlecock they could fiercely keep flying between them.'

Beale and Ida, James comments in the preface to the novel, could interest him only through the value Maisie lends them. Because Maisie has the greater faith in her mother, he made Ida 'concrete, immense and awful.' Imagery characterizing Ida and her relations with Maisie abounds on the rare occasions on which the child is privileged to see her mother, and it is imagery in which Ida appears as a consummate actress.

Maisie's first glimpse of her mother after the latter's marriage to Sir Claude shows Ida no longer blonde but red-haired and wearing 'the stare of some gorgeous idol described in a story-book':

Her professions and explanations were mixed with eager challenges and sudden drops, in the midst of which Maisie recognised as a memory of other years the rattle of her trinkets and the scratch of her endearments, the odour of her clothes and the jumps of her conversation. She had all her old clever way . . . of changing the subject as she might have slammed the door in your face.

As Ida begins to suspect Sir Claude's attraction to Mrs Beale, Maisie's stepmother, her visits to the schoolroom, in which Maisie is largely confined with her governess Mrs Wix, become more erratic:

Her visits were as good as an outfit; her manner, as Mrs. Wix once said, as good as a pair of curtains; but she was a person addicted to extremes — sometimes barely speaking to her child and sometimes pressing this tender shoot to a bosom cut, as Mrs. Wix had also observed, remarkably low.

Ida consoles herself largely for Sir Claude's infidelity, and one day walking in Kensington Gardens with Sir Claude, Maisie meets her mother with a gentleman presently made known to her as 'the Captain.' As Ida furiously advances upon Sir Claude, Maisie reflects, 'But what idea, as she now came grandly on, did mamma fit? — unless that of an actress, in some tremendous situation, sweeping down to the footlights as if she would jump them.' Maisie feels 'the full force of her mother's huge painted eyes — they were like Japanese lanterns swung under festal arches.' Ida glances back at the Captain with a 'face that was like an illuminated garden, turnstile and all, for the frequentation of which he had his season-ticket'; and as she directs Maisie to go to him while she deals with Sir Claude, the child finds herself on her mother's breast, 'where, amid a wilderness of trinkets, she felt as if she had suddenly been thrust, with a smash of glass, into a jeweller's shop-front.'

Maisie likes the Captain because he is the first person who has ever believed that her mother is 'good.' Whatever Maisie knows of Ida's goodness, she does eventually acknowledge the charm that her mother exerts for gentlemen. The evening that Sir Claude takes Maisie to Folkestone, thinking eventually to make a home for her with himself and Mrs Beale, Ida is suddenly announced. Her mother's reappearance has on Maisie 'the effect of one of the iron shutters that . . . she had seen suddenly, at the touch of a spring, rattle down over shining shop-fronts.' Yet as she sits in the garden with her parent, she reflects that

her huge eyes, her red lips, the intense marks in her face formed an *éclairage* as distinct and public as a lamp set in a window. The child seemed quite to see in it the very beacon that had lighted her path; she suddenly found herself reflecting that it was no wonder the gentlemen were guided.

As for Ida, she has come to 'give up' Maisie. She is dreadfully ill, she says, and someone is taking her to South Africa. She leaves giving Maisie 'one of the looks that slammed the door in her face.' But just before she makes her exit from the novel the recurrent imagery of the theatre is concluded: 'She draped herself in the tatters of her impudence, postured to her utmost before the last little triangle of cracked glass to which so many fractures had reduced the polished plate of filial superstition.'

Practicing his cherished principle of dramatic economy, James portrayed Beale almost entirely by implication, merely paralleling his career with Ida's: Beale remarries, is unfaithful to his second wife, and 'gives up' Maisie to go with a current mistress, not, however, to South Africa but to America. Even in appearance Beale is almost as florid as Ida, with the 'eternal glitter' or 'perfect parade' of all his teeth and his great fair beard, 'burnished like a gold breastplate.' But to make Beale count in Maisie's scale of values, James had to give him a 'big scene,' one which, he later felt, admirably achieved its purpose. Visiting the Exhibition with Mrs Beale, as she had earlier visited Kensington Gardens with Sir Claude, Maisie sees her father in the company of a 'brown' lady. A moment later she is whisked away by her father to the 'brown' lady's home, where, designing that she will let him off with honor, Beale proposes that she accompany him and his mistress to America. Maisie's revulsion at this deplorable scene is expressed in a single image about the lady of her papa's choice: 'She literally struck the child more as an animal than as a "real" lady; she might have been a clever frizzled poodle in a frill or a dreadful human monkey in a spangled petticoat.'

In the *Notebooks* James refers to Maisie's elderly governess, Mrs Wix, as 'the frump.' In the novel she is sometimes referred to by the 'diadem' and the 'button' in which she wears her hair on the top and on the back of her head respectively. More often, her image is 'the straighteners' — physically, her glasses; psychologically, her honesty. Curious as she looks — like a 'horrid beetle,' Maisie thinks at first — her pupil adores her and the two can scarcely endure their first parting:

The child had lately been to the dentist's and had a term of comparison for the screwed-up intensity of the scene. . . . a month later, the "arrange-

ment," as her periodical uprootings were called, played the part of the horrible forceps. Embedded in Mrs. Wix's nature as her tooth had been socketed in her gum, the operation of extracting her would really have been a case for chloroform.

Indeed, Maisie adores Mrs Wix next to Sir Claude, who shines 'in her yearning eye like the single, the sovereign window-square of a great dim disproportioned room.' Fortunately, Mrs Wix also confesses herself 'in love' with Sir Claude, and between them the stepfather and the governess reassure Maisie. At home Ida's conduct puts Mrs Wix and the child 'more than ever, in this troubled sea, in the same boat, so that with the consciousness of ideas on the part of her fellow-mariner Maisie could sit close and wait.' And at Folkestone during her last encounter with her mother, Maisie feels herself 'launched with Sir Claude . . . the great seaway clear for the morrow.'

To save both Maisie and Sir Claude, Mrs Wix implores him to take a house for the three of them. This idea she has 'pumped' into him for weeks

on lines of approach that she had been capable of the extraordinary art of preserving from entanglement in the fine network of his relations with Mrs. Beale. The breath of her sincerity, blowing without a break, had puffed him up to the flight.

In the capacity of savior Mrs Wix is clothed in religious imagery. Because of Ida's wrath Maisie never goes home from her excursions with Sir Claude 'without expecting to find the temple of her studies empty and the poor priestess cast out.' Nor could Mrs Wix in her influence with Sir Claude 'have been more impressive, even at second-hand, if she had been a prophetess with an open scroll or some ardent abbess speaking with the lips of the Church.'

However, it is neither sea nor religious imagery that James most uses with Mrs Wix, but rather military. When she first proposes to Sir Claude that he take a house for them, he objects: 'On his protesting with all the warmth in nature against this note of secession she asked what else in the world was left to them if her ladyship should stop supplies.' Sir Claude thereupon sends Maisie and Mrs Wix 'a huge frosted cake, a wonderful delectable mountain with geological strata of jam, which might, with economy, see them through many days of their siege.' At Boulogne, whither Ida sends Mrs Wix for Maisie, the old woman wages the doughtiest battle of her career to save both the child and Sir Claude. When he proposes that he return to London,

where Mrs Beale is, Mrs Wix gives 'an unparalleled neigh of battle.' So vehement is she that Maisie chooses the 'soft method of silence to satisfy him, the silence that after battles of talk was the best balm she could offer his wounds.' When Maisie proposes that she and Mrs Wix and Sir Claude and Mrs Beale live together as a foursome, Mrs Wix gives 'the start even of one who hears a bullet whiz at the flag of truce.' When Mrs Beale makes the same proposal, with the exclusion of Mrs Wix, the latter is again 'in the field.' Finally, when she has lost Sir Claude, she comes forth, 'with the heat of her late engagement . . . still on her brow,' to save Maisie, 'girded . . . and armed with a small fat rusty reticule which, almost in the manner of a battle-axe, she brandished in support of her words.'

The foregoing imagery of character and its interplay is, of course, contributory to the major imagery of the novel, that of Maisie's relation to her knowledge. At Beale's house with her nurse Moddle after the divorce, Maisie 'embalms in wonder' what she cannot understand:

By the time she had grown sharper . . . she found in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings were 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. The great strain meanwhile was that of carrying by the right end the things her father said about her mother — things mostly indeed that Moddle, on a glimpse of them, as if they had been complicated toys or difficult books, took out of her hands and put away in the closet. A wonderful assortment of objects of this kind she was to discover there later, all tumbled up too with the things, shuffled into the same receptacle, that her mother had said about her father.

After two years of innocently carrying the insults of one parent to the other, Maisie sees

the complete vision, private but final, of the strange office she filled. It was literally a moral revolution and accomplished in the depths of her nature. The stiff dolls on the dusky shelves began to move their arms and legs; old forms and phases began to have a sense that frightened her. She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment. She puzzled out, with imperfect signs, but with a prodigious spirit, that she had been a centre of hatred and a messenger of insult.

Thereafter Maisie practices 'the pacific art of stupidity.' Interestingly, the image in which she expresses the necessity of 'puzzling out' things for herself initiates the recurrent imagery of her mother's relation to her,

Ida's forever 'slamming the door in her face': 'Everything had something behind it: 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 — this seemed to produce from within such sounds of derision.' When after the remarriages of her parents Maisie's future becomes the concern of Sir Claude and Mrs Wix, she listens to them talk of it with a kind of fascination:

So the sharpened sense of spectatorship was the child's main support, 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 often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass.

Eventually at Boulogne Maisie is herself faced with the choice of her future: Mrs Wix or Sir Claude and Mrs Beale, who are not yet divorced from her mother and father respectively. Both she and Mrs Wix consider that since Maisie has been condemned to know more and more, she must, logically, soon know Most, Everything, All. For Mrs Wix this consideration takes the form of a question, 'Haven't you really and truly *any* moral sense?' Hesitant because she loves Sir Claude more than Mrs Wix, Maisie feels the latter's insistence on this possession as 'a long tense cord, twitched by a nervous hand, on which the valued pearls of intelligence were to be neatly strung.' As Maisie goes to discuss the matter of her choice with Sir Claude, Mrs Wix, 'slow still tears behind the straighteners,' reminds her that her decision is a tremendously grave one.

"It is — it is." Maisie spoke as if she were now dressed quite up to the occasion; as if indeed with the last touch she had put on the judgement-cap.

Once in the presence of Sir Claude, she phrases her ordeal to herself in the language of the schoolroom, as she had earlier puzzled out things in the vocabulary of the nursery. Maisie's academic knowledge has by no means kept pace with her personal knowledge. As an instructor, Mrs Wix 'took refuge on the firm ground of fiction, through which indeed there curled the blue river of truth.' As for her other governess, Miss Overmore had ceased to have time for lessons once she became Mrs Beale, a state of affairs causing Maisie 'to feel henceforth as if she were flattening her nose upon the hard window-pane of the sweet-shop of knowledge.' Yet her experience of the schoolroom does suffice to

provide her, in her dilemma, with terms of comparison: 'Her choice . . . was there before her like an impossible sum on a slate, a sum that in spite of her plea for consideration she simply got off from doing while she walked about with him.'

In the final scene of the novel, in which Mrs Wix and Mrs Beale contend for the child, Maisie's scant experience of the schoolroom again occurs to her. Mrs Wix demands to know whether she has lost the moral sense so arduously cultivated between them:

It brought back to the child's recollection how she sometimes couldn't repeat on Friday the sentence that had been glib on Wednesday, and she dealt all feebly and ruefully with the present tough passage. Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale stood there like visitors at an "exam." She had indeed an instant a whiff of the faint flower that Mrs. Wix pretended to have plucked and now with such a peremptory hand thrust at her nose. Then it left her, and, as if she were sinking with a slip from a foothold, her arms made a short jerk. What this jerk represented was the spasm within her of something still deeper than a moral sense. She looked at her examiner; she looked at the visitors; she felt the rising of the tears she had kept down at the station. They had nothing — no, distinctly nothing — to do with her moral sense. The only thing was the old flat shameful schoolroom plea. "I don't know — I don't know."

But Sir Claude tells Mrs Beale and Mrs Wix that Maisie has already made her choice: she would have given up Mrs Wix if he had been willing to give up Mrs Beale. Maisie's moral sense, he says, is the most beautiful thing he has ever met, exquisite, sacred; and he speaks 'as if some lovely work of art or of nature had suddenly been set down among them.'

III

Because *The Awkward Age* is constructed like a play, imagery of character is placed like stage directions. It seldom occurs in the minds of the characters but rather as a parenthesis to their moments on stage. For Mrs Brookenham and the two most intimate members of her salon, Mitchy and Van, it is lavishly recurrent, for the reason that Nanda's plight can be realized only if the character of her mother's circle is made clear. Toward this clarity the portrait of Mrs Brookenham demanded the highest finish, and accordingly James gave her imagery richer and more varied than Mitchy's and Van's. With her first en-

trance he provides the directions on which he was to play variations in the later scenes of his drama:

She had about her the pure light of youth — would always have it; her head, her figure, her flexibility, her flickering colour, her lovely, silly eyes, her natural, quavering tone, all played together toward this effect by some trick that had never yet been exposed. . . . she suggested for the most part the luxury, the novelty of woe, the excitement of strange sorrows and the cultivation of fine indifferences. This was her special sign — an innocence dimly tragic.

This primary image of Mrs Brookenham's 'dimly tragic innocence' is expanded throughout the novel by means of subsidiary images characterizing her manner, her expression, and her speech. Whatever she does, she does 'with the hanging head of a broken lily,' 'as a broken lily,' 'in the habit . . . of the languid lily-bend.' She looks 'intelligent and wan,' wearing a 'face . . . charged with the woe of the world,' a 'wan smile,' a 'sweet world-weariness,' a 'pale interest,' a 'sweet vacancy,' or, most often, 'an infantine stare.' Her speech always 'wails' or 'quavers,' rising as it does from 'the state of muffled exaltation that was the mark of all her intercourse.'

Mitchy, Mrs Brookenham's candidate for Nanda's hand, is characterized by only two images, but they recur with a more insistent frequency than even her infantine stare. Mitchy is honest, generous with the wealth inherited from his shoemaker father, and superlatively ugly, with prominent colorless eyes and a receding chin. All three qualities, and his origin too, are present in his 'glare' and in his 'goggle.' He 'glares' and 'goggles' his way through the novel 'naturally,' 'fairly,' 'queerly,' and 'wonderfully.'

Mitchy supplies the one image of character and of relation for Van. Early in the novel, as a prelude to his coining this image, Mitchy tells Mrs Brookenham that Nanda is in love with Van. Wishing as she does to keep Van for herself, she pretends shock. Mitchy exclaims, 'How can you possibly have such a fellow about, so beastly good-looking, so infernally well turned out in the way of "culture," and so bringing them down in short on every side, and expect in the bosom of your family the absence of history of the reigns of the good kings?' Midway in the complication, as Mrs Brookenham, Mitchy, and Van discuss Mr Longdon's proposal to *doter* Nanda if Van will have her, Mitchy remarks to Van: 'The great thing's the sacred terror. It's you who give *that* out.' Mrs Brookenham approves the image, and she and Mitchy

regularly use it to explain Van. At the close of the novel Van has rejected Nanda because of the sophistication to which her mother deliberately exposed her in order to keep him for herself. Mitchy comments to Mr Longdon that he still likes Van: 'There are people like that — great cases of privilege. . . . There it is. They go through life somehow guaranteed. They can't help pleasing. . . . They hold, they keep every one. . . . It's the sacred terror.'

Unlike the images of character, the imagery of the relations within Mrs Brookenham's circle occurs in the minds of the characters inasmuch as widely divergent views of the purpose of the salon exist. Mitchy's is the most generous: 'We're simply a collection of natural affinities . . . governed . . . everywhere by Mrs. Brook, in our mysterious ebbs and flows, very much as the tides are governed by the moon.' The Duchess' view is considerably less kind. The Duchess, Mr Brookenham's cousin come from Italy to make a wealthy marriage for her niece, Little Aggie, regards Mrs Brookenham's salon 'as from a box at the play, comfortably shut in, as in the old operatic days at Naples,' and comments, in an aside to her lover Petherton, 'one can't know the dear soul, of course, without knowing that she has set up, for the convenience of her friends, a little office for consultations. She listens to the case, she strokes her chin and prescribes . . . Of course we know that the great business she does is in husbands and wives.'

James carefully authenticates the Duchess' view by showing Mrs Brookenham in action with an unhappily married woman, Lady Fanny Cashmore. Both Lady Fanny and Mr Cashmore seek Mrs Brookenham for consultation, but Mr Cashmore has attractions in London, one of them Nanda, and the great question therefore is whether or not Lady Fanny will 'bolt' abroad. His wife, Mrs Brookenham explains to Mr Cashmore, is 'a great, calm, silver statue,' 'a great, glorious pagan,' 'some great natural poetic thing — an Alpine sunrise or a big high tide,' one who 'shows things, don't you see? as some fine tourist region shows the placards in the fields and the posters on the rocks.' To Van Mrs Brookenham is more explicit about the uses of Lady Fanny: 'She's the ornament of our circle. . . . She will, she won't — she won't, she will! It's the excitement, every day, of plucking the daisy over.' As Van's amusement at this sport wanes, Mrs Brookenham insists the more on the interest of Lady Fanny:

Not to be afraid of what may happen to you when you've no more to say for yourself than a steamer without a light — that truly is the highest

heroism, and Lady Fanny's greatness is that she's never afraid. . . . we delight in her; though when either of us watches her in a circle of others it's like seeing a very large blind person in the middle of Oxford Street. One fairly looks about for the police.

So delighting in good talk, Mrs Brookenham bitterly resents having to 'haul in sail' for the sake of an eighteen-year-old daughter. On the question of what to do with Nanda she seems 'to stand with little nipping scissors in a garden of alternatives.' Even her son Harold, 'as clear and crisp and undefiled' as the five-pound notes he borrows from her friends, notices her grievance: 'How you *do* like to tuck us in and then sit up yourself!'

Harold's quip is confirmed by the Duchess' second, and masterly, description of Mrs Brookenham and her circle to Mr Longdon. This time she includes the position of Mr Brookenham, her kinsman Edward:

I do her perfect justice. As your women go, she's rare. If she were French she'd be a *femme d'esprit*. She has invented a *nuance* of her own and she has done it all by herself, for Edward figures in her drawing-room only as one of those queer extinguishers of fire in the corridors of hotels. He's just a bucket on a peg. The men, the young and the clever ones, find it a house — and heaven knows they're right — with intellectual elbow-room, with freedom of talk. Most English talk is a quadrille in a sentry-box.

The Duchess succeeds in marrying Little Aggie to Mitchy. The plan of Mitchy for Nanda and Van for herself smashed, Mrs Brookenham ships Nanda off to Mr Longdon in the country for five months. Edward is pleased to be relieved of the support of his daughter. But still Van does not become Mrs Brookenham's; as the Duchess phrases it, 'She has put down her money, as it were, without a return.' Sore and desperate, Mrs Brookenham perpetrates the climax of the situation and the novel. At a party given by Nanda's friend, Tishy Greendon, with the entire cast of characters on stage, she asks Mr Longdon to give Nanda back. Mr Longdon and the Duchess immediately see that Mrs Brookenham is recalling Nanda to expose her to such freedoms that Van will never marry her. But Edward, missing his cue, failing as 'oracle' to the 'priestess,' says they wouldn't *take* Nanda back. Herself and her system laid bare, Mrs Brookenham neatly exposes the 'systems' of all the cast; as Van comments to her months later, 'It was a wonderful performance. You pulled us down — just closing with each of the great columns in its turn — as Samson pulled down the temple.'

The 'performance' costs Mrs Brookenham Van and her circle. But

Nanda, preparing to return to Mr Longdon forever, feels compassion for her mother's 'solitude' and 'youth' and asks Van, as well as Mitchy, to relieve her loneliness. As he agrees, Van reverts to Mitchy's original image for Mrs Brookenham and her circle: "She's a fixed star." "Oh I know she is," Nanda said. "It's *you* —" "Who may be only the flashing meteor? . . . I promise you, then, that your words have stayed me in my course. You've made me stand as still as Joshua made the sun."

Mr Longdon's devotion to Nanda begins with his perception of her exact physical likeness to her grandmother, Lady Julia, whom he loved all her life. A visitor to London after a lifetime in the country, he has tea with Van, whose mother he had also loved, before Lady Julia; there was nothing, he tells Van, after Lady Julia. As Nanda comes in, he is profoundly shaken by the resemblance, or, as Mitchy puts it, 'pierced to the heart . . . the victim done for by one glance of the goddess!' Although her manners are very different from her grandmother's, Mr Longdon comes to love Nanda for her 'tragic candor.' As a representative of the manners of an older generation, he is deeply shocked at her being allowed to frequent her mother's drawing room, where he feels like 'a stranger at an Eastern court — comically helpless without his interpreter.' He wishes somehow to protect her, to assure her future. The single image used to embrace his fineness, his kindness, his urbanity, and his diffidence refers to his pince-nez. This double eyeglass, which Mr Longdon constantly takes off and swings and readjusts as he surveys Nanda's circumstances, is called 'the nippers.' As a stage direction it is used with the frequency of Mrs Brookenham's infantine wonder and Mitchy's queer glare.

Mr Longdon's nippers do not serve only the function of emphasizing and dramatizing the central idea of the novel. They also point up James's theory of the vulgarization and decay of English society. The deviation of Mrs Brookenham's salon from the standards of his youth preoccupies Mr Longdon. However much Nanda explains,

It was apt to be when he felt as if he had exhausted surprises that he really received his greatest shocks. There were no such queer-tasting draughts as some of those yielded by the bucket that had repeatedly, as he imagined, touched the bottom of the well.

He puzzles aloud to Nanda:

The more one thinks of it the more one seems to see that society — for we're *in* society, aren't we, and that's our horizon? — can never have been

anything but increasingly vulgar. The point is, that in the twilight of time — and I belong, you see, to the twilight — it had made out much less how vulgar it *could* be. It did its best very probably, but there were too many superstitions it had to get rid of. It has been throwing them overboard one by one, so that now the ship sails uncommonly light. That's the way . . . I come to feel so the lurching and pitching. If I weren't a pretty fair sailor — well, as it is, my dear . . . I show you often what grabs I make for support.

Mr Longdon's nippers, more fully than the Duchess, Lord Petheron, and the Cashmores, point up the sophistication of Mrs Brookenham's circle.

Nanda's foil in the novel, Little Aggie, has been reared by the Duchess as a blank page to be inscribed only with marriage. As the Duchess displays her handiwork to Mrs Brookenham's salon, she can afford complacency about her 'little ivory princess':

As slight and white, as delicately lovely, as a gathered garden lily, her admirable training appeared to hold her out to them all as with precautionary finger-tips. . . . Little Aggie presented, up and down, an arrangement of dress exactly in the key of her age, her complexion, her emphasised virginity. She might have been prepared for her visit by a cluster of dotting nuns, cloistered daughters of ancient houses and educators of similar products, whose taste, hereditarily good, had grown, out of the world and most delightfully, so queer as to leave on everything they touched a particular shade of distinction.

Mrs Brookenham's response to the exhibit, made, of course, only to Van and Mitchy, is quite as acid as the Duchess' remarks on Nanda's 'depravity':

Aggie, don't you see? is the Duchess's morality, her virtue; which, by having it that way outside of you, as one may say, you can make a much better thing of. The child has been for Jane, I admit, a capital little subject, but Jane has kept her on hand and finished her like some wonderful piece of stitching. Oh as work it's of a *soigné*! There it is — to show. A woman like me has to be *herself*, poor thing, her virtue and her morality. What will you have?

When Mr Longdon meets little Aggie, he acknowledges that 'from the point of view under which she had been formed, she was a remarkable, a rare success':

Since to create a particular little rounded and tinted innocence had been aimed at, the fruit had been grown to the perfection of a peach on a sheltered wall . . . Little Aggie differed from any young person he had ever

met in that she had been deliberately prepared for consumption and in that furthermore the gentleness of her spirit had immensely helped the preparation.

Thoughtfully he contrasts her with Nanda:

Nanda, beside her, was a Northern savage, and the reason was partly that the elements of that young lady's nature were already, were publicly, were almost indecorously active. They were practically there for good or for ill; experience was still to come and what they might work out to still a mystery; but the sum would get itself done with the figures now on the slate. On Little Aggie's slate the figures were yet to be written; which sufficiently accounted for the difference of the two surfaces.

Little Aggie can, then, have no relation to knowledge. Nanda, on the contrary, has never not had such a relation. Very simply she explains the difference to Mitchy: 'There was never a time when I didn't know *something* or other, and . . . I became more and more aware, as I grew older, of a hundred little chinks of daylight.' She has always 'taken in things at her pores,' she tells Van as she attempts to show him that girls have changed, they understand now, and the fact had much better be faced than dodged. Talk with her unhappily married friend Tishy Grendon has not been harmful because it has been natural. In her mother's drawing room, on the contrary, it has been so 'controlled' as to suggest horrors: 'Of course what's so awfully unutterable is just what we most notice.' She knows as well as Mr Longdon does that her sum will get itself written with the figures already on the slate, for, she tells Van,

I shall never change — I shall be always just the same. The same old, mannered, modern, slangy hack . . . Yes . . . what I am I must remain. I haven't what's called a principle of growth. . . . I'm about as good as I can be — and about as bad.

Ten weeks after her marriage to Mitchy, Little Aggie is carrying on a flirtation with her aunt's lover, Petherton. She has 'come out' — 'with a bound — into the arena.' Why her mother's circle should be so disconcerted, Nanda fails to understand, for she, and she alone, recognizes that Little Aggie 'is trying to find out . . . what sort of a person she is.' As for Nanda, she has been right about herself too. Van has proved more old-fashioned than Mr Longdon; he has been unable to recognize that if society has changed extraordinarily, so, naturally, have the girls reared in it; he should have married Little Aggie. But Nanda's love for him remains the same. Midway in the novel the

Duchess described it to Mr Longdon in an image he found odd: 'Nanda's fairly sick—as sick as a little cat—with her passion.' In the final chapter, after she has restored Van to her mother and is preparing to leave with Mr Longdon, she breaks down and sobs 'in a passion as sharp and brief as the flurry of a wild thing for an instant uncaged.'

Nor does her tragic candor change, the rare innocence of spirit for which Mitchy and Mr Longdon alone have their appreciations. Mitchy expresses his in conversation when Nanda asks him, 'Doesn't one become a sort of a little drain-pipe with everything flowing through?' and he replies, 'Why don't you call it more gracefully . . . a little acolian-harp set in the drawing-room window and vibrating in the breeze of conversation?' Mr Longdon quietly thinks his appreciation, as he reflects upon the contrast between Little Aggie and Nanda, in the finest image of the novel:

Both the girls struck him as lambs with the great shambles of life in their future; but while one, with its neck in a pink ribbon, had no consciousness but that of being fed from the hand with the small sweet biscuit of unobjectionable knowledge, the other struggled with instincts and forebodings, with the suspicion of its doom and the far-borne scent, in the flowery fields, of blood.

IV

None of the single images of character in 'The Pupil' is repeated in either of the novels. One image of the Moreens' inability to pay Pember-ton does recur in *The Awkward Age* to suggest Mrs Brookenham's financial worries. In the short story it is 'the young man couldn't but suspect this failure of the cup when at their very lips to have been the effect of a rude jostle of his own.' In the novel it reads, 'It was as if Mrs. Brook had found the cup of her secret sorrows suddenly jostled by some touch of which the perversity . . . proved . . . sufficient to make it flow over.' Similarly, very few of the single or recurrent images of character and relation of *What Maisie Knew* reappear in *The Awkward Age*. Lord Petherton's teeth, it is true, resemble Beale's in their 'bold handsome parade.' The military imagery that shows Mrs Wix's fight for Maisie and Sir Claude occurs briefly at the climax of the later novel as Mrs Brookenham 'rattled the standard' since 'no victory had yet been snatched' in her verbal battle with the Duchess. Again, the sea image of Maisie's finding herself 'in the same boat' with Mrs Wix, a 'fellow mariner of ideas,' is converted by Mrs Brookenham into an amusingly wicked innuendo to Mr Longdon. She says that if

the Duchess is in Petherton's 'boat,' she is an 'experienced mariner.' Further, the image of Maisie's choice of future as a sum on a slate is extended into that of the figures already written and not yet written on the slates of Nanda and Little Aggie. These four images are the only instances of repetition between the novels unless Mrs Wix's straighteners may be regarded as her psychological equivalent of Mr Longdon's nippers.

Imagery in the short story written at the beginning of James's experience with the theatre, in the novel written as he turned from the drama back to the novel form, and in the novel composed as a play reflects his growing mastery of the scenic method. With 'The Pupil' Pemberton serves as James's deputy, relieving him of the hateful burden of omniscient comment. Pemberton's vision of the Morcens is limited to his experience as their son's tutor. To begin with, they do not pay him; they depend, and cannily enough, on his devotion to Morgan to keep him on. Then, he almost never sees them with the boy, for they leave Morgan to him. Nor does he see them in the company of the society to which they aspire and off which they try to live; he sees only their failures, the sudden flights from Nice to Paris to Venice. Further, he has no one with whom he can compare his impressions, for however much Morgan may disclose, Pemberton's sense of ethics forbids open discussion of the parents with the child. As a consequence, the images that constantly occur to him can be only those of character; the restrictions of his point of view prevent imagery of relation.

The point of view that James first conceived for *What Maisie Knew* was Maisie's alone; he planned to restrict the novel rigorously to what she could interpret and appreciate. Further reflection and experiment convinced him that a six-year-old, however perceptive, would understand too little and misunderstand too much. He decided, then, to limit the novel to what Maisie saw, leaving the reader to interpret and appreciate better than she could. But since Maisie's interpretation of what she saw was his major concern, he recognized the necessity of his supplying the terms for what she missed. Thus he widened the point of view to include his amplification of Maisie's consciousness. This procedure he justified on the premise that small children have always many more and much richer perceptions than they have vocabulary to express. The dramatic principle, he contended, was wholly operative, for his own commentary was honorably directed by Maisie's sensibility. As a result of the enlarged point of view, the imagery is

expanded beyond that of character in 'The Pupil' to that of Maisie's relations to her parents, her stepparents, her governesses, and, primarily, her knowledge.

The Awkward Age has, of course, no point of view. The ten books in which the novel is constructed may be grouped as a play, the first three as the expository first act, the next four as the second act with the complication coming to a climax in Book Eighth, and the final two as the third act with its brief denouement. With an economy matching that of the plot structure, the large cast of characters are assigned their positions on stage according to their roles, Nanda as protagonist, Mrs Brookenham and her circle as antagonist, and Mr Longdon as chorus. The same rigorous rule of dramatic economy governs the imagery: the images for the tripartite grouping of characters constitute the theme. The imagery depicting Mrs Brookenham and her circle, both their pastimes and the traits of her eternal youth, Mitchy's goggle, and Van's sacred terror, clearly show the lack of innocence of her favorite society. The images that portray Nanda's relation to her knowledge give her extraordinary fineness. Mr Longdon's nippers penetrate Nanda's plight and the morality of the salon and of English society in the late nineteenth century. Together the three groups of images present the theme of *The Awkward Age*.

'No themes,' James wrote, in the preface for *What Maisie Knew*, 'are so human as those that reflect for us, out of the confusion of life, the close connexion of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt, so dangling before us for ever that bright hard medal, of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody's right and ease and the other somebody's pain and wrong.' The 'right and ease' to which Morgan, Maisie, and Nanda attain is moral perception. Morgan has only time to exercise it in the choice of a life with Pemberton rather than with his family. The reader's relation with Maisie ends with the death of her childhood, but she has had time to demonstrate triply the beauty of her moral perception, in her 'giving up' her mother, her father, and, hardest of all, Sir Claude. Nanda's use of moral perception is the most difficult, for it is to last a lifetime. She asks the man she loves to return to her mother who, she knows, has prevented his loving herself. But the difficulty is just the beauty. It is, as James said in the preface to the earlier novel, 'drawing some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness.'

LOTUS SNOW

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