

Prepossessing Henry James

The Strange Freedom

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3 Daemonization

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I

The only referable ghost that appears in *The Turn of the Screw* is that of Richardson's character Pamela:

Seated at my own table in clear noonday light I saw a person whom [. . .] I should have taken at the first blush for some housemaid who might have stayed at home to look after the place and who, availing herself of rare relief from observation and of the schoolroom table and my pens, ink, and paper, had applied herself to the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart [. . .] in spite of my entrance, her attitude strangely persisted.

(57)¹

Then follows a long descriptive passage of the aspect of the person the governess believes to be her “vile predecessor”—dressed in black, haggardly beautiful, dishonored, tragic, melancholy, detached, indifferent. I invite the reader to compare this scene with the Joseph Highmore painting “Mr B finds Pamela writing,” now in the Tate Collection. The governess strives Hamlet-wise to “fix” and to “secure”—to *screw*—in her memory the “image” of the apparition. The person she sees uncannily resembles the waiting-maid in Richardson's narrative, a young woman surrounded by pens, ink, and paper, who is also a writer. Unlike the immediate “vile predecessor” in James's tale, the governess may not be the *lady* she believes she is. In point of fact, under conditions of status inconsistency, she becomes the less-than-lady scribe that pens the inset narrative. She becomes, like Pamela, an *author*. And the secrecy around the clandestinity of writing (private papers, letters, journals) is similar in both narratives. James inherited this contested *scène de l'écriture* (Derrida, *L'écriture* 293) from his English eighteenth-century predecessor.² In both tales we confront a story of miss-writing—“Have you written, Miss?” (63)—and misappropriated words, misused words, offensive phrases, stolen letters, and repeated stories.

Michael McKeon suggested decades ago that the rise of the English novel was informed by a complex dialectic where questions of truth and questions of virtue were inextricably interwoven. *The Turn of the Screw* has been recursively received by the critical tradition as an obscure allegory of truth, and therefore as an epistemological tale. Much has been said, for instance, about the salience of the acts of *seeing* in a tale where some see more than others, and about the bearing that these acts have on its cognitive makeup. *The Turn of the Screw*, Shoshana Felman has pointed out, “in every sense of the word, is a *reflection* of, and on, the act of *seeing*” (132), an observation confirmed by the governess in the following admission: “What it was most impossible to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw *more*—things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past” (51). This reading is, I believe, correct. But by foregrounding the action of seeing—something we may impute to the governess as much as to scholars—we overlook the comparative importance of both the *passion* of seeing (to suffer to be shown something) and the related actions of talking about, saying, and giving names to what you don’t actually see but are visually offered. I am of course using the verb *see* in an extended sense, implying to grasp and understand. Being invited to *see* what you still don’t *understand* is of course what happens to Maisie (Pippin, “On Maisie’s Knowing” 129) and to Denis Duval in Thackeray’s unfinished novel—“I was so young that I could not understand all I read” (*Denis* 446)—a sentence that echoes Gibbon’s “I was too young to feel the importance of my loss” (*Memoirs* 66), in reference to the death of his mother when he was only ten years old. The limitation of *being too young*, as much as—along with—the excess of *seeing too much*, is what James’s tale explores. As a rule, we tend to talk (*doxa*) about we do not see (*episteme*), and if we talk long and wrong enough, we end up believing (*pistis*) it. I am not trying to say that *The Turn of the Screw* doesn’t lodge an epistemic predicament about the transparency of sight: the tale effectively presupposes a naive epistemic realism—recall Fielding’s irony behind Joseph Andrews’s claim, “I believe I might aver, that I have writ little more than I have seen” (*Joseph* 164)—qualified by the relativist principle that Paul imparts to Hyacinth: “It all depends on what you see” (*Princess* 445). I am implying, rather, that the story takes for granted such predicament—“we work in the dark” (“The Middle Years,” *Tales* 227): nobody can see what the governess claims to see beyond herself or what she holds inside her mind, her soul, her throat—and that the weight of the story lies in the layered clinical debate the girl manages to orchestrate around her invisible contents. And that this involves a degree of voluntary self-exposure—look at my open throat, listen to my words, read my tale—that calls for moral arguments about virtue as much as for epistemic arguments about truth.

But before we move ahead in this direction, let me recall that a rehearsal of our master plot has already taken place—the man, Peter Quint, goes behind the tree, slips, and dies *because* the woman, Miss Jessel, has already exited the narrative space towards her own mysterious death. It is the impenetrability of this incomplete story that sets the second governess's analytical imagination on fire. She joins a medical board, “the most splendid assembly or politest circle” (*Tom Jones* 153)—comprising Mrs. Grose and the participants in the opening fireside conversation—whose assigned task is to *examine* Miss Jessel, but she becomes in turn the ejected miss in her own seduction plot, sent to a nunnery of sorts by her absentee master, and therefore a potential object of clinical excavation. It is important to recall that the governess describes herself as a “sister of charity” (*Turn* 61) inside a Protestant country house that is in a sense a secularization of the Catholic nunnery.³ Marvell adverted that the country house “scarce endures the Master great” (“Upon Appleton House,” *Poems* 77), a fact that Maria Edgeworth in *The Absentee* and James in *The Turn of the Screw* dramatized to different effect.⁴

There is, in short, a discreet omnipresence, in the tale, of questions of virtue, vaguely denoted by McKeon as “ethical and social concerns” (384). By paying attention to these neglected concerns, I want to suggest that the dramatization of cognitive predicaments is subservient to the unstable logic of its social and ideological anxieties.⁵ The phrase of the title occurs twice in the body of the tale. First, when Douglas remarks that “if the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—?” (*Turn* 1). Second, when the distressed governess asserts her right to demand, “after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue” (77). The screw is turned in order to test the resilience of two related moral variables: *childish innocence* and *young female virtue*. Both are central to the story, and the latter is arguably the ideologeme whose unpacking cues the inception of the modern English novel with a text, *Pamela*, significantly subtitled *Virtue Rewarded*. Lukacher has argued that *The Turn of the Screw* “is really a pathetic tragedy of a woman caught in the machinations of a decadent patriarchy” (127), a description that befits *Clarissa* better than *Pamela*: in the latter, the comedic resolution betrays a moral blemish (feigned virtue) that is also central to James's tale. Its title idiom was originally coined in the context of torture, which explains what the governess, acting as “executioner” (84), does at the tale's close—“I caught him, yes, I held him—it may be imagined with what a passion” (85). But how can the *virtue* of a young woman who *corrupts* *childish innocence* be at all *rewarded*?⁶ Because such unspeakable act of corruption permits both an *aleatory-materialist* and a *liberal policy* to unfold: the first stipulates we should not “forget ontology,” that the governess is not deluded in her compulsive search for the trace of a ghostly

real (Lukacher 120–122) that at bottom incoherently—when she says that the children were “adorable” (*Turn* 52) she obviously means “adwhore-able,” a Fielding pun that suggests their access to the ad-horrible reality of the primal scene;⁷ the second policy prescribes that no Puritan censure can stop anyone, including children, from *seeing what is there to be seen*—i.e. the enhanced mischief of class-cross sexual transgression. Who rewards her? First, the Master: Henry James. Second, her master and employer: “when, for a moment, disburdened, delighted, he held her hand, thanking her for the sacrifice, she already felt *rewarded*” (6; emphasis added). The governess is—yes, the Freudianized liberal critics were right—a hysterical young Puritan woman, but she unwittingly performs a breakthrough act. In addition, she is guilty, “for if he *were* innocent what then on earth was I?” (83) The tale is ironic because James uses the woman. It is unironic in that his usage permits a liberal achievement—let the children read and see and know—congenial to the author of *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*. And it is, finally, meta-ironic by virtue of the threat this liberation poses to James’s own sense of literary propriety: what the governess accomplishes James may admire, but he ultimately cannot do, refuses to do, never does. Radical innocence (that romantic rebus) fascinated James, simultaneously seduced him and irritated him, but never to the point of procuring its downright elimination. *The Turn of the Screw* is not the joke James tried to fool others into believing it was.

James observed once that Thackeray had arrived, “in *The Roundabout Papers* and elsewhere [. . .] at writing excellent reconstructed eighteenth” (*LC I* 1294). I want to argue that *The Turn of the Screw* is also written in *reconstructed eighteenth*, that it is a masterful exercise in parodic imitation of a narrative style and an attendant domestic reality—the country house, the allegorical garden, the menacing pond, the community of dependents, the education of children—that we commonly associate with Richardson, Fielding, and Goldsmith. The parody, however, was achieved through a turn that was more romantic than the imitated style allowed.

II

By far the most examined sources for *The Turn of the Screw* have been Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.⁸ Both narratives are alluded to in James’s tale, one (*Udolpho*) openly, the other (*Eyre*) indirectly. But Henry Fielding’s last novel, *Amelia*, is also mentioned, and the very explicit allusion occurs at a crucial point: the governess is reading a copy of it right before her third encounter with Quint. This has not escaped critical notice, but the attention devoted to it is comparatively irrelevant. The acknowledgement of the presence and pressure of *Amelia* in James’s story regularly takes the form of a casual bow.

More often, however, it fails to occur. The first to examine the Fielding allusion were Valerie Purton in 1975 and May L. Ryburn in 1979. Notwithstanding their indisputable merit, both articles are restricted to vague parallelisms of characterization and plot, and their authors have failed to explain the structural function of *Amelia* in *The Turn of the Screw*, let alone to suggest the necessity of a more thorough collation. The same can be said of Lustig's rather perfunctory attempt to establish a one-to-one correlation between characters in both narratives (*Henry James* 144–146).

In her reading of the story, Shoshana Felman devotes a footnote to clarify the allusions to *Jane Eyre* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with no reference to Fielding's last novel. This is very odd, for she quotes extensively, on page 152 of her brilliant essay, from the passage where *Amelia* is mentioned. This is what she quotes, reads, and asks us to read:

I sat reading by a couple of candles (. . .) I remember that the book I had in my hand was Fielding's *Amelia*; also that I was wholly awake. I recall further both a general conviction that it was horribly late and a particular objection to looking at my watch. (. . .) I recollect (. . .) that, though I was deeply interested in the author, I found myself, at the turn of a page and with his spell all scattered, looking straight up from him and hard at the door of my room. (. . .) -I went straight along the lobby (. . .) till I came within sight of the tall window that presided over the great turn of the staircase. (. . .) My candle (. . .) went out. (. . .) Without it, the next instant, I knew that there was a figure on the stair. I speak of sequences, but I require no lapse of seconds to stiffen myself for a third encounter with Quint.

(ch. 9, pp. 40–41)⁹

Is *Amelia*—the novel, the title, the name, the graph, the italicized word that is left hanging in the paragraph's opening—the very purloined letter Felman fails to *see* in her otherwise orthodox Lacanian reading? The name is right there, bulking askance in the very first sentence, and yet it is also not there, for it appears to slip away into one of those parenthetical gaps (. . .) with which the scholar has interspersed the fragment. It is very likely that Felman's lack of familiarity with this most unfamiliar (unread and neglected) novel prompted her to disown it as a hermeneutic option. It is paradoxical that the most sophisticated hermeneutic piece on the tale to date, an essay which works its way through circuitous attestations of non-presence, can be said to revolve (turn) around the absence of the tale's sub-text. Consider what goes down the drain in Felman's selective quotation:

I had not gone to bed; I sat reading by a couple of candles. There was a roomful of old books at Bly—last-century fiction, some of it, which,

to the extent of a distinctly deprecated renown, but never to so much as that of a stray specimen, had reached the sequestered home and appealed to the unavowed curiosity of my youth. I remember that the book I had in my hand was Fielding's "Amelia"; also that I was wholly awake.

(38)

The governess later confesses to being "deeply interested in my author" (39). A combination of repression and secrecy (*deprecated, sequestered, stray, unavowed*) seems to control the logic of this comment, endowing it with an aura of bashful confession. But what is there to be ashamed about? The governess has at least accomplished what very few of her readers can pride themselves of: she has read or is reading *Amelia*. It looks as if the character were apologizing, before the tribunal of her prospective readers, for an interest (*curiosity* is her word) in a *stray* narrative *specimen* of *distinctly deprecated renown* that she knows in advance those readers will not share. It is quite symptomatic that Felman has decided to erase the girl's convoluted justification. She should have known better: what could be more convenient for the interpretation of a putative allegory of equivocal vision than to *see* (read, understand) what the governess has *seen* (read) when she was "wholly awake"? The narrator of James's story tells us that, on first meeting her "prospective patron," he "proved a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered, anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage" (4). The disjunction inside the exception—"save in a dream or an old novel"—signifies that if, in this pre-visionary episode, she was wholly awake, she was not in a dream—ergo she must have been *in an old novel*. *Amelia* is indeed *an old novel*, but no older than *Pamela*. Both are intimately related, the former being the last in a sequence of responses to the latter that Fielding spent much of his life spinning: *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia* all look back to *Pamela* as to its contested origin, contentious parent, and disputed *raison d'être*. In fact, *Amelia* moves more resolvedly, and respectfully, "into territory associated with Richardson," the territory of "distressed heroines" (Sabor 95). The very choice of titular name involves an ostentatious display of genealogical dependence (*Pamela* > *Pamelia* > *Amelia*) to which James's tale bows in deference through his sardonic investment in the children's (and the governess's) presumed *blamelessness* (*Turn* 37).

III

Let us concede, for the sake of speculative argument, that the governess's *old novel*—the one that is two (*Pamela* + *Amelia*) and keeps her wholly awake—is actually *Pamela*.¹⁰ Nota bene: my speculation is not completely

unfounded. In Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, constant reference is made to the doctor reading—and falling asleep while reading—*Pamela* (*Haunting* 304, 306, 310, 331) and later *Grandison* (34), and there is also mention of *Clarissa* and Fielding's novels (304, 347). Jackson, moreover, uses *The Turn of the Screw* as a determining subtext for her narrative, which incorporates an inset horror tale complete with children, a governess, ghosts, a brook, and a garden. The combination of both strategies—the explicit allusion to eighteenth-century narratives and the implicit recourse to the James subtext—yields what I take to be the most eloquent appraisal to date of the way *The Turn of the Screw* is indebted to the Richardson-Fielding intertextual mesh woven around *Pamela*. It is difficult to improve on what someone as talented as Jackson did, but we can try other, more arid, roads to reach the same intersection.

Pamela and the governess are not only similar in that, holding a subaltern social position in a country-house, they are both apprehensively in love with their masters, and secretly yearn for interclass transgression, but also in that their troubled subjectivation is marked by an *affected profession of virtue*.¹¹ There is a sense—an ambivalence built into both tales—in which the country maid or governess, a paragon of integrity and example of ladies, is also a “hypocritical, crafty girl” (Keymer and Sabor, *Controversy I* xviii). Sexual frustration gets bound up with fantasies of social mobility and interclass marriage. The plot of both tales turns on “seduction, abandonment, and imprisonment” and involves an “intoxicating fantasy of rags-to-riches advancement and providential reward” (Keymer and Sabor, *Controversy I* xv). The complaints, in *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Amelia*, against scheming maidservants, the upsetting of subaltern hierarchy, and marital *misalliance* are a clear function of the power of Richardson's transgression in *Pamela*. Never was *status inconsistency* more brutally in display than in the limpid confessional prose of this introspective maid. James, in *The Turn of the Screw*, follows Fielding's lead in excoriating the collusion of moral deception and social freedom that lies at the core of Richardson's first masterpiece. Against the radically *strange freedom* (*Turn* 16) implied in “the erotic transgression of class” (Robbins, *The Servant's Hand* 201), James joins Fielding's celebration of the liberal exemptions of a free conversation—or contemplation—premised on the protection of specific adult secrets, but also on his rejection of a Puritan education that prevents children from having free access to the open adult world. The first condition is represented by the detached master in James' story, an emblem of recalcitrant liberal privacy: his absolute condition is, remember, that the governess “should never trouble him—but never, never: neither appeal nor complain nor write about anything” (*Turn* 6). Note the bottom line: employees do not write to their employers, servants do not write to their masters, or, if you wish, to reveal the patrician prejudice organizing

the violent reaction against the publication of *Pamela*, maids do not write, *tout court*. The second is enforced, parodically, by the governess's sadistic impulse to *have the children see what they should never see*—first, that the social hierarchies can be upset, and second, that a “base menial,” promoted to valet, can socially and sexually approach a governess.

My aim in this chapter is to reconsider the rationale of the Richardson-Fielding-James connection from an ideological standpoint, open to questions of rank, class, and virtue. I claim that James's story belongs in a tradition of literary texts that respond ironically to the “irrepressible creative nerviness” (Lockwood 548) that prompted and followed the revolutionary publication of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). In two crucial studies, Tom Keymer and Peter Sabor have mapped out “The Pamela Controversy” as the “deluge of print” (*Controversy I xvii*) that accompanied the publication of Richardson's narrative—a media event described by Fielding as an “epidemical Frenzy” (qtd. Lockwood 550)—in the form of “piracies, criticisms, cavils, panegyrics, supplements, [and] imitations,” and to the “struggle of interpretation” (*Marketplace 1*) that these diverse appropriations, transformations and misreadings contributed to. Some of the earlier responses, like Fielding's *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* or Haywood's *Anti-Pamela*, were overly parodic in their capacity to unpack subversively self-defeating hermeneutic possibilities that lied dormant in Richardson's text. These canonical responses, and other minor texts titled *Pamela, or the Fair Impostor* and *Mock-Pamela*, also testified to the original text's capacity to put forward a brutal ideological inconsistency that could only be neutralized through sarcasm, parody, or satire. But could it really? Was it ever properly neutralized? I have already mentioned Leslie Fiedler's provocative suggestion that *Clarissa* is the first American novel. Let me add the apparent fact that *Pamela* became “the first novel printed in America” (Keymer and Sabor, *Marketplace 2*). My surmise is that James is still responding to it, still trying to contain and stabilize the ideological inconsistency of Richardson's American classic through the writing of a tale that parodically mobilizes its ideological structure and rehearses some of its enabling (scenic, dramatic) conditions. It is worth observing that the battle of divided allegiances that broke out after the publication of *Daisy Miller*, splitting the field between Daisy Millerites and anti-Daisy Millerites, was foreshadowed by a parallel episode of conflicted reception in the previous century, marked by the emergence of two bands, Pamelists and anti-Pamelists.¹²

James was probably aware of the complex hermeneutic dialogue that emerged from this epoch-making intertextual clash. Fielding's narrative response to *Pamela* proved that, as F. Schlegel pointed out, the best theory of the novel is another novel. In addition, James's sarcastic allusion at the

prudery of Richardson and Fielding, who turned away from social frankness about sex, and went “under the mahogany” in order to avoid eye contact with “the great relation between men and women, the constant world-renewal” (James, *LC I* 107), proves that he was aware of the moral implications lurking behind the self-conscious emergence of the modern novel. The constitutive ambiguity of the character of Pamela springs from her multiple inconsistencies, all of which were detected by early reviewers: *stylistic*, because she wrote above her station (in neoclassical terms, the language of the maid is improperly or indecorously elevated); *moral*, because she feigned a virtue (the subtitle of Haywood’s response, *Feigned Innocence Detected*, is a formidable reversal of the original subtitle, *Virtue Rewarded*) that she failed to put into practice when she became rewarded and socially assimilated;¹³ *social*, because she violates rank distinction by accepting the marriage proposal of a country squire. In fact, this realization was the triggering factor in Fielding’s splenetic response. The governess’ moral ambiguity is also a frequent consideration made by critics of James’s ghost story. The maid and the governess are not only similar in that, holding a subaltern social position in a country house, they are both apprehensively in love with their masters, but also in that their troubled subjectivation is marked by an *affected profession of virtue*. Both indulge in proclamations of personal moral integrity and notoriously excel in the art of deceiving (Keymer and Sabor, *Marketplace* 83–90). The problem of sexual frustration, I have already observed, gets bound up with fantasies of cross-class marital bonding. The complaints, in *Joseph Andrews*, against scheming maidservants and hyper-marriage are a clear function of the power of Richardson’s transgression—the social liberty or *strange freedom*—in *Pamela*. True enough, the role “the erotic transgression of class” plays in James’ tale has been noted by some scholars, like Bruce Robbins, who in a brilliant study titled *The Servant’s Hand: English Fiction from Below* (201) makes his analysis of *The Turn of the Screw* genealogically depend on his reading of *Pamela*, and highlights the freedom for indiscretion and impertinence of its protagonist with no apparent realization of the striking resemblance between both tales and no interest in pursuing the comparison. This *strange freedom* is the overall theme that organizes my approach, in fact my whole book. It is a liberty to inconsist further what is already inconsistent—to stop wearing a hat when you already overdress as a gentleman and master of the house—to authorize yourself in the act of digressing around antagonism, the liberty cherished by a higher-born heroine in her own set of letters—“My talent is scribbling, and I the reader fell into this freedom, as I find delight in writing” (*Clarissa* 408)—and the liberty Fielding wrongly believed was a privilege of enlightened, spectatorial and speculative males.¹⁴

IV

Keymer and Sabor have described *Pamela* as a “site of ideological contestation” that dramatizes the “relationship between virtue and class” (*Controversy* I xix). They implicitly follow McKeon’s suggestion that Richardson’s novel subserves a plot of typically progressive ideology (*Origins* 359), even if, in the last instance, it serves the ends of continuity, not change (391). Although the clash between Pamela’s progressive strain and Mr. B’s aristocratic ideology closes with a rather unrevolutionary solution (assimilation), “the message that inherited social status is strictly ‘accidental’ and strictly uncorrelated with the ‘natural’ gifts of virtue and merit is central enough to the ideology of *Pamela*” (365).¹⁵ The semantic reduction of the notion of virtue to its crass sexual connotation is part of the moral violence exerted by Richardson in his novel. “Pamela’s essential power,” writes McKeon, “is the passive and negative one of being virtuous, of resisting the sexual and social power of others” (364). In *The Turn of the Screw*, power gets erratically reallocated among menials engaged in a contest of mastery, and virtue is dwarfed to the exiguous dimensions of domestic decency: the governess displays her sham-virtue by advertising her readiness and ability to protect the children from forbidden knowledge, and the children, especially Flora, stand for the virtuous chastity or virginity; in his preface to the tale, James described it as “a full-blown *flower* of high fancy” (“Preface,” *Turn* 123; emphasis added).

But the sexual concern masks deeper ideological trouble. *Pamela* is not simply the story of a girl repelling the sexual advances of a man. It is the story of a maid that crosses the rank divide and triumphs socially by manipulating the master who mishandles her. And Pamela, McKeon observes, is not “the only case of social mobility” in the novel. Mrs. Jervis is “a Gentlewoman born, tho’ she has had Misfortunes” (*Pamela* 17), and Pamela’s father has not always been obliged to engage in “hard Labour” (313). “It is a world,” the critic concludes, “already primed for status inconsistency” (365). And yet the novel also contributed greatly to encourage the visibility of the antagonism it presupposes. Social historians have detected that, in the wake of its publication, there was a surge of intermarrying between the serving class and the gentry (Lockwood 551). To be sure, our governess fails to marry her diffident and reclusive master, and James’s adoption of the realistic solution to the problem of cross-class marriage evinces perhaps his willingness to contribute to the ongoing sequence of dissenting appropriations of *Pamela*. This of course involved, in part, adopting Fielding’s voice, a move no doubt facilitated by the presence, in Richardson’s near-heteroglossic novel, of a conservative perspective likely to ridicule the moral pretense of its protagonist, and, by extension, the progressive ideology she purports to embody. Nancy Armstrong rightly

called attention to the naturalness with which Mr. B's housekeeper assumes her master's right to sexually assault the maid (*Desire* 5): "Are not the two Sexes made for one another? And is it not natural for a Gentleman to love a pretty Woman? And suppose he can obtain his Desires, is that so bad as cutting her Throat?" (*Pamela* 110) The choice between raping her and killing her is both brutal and false. Brutal because it's in keeping with the unsentimental realism that sustains the conservative ideology, and yet false because at variance with the set of promotion tools available to it. One such tool is not exactly the knife used to cut the girl's throat, but almost: it is the cotton forceps and laryngeal mirror used by the Freudian doctor and his clique of colleagues to examine that very throat. Let me recall, in passing, that in Tennyson's "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," the rebuked lover reminds the cold Lady who "[pines] among your halls and towers" of the death of a previous admirer, and reproaches her that "there was that across his throat/Which you had hardly cared to see." The consequences of her indifference are plain enough, and foreshadow the events at Bly:

Lady Clara Vere de Vere,
 There stands a spectre in your hall:
 The guilt of blood is at your door.
 (*Complete Works* 25)

But let us return to *Pamela*. The housekeeper actually responds to Pamela's assertion that "to rob a person of her Virtue is worse than cutting her Throat" (110). When the inspecting male sees nothing (no content, no master-signifier, no soul, no phallus, no nodal organ of thought or *jouissance*), the possibility of castration is attenuated, and stealing gets ruled out as a viable option. The male strives to obtain solely a temporary alienation of her meaning. Examining the throat stands here figuratively for, say, reading the girl's letters, which is exactly what Mr. B (and Fielding, behind him, taking Richardson from behind) aspires most to do, short of possessing her body. His voice is another prefiguration, in the novel, of what the conservative voice will become: an aristocratic tone (Lovelace's in *Clarissa*) filtered through the progressive mud, clinging in despair and panic to the *imaginary value* (politeness, manners) that the low-class maid offers him in exchange for her body. Fielding's voice—and James's too—is therefore bound to connive with the vocal-ideological perspective intimated by the housekeeper and qualified by Mr. B: we will neither kill nor rape the girl, we will not even (at this point) expel her from the novel towards death or a convent: like *Clarissa*, later, she is always already inside an *adwhoreable nunnery*. We will simply observe her, open her mouth, and inspect, simply listen to her, set the fire, lean on the armchair, peruse her letters, read aloud

a tale or two. We will try to expose her gaps, identify the places where her voice cracks, her story inconsistencies, and digress cavalierly around that void. What is the framing para-text around the governess's tale if not a genteel, fireside actualization of precisely this clinical scene?

Fielding's novels, especially *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*, are performatively organized like a talk, a scene of verbal intercourse where the narrator presents the incidents and judges them, digressing and expatiating on the moral values involved. The novels are not only a "record of corruption, oppression, and disorder in society at large and in the private sphere" (Battestin 614), but also the enmeshed digression conceived with the reader in mind, whom the narrator constantly and jocularly addresses. This is the opposite of what we find in Richardson, whose narratives are presented as private epistolary exchanges between explosive subjectivities that the reader can only read—as we and the fireside interlocutors read the governess's tale in *The Turn of the Screw*—with a liberal sense of improper violation. Fielding's attempt to bring the correct secrets correctly to the fore, and to allow the young, including the female young, to engage in polite talk, is a landmark achievement. It is fascinating to confirm how eagerly Jane Austen and some of her heroines saw themselves interpellated and willing to respond.¹⁶ Fielding's voice is the embodiment of an ideology that is in turn "the issue of a double critique, first of aristocratic ideology by progressive, then of progressive ideology by conservative" (*Origins* 385). McKeon's argument that Richardson's rendition of social mobility "could resonate for Fielding with the culturally fraught effrontery of the rise of the undeserving" (396) could also extend to the democracy-affronted James. Fielding's technical reaction deserves some attention. In conservative logic, he clings—like Hamlet—to the "imaginary value" of the aristocratic ideology, but by the time he writes, these values have become socially institutionalized in the collective *forms* (not substances) of social deference, custom, and the law. Unlike right-winged Hegelians, who will end up worshipping these configurations of objectified Geist, Fielding recognizes their *fictionality*. McKeon lucidly foregrounded this aspect of Fielding's conservative mentality and spoke of an *instrumentalization of belief*. Thus "instrumental belief in institutions whose authority may be fictional—social deference, custom, the law" (392), implies the acceptance of these institutions as arbitrary social forms (imaginary values) that the contingencies of historical development have rendered necessarily convenient—an argument that looks ahead to Edmund Burke. Fielding respects, instrumentally, "customary *noblesse oblige* and the hallowed system of the English law," but this doesn't mean, warns McKeon, "that they are able to counter the endemic condition of 'status inconsistency'—perhaps the more precise term for Fielding would be 'status indeterminacy'" (403). And the expression of this respect takes the form of a "reclamation of

fictionality” (394) that defuses the *existential veracity* Richardson endowed his heroines with. In *Shamela*, particularly, this reclamation is premised upon principles of rationality deployed to contain the excess of a Puritan (Methodist) emphasis on justification by grace, which tended to legitimate self-proclaimed—not performed and socially justified—professions of self-righteousness and virtue. The ironic handling of narratorial intrusion and commentary subserves such reclamation, and so do the framing devices of documentary historicity (the dance of telescoped narrators around a hidden manuscript). I believe this multimodal ironic reclamation of fictionality energizes the construction of *The Turn of the Screw*. Nothing undermines more the governess’s constant profession of righteousness than the way she is drawn, by the ironic echoes of the para-textual debate, to question the first governess’s respectability: her explosion—“‘Miss Jessel indeed—she!’ Ah, she’s ‘respectable,’ the chit!”—reverberates with the brutal question around which turns the framing fireside conversation: “And what did the former governess die of? Or so much respectability?” (5)

Fielding, in short, allows the undeserving girl to talk and, like Irma in Freud’s tale, to complain about pain in her throat. This is his progressive concession. His conservative maneuver is to confer with his readers, mundanely and ironically, about the clinical case, and to reach, by way of conclusion, “the conservative truth that status inconsistency yet reigns in the modern world of progressive ‘social justice’ as surely as it did in ancient, aristocratic, culture” (385): you, the, assimilationist parvenu, have finally married and yet still feel the pain, you feel that things still fall apart, are out of joint, and inconsist, well, you should have known better. James’s handling of the dialogic-narrative is, however, different from Fielding’s—he neither takes for granted his precursor’s universalist premises nor shares the (Hegelian) ethical-communitarian longings that Pippin, for instance, identifies in James. The American philosopher censures the critical attempt to place the governess’s “moral distortion in her relationship with everyone else” (120) within a hermeneutic framework—combining “the Gothic reaction” and its “post-structuralist response”—that is supposedly caught in a meaningless pursuit of determinate meaning (mystery, riddle, revelation, secret, ghost) (123). Thus, Sedgwick’s readings of homosexual panic and

Freudian readings, of *The Turn of the Screw* in particular, would have to count as equally defensive, reactive, Gothic readings. They assume precisely what James is trying to problematize or ironize: that there must be a real, determinate “beast” or “ghost” lurking behind or underneath and that it must just be properly, finally named by our sharp-eyed, excavating critic.

(Henry James 123–124)

This is wrong. James is not ironicizing in advance the post-structuralist pursuit of hidden meaning. On the contrary. The fact that he renders such pursuit more complex and indeterminate—that he “problematizes” it, in Pippin’s correct terms—doesn’t imply that he renounces the romantic search of a beast or a ghost. There is no dialogic stage of mutuality, reciprocity, and recognition in the James social world: characters do not speak to reconfigure novel modes of ethical recognition or to fall back on shared doxa. They speak to disambiguate the deictics (*he, she, they, it, all, everything, nothing*) whose maddening indeterminacy stands in their way towards a social or moral success that is uncompromisingly individual. Not even marriage stands for a locus of semiotic repose: when desired by the individual, marriage in James’s world works solely as a formal condition for individual achievement, not as the compromise telos of a communal aspiration. That marriage is no solution to any conflict, no resolution to antagonism, no fulfillment to vacuity, no redemption to fault, no reward to sacrifice is one of the conservative lessons Fielding handed down to Thackeray, who in turn passed it on to James.¹⁷ Pamela’s and the governess’s overexertion of “industrious virtue” are no compensation for an inside gap that resonates with the void of the society in which we believe to exist.¹⁸ *Amelia* is the novel where this lesson obtains its most effective narrative illustration.

But the road to *Amelia* offered Fielding other resting places—*Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, especially—more immediately gratifying in their parodic echo of *Pamela*. The new novelist sharpens and perfects his conservative weapons in each station of the way. In *Shamela*, for instance, he convokes a board of male sages (Parson Oliver, Parson Tickletext, Parson Williams) to confer around “the Mouth of a Sinner” (*Shamela* 328), “the Mouth of a Woman” (*Pamela* 134). One of the doctors cynically voices out his conservative concerns:

The Instruction which it conveys to Servant-Maids, is, I think, very plainly this, To look out for their Masters as sharp as they can. The Consequences of which will be, besides Neglect of their Business, and the using all manner of Means to come at Ornaments of their Persons, that if the Master is not a Fool, they will be debauched by him; and if he is a Fool, they will marry him. Neither of which, I apprehend, my good Friend, we desire should be the Case of our Sons.

(313)

Interestingly, our governess is deprived of the luxury of *looking out* for her master, who has placed himself in a position of invulnerable detachment. And yet, her tale is proof that she has been somehow *debauched by him*—originally, to *debauch* meant to lead astray, and more specifically, to lure

someone off the job. The governess, we will see, is somewhat improperly displaced from her job to the position of mock lady of the house. Also conservative is Fielding's liberal conception of social reality, open to all classes and human specimens, and not only to those among the lower classes who are likely to become delusively softened by the siren calls of sentimental progressivism. This results in a broadness and harshness of social reference that many critics considered indecorous. George Cheyne, for instance,

told Richardson that *Joseph Andrews* "will entertain none but Porters and Watermen", and six years later Fielding was scorned anonymously for writing, in *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild*, "the adventures of Footmen, and the Lives of Thief-Catchers": Low Humour, like his own, he once exprest,/In Footman, Country Wench, and Country Priest.

(417)

Let me recall that the governess is almost a country wench, and Peter Quint almost a footman.

When Richardson attacked the "lowness" of *Amelia* arguing that he "found the characters and situations so wretchedly low and dirty" (qtd. in Bree, Introduction to *Amelia* 28), he resorted to a notion of experience that was in principle visual: "His brawls, his jarrs, his gaols, his spunging-houses, are all drawn from what he has *seen* and *known*" (qtd. in Sabor 100; emphasis added). But the addition of the participle *known* makes room for the verbal experience that is one of the staples of Fielding's comic realism, and it is solely through that *verbal experience* that Richardson can infer that Fielding has *seen* too much. Do we *see* what we *hear* when we *read*? Or do we rather, like the governess (and Quixote, and Catherine, and Bovary) read when we see? I will leave these questions hanging.

Amelia, Fielding's last novel, centers around a most Thackerayan topic—postnuptial experience, or, the trials of marital life. In the exordium, the narrator states that his "history" deals with the "various accidents"—distresses and incidents—that a very worthy couple are subject to "after their uniting in the state of matrimony." These accidents, he adds, "seemed to require not only the utmost malice, but the utmost invention, which superstition hath ever attributed to Fortune." The importance of *moral responsibility*, announced in the Shakespearean coda on the foppery of the superstition about fortune (*King Lear* 1.2.118–133), has led a scholar like Linde Bree to stress reconciliation, in the novel, of unprecedented levels of verisimilitude and the "eighteenth-century desire to see morality in action" ("Introduction" 15), a desire that had been inflamed by the publication of *Pamela*. Morality, in *Amelia*, hinges upon the difference between the fatalism of the passions and the necessary liberty of moral agents (Battestin 625–230). Booth is incarcerated at the novel's opening and much action

and conversation takes place inside a prison. For Denmark's not the only prison. Upon revisiting Lincolnshire Estate, where she had been "imprisoned," Pamela exclaims: "What a different Aspect every thing in and about this House bears now, to my thinking, to what it once had! The Garden, the Pond, the Alcove, the Elm-walk. But, oh! my Prison is become my Palace" (*Pamela* 349)¹⁹ When, in James's tale, the strangely free Peter Quint comes into view "like a sentinel before a prison," we feel the diachronic trope has reached a maximum of ideological crystallization. Fielding's idea that "Life may as properly be called an Art as any other" and his claim that

by observing minutely the several Incidents which tend to the Catastrophe or Completion of the Whole, and the minute Causes whence those Incidents are produced, we shall best be instructed in this most useful of all Arts, which I call the Art of Life.

(*Amelia* 58–59)

resonates with James's regular aestheticization of moral concerns in his fiction, with his conviction, that is, that fiction is an *imaginary value* because it procures a morally valuable form of the imagination. In a letter to Wells he asserted that "it is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, and I know of no substitute for the force and beauty of its process" (*Letters IV* 770). Informing, forming, and reforming the lives of others, especially children, takes therefore a great deal of moral courage. Bildung hinges upon the liberal courage to leave the prison's doors open. This the governess is keenly aware of: "To watch, teach, 'form' little Flora would too evidently be the making of a happy and useful life" (*Turn* 8). The fact that she regards her "life with Miles and Flora" as her "charming work," while they happen to be "leading a life of their own," to the point where Miles begs "to see more life" (18), produces a critical strain. The boy was right. Life may be an art, open to formation and reformation, but Bly's a prison.

V

Let me raise a question: why would the governess want to hold, turn, and eventually kill Miles? Very simple: she wants Bly to become a definitely blighted place. Like the protagonist of *The Haunting of Hill House*, she kills to curse the house that is already half-damned and inexplicably haunted. The death—of herself in one case, of the child in the other—provides a solacing retrospective explanation to the case. But why would she want to damn the house? Arguably, to prevent a future governess from arriving to it. The governess knows she is a latecomer, one of a series, that without being a lady proper she is bound to remain "the same lady" (53), she knows that there was a predecessor, also in love with the master, and that she left the house and died; she knows that, in accordance with

this logic deferral and succession, she will herself leave the house and die, unable like Pamela to regress in marital bliss. Everything in *The Turn of the Screw* occurs “with recurrence—for recurrence we took for granted” (33), and Mrs. Grose translates this precept into terms that the governess cannot withstand: “Well, Miss, you ‘re not the first—and you won’t be the last” (8). Her evasive reply—“‘Oh, I’ve no pretensions,’ I could laugh, ‘to be the only one’” (9)—is the most important sentence in the tale. She wants not only to remain what she is—a living human animal (a congregation of more or less aleatory metaphysicians, like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Nietzsche, Freud, Deleuze, and Bloom is constituted around the worship of such *vis*, such *conatus*, such *Trieb*)—but also to remain unique and singular, *to be the only one*. This appeal to exclusive singularity is predicated upon the avoidance of prepossession. To be possessed is to renounce your uniqueness, to accept your epigonality, to bow in deference to a supervising precursor—“the lady who had prepared them for my discipline” (*Turn* 49). As a latecomer in a horizon of *ewige Wiederkehr* she is confronted with the horror of finding herself to be only a replica.²⁰ To be prepossessed is to be possessed in advance, to know, before you actually fall under the spell of your precursor, that “you’re not the first.” Before the dead returned, this hauntological tale of *fiction* and *repetition* (Hillis Miller) was already marked by “the return of the dead” (*Turn* 49). The method she devises to preclude prepossession by another—to cancel the necessity of her secondariness—is sophisticatedly simple: by imaginatively staging a case of ghostly apparition, she gains preemptive and preventive control over the risk of prepossession. By orchestrating a controlled and supervised play of ghosts she averts the risk of being accidentally played on by her spectral precursor—of being taken by the dead mistress from behind. This is, after all, a strategy of legitimate palliating spiritualization of crudely material interests, no more deviant than those deployed by perverse ladies in medieval courtly poetry.²¹ The governess turns her possession into something (a chimera) of her own conscious making; we may call this fantasy poetry, romance, or simply misprision. It is, at any rate, a fabulous instance of “disciplined perverseness” (Bloom, *Anxiety* 95). And she succeeds. By deploying a refined “‘romance’ adventure of service”—McKeon’s description of *Pamela* (371)—she interrupts the series, discontinues the chain, and inscribes her singularity. The master will never forget her. Douglas will never forget her. The narrator will never forget her. Neither will we. And, as Rowe and Lukacher have suggested, her fantasy is more Real than reality itself.

One beautiful spring day an already married Pamela discovers she is also a replica (476–477). The incident involves a farmhouse, a governess, and four misses, only one of whom embodies the real mistake, the real mischief, the miss. This whole scene of the visit to the farmhouse reads like a dreamlike pre-creation, a visionary adumbration, of the awkwardly

genteel country atmosphere that permeates *The Turn of the Screw*. Mr. B and Pamela go on an excursion for breakfast at a Farmhouse. The housewife regularly receives the visit of the ladies that live at the nearby Boarding School. Years earlier, Mr. B had seduced a girl called Sally Godfrey. One of the misses boarded at the school, Miss Goodwin, is his daughter, although he reluctantly introduces her to his new wife as his niece. When Pamela approaches her with affection, taking her in her arms, she rebukes her, arguing that she is not even allowed to address Mr. B as her uncle. Once the desperate ruse is exposed, Mr. B is forced to explain the reach of his “past liberties” (487):

When I was at College, I was well received by a Widow Lady, who had several Daughters, and but small Fortunes to give them; and the old Lady set one of them; a deserving good Girl she was; to draw me into Marriage with her, for the sake of the Fortune I was Heir to; and contrived many Opportunities to bring us and leave us together. I was not then of Age; and the young Lady, not half so artful as her Mother, yielded to my Addresses before the Mother’s Plot could be ripened, and so utterly disappointed it. This, my *Pamela*, is the *Sally Godfrey*, this malicious Woman, with the worst Intentions, has informed you of.

(432)

This daughter of a widowed lady of small fortunes called Sally Godfrey becomes, suddenly, Pamela’s precursor, a ghost that will haunt her new blissful marital state, openly proclaiming the one *inconsistency* that Pamela herself had brought into her marriage. She becomes a permanent reminder of the gap of impropriety she has inserted in a legitimate flow of genealogical continuity. Sally is a Pamela before Pamela. Or, better, Pamela is Sally *rediviva*, as Mr. B maliciously suggests: “that I doubted not to make my Pamela change her name, without either act of parliament, or wedlock, and be Sally Godfrey the second” (486). The fate of her “vile precursor” becomes a source of concern—“I wonder whether poor Miss Sally Godfrey be living or dead!” (448)—but the question is irrelevant, for, dead or alive, Sally has already turned into her accompanying ghost. The previous exclamation is inserted between article 6 and 7 of the memorandum Pamela drafts in her Journal as “rules for my future behavior.” Interestingly, the seventh suggests the possibility of her own perverseness, and the eight subsequent rules concern the education of children. All critical editions of *The Turn of the Screw* should include them in an appendix. The emphases are all mine:

8. That the Education of *Young People of Condition* is generally *wrong*.
Memorandum, That if any part of children’s education fall to my

lot, I never indulge and humour them in things that they *ought to be restrained* in.

9. That I accustom them to bear Disappointments and *Control*.
10. That I suffer them not to be *too much indulged* in their Infancy.
11. Nor at *School*.
12. Nor spoil them *when they come home*.
13. For that *Children generally extend their Perverseness from the Nurse to the Schoolmaster: from the Schoolmaster to the Parents:*
14. And, in their next Step, as a proper Punishment for all, make their own Selves unhappy.
15. That undutiful and *perverse Children* make bad Husbands and Wives: And, collaterally, *bad Masters and Mistresses*. (448)

By calling attention to these rules I am not implying that we should impute moral perversion to Flora and Miles. What I am suggesting is that the governess profits from the (conservative) expectation of the children's predictable perverseness to orchestrate her fantasy. It is not enough that they should hint at certain things; they should be forced to see them.

VII

Edmund Wilson was right: the tale is “study of morbid psychology,” namely female hysteria; it is a “variation on one of James’s familiar themes, the thwarted Anglo-Saxon spinster” (94–95); it offers, in fact, a “solid and unmistakable picture of the poor country parson’s daughter, with her English middle-class consciousness, her inability to admit to herself her sexual impulses” (95). This, I think, is basically true, and it corresponds to James’s conscious intention. Psychology and ideology are woven together in this complex diagnosis, for her “hysteria” is inseparable from her “English middle-class consciousness.” Psychological morbidity is socially induced. The governess’ consciousness is, we are told, limited. She represses the following: 1) her awareness of her sexual impulses; 2) her complete realization that she is in love with the master; 3) her consciousness of the fact that she wants to be unique. She is by contrast fully conscious of the plan she has designed, even if her narrative conceals the intensity of this awareness. She knows that she wants the children fully to see what they may have only imperfectly grasped: the improper cross-class sexual relation that existed between the master’s former valet, Peter Quint, and the previous governess, Miss Jessel. As Bruce Robbins has pointed out,

love between the classes is of course precisely what the governess discovers in the earthly paradise at Bly. The corruption she perceives

has to do with the children's knowledge of sexual relations between the former governess and one of the servants, who was "dreadfully below."
(200)²²

But this is the very corruption she herself longs for, since, Robbins rightly adds, the governess is in love with the master and what she "herself desires is of course nothing but the erotic transgression of class" (201). What she aspires to is, in short, "to repeat the ghost's transgression and indulge a love that is prohibited by the social hierarchy" (202). She desires the *jouissance* of the Other—or, to be more precise, *the others*. Her imaginary relation with the master repeats both the former governess' conjectural relation with him and the surrogate relation that ostensibly stands (or appears) for it: her relation with the master's man dressed up in his clothes. Peter Quint is openly described as a grotesque, vulgar, and highly sexualized replacement of the master, capable of displaying an authority (avuncular, domestic-political, sexual) that the latter fails or refuses to exercise.²³ But she doesn't want her transgression to come through as a repetition. She wants her "romance"—this is the term Robbins correctly borrows from Fredric Jameson—to be unique. She is of course at the service of her master, but also self-employed to imagine—like the protagonist of *Northanger Abbey*—more than she is conceivably, empirically, pragmatically cued to believe.²⁴ This is probably the reason why she is so meticulous in the reconstruction of the wickedness and awkwardness (the horror, the horror) of a relationship that mesmerizes her: she may triumph over the former governess in seducing the actual master (that is her hope) but she will never reach the peak of libidinal transgression—the forbidden *jouissance*—that her predecessor has probably enjoyed (that is her fear). The thought of it would lead her to the forbidden quick-sands of French erotic fiction, including Sade: *La philosophie dans le boudoir* offers some gruesome instances of interclass sexual transgression. The governess knows the relation between Quint and Miss Jessel took place, because she is told by Mrs. Grose, and she is imaginative enough to presume an inchoate imaginative apprehension, on the children's part, of this misalliance. Her plan is to complete what the children have only imperfectly hinted at. For Flora and Miles it probably sufficed to see these characters leave Bly to know that something was amiss in the way of their being there, a mode of closeness they knew something about because of the inappropriate intimacy they (high-class children) enjoyed with them (adult household employees), especially with the subaltern Peter. The governess' insistence on their re-appearance was sufficient motive to upset them in a profoundly disturbing manner. Sufficient motive, in sum, to bring the situation to a breaking point, and force the visit of the master. She probably didn't intend to break the boy, but the boy had no other choice than breaking.

There is one important fact about the story that has in part escaped scholarly attention. From the moment the governess begins to claim having seen the ghosts, the object of her and of Mrs. Grose's concern is less the occurrence of the apparitions than the proximity, first, between Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, and second, between these persons and the children, configuring a sort of perverse *party quarrée* (Fielding, *Amelia* III.IX, 156). The governess is adamant: "The four, depend upon it, perpetually meet" (46). And the past occurrence of such dismal conclave—the meeting of the ghosts of "the others, the outsiders" (51), who "*were* rascals" (47), and the children—is likely to recur. What bothers her is an interpersonal closeness—an attachment, the violation of detachment—consequent on "a servant exceeding his or her station" (238).²⁵ Why doesn't the governess ask the housekeeper if she has ever seen the apparitions as apparitions and not as real people? That the governess doesn't seem to care about the fact that the house is haunted is perfectly understandable: she knows it is not. What is remarkable is that within the coordinates of probability (verisimilitude) that she has stipulated for a game the housekeeper is willing to play, neither woman finds it incumbent upon herself to discuss the one issue that academic readers of the story have battled over for decades: are the ghosts real or not? They speculate about the motive of the apparitions (the *why*), about their configuration (the *how*), not about their reality (the *what*). In *Hamlet*, by contrast, debate is raised about three problematic issues: first, the *whether of the ghost*—the possibility and reality of the apparition, seriously questioned by Horatio at first (*Hamlet* 1.1.27); second, the *what of the ghost*—its identity, which oscillates between the spirit of the deceased king and a devil taking its form (1.4.40–45); finally, and subservient to the other two questions, the *why of the ghost*—why is the spirit here, what does it want to warn us against, inform us about (1.4.47–57)? In *The Turn of the Screw*, the first question (the reality of the apparition) is never seriously considered.

The governess pretends to be solely concerned about the renewed meetings of these four characters. Never was property or possession so distinctly defined in terms of proximity: "They're not mine—they're not ours. They're his and they're hers! 'Quint's and that woman's?' 'Quint's and that woman's. She wants to get to them.'" But the collapse of rank distinction revealing status inconsistency is more dramatically rendered in the following account:

They don't know, as yet, quite how—but they're trying hard. They're seen only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places, the top of towers, the roof of houses, the outside of windows, the further edge of pools; but there's a deep design, on either side, to *shorten the distance* and overcome the obstacle.

(47; emphasis added)

I noted previously that the governess' task is to fabricate an exceptional case, which may interrupt the series that makes her unexceptional. And she does so by mobilizing the imaginative resources and conventions of Gothic romance she may be acquainted with as a potential reader of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre*: "I had the view of a castle inhabited by a rosy sprite" (9). But it is *Amelia*, I suggested, that provides the narrator with the imaginative horizon that makes the tale possible in the first place. We have, therefore, two narrative consciousnesses, one inside the other. The first is the literary (Bovarian) consciousness of the governess as inside narrator, awash in romance conventions and yet learning to remain wholly awake to the realist "art of life." The second, and more capacious, is the literary (Flaubertian) consciousness of the external narrator, teeming with the negative irony of realism. Fielding furnishes James with narrative irony in order to set his "sinister romance" ("Preface" 124), his "little firm fantasy" (126), in motion. The reciprocal interpenetration of both modes (romance and ironic realism) is something the late James acknowledged. In his 1865 review of M. E. Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*, he distinguishes between Ann Radcliffe's "mysteries," described as "romances pure and simple," and those of Wilkie Collins, which are "stern reality" (98). Interestingly, James contends that *The Woman in White*, "with its diaries and letters and its general ponderosity, was a kind of nineteenth century version of *Clarissa Harlowe*" (98). This genealogical aperçu reinforces the eighteenth-century atmosphere of *The Turn of the Screw*, and the appropriateness of our reading it as a kind of *nineteenth century version of Pamela*.

If I place such an emphasis on the *literary education* of the governess, it is because this particular feature of her personality has been either passively neglected or actively denied by critics. Take, for instance, Robert Pippin's description of the girl, and compare it, say, with his appreciation of Isabel Archer as a woman who, according to her chronicler, had "a reputation of reading a great deal" and was immersed in the world of "the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot" (*Portrait* 88–89). The governess, by contrast, is just

a young, unworldly girl from a religious background, a vicarage, we are led to believe, so remote (so pre-modern perhaps) that it might be on another planet, a girl with no experience even of novels, plays, who has never even seen herself in a full-length mirror.

(Pippin, *James* 114)

But who is *this* girl? If you detract from, say, Emily Brontë the massive bulk of her intense readings (of plays, poems, the Bible, newspapers, and novels) you are left with a rustic ingénue that approximates Pippin's idea of the girl. But this diminished creature, the result of a mathematical operation,

is absent from the pages of *The Turn of the Screw*. Nobody freshly landed from Immanuel's Land or another planet can fantasize as lushly as the governess. Recall that such capacity for fantasy reveals, paradoxically, according to genteel standards, a socially induced lack of manners and imagination: "To have frequent recourse to narrative, betrays great want of imagination" (Chesterfield, qtd. in Womersley, *Transformation* 100). This outmoded charge obviously places the loquacious governess on a par with Fielding and James, eminent narrators, and all three more than an inch below the Elysium of polite gentility. To imagine and mystify—to *fill out*, to use a recursive verb in *The Ambassadors*—so effectively, you need some deviant symbolic mediation or literary prepossession. You need, at least, to have been imaginatively taken from behind—if not to nurse the hope of impregnating (introjecting the earliness of, preempting the mastery of, fathering yourself through) your precursor. Had she had, as Pip-pin suggests, "no experience even of novels," she wouldn't have chosen *Amelia*—a voluminous, three-volume, novel—to kill her hours at Bly. The psalms, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or even *The Vicar of Wakefield* would have been more reasonable choices for an "unworldly girl from a religious background."

Or she could have chosen *Pamela*, written prima facie by another romancier and plotter. Mr. B accuses the maid of "horrid romancing" (*Pamela* 179) and traces her literary talents to a family habit of excessive and superfluous reading: "the Girl's Head's turned by Romances" (93). The reading of Richardson's novel would have turned further her romance-infested mind, encouraging a romantic aspiration to transgress social norms of status separation. Perrault's version of the Bluebeard folktale, which James significantly mentions in his Preface to the tale, could have also been a suitable choice. Thackeray was compulsively drawn to this particular folktale of "a woman's transgression against an express prohibition" (McMaster 200), and he rewrote and refashioned it in gruesome drawings featuring scenes of female beheading, and lonely ladies waving handkerchiefs in castle battlements, which remind us both of Mrs. Grose's resolve that she and the governess should keep their heads—"we must keep our heads" (*Turn* 30); "we were to keep our heads" (32)—in their haunted, masterless "castle" and the vision of Quint standing in the battlements (16–17). In *The Adventures of Philip*, Thackeray also included several references to the motif of the skeleton in the closet, as well as a chapter-opening illustration (chapter 3) where the huge initial "S" covers the door of a "skeleton closet" (*Philip* 119) that is being furtively opened by a boy and a girl.²⁶ This ungainly drawing works as a perfect pictorial-allegorical anticipation of the referential concretion that James's tale works so admirably to avoid. If the governess had chosen Thackeray's novel, and eyed the picture, her fantasy would have taken a not very different turn—of the key.

VIII

But she chose *Amelia*, and in the course of her wakeful reading she drew along significant strips and shreds of the textual net Fielding's last novel was woven into. Let us now examine the fabric more closely. Douglas explains that the story is written, and that he doesn't have the manuscript with him. "It's in a locked drawer—it has not been out for years. I could write to my man and enclose the key; he could send down the packet as he finds it" (2). *The Turn of the Screw* is premised, tellingly, upon *the turn of a key*. The possibility of the story—its physical availability as document, its arrival to the community of listeners, its aural presentation as tale—depends upon access to a locked drawer that is granted to a servant. The difference between—to put it in Coetzee's memorable terms—*he and his man* inscribes the primal scene to which the story is inexorably indebted. The servant (his man) receives a letter with a key to a drawer, and privileged access to private papers: this temporary incident of subaltern mastery prefigures the contained (dialogized) disclosure of liberal secrets that organize the entire text. The servant, the manuscript, the drawer, the letter, the key: these are, to be sure, basic ingredients of English eighteenth-century fiction, in particular of that inaugural textual *dispositif* that Richardson unforgettably modulated in *Pamela*.²⁷

We next discover that the author of this story was Douglas' sister's governess. As Henry Sussman has pointed out, this places Douglas in the curious position of a surrogate Miles. It is a position of secondariness. Everything in this tale turns around the uncanny logic of *difference and repetition* (Deleuze), of difference between social positions (master, governess, housekeeper, valet, servant, maid) that keep reemerging in vicarious scenes—of difference. There is a story, let me add, not so much because these divergent roles are always further recast in derivational scenes but rather because the difference that organizes their repetition is temporarily violated in one of them. When the *distance of difference*—what we call *distinction*—collapses, we get the *proximity of equality* (fusion, intimacy, intercourse) that the story encodes in terms of demonic sublimity. The horror of propinquity is initially evoked through the "impropriety" of Douglas' "love" for his sister's governess, and next in the related *awkwardness* of her love for her first master. Through the indirection of the surrogate narrator's love for the governess, we reach the story's most important violation of social decorum. If I italicize the very awkward noun *awkwardness* it is because James uses it three times in the tale, exactly as often as he uses the adjective: there is reference to the "great awkwardness" (*Turn 5*) of the first governess's death, to the "awkwardness" often brought off by the children's and the governess's insane prospect of writing to the master (52), to the "mere alien awkwardness" the governess has basely created

for a “being so exquisite” and so full of “possibilities of beautiful intercourse” as Miles (81). The frictions caused by the intercourse between the master and the first governess, the master and the second governess, and the second governess and Miles invariably lead to an awkward outcome. Etymologically, *awkward* is what is *turned* the wrong way, the perverse, the untoward, the backward. We may want to recall that Douglas first discloses the news about a “horrible” tale while presenting “his back” (1) to the fire, a position that reminds us of the underground-cave prisoners in Plato’s *Republic*, or that the governess sees Quint’s figure

turn as I might have seen the low wretch to which it had once belonged
turn on receipt of an order, and pass, with my eyes on the villainous
back that no hunch could have more disfigured, straight down the stair-
case and into the darkness in which the next bend was lost.

(40)

She later looks down from the top of the stairs to recognize “the presence of a woman seated on one of the lower steps with her back presented to me, her body half-bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands” (42). But more on awkwardness later.

IX

The governess is described as “the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson” (4)—a depiction that inevitably evokes the Brontë sisters—and the master or “patron” comes through as “a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage” (4). The term *gentleman* marks here all the difference, for this particular governess is not yet described as a *lady*. Indeed, as Peter Laslett pointed out in a memorable study, “the term gentleman marked the boundary at which the traditional social system divided up the population into two extremely unequal sections.” And yet, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century a “marked inconsistency” set in, proving “most pronounced at the boundary between [. . .] the gentry and the rest of society,” and giving rise to “a considerable intermediate area of uncertain status between the élite and the mass” (*World* 27–29). Needless to say, the horror of James’s tale unfolds in the twilight of this intermediate area. The élite in *The Turn* is of course the master, a terminal version of “the independent country gentleman” that republican ideologies identified with “the leading repository of moral dignity and worth in modern societies” (Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* 95). He is separate, not dependent—independent, not obnoxious. He is what Isabel Archer fails to be, because she has fallen “into a condition of

avoidable dependence on the goodwill of others” (*Liberty* 119). And this is, let me recall, pace Pippin, a Hegelian condition. But whereas the *incommunicado* master is a gentleman, the governess is an unlikely *lady*.²⁸ She is thus first alluded to indirectly, when Douglas, before “reading” the story to the group, mentions “the young lady who should go down as governess” (5). The second time she is conferred the distinction of this title is in the story proper penned by the governess herself, but the word is put in Miles’ mouth, who resents being “with a lady always [. . .] and always with the same lady. [. . .] Ah, of course, she’s a jolly, ‘perfect’ lady; but, after all, I’m a fellow, don’t you see?” (53). The ironic innuendo—the distance of free direct speech, the notation of added reported speech when registering her own “perfect” *ladiness*—is rather strong and is further compounded with Mrs. Grose’s dry rebuttal at the governess’ claim to see Miss Jessel across the lake: “She isn’t there, little lady, and nobody’s there—and you never see nothing, my sweet!” (70). *Little lady, perfect lady*: these demeaning locutions contrast with Flora’s unassuming right to be called “little lady” (11, 25, 35) and “young lady” (74), and, more crucially, with the respectful allusions to Miss Jessel as a real lady—the “young lady” mentioned by Douglas (5), by the new governess (12, 49), and by the housekeeper (12). The genuine standing of the first governess as lady is the focus of an immensely relevant exchange between the second governess and the housekeeper:

“I must have it now. Of what did she die? Come, there was something between them.”
 “There was everything.”
 “In spite of the difference—?”
 “Oh, of their rank, their condition”—she brought it woefully out. “*She* was a lady.”
 I turned it over; I again saw. “Yes—she was a lady.”
 “And he so dreadfully below,” said Mrs. Grose.

(31–32)

What is it that the governess *sees* when she concedes, after turning it over, “I again saw”? Conceivably, she is less interested in the scandalous nature of the relation between the two former workers, “in spite of their difference,” than with the fact that the former governess was indeed—alas—a lady. She is later described as having gone “off” at some point—possibly pregnant, to her home, and eventually to die—but this is the same turn of phrase that marks, in his first letter, the liberal distinction of the master—“I’m off!” (10)—which is of course the distinction to be indifferent about distinction: only those *dreadfully below* care about the contingency and

virtual inconsistency of a difference that those above simply take for granted. The first governess dies, yes, but she is not “sacrificed” (55) like the second: whereas the former chooses her destiny—she could decide, with aloofness, “to go home, as she said, for a short holiday” (12)—the latter is trapped in a gruesome plot. But gruesome for whom? A woman who feels “lifted aloft in a wave of infatuation and pity” (14) by the ruinous task of fathering (preserving, feeding, clothing, instructing, and defending) the unlikely Bly “commonwealth” (Filmer, *Patriarcha* 12); a woman who, under such circumstances and already beset by discipline trouble, considers that it “was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom” (14) is not the kind of person likely to invest terms like “home” and “holiday” with the positive connotation other people often attach to them: this fate she shares with the unforgettable protagonist of *The Haunting of Hill House*. What the governess dismally realizes is that the pronominal emphasis—“*She* was a lady”—doesn’t so much set Miss Jessel apart from a non-gentleman as distinguish her from a woman (herself) who is perhaps less than a lady. “*She* was a lady” also implies “*You* are not a lady”: this is what she “again saw.” To be sure, a profound ideological incongruence caused such categorical ambivalence:

The structure of the [Victorian] household pointed to the governess’s anomalous position. She was a lady, and therefore not a servant, but she was an employee, and therefore not of equal status with the wife and daughters of the house. The purposes of her employment contributed further to the incongruence of her position.

(Peterson 11)

But the fact is that the former governess had it both ways: she was seigneurial enough to be rightfully in love with a gentleman like the master, and liberal enough to demean herself to the lowness of interclass sex with servants. She had her cake and ate it too. In *Amelia*, Mr Booth narrates how he was once taken ill in a cart to a country house and “left in the care of one maid-servant.” The girl came into the hall “with the footman who had driven the cart,” and “a scene of the highest fondness” follows:

the Fellow proposed, and the Maid consented, to open the Hamper and drink a Bottle together, which, they agreed, their Mistress would hardly miss in such a Quantity. They presently began to execute their Purpose. They opened the Hamper, and, to their great Surprise, discovered the Contents. I took an immediate Advantage of the Consternation which appeared in the Countenances of both the Servants, and had sufficient Presence of Mind to improve the Knowledge of those Secrets to which

I was privy. I told them that it entirely depended on their Behaviour to me whether their Mistress should ever be acquainted, either with what they had done or with what they had intended to do.

(II.V. 112)

The secret intercourse between the maid and the footman doesn't violate in principle the strictures of rank separation, but by drinking the wine of their betters, these "two Delinquents" (112) transgress, like the subalterns at Bly, strict rules of property and propriety. Likewise, the former governess ate and drank: she reached the jouissance the higher classes believed was more opulently accessible to the Molls, Mollies, Fannies, and Nancies of "the alley and the gutter" (*Oliver Twist* 267). *Noblesse oblige*. Too much for a "poor country parson's daughter" to handle mundanely. And any reader of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* knows that when the upright *bonne* is about to break under the strain of class consciousness, she begins to see ghosts. In *The Princess Casamassima*, Captain Sholto also stresses the way cross-class democratic *freedom* is irremediably attended by a *strange* ghostliness.²⁹ *Noblesse*, indeed, *oblige*. Foucault elaborated this maxim in his discussion of the way in which the aristocratic blood-caste distinction was developed into a bourgeois sex-class distinction. This discussion throws light on the anxiously repressive and hygienic soteriology—the "biological, medical [. . .] precepts" (Foucault, *History* 124)—the governess wishes to deploy at Bly: when she imaginatively transfigures the unclean Miles into a hospital patient, she muses "I would have given, as the resemblance came to me, all I possessed on earth really to be the nurse or the sister of charity who might have helped to cure him" (61). *The Turn of the Screw* enacts the problematic and ever-imperfect transition "from a *symbolics of blood* to an *analytics of sex*" (148). What Foucault calls here blood is plain animal sex, and what he calls sex is *sex observed and scrutinized*. In fact, the spectral omnipresence of the monstrous *lady-male servant intercourse* turns the tale into a defective sublimation of the standard Sade vignette, with the "exhaustive analysis of sex [carried] over into the mechanisms of the old power of sovereignty and endowed [. . .] with the ancient but fully maintained prestige of blood" (*History of Sexuality I* 148). The governess, in short, is wrongly trying to (analytically) sexualize a site of blood. "According to the Foucauldian hypothesis," writes Armstrong,

our thinking is most completely inscribed within middle-class sexuality when we indulge in this fantasy, for the repressive hypothesis ensures that we imagine freedom in terms of repression, without questioning the truth or necessity of what we become with the lifting of bans.

(*Desire* 13)

If I say that the governess tries wrongly, it is because liberal James is never conservative enough to instrumentally lift the bans and fully give up the blood-based “caste distinction” (Foucault, *History* 124).

X

Domestic trouble begins when the master, in the role of “guardian” of his nephew and niece, sends the children to his “other house” in the country. So far, this sounds perfectly apropos. But he decides to keep “them there with the best people he could find to look after them, parting even with his own servants to wait on them” (5). The narrator deems it “awkward” that the children should have had no other relatives and that the uncle should have been so absorbed in his “affairs” that he failed to visit them. A faint echo of Prospero’s prehistory can be sensed in this reproach. But more awkward still is that she should decide to give up *his* servants. The anomalous reallocation of the subalterns is a first symptom. The second is that they are allowed to become masters of the house: “He put them in possession of Bly” (*Turn* 5; emphasis added). His mother’s former maid, Mrs. Grose, is “placed at the head of their little establishment—but below-stairs only” (5). This involves rash promotion: “She was now housekeeper and was also acting for the time as superintendent to the little girl” (5). Maid, housekeeper, superintendent: this is a plain case of overemployment. But these maladjusted and expedient rearrangements had started earlier, when the first governess went “off” and “a young woman—a nursemaid who had stayed on and who was a good girl and clever [. . .] *she* took the children altogether for the interval” (12). The housekeeper’s emphasis on the pronoun (*she*) foreshadows the occurrence analyzed previously, thus reinvesting the sentence with the implication that this clever nursemaid was *not* a lady either. Considering these domestic disturbances, it is no surprise the master should find it expedient to look for a shortcut: the absolute *potestas* of the new governess. But the solution is hopeless: “There were plenty of people to help, but of course the young lady who should go down as governess would be in supreme authority” (5). A dystopian polity of servants—“there were, further, a cook, a housemaid, a dairywoman, an old pony, an old groom and an old gardener, all likewise thoroughly respectable” (5)—is thus constituted, with the unnamed governess as Lady Queen, flanked by Mrs. Grose in the role of garrulous “counsellor” (10). One may speak of the culmination of “the decay of ‘housekeeping’” (Watt, *Rise* 158) and the collapse of the patriarchal family, whose beginning Watt traced back to the Jacobean period. There is something Swiftian about the circumspect outline of this makeshift commonwealth, structurally split into two distinct groups, “the part of the servants” and “the part of the children” (43). The title is *The Lady of the Blies*, and it alludes to the

delusional daughter of the country parson who struggles to obtain “an odd recognition of my superiority—my accomplishments and my function—in [the housekeeper’s] patience under my pain” (44). The question is: will they all survive?

The power given to the governess at Bly is not dissimilar from the domestic power Pamela gains at Lincolnshire. Both are perfect embodiments of status inconsistency. The maid, who enjoys the benefits of an ideology of feudal paternalism projected on domestic service, is however described by the impatient Mr B. as a “strange Medley of Inconsistence” (*Pamela* 75). McKeon has spoken of the squire’s “total discomposure at the status inconsistency of this half-girl half-lady, half-servant half-mistress” (371), and explained the larger context in terms of the “volatile modernization of feudal conceptions of institutional service,” which turned “domestic service within the last bastion of feudal patrimonialism, the family.” As a result of it, “in eighteenth century England, the theory of domestic service continued to be dominated by a ‘medieval’ model of personal discretion and submission that was increasingly at odds with the practicalities of wage employment” (369). The heated debate, in Book IV, chapter 2 of Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*, over “the Terms *Master and Service*” (246–247) is proof of the ongoing relevance of this disputed issue, all the way up to James, whose plots force tendentially free protagonists to gravitate around that “last bastion of feudal patrimonialism, the family.” In *Pamela*, the girl is not just a commoner confronting a member of the gentry; she is also a servant placed below a master. In *The Turn of the Screw*, written at a time when class orientation has smoothed and *almost* overrun the edginess of status inconsistency (McKeon 419), the governess undecidedly wavers between an enlightened-liberal respectable lady and a submitted medieval servant. I have already pointed out that the governess has a literary education which she tries to project on the children. This obviously betokens her professional faculty as a governess. What about Pamela? McKeon aptly summarizes that “from Mr. B’s mother Pamela learns the more delicate labor of needlework and the gentle arts of singing, dancing, and drawing; and from her she receives the cast-off clothing B. so liberally and alarmingly supplements after his mother’s death” (370). This transmission of labors, arts, and clothing makes up the educational program she benefits from at the Bedfordshire estate. Labors, arts, and clothing are part of the “imaginary value” that will gentryfy her. McKeon had observed that “elevated birth affords opportunities for education, travel, and companionship which are otherwise not available, and that this will give the edge to the noble youth” (*Origins* 170), but the *imaginary value* lodged in those opportunities (education, travel, companionship) was also, in a progressive sense, accessible to maids. “I have been,” Pamela realizes, “brought up wrong, as Matters stand” (371).

XI

Literary descriptions of awkward arrangements of domestic power were not difficult to come by. In Fielding's *Amelia*, for instance, we come upon similarly allegorical dramatizations of unvirtuous domestic misemployment:

Figure to yourself then a Family, the Master of which should dispose of the several economical Offices in the following manner; *viz.* should put his Butler in the Coachbox, his steward behind his Coach, his Coachman in the Butlery, and his Footman in the Stewardship, and in the same ridiculous manner should misemploy the Talents of every other Servant; it is easy to see what a Figure such a Family must make in the World.

(59)

Like this family, the community of menials in *The Turn of the Screw* makes indeed *una brutta figura*. Domestic chaos becomes morally unbearable when the hierarchies of education are at stake. In Gibbon's *Memoirs*, James could have encountered allusions to orthodox relations between the "domestic tutor" and the "pupil" (63–64), but also some piquant cases of uncanny domestic disarrangement. The English historian evokes the incident of children abandoned in the "house," "family," and "private academy" of the Reverend Mr Philip Francis. Gibbon, who was a temporary resident of the place, is shocked to discover that "Mr Francis's spirit was too lively for his profession; and while he indulged himself in the pleasures of London, his pupils were left idle at Esher in the custody of a Dutch usher, of low manners and contemptible learning" (*Memoirs* 70–71). Idle master, abandoned pupils, misplaced custody, low manners: on these conditions, things are likely to take a bad *turn*.

The arrival of a governess involved no automatic alleviation of social anxieties. Although the governess's labor's restriction to domestic duties placed her in "the cast of respectable women," conduct-books upholding ideals of domestic femaleness found women who worked for their living to be "morally bankrupt." The governess, therefore, "was commonly represented as a threat to the well-being of the household" (Armstrong, *Desire* 78–79). The arrival of James's governess to Bly is shrouded in a vague sensation of "mistake" (6). This psychological feeling carries deeper ideological confusion. Watching "its open windows and fresh curtains and the pair of maids looking out," the lawn, the gravel, the tree-tops, and a "civil person" at the door "who dropped me as decent a curtsy," she feels she was "the mistress of a distinguished visitor" (7). She is surprised at the "liberality with which I was treated" (7)—like a mistress. This bodes further trouble. Whatever she really takes herself to be—poor country lady, governess, mistress—the fact is that she aspires to gain immediate

recognition: “I reflected that my first duty was, by the gentlest art I could contrive, to win the child into the sense of knowing me” (9). Knowledge, commonly reduced by readers of the tale to denote the grasp of the unfathomable or sexual intercourse, is primarily *knowledge of social standing*. Her professional authority is always called into question: her “employer” assigns her tasks—dealing, for instance, with the headmaster at Miles’ school—that she is unfit to carry out. Her “colleague,” Mrs. Grose, former maid, temporary head of the establishment, current housekeeper, and private “counsellor” to the Mistress, Queen, and Lady of the House, is also unable to execute the task.

Peter Quint’s first apparition is marked by the social impropriety of failed etiquette and excessive visual intimacy: “there was a touch of the strange freedom, as I remember, in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat [. . .] our straight mutual stare [. . .] he never took his eyes from me” (16). The idea is later reiterated in reference to Miss Jessel, when the housekeeper and the governess are looking for Flora:

“No; she’s at a distance.” I had made up my mind. “She has gone out.”
Mrs. Grose stared. “Without a hat?”
I naturally also looked volumes. “Isn’t that woman always without one?”
“She’s with *her*?”
“She’s with *her!*” I declared. “We must find them.”

(64)

A sense of violation is suggested. This “queer affair” is retrospectively construed as one of *excessive nearness*—“the visitor with whom I had been so inexplicably and yet, as it seemed to me, so intimately concerned” (17–18)—and sets the governess on the track of “any domestic complication” (18). Like Hamlet, she suspects foul play and holds fast to the “inference” that “some one had taken a liberty rather monstrous” (18). *Strange freedom, monstrous liberty*: these spell, we will see, the discontents of the *liberal imagination*. Like Trilling—and, genealogically, like Eliot Norton, the James brothers, Wilson, and Matthiessen—the governess did not study with her pupils “only fiction and verse” (18), which means of course that she overtreated them to exactly this liberal diet. As Felman has rightly demonstrated, the governess’ imagination is now fully at work, even if the housekeeper calls her to task: “How can I if *you* don’t imagine?” (21) Her imaginative limitation doesn’t prevent her, however, from realizing the dreadfulness of the scene. As in *Hamlet*, the opening concern is about the identity of the apparition witnessed in the castle’s battlements. In the final apparition, I have already noted, Peter Quint comes into view “like a sentinel before a prison” (81). This resonates too with Dickensian echoes: it reminds us of the passage, at the end of chapter 34 of *Oliver Twist*,

where Monks and Fagin watch through the window how Oliver sleeps over a desk with books. The scene was immortalized by Cruikshank in his engraving “Reappearance of Monks and the Jew,” and James mentioned these “vividly terrible” illustrations of “the low and the awkward” in his autobiography as producing an indelible inscription in his childhood memory.³⁰ Monks and Fagin, we know, were no men of the genteel world, but what about Quint? “Was he a gentleman?” (22) The negative answer is repeated: “‘No.’ She gazed in deeper wonder. ‘No’” (22). Then follows this relevant exchange:

“But if he is n’t a gentleman—
 “What is he? He’s a horror.”
 “A horror?”
 “He’s—God help me if I know *what* he is!”
 (22)

The metaphysical impenetrability of his (or its) identity, further confirmed by the estimate that “he’s like nobody” (23), is less relevant than the question of social unreadability he strikingly poses: “He has no hat” (23). The governess and the housekeeper gropingly concur that he is not a gentleman—“‘but never—no, never!—a gentleman.’ [. . .] ‘A gentleman?’ she gasped, confounded, stupefied: ‘a gentleman *he?*’” (23) And yet he is “remarkably handsome” and “dressed,” the governess believes, “in somebody’s clothes.” Mrs. Grose confirms: “They’re the master’s!” Correctly or not, the governess will later refer to him as “that gentleman” (42). Such categorial volatility is alarming. The episode of social-domestic usurpation that this observation entails both foreshadows the uncanny arrogations of the talented—and positively Jamesian—Mr. Ripley and harks back to the symbolism of “ill-fitting garments” (Spurgeon 325) informing Macbeth’s anticipation of magnicide. The use of the trope of “strange garments” (*Macbeth* 1.4.143) and “borrowed robes” (1.3.107) “to express status inconsistency” is also a signature symbolic strategy in *Pamela*: Mr. B insists on giving the maid his mother’s clothing as a present, and the locked portmanteau containing it haunts the girl as a reminder of her transgression. In *The Turn*, the remaining intermittent exchange between the two women construes an alternative scene of domestic usurpation:³¹

I caught it up. “You *do* know him?”
 She faltered but a second. “Quint!” she cried.
 “Quint?”
 “Peter Quint—his own man, his valet, when he was here!”
 “When the master was?”

Gaping still, but meeting me, she pieced it all together. “He never wore his hat, but he did wear—well, there were waistcoats missed. They were both here—last year. Then the master went, and Quint was alone.”

I followed, but halting a little. “Alone?”

“Alone with *us*.” Then, as from a deeper depth, “In charge,” she added.

(23)

XII

The case of the hysteric governess has been persuasively argued by the critical tradition. But what about the master? What about the gentleman who “went,” leaving his entire household “in charge” of a *valet de chambre*, a male household servant of the meaner sort who takes his master’s waistcoats? This very much argues for the case—notably, a Sadean fantasy—of a perverse impotent master who draws surrogate pleasure from having his man display the absolute domestic (political and sexual) power he can no longer exercise.³² The governesses fall in love with him, and he returns their love with the gift of a sexual doppelgänger, a stand-in better qualified to stand—and stay in. The episode of semiotic replacement implied in this transaction can only be explained in terms of an ideological transition whose liberal boundaries make room for the aberrant indeterminacies of what James, in the tale, calls *the strange freedom*:

The vestigial but resilient ties of eighteenth-century domestic service to the cultural ethos of feudal service made it a particular unstable social institution, balanced uncertainly between status and class orientations. This can be seen in what happens to the conventions of servants’ wearing apparel. Livery remained customary for lower menservants, but a system of signification that once conferred the honor of service was now as likely to suggest a demeaning slavery. “Body servants” received a more subtle “livery”, the cast-off clothing of their masters or mistresses. Although such a custom might aim to advertise the elevation of the employer, it could equally serve a contrary end by blurring the sumptuary distinctions between ranks, so that the servant appeared not as the signifier of his betters but as the self-sufficient signified.

(McKeon 370)

Peter Quint’s extended duties also include the education of the children. This obviously runs against the sense of propriety Parson Adams upholds: “the first care I always take, is of a Boy’s Morals” (*Joseph* 200). “I prefer,”

he adds, “a private School, where Boys may be kept in Innocence and Ignorance” (201). But Flora and Miles are stuck with a man of very questionable manners. The governess stresses the “particular fact that for a period of several months Quint and the boy had been perpetually together” (34), that they “had been about together quite as if Quint were his tutor” (35). The governess is intrigued by the housekeeper’s courage “to criticize the propriety, to hint at the incongruity, of so close an alliance” (34). To her mind, Quint is gradually turning into a “phantom of inconsistency” (Badiou, *Being* 53). When the latter reminded the first governess of this incongruity, Miss Jessel asked her to mind her own business. But the housekeeper lets Miles know that “young gentlemen [should] not forget their station” (34). Fascinated with this account, the governess demands a more specific confirmation: “You reminded him that Quint was only a base menial?” (34) She did, but Miles replied that the housekeeper she was “another” (36). The account of the menial’s final fate tested the limits of James’s genteel imagination.

On the dawn of a winter’s morning, Peter Quint was found, by a laborer going to early work, stone dead on the road from the village: a catastrophe explained—superficially at least—by a visible wound to his head; such a wound as might have been produced—and as, on the final evidence, *had* been—by a fatal slip, in the dark and after leaving the public house, on the steepish icy slope, a wrong path altogether, at the bottom of which he lay. The icy slope, the turn mistaken at night and in liquor, accounted for much—practically, in the end and after the inquest and boundless chatter, for everything; but there had been matters in his life—strange passages and perils, secret disorders, vices more than suspected—that would have accounted for a good deal more.

(27)

This mode of realism, more at home in a Hardy novel, can be traced back to Fielding. Some elements of the description—notably, nighttime, liquor, loneliness, the head wound, the slope, the ditch—are actually present in the account of an accident that befell Pamela’s brother. Joseph drinks wine with a friend in an inn, and continues his journey on foot, when he is “met by two Fellows in a narrow Lane and ordered to stand and deliver.” A fight follows where Joseph receives

a Blow from behind, with the Butt-end of a Pistol, from the other Villain, which felled him to the Ground, and totally deprived him of his Senses. The Thief who had been knocked down had now recovered himself; and both together fell to be-labouring poor Joseph with their Sticks, till they were convinced they had put an end to his miserable Being. They then

stripped him entirely naked, threw him into a Ditch, and departed with their Booty.

(*Joseph Andrews* 44–45)

Interestingly, the clothing they strip him of were *borrowed robes*, the “coat and breeches of a friend.” Quint’s “fatal slip” is obviously more fatal, but Joseph’s is not devoid of moral meaning. He is not, however, the only character in his novel to make slips. Mrs. Tow-woose’s husband, for instance, goes to bed with Betty, the “beggarly saucy dirty Servant-Maid” (72). More importantly, Lady Booby’s waiting-gentlewoman, significantly called Mrs. Slipslop, is “the Daughter of a Curate” (21) who “made a small Slip in her Youth and continued a good Maid ever since” (27). The suggestion is that “an occasional slip in the dark” may not kill you, but take one single step down the ladder and life will become more sinister, or more ridiculous. Joseph works as stable boy and footman to Thomas Booby. Unlike Peter Quint—who simply “went”—he is discharged from a household that includes Peter Pounce as a steward. Like the first governess, Lady Booby—who “can’t remember all the inferior Servants in [her] Family” (138)—has exposed herself to “the Refusal of [her] Footman” (36). Unlike Miss Jessel, she ends up rejected. Although she has a rather liberal grasp of her moral compass—“No woman could ever safely say, *so far only will I go*” (36)—she censures her waiting-gentlewoman “for that extraordinary degree of Freedom in which she thought proper to indulge her Tongue. ‘Freedom!’ says Slipslop, ‘I don’t know what you call Freedom, Madam; Servants have Tongues as well as their Mistresses’” (37). Later, Slipslop protests that “it is not the business of an upper Servant to *hint or fear* on those occasions” (243). When her lady accuses her of being jealous, she replies: “I assure you I look upon myself as his Betters; I am not Meat for a Footman I hope” (244). And on mentioning “Mr. Joseph,” the lady replies: “Pray don’t Mister such Fellows to me” (246). The anticipated moral Lady Booby draws from this set of connected social reversals is an apt description of the problem at Bly: “dear Reputation was in the power of her Servants” (38).

In Book II, chapter XIII of *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding introduces his *allegory of the ladder* to illustrate the division of the human species “into two sorts of People, to wit, high people and low People.” The meaning of these categories is not taken for granted, but ironically scrutinized to conclude that “high People signify no other than People of Fashion, and low People those of no Fashion,” with the proviso that “this word *Fashion* hath by long use lost its original meaning.” Originally, he argues, a “Person of Fashion” was “a Person who dress himself in the Fashion of the Times,” and “the Word really and truly signifies no more at this day”: think of the implications this has for Quint’s appropriation of

his master's clothes. "Really and truly," argues Fielding, because some take the word today to imply something different, to wit, a "Conception of Birth and Accomplishments superior to the Herd of Mankind." With ironic pragmatism, Fielding is cutting down the category to fit a merely ornamental sense—an *imaginary value*—shorn of genealogical implications of gentility and aristocracy. Then follows the allegory of the *ladder of dependance*—perhaps inspired in a passage of Filmer's *Patriarcha*—and the intimacy-promoting breaches of propriety—the correspondence in private, the condescension, the degradation—that punctuate the moral landscape of *The Turn of the Screw*:

Now, the World being thus divided into People of Fashion and people of no Fashion, a fierce Contention arose between them; nor would those of one Party, to avoid Suspicion, be seen publicly to speak to those of the other, though they often held a very good Correspondence in private. [. . .] This Distinction I have never met with any one able to account for: it is sufficient that, so far from looking on each other as Brethren in the Christian language, they seem scarce to regard each other as of the same Species. This, the Terms *strange Persons, People one does not know, the Creature, Wretches, Beasts, Brutes*, and many other Appellations evidently demonstrate [. . .] for these two Parties, especially those bordering nearly on each other, to wit, the lowest of the high, and the highest of the low, often change their Parties according to Place and Time; for those who are People of Fashion in one place are often People of no Fashion in another. And with regard to Time, it may not be unpleasant to survey the Picture of Dependance like a kind of Ladder; as, for instance; early in the Morning arises the Postillion, or some other Boy, which great Families, no more than great Ships, are without, and falls to brushing the Clothes and cleaning the Shoes of *John* the Footman; who, being drest himself, applies his Hands to the same Labours for Mr. *Second-hand*, the Squire's Gentleman; the Gentleman in the like manner, a little later in the Day, attends the Squire; the Squire is no sooner equipped than he attends the Levee of my Lord; which is no sooner over than my Lord himself is seen at the Levee of the Favourite, who, after the Hour of Homage is at an end, appears himself to pay Homage to the Levee of his Sovereign. Nor is there, perhaps, in this whole Ladder of Dependance, any one Step at a greater Distance from the other than the first from the second; so that to a Philosopher the Question might only seem, whether you would chuse to be a great Man at six in the morning, or at two in the Afternoon. And yet there are scarce two of these who do not think the least Familiarity with the Persons below them a Condescension, and, if they were to go one Step farther, a Degradation.

(136–137)³³

XIII

Let us consider a crucial scene of improper “Familiarity” and potential “Degradation” in James’s tale, the scene when the governess and Flora are confronted from “the other side of the lake” by her “predecessor,” “a figure [. . .] of horror and evil, a woman in black, pale and dreadful” (30) who “only fixed the child” (31). This encounter, the governess suspects, may not be the first and is likely to be repeated in the future (30). She assumes it has in fact occurred again when Flora escapes alone to the lake for a small boating “adventure” of her own, only to be found later by the governess and Mrs. Grose standing on the grass by a bank, stooping down “to pluck—quite as if it were all she was there for—a big ugly spray of withered fern” (67). The overlap, on both occasions, of dubious childish innocence and potential adult perversion generates a suffocating atmosphere of anti-pastoral transgression. The clearest precedent for this scene is a crucial incident in chapter XIX, “The Child at the Brook-Side,” of *The Scarlet Letter*, where Pearl gazes “silently at Hester and the clergyman” while she stands at the farther side of a brook, right at the curve where it “chanced to form a pool,”

so smooth and quiet that it reflected a perfect image of her little figure, with all the brilliant picturesqueness of her beauty, in its adornment of flowers and wreathed foliage, but more refined and spiritualized than the reality. This image, so nearly identical with the living Pearl, seemed to communicate somewhat of its own shadowy and intangible quality to the child herself. It was strange, the way in which Pearl stood, looking so steadfastly at them through the dim medium of the forest-gloom; herself, meanwhile, all glorified with a ray of sunshine, that was attracted thitherward as by a certain sympathy. In the brook beneath stood another child,—another and the same,—with likewise its ray of golden light. Hester felt herself, in some indistinct and tantalizing manner, estranged from Pearl; as if the child, in her lonely ramble through the forest, had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was now vainly seeking to return to it.

(*Scarlet* 224–225)

The girl stubbornly refuses to cross the brook because her mother is no longer carrying the scarlet letter.³⁴ The mother picks it up, fastens it again in her bosom, and the girl is finally persuaded. But she remains apart, “silently watching Hester and the clergyman” (229). If this is not material for a ghost story, what is it? James was intrigued by the scene, although he found fault with the rhetorical strategy:

Hawthorne is perpetually looking for images which shall place themselves in picturesque correspondence with the spiritual facts with which

he is concerned, and of course the search is of the very essence of poetry. But in such a process discretion is everything, and when the image becomes importunate it is in danger of seeming to stand for nothing more serious than itself. When Hester meets the minister by appointment in the forest, and sits talking with him while little Pearl wanders away and plays by the edge of the brook, the child is represented as at last making her way over to the other side of the woodland stream, and disporting herself there in a manner which makes her mother feel herself, "in some indistinct and tantalising manner, estranged from Pearl; as if the child, in her lonely ramble through the forest, had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was now vainly seeking to return to it." And Hawthorne devotes a chapter to this idea of the child's having, by putting the brook between Hester and herself, established a kind of spiritual gulf, on the verge of which her little fantastic person innocently mocks at her mother's sense of bereavement. This conception belongs, one would say, quite to the lighter order of a story-teller's devices, and the reader hardly goes with Hawthorne in the large development he gives to it.

(*LC I* 408–409)

Is the image of Flora wandering away across the ladder of dependance to a further bank of the lake also "importunate"? Or is it rather in picturesque correspondence with a spiritual fact? And what about her holding a bouquet of withered fern? Isn't there a correspondence between that emblem and Pearl's Ophelia-like "image, crowned and girdled with flowers" (Hawthorne, *Scarlet* 226)? And a further correlation between both and the "lovely Flora," as she appears in *Tom Jones*, rising "from her chamber, perfumed with pearly dews," to follow the fragrant winds (134)? In the same essay on Hawthorne, James alludes to a description of what could be a Hugue Merle painting of "an elfish-looking little girl, fantastically dressed and crowned with flowers [who] glances strangely out of the picture" (402) which is a distinct prefiguration of Flora. But there are others. Take the following anti-pastoral in *Amelia*:

The next evening *Booth* and *Amelia* went to walk in the Park with their Children. They were now on the Verge of the Parade, and *Booth* was describing to his Wife the several Buildings round it, when, on a sudden, *Amelia*, missing her little Boy, cried out, "Where's little *Billy*?" Upon which, *Booth*, casting his Eyes over the Grass, saw a Foot-Soldier shaking the Boy at a little Distance. At this Sight, without making any Answer to his Wife, he leapt over the Rails, and, running directly up to the Fellow, who had a Firelock with a Bayonet fixed in his Hand, he seized him by the Collar and tript up his Heels, and, at the same time, wrested his Arms from him. A Serjeant upon Duty, seeing the Affray at

some Distance, ran presently up, and, being told what had happened, gave the Centinel a hearty Curse, and told him he deserved to be hanged. A By-stander gave this Information; for Booth was returned with his little Boy to meet Amelia, who staggered towards him as fast as she could, all pale and breathless, and scarce able to support her tottering Limbs. The Serjeant now came up to Booth, to make an Apology for the Behaviour of the Soldier, when, of a sudden, he turned almost as pale as Amelia herself. He stood silent whilst Booth was employed in comforting and recovering his Wife; and then, addressing himself to him, said, “Bless me! lieutenant, could I imagine it had been your honour; and was it my little Master that the Rascal used so?—I am glad I did not know it, for I should certainly have run my Halbert into him.”

(*Amelia* 200)

The sergeant is Booth’s “old faithful Servant Atkinson.” The father greets him heartily and thanks him for his action. The child is later reprimanded. The officer in charge agrees, “for that idle Boy ought to be corrected” (202). Two violations of distance occur in this scene: first, the degradation of “the Foot-Soldier shaking the Boy at a little Distance”; second, the sergeant’s familiarity with the son of a lieutenant and former master, whom he takes “by the Hand.” What Fielding calls *the picture of dependance* is at risk. Serjeant Atkinson is a pin holder of status inconsistency. He is Amelia’s foster brother, but becomes Booth’s servant. He shows throughout an

almost unparalleled Fidelity of poor *Atkinson* (for that was my man’s name), who was not only constant in the Assiduity of his Attendance, but during the Time of my Danger demonstrated a Concern for me which I can hardly account for.

(*Amelia* 142)

Not only does he make this uncanny apparition in the park scene. At one point he *crosses the window* of Mrs. Ellison’s parlor (Book 5, chapter 2), like Monks, Fagin, and Quint. In another bucolic scene he plays the Esmond role of domestic usurper, playing with the children and Amelia (222).

But it is in *Pamela* that we find the most direct prefiguration of the vindictive, visionary unconscious organizing the lake scenes at Bly. The pale and dreadful woman that confronts Flora and the governess from the other side of the lake is the ghost of Pamela, a nemesis, freshly emerged from her imaginary drowning:

And then, Thought I, (and Oh! that Thought was surely of the Devil’s Instigation; for it was very soothing, and powerful with me) these wicked Wretches, who now have no Remorse, no Pity on me, will then be moved

to lament their Misdoings; and when they see the dead Corpse of the unhappy *Pamela* dragged out to these dewy Banks, and lying breathless at their Feet, they will find that Remorse to soften their obdurate Heart, which, now, has no Place there!—And my Master, my angry Master, will then forget his Resentments, and say, O this is the unhappy *Pamela*! that I have so causelessly persecuted and destroyed! Now do I see she preferred her Honesty to her Life, will he say, and is no Hypocrite, nor Deceiver; but really was the innocent Creature she pretended to be!

(92)

We may want to know that the innocent creature she pretended to be suffered as a child the excesses of a “rough-natured governess.” Whose eyes did the ghost of Jessel fix?

XIV

Though unnamed in the phantasmagoria with which I opened this book, Richardson and Fielding hold a place of honor in *The Haunting of James House*. As I have noted previously, in “The Future of the Novel” (1899) James mocked Fielding’s and Richardson’s prudery vis-à-vis “the great *relation* between men and women, the constant world-renewal” (*LC I* 107). In order to avoid *seeing* a “relation” premised upon the physical proximity of the sexual players, the two novelists went “under the mahogany” (*LC I* 107). There was, however, a major difference between the two: whereas Richardson construed sexuality in a Puritan manner, as a shameful secret liable to explosive revelation, Fielding employed a more liberal policy, accepting sexuality as a natural fact whose moral effects on human life could become the topic of polite conversation. Fielding’s liberal policy, in short, shunned the embarrassments of violated secrecy by promoting the frankness of interpersonal discussion amongst “dissentients afflicted with the malady of thought” (Mill, *On Liberty* 34).³⁵ Fielding was, moreover, shocked by Richardson’s greater moral hypocrisy in putting virtue at the service of pornography. James was surely aware of this difference, but he made no explicit effort at reminding his readers of it. In a review of Senior’s *Essays in Fiction*, he observes that “Richardson is neither a romancer nor a story-teller: he is simply Richardson,” only to conclude that although “the works of Fielding and Smollett are less monumental [. . .] we cannot help feeling that they too are writing for an age in which a single novel is meant to go a great way” (*LC I* 1201). Richardson’s formal singularity is effaced in the same sentence it appears to be asserted. What about Fielding’s difference, from Richardson and from so much that came before and after? In the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, James commends Fielding’s “fine old moralism, fine old humour and fine old style” (41). This appraisal is

probably mediated by his nearly unconditional estimation of Thackeray.³⁶ In a review of *Thackerayana* (1875), he mentions the Victorian novelist's familiarity with the press culture of Queen Anne's time. From this erudite acquaintance with "the Spectators, Tatlers, Worlds, Ramblers, etc. Thackeray wrote 'Esmond' and the 'Humorists'" (*LC I* 1288). We know James admired *Henry Esmond*, but it is unclear whether he read *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*. If he did, the description of a writer with "more than ordinary opportunities for becoming acquainted with life," who tended to be "himself the hero of his books," who "liked good wine, good clothes and good company," who underwent a strict course of classical study that led him to the Continent (specifically, Leiden), who "had a paternal allowance from his father," and was gifted with "an admirable natural love of truth, the keenest instinctive antipathy to hypocrisy," a writer who "respects female innocence and infantine tenderness," and is a "wit wonderfully wise and detective" (*Humorists* 576–578) must have caught his eye. If, in addition, James happened to be reading it any time after 1895, the year of his theatrical fiasco, then the information that this writer began at one point in his career, when the paternal allowance proved insufficient to meet his mounting debts, to "write theatrical pieces" that were hissed at by audiences because they were irreparably bad, and the proviso that "he did not prepare the novels in this way, and with a very different care and interest laid the foundations and built up the edifices of his future fame," must have brought a shiver of recognition. This writer was another Henry: Henry Fielding. In the same chapter, James could have read that "human nature is always pleased with the spectacle of innocence rescued by fidelity, purity and courage" (579), a statement whose ironic underdoing paves the way to Bly. Fielding, adds Thackeray,

no doubt, began to write [*Joseph Andrews*] in ridicule of "Pamela", for which work one can understand the hearty contempt and antipathy which such an athletic and boisterous genius as Fielding must have entertained. He couldn't do otherwise than laugh at the puny cockney bookseller, pouring out endless volumes of sentimental twaddle.

(580)

It is easy enough to nod at this, to be drawn into the current of Thackeray's scorn, and it is no doubt likely that James was in no small measure pleased with the sting. To suggest that the governess of Miles and Flora is inclined too to pour out endless volumes of sentimental twaddle—"like a whore, unpack [her] heart with words" (*Hamlet* 2.2.563)—that she comes through as Pamela *rediviva*, and that she is therefore the target of James' anti-Puritan scorn, may not be totally inaccurate. Still, this exercise of culturally protracted derision can hardly account for the undeniable strength

of Richardson's original textual inscription, which earned him the immediate admiration of intellectuals like Diderot or Goethe. Why is Richardson's name repeatedly silenced in scholarly readings of novels by Henry James, admittedly the consummator of the tradition the author of *Pamela* allegedly founded? I discussed this problem briefly in the first chapter, but let me recall here Virginia Woolf's opinion that "Henry James achieved what Richardson attempted" (qtd. in Leyburn 167). What Woolf doesn't say is that this achievement would have been inconceivable without the dialectical mediation of Fielding, the only one of the two who came out from under the mahogany in order to *see* the transgressive "relation" with fully open eyes, to place inconsistency (the inexistence of the sexual relation and the impossibility of social togetherness), in the contradictory form of *female virtue*—"what the ladies are pleased to call virtue" (*Tom Jones* 38), i.e. a *nothing* the *vir* vainly attempts to fill out—under collective medical scrutiny, and to procure a dialogue around such a void. This dialogue is premised on the cancellation of the "unreasoning instinct of avoidance" (*LC I* 107), and it therefore can only take place in the open, in a public sphere that "adopts the form of free commerce among equals like the discourse of adults in a private household" (Bender, "Introduction" to *Tom Jones* xxiii). What Peter Brooks has argued apropos of *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*—that they "are in some large measure about the sexual secret at the center of society" (*Henry James* 174)—applies word by word to *The Turn of the Screw*: the argument has the additional merit of making the sexual and the social overlap around their shared inconsistency or void (secret, center). The Puritan governess's paradoxical achievement is precisely to contribute to broaden the range of the liberal exposure: traversing her own fantasy of forbidden cross-class *jouissance*, she removes the mahogany and forces the children to glance at the void and *see* (visualize) what (the relation) they had probably already *seen* (understood)—*to be impossible, to inconsist.* Maybe Mr. B. was right when he forced Pamela to memorize that *children generally extend their Perverseness from the Nurse to the Schoolmaster: from the Schoolmaster to the Parents*. What this gentleman doesn't say is that their perverseness is a function of the inconsistency that lies at the center of the society they are being invited to join.

To conclude, let me briefly consider James's complex position vis-à-vis the anti-liberal, censorious, streak in Victorian education. The illiberal refusal to discuss certain things before children or even to discuss them tout court is a fault that James attributes mostly to Americans. In *The Ambassadors*, the narrator ironically suggests that taking for granted the perverseness of what is only imperfectly apprehended as improper leads to the circular argument that if some things are assumed "too bad to be talked about," then we have a right to hold "a deep conception of their badness" (82).

In the crucial preface to *The Awkward Age*, James sees his story as growing out of the promise in a case that depends on “the account to be taken, in a circle of free talk, of a new and innocent, a wholly unacclimatised presence, as to which such accommodations have never had to come up.” A circle of free talk is, remember, the clinical board of narrators, parsons and other cultivated spirits, that Fielding convokes around *Pamela*, and *The Turn of the Screw* opens with this very circle gathered before a fire. “One could count them on one’s fingers,” adds James,

the liberal firesides beyond the wide glow of which, in a comparative dimness, female adolescence hovered and waited. The wide glow was bright, was favourable to “real” talk, to play of mind, to an explicit interest in life, a due demonstration of the interest by persons I qualified to feel it: all of which meant frankness and ease, the perfection, almost, as it were, of intercourse, and a tone as far as possible removed from that of the nursery and the schoolroom—as far as possible removed even, no doubt, in its appealing “modernity,” from that of supposedly privileged scenes of conversation twenty years ago. The charm was, with a hundred other things, in the freedom—the freedom menaced by the inevitable irruption of the ingenuous mind; whereby, if the freedom should be sacrificed, what would truly *become* of the charm?

(Preface to *The Awkward Age* 6)

James moves on to distinguish between three different ways in which “the awkward age is handled.” In French society, the social scheme, he argues, “absolutely provides against awkwardness.” This means that the French do not permit the “hovering female young” to “be present at ‘good’ talk:” only when youth is “corrected” by marriage are they allowed to participate in the circle of free talk. The French solution, then, favors the “liberal firesides” described in the previously cited passage. In English society, by contrast, no such arrangement is at work. The social occasion of talk is governed rather by a “compromise” that James describes as too “morally well-meant” and “intellectually helpless.” Whereas the French mind, analytically and scientifically, is ultra-sensitive to the propriety gradations of social difference, the English mind can only conceive of one “grand propriety,” the rigorous application of which proves equivocal and is not “without a thousand departures from the grim ideal.” The American theory, finally, is that “talk should never become ‘better’ than the female young, either actually or constructively present, are minded to allow it.” This system involves “little compromise” and is “absolutely simple,” like the French, “and the beauty of its success,” he adds with unrepressed sarcasm, “shines out in every record of our conditions of intercourse—premising always our ‘basic’ assumption that the female young read the newspapers.”

And then, of course, while the American young read the newspapers—or Emerson—the English adults, with the exception of Hyacinth, read *Treasure Island*, *Denis Duval*, and Trollope's *The Belton Estate*, described by James as “work written for children; a work prepared for minds unable to think; a work below the apprehension of the average man and woman” (LC I 1325).

Daemonization

In writing *The Turn of the Screw*, James presciently conformed to the notion that “the British are more genuinely revisionists of one another, but we (or at least most of our post-Emersonian poets) tend to see our fathers as not having dared enough” (68). The governess dared. James dared. Miles died. The dominant ratio in James's tale is obviously that of *apophrades*, correctly translated by the governess as “the return of the dead” (Turn 49). But the trope of *daemonization* is also openly at work. Maybe the governess is a pervert who simply disavows the split condition of her subjectivity and displaces that division to the object of her desire—cross-class sex—exposing it for what it is, the Real cause of cultural-ideological distortion and fiction, and showing it divided in itself, a reality that is at once a Real traumatic kernel and a social taboo accommodated (moralized, censured, sentimentalized) for display before the Augustan and Victorian gaze. Exposing the children to such recognition kills them—kills the gaze. She forces the children to incorporate their visual apprehension into the gaze of the Other, to become, that is, complicit with the panopticon. This is more than a utilitarian fantasy of repressed desire, based “on seeing in every effect evidence of some actually existing cause” (Copjec 103). In our case, the governess *fails to see*, and this prompts her claustrophobia before a scene devoid of signs of guilt. “The guilt thus internally denied the subject comes to saturate its surroundings” (104). The crime is thus posed retroactively, and this operation renders the surroundings guilty. Her failure of sight—which is the blindness of the Victorian ideology—is compensated for by the inordinate conferral of sublime vision to the children—who see not so much the evidence of a cause, but the cause itself: the obscene charm of the bourgeoisie. Her act of perversion is to demonize the children.

Daemonization, according to Bloom, “attempts to expand the precursor's power to a principle larger than its own, but pragmatically makes the son more of a daemon and the precursor more of a man” (106). In daemonization, moreover, “the augmented poetic consciousness sees clear outline and it yields back to description what it had overyielded to sympathy” (101). This means that the liberal expansion and augmentation of freedom reverses the contained transaction of Burke's sublime, where the reader “yields to sympathy what he refuses to description” (101). By yielding

back to description, the son's augmented consciousness is bound to *see clear outline*, forced to see it by the intermediation of the first demon—the Puritan governess. The children are thus demonized into clear sight, and supposedly made freer. The first demon in turn “falls upwards” (104–105), and this is not solely a Shelleyan trope of sublime *Verstiegenheit* or celestial extravagance—this is also a misprision of social elevation along the ladder of dependence. The governess is sublimely demonized into mock lady. This way, James appropriates, and modifies—subversively, inappropriately—the *glance of another*, of his precursor Fielding. “To appropriate the precursor’s landscape for himself, the ephebe must estrange it further from himself.” The ephebe, James, becomes the master of his tale—the gentleman who never came to Bly to see the *clear outline* of the ghosts.

Notes

- 1 All citations from *The Turn of the Screw* are taken from Deborah Esch’s and Jonathan Warren’s edition of the tale (Norton, 1999).
- 2 In letter 5, Pamela confesses: “I love Writing” (17). McKeon has insisted on the centrality of the scene of writing (*Origins* 358), arguing that “language is her medium” (367) and that “her apparent linguistic assimilation masks a supersession of aristocratic honour” (368). See also Castle, *Clarissa’s Ciphers*, 38–56.
- 3 One overhears echoes of *All’s Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Hamlet*. Oscar Wilde described James’s tale in a letter as a “wonderful, lurid, poisonous little tale, like an Elizabethan tragedy”: qtd. in Freedman, *Professions*, 169, note.
- 4 See McKeon, *Origins*, 241. For the withdrawal from authority (the deconstruction of mastery) performed by the absent master, and the connection this may have with “homelessness” as a textual principle of (de)composition, see Davidson, 457–458.
- 5 As early as 1984, in an extraordinary reading of *The Turn of the Screw*, Rowe was denouncing the critical “exclusion of the work’s wider social implications” (123).
- 6 The *corruption of innocence* is a central motif in *Tom Jones*. See for instance Book V, chapter 5.
- 7 Fielding uses this pun in *Jonathan Wild* and *Amelia*: see Sabor, “Amelia,” 97. Two years before Lukacher, Rowe was courageously contending that there is no proper undecidability in James’s tale: “it is always the effect or product of a certain forgetting of motives and drives” (*Theoretical* 145). For the *real* in *The Turn*, see also Miller, *Literature*, 299–302.
- 8 Max Duperray notes that in *The Turn of the Screw* James “does rely on the assumption of a romantic pretext” (147) and he examines the intertextual dialogue the story engages in with *Jane Eyre* and earlier Gothic narratives.
- 9 The passage can be found on pages 38–39 of the Norton edition.
- 10 Both Robbins and Bell mention, though only in passing, Richardson’s novel in their brilliant readings of *The Turn of the Screw*.
- 11 The exhibition of passive virtue is also one of the causes of struggle for interpretation in Richardson’s *Clarissa*: Warner, *Reading Clarissa*, 4–6.

- 12 The analogy is sharply suggested by Keymer and Sabor, Pamela *in the Marketplace*, 8–11.
- 13 McKeon comments on the “social injustice” that is consequent upon the need for a reward (*Origins* 364). Her assimilation occurs within conditions of “status inconstancy” (365), greatly encouraged by her “highly equivocal possession of power” (365) at the end, when she gets married to Mr. B. This echoes the governess’s mock promotion to “Lady” of the house at Bly.
- 14 This penchant for a freedom to transgressively observe, fantasize, scheme, meddle, and give opinion over and beyond all class boundaries foreshadows a Hegelian talent for reflective and “idle speculation” that has been associated with James’s tale: see Sussman, *The Hegelian Aftermath*, 231.
- 15 For McKeon, the conservative reduction reaches the persuasion that “progressive ‘virtue’ only recapitulates the old arbitrariness of aristocratic ‘honour’: if inherited nobility owes its ascendancy to ‘the fortunate accident of birth’, the self-made upstart is similarly raised by fortunate accidents and execrable vices” (387). For the oscillation in the meaning of categories like virtue and honour, see also *Origins*, 366–367.
- 16 In *Northanger Abbey*, Mr. Thorpe recommends Catherine to read *Tom Jones* and *The Monk*. Henry Austen’s observation that his sister “did not rank any work of Fielding quite so high” as Richardson’s *Grandison* must be taken with a grain of salt. See *Northanger Abbey*, 7, 47.
- 17 More generally, the lesson stipulates that that the cross-class matrimonial contract doesn’t abrogate the twin notions that the sexual relation doesn’t exist and that society doesn’t exist, that the property contract is no defense against alienation, that the citizenship contract is no absolution to the precarious, finite body, and that the constitutional contract doesn’t turn a certain convocation of political entities into a substantial, transfinite, body. Žižek, I believe, is right, and this is the reason why his position is a bone in the throat of all progressive ideologies.
- 18 Pamela’s post-marital plights stem largely from the lingering suspicion raised by “the more fundamental—and characteristically conservative—tendency,” which is to “collapse the very distinction between positive and negative, on which progressive plots thrive, by making ‘industrious virtue’ itself a very suspect category” (McKeon 386).
- 19 There is also a lake near Mr. Allworthy’s house in *Tom Jones*, 37. The motif is traditional, and it reappears, to great effect, in Iris Murdoch’s *The Bell* (1958).
- 20 For Harold Bloom, “conceptually the central problem of the latecomer necessarily is repetition, for repetition dialectically raised to re-creation is the epebe’s road of excess, leading from the horror of finding himself to be only a copy or replica” (*The Anxiety* 80).
- 21 McKeon argues that medieval stories of love service concretize a “sense of disparity in status, a yearning to overcome that disparity,” and exhibit the “profoundly palliating spiritualization of upwardly mobile ambitions and of the arduous material services required to fulfill them” (143).
- 22 In the same year of 1993, Millicent Bell put forward a similar argument: the *Turn of the Screw* “is about social classes and their relation to one another and about gender in this context” (91).
- 23 For Rowe’s ingenious alternative interpretation, see *Theoretical*, 130–136.
- 24 McKeon insists on the importance of Pamela’s clandestine self-employment (373) as letter writer, journal writer, romancier.

- 25 Perhaps even the focus on the homosocial growth of “mutual esteem” between the governess and the housekeeper, on their meeting “more intimately” (13), the fact that they “embrace like sisters” (14), deserves some attention.
- 26 See Juliet McMaster 208, and the article by Butterworth-McDermott. See Savoy’s superb reading of the *closet* trope in his reading of *The Jolly Corner*, 6–8.
- 27 References to the key to her closet, to the door of her room and chamber, to the back door at Lincolnshire (check), and to the portmanteau abound in the novel.
- 28 Millicent Bell calls attention to the paradoxical devolution of gentility that occurs inside the Victorian household where “the girl who had once herself had a governess” and is in turn employed as a governess “might retain something of a lady’s status by assuming a part of her employer’s role” (92).
- 29 “I was looking for anything that would turn up, that might take her fancy. Don’t you understand that I’m always looking? There was a time when I went in immensely for illuminated missals, and another when I collected horrible ghost-stories (she wanted to cultivate a belief in ghosts), all for her. The day I saw she was turning her attention to the rising democracy I began to collect little democrats. That’s how I collected you” (*Princess* 346).
- 30 See *A Small Boy*, 102–113; and also his evocation of Cruikshank’s illustrations during a drive through London with his family in the summer of 1858, on pages 240–241. For a lucid discussion of the impact of this visual *Oliver Twist* in James’s imagination, and more particularly in the conception of *The Turn of the Screw*, see Blackall.
- 31 For the *usurpation* of domestic authority in James’s tale, see Hadley, 62–64. Another fascinating episode of figurative role-reversal occurs when the governess visualized the maid as a waiter attending a young couple on their wedding journey, the young couple being herself and Miles, who looks at the window with his back to her. The problematic “telling” of sexuality implied in the reverie is brilliantly analyzed by Zwinger, 16–20.
- 32 For a sensible development of this point, see Bell, 106–107.
- 33 Compare to: “thus, as in a Family, where one Office is to be done by many Servants, one looks upon another, and every own leaves the Business for his Fellow, until it is quite neglected by all” (*Patriarcha* 31).
- 34 For James’s readerly and visual fascination with the letter-mediated Hester-Pearl relation, and the “regression to childhood” this daemonic fascination entails, see Rowe, *Theoretical*, 53–55.
- 35 *Clarissa* may be read as a move in Fielding’s direction. Castle has rightly stressed the hermeneutic violence exerted on a victim who never quite manages to tell her “Story”: *Clarissa’s Ciphers*, 22–25.
- 36 In William Golding’s *Rites of Passage* we read that “we have, I believe, paid more attention to sentimental Goldsmith and Richardson than lively old Fielding and Smollett!” (1)