Knowing Maisie

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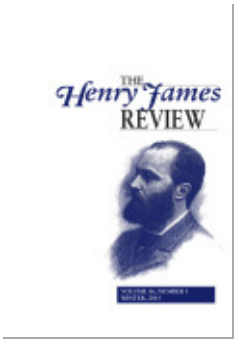

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Knowing Maisie

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> Somewhere in the depths of it the dim straighteners were fixed upon her; somewhere out of the troubled little current Mrs Wix intensely waited.
>
> —*What Maisie Knew*

> we fellow witnesses, we not more invited but only more expert critics. . . .
>
> —Preface to *What Maisie Knew*

In his preface to the New York Edition of *What Maisie Knew* (1897), James posits that Maisie Farange knew without knowing, influenced without "design," her narrator nowhere to be found:

> This better state, in the young life, would reside in the exercise of a function other than that of disconcerting the selfishness of its parents. . . . [O]ur little wonder-working agent would create, without design, quite fresh elements of this order—contribute, that is, to the formation of a fresh tie, from which it would then (and for all the world as if through a small demonic foresight) proceed to derive great profit. (*WMK* 4–5)

In this passage, James describes what Maisie reads, what she writes, what she does, what she is. Inevitably bound up with the "foretaste of . . . death" she will experience late in the novel (223), Maisie's "demonic foresight" endows her with a vision of the future, glimpses of which she shares with the narrator and with us throughout the novel. But most important is this passage's suggestion that the Maisie who haunts the preface to the New York Edition has already seen the events that will transpire in the novel we are about to read. This is easy enough to accept in reference to a text that James has completed, published, and reread. What I find peculiar, however, is how

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it would be possible for such a vision to be part of a demonic foresight yet "without design" in any text of narrative fiction. As I will show, Maisie's foresight—her visionary mode of seeing—controls discourse by way of clairvoyant visions and telepathic insights rendered as proleptic events of plot.[1] Thus, a central, defining aspect of Maisie's storied character shapes the narrative. What James effectively does in this single sentence, then, is attempt to enact the first divorce of the New York Edition: the divorce of story from discourse. If visionary seeing places Maisie in the subject position of the artist, then when James imagines her so doing "without design," he is attempting by way of Maisie to construct that already foreseen course—i.e., the work of the author—as somehow charting itself.[2]

Maisie flourishes by way of what Lisa Zunshine calls "plain old telepathy," turning clairvoyance into events and mental impressions into discourse (6). What Maisie envisions in the first half of the novel James engages the narrator in describing; and with the "collection of images and echoes . . . kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers" that he presents to us in the first half of the novel, the narrator unconsciously inscribes the text with the "wonderful assortment of objects" Maisie would "discover there later" in the final chapters (*WMK* 20). As Martha Banta's early work in *Henry James and the Occult* nicely demonstrates, James was, unlike his brother William, inclined to view telepathy less as an object for scientific inquiry than as an apt literary device for the representation of occult communications transmitted between characters (alive or dead) without words or gestures. Of course James's fiction is rife with hesitations, downcast eyes, looks pregnant with meaning, and other gestures from which mind-reading characters and readers alike can glean a narrative of body language that articulates much of what happens in the novels. The narratives detectable in these "externalist" aspects of characterization, as Alan Palmer refers to them, are fundamental to our understanding of James. But more fundamental to *What Maisie Knew* is the overlap between the figure of the child and the technique of telepathy through which Maisie receives and transmits impressions. Where Pamela Thurschwell's rich study of telepathic exchanges among characters in James focuses, like that of Richard Menke, primarily on the frequently female adult information worker, my interest lies in the child.[3]

Like all literary child figures, Maisie invites fantasy and speculation. Her youth is anticipatory, and yet, dependent as she is upon guardians, stories, and inheritance, she points inevitably to a past James's fiction will increasingly visit by occult means. She also embodies a mute invisibility that conceals a perceptive presence: hidden around corners, in tall gardens, under tables, or in plain sight, the child figure gathers much more than she ought to know, misguiding Pemberton and sending Miles and Flora's governess into virtual hysteria. She absorbs fugitive information by means other than the medium of language, for her vocabulary cannot yet answer to adult lexica. The telepathic mode enables James to obviate those limitations, imbuing children and "innocents" such as Milly Theale with the very knowledge that undermines their conventional status as such. Thus, child figures in James are often telepathic, and telepathic effects can often be traced to children or so-called innocents, forcing readers to encounter them on unsettling, counterintuitive grounds on which Maisie's narrator never quite finds his footing.

Knowing Maisie

Mrs. Wix, Sir Claude, the narrator, and the reader make Maisie's wonder-working possible. Though Miss Overmore would also seem crucial to Maisie's vision, Mrs. Beale turns out to be its adversary.[4] Early in her development, Maisie reveals to Miss Overmore that she sees the affair developing between her and Maisie's father and questions whether she should expose her father's deceit to her mother (24). In answer to the question, Miss Overmore's thoughts impress a mental response into Maisie's mind, even as the girl's shared thoughts alter the shape of Miss Overmore's, endowing them with the beauty of Maisie's wonder. The quoted dialogue below is purely telepathic; no explicit exchange of words takes place:

> It was then that her companion addressed her in the *unmistakeable language of a pair of eyes of deep dark grey*. "I can't say No," they replied as distinctly as possible; " . . . because I'm afraid of your mamma, don't you see? Yet how can I say Yes after your Papa has been so kind to me, talking to me so long the other day, smiling and flashing his beautiful teeth at me the time we met him in the Park . . . ?" *Somehow in the light of Miss Overmore's lovely eyes that incident came back to Maisie with a charm it hadn't had at the time*. . . . On their way home, when papa had quitted them, *she had expressed the hope that the child wouldn't mention it to mamma*. Maisie liked her so, and had so the charmed sense of being liked by her, that she accepted this remark as settling the matter and wonderingly conformed to it. The wonder now lived again, lived in the . . . pleasure of the thought that Miss Overmore was saving her. It seemed to make them cling together as in some wild game of "going round." (24–25, emphasis mine)

Miss Overmore is portrayed here as inside Maisie's mind, pleading with Maisie to conceal the latter's knowledge. When Miss Overmore shares Maisie's vision of the scene at the Park, she imbues it with her desire for Beale Farange, producing in Maisie the romantic effects of mimetic desire, which lend to the scene a new "charm" for the girl. Maisie likes the idea of being saved by her governess, and Overmore's charm soon produces in Maisie an image of the two females "cling[ing]" to each other in a secret instance of vaguely eroticized female bonding, which will be echoed often in the novel, reaching its climax in a scene in which Mrs. Wix and Maisie "touched bottom and melted together" (222).

"[W]e fellow witnesses," with whom James importantly aligns himself in the preface, find in this telepathic exchange evidence of the questionable moral fiber of Maisie's governess, the narrator's hollow attempts to control reception, and Maisie's unsettling ability to see what the narrator can only glimpse. The effects produced by the quoted language above, together with the plea for silence, can be taken as authentic insight into Miss Overmore's manipulative prowess and moral character: a covert, fugitive mode of communication emulates its content. And the narrator's deceptive rhetoric only pretends to put us in view of Maisie's ability to discern Miss Overmore's thoughts in her physical features. After all, what exactly is "the *unmistakeable* language of a pair of eyes of deep dark grey" (emphasis mine)? The

physical gesture the narrator misrepresents is the result of a strange posture in which she or he reports a telepathic conversation, even while explaining it away with an indeterminate language of the body. In fact, the narrator is compelled to report Miss Overmore's actual utterances in *indirect* discourse ("she had expressed the hope that . . ."), reflecting Maisie's desire to dispel from memory the words that threaten to fragment a private, mental bond.

Indeed, telepathy reads in *What Maisie Knew*, as elsewhere in James, as a spell that can be broken by verbal utterances. Ineffability thus makes child characters such as Maisie, Miles, and Morgan Moreen especially attractive as sites of telepathic exchange. Despite having "'no end' of sensibility," James reminds us, Maisie lacks the vocabulary to describe what she senses, and Morgan is left searching for the Greek for "transparent fiction" when Pemberton feigns handsome payment for his tutoring efforts (*WMK* 6, 8; *TA* 147). In his discussion of Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, Ned Schantz observes that a character's "knowledge of the telepathy she enjoys with [another character] has no meaning except through the technological networks that confirm it" (87).[5] In other words, technological networks not only allow the character to perceive telepathy, they cause her to do so. If the viewer perceives telepathy, such a perception exists over and above the technologically induced chimera the character "enjoys." Maisie, in contrast, can delight in telepathy largely because she does *not* ever confirm it in words and thus expose the ontology she occupies to the technological underpinnings of the novel that produce extrafictional witnesses: technology does not cause literary telepathy to exist in the world of the fiction, it merely records and disseminates telepathy's dramatization by James. It's no surprise therefore that James began to refine his production of telepathic effects following his short, unsuccessful stay in the theater. He provides scene and stage on which his fellow witnesses are enabled to discern telepathic acts, to see the value in such a reading, and to take responsibility for it. Such a witness is especially necessary to the confirmation of telepathic communication in which thoughts remain unnamed. Distinct from the directly quoted telepathic exchange between Maisie and Miss Overmore above, the unnarrated telepathic exchanges I'll discuss below require a reader who produces one singular impression that both characters share.

If we assume that fictional human beings are capable of reading minds, then Maisie's telepathic narrator (i.e., the kind of narrator Nicholas Royle describes in *The Uncanny*) maintains a level of equality with the other characters.[6] He's one of us, but with one special power: he can read Maisie's mind. Just Maisie's; nobody else's. In this paradigm, all characters' actions, as well as the thoughts they communicate to us through Maisie through the narrator, can be evaluated in light of the moral and affective aspects of human experience that were so compelling to James. The witnessing that James emphasizes in the preface implies that something actual, provable by law, has occurred and that we have seen it. His deployment of telepathy thus asks us to act as though we are reading minds that are actually reading minds. Such a posture toward the telepathic act, then, accepts that the contents of telepathic messages provide evidentiary contributions to knowledge. Assuming that witnessing posture into which James has placed her, the reader is triangulated with Maisie and Miss Overmore. This posture then informs our readings of crucial moments between Maisie and Mrs. Wix, and between Maisie and Sir Claude in the pivotal final chapters of the novel.

Writing Maisie

I'd like now to look at two examples of how these telepathic effects work to produce Maisie's reading/writing function in the text, that is, her role as wonder-working agent. The first example serves chiefly to illustrate how Maisie willingly brings the contents of Mrs. Wix's mind into full consciousness and embraces their latent potential, bearing out Sharon Cameron's account of consciousness in *Maisie* which emphasizes the girl's "volition" to know (65).[7] The second example, involving Sir Claude, will illustrate the discursive effects of Maisie's clairvoyant vision in the novel.

Maisie and Mrs. Wix's relationship is replete with telepathic effects, effects presented early in the novel in the "silent profundity" they share (64). In one of the most striking telepathic moments in the narrative, Maisie inhabits Mrs. Wix's consciousness at a distance, drawing the governess into her physical space at a time when Maisie needs her, desperately. Having been permanently cast out of Maisie's life by Miss Overmore (of whom Mrs. Wix has thus far retained at least a little fear), Mrs. Wix nevertheless remains remarkably present to Maisie:

> [Mrs. Wix's] very silence became . . . one of the largest elements of Maisie's consciousness; it proved a warm and habitable air, *into which the child penetrated further than she dared ever to mention to her companions. Somewhere in the depths of it the dim straighteners were fixed upon her; somewhere out of the troubled little current Mrs Wix intensely waited*. (43, emphasis mine)

At the end of this passage, the narrator closes the chapter, inviting us to inhabit this profound, "unnarratable" (221–24) space, in Robyn Warhol's terms, with the girl and her governess—to rest comfortably in our witnessing postures as we feel Maisie's "warm[th]" and Mrs. Wix's "intens[ity]" intermingling along the metaphorically telegraphic "current" that diminishes the physical space between them (*WMK* 43). With her two-way vision, Mrs. Wix remains grounded, even as her wandering eye is fixed on Maisie. (This represents one of Mrs. Wix's most fascinating qualities: in a novel full of visionary figuration, the "wall-eyed" Mrs. Wix sees in two different directions at once, her two-way vision inducing her to wear "straighteners," not to improve her own vision but rather to improve her interlocutors' vision of her vision of them.) What transpires between the absence imposed by Miss Overmore's injunction and the sudden transition to the following scene in Beale's home at the beginning of chapter 7 is up to the "authorial audience" to write, enhancing our connection to Maisie and Mrs. Wix (Rabinowitz 21).

Chapter 7 commences with an intricate, tautological passage in which Mrs. Wix is discovered at Maisie's residence, brought there not by the narrator and not even by Mrs. Wix's own volition, but by the pull of Maisie's "unutterable and inexhaustible" communication in the preceding chapter (*WMK* 30). Mrs. Wix has appeared at Beale Farange's home during Beale's and Miss Overmore's stay in Brighton. But how she came to know of their absence is inexplicable by any conventional means of communication. Here is the passage:

> [O]ne day, . . . Maisie . . . found [Mrs. Wix] in the hall, seated on the stool usually occupied by the telegraph-boys who haunted Beale Farange's. . . .

> She understood in a *flash* how the visit had come to be possible—that Mrs Wix, watching her chance, must have slipped in under protection of the fact that papa . . . had, for a three days' excursion to Brighton, absolutely insisted on the attendance of her adversary. [W]hen Maisie explained their absence . . . Mrs Wix wore an expression so peculiar that it could only have had its origin in surprise. *This contradiction indeed peeped out only to vanish*, for at the very moment that, *in the spirit of it*, she threw herself afresh upon her young friend a hansom crested with neat luggage rattled up to the door and Miss Overmore bounded out. (44, emphasis mine)

Expressed as a "flash" and "contradiction," the lacuna produced by the circularity of this passage almost disguises the question it begs: how could Mrs. Wix have been there on account of Beale's and Miss Overmore's absence if their absence proves to be a "surprise" to her? The "contradiction" belongs simultaneously to Maisie and Mrs. Wix, the latter of whom is unsettled by what "we fellow witnesses" perceive from within the habitable air of Mrs. Wix's consciousness we have so recently occupied with Maisie. We can read Mrs. Wix's unease in a number of meaningful ways, but I'd like to suggest that we read it as an effect of her ephemeral consciousness of why she's there: Mrs. Wix's straighteners intensely fixed on Maisie impressed their image into the girl's mind, the contents of which were then, in a typical Jamesian reversal, returned to Mrs. Wix, this time mingled with Maisie's isolation and longing for companionship. The effect of representing Mrs. Wix in Maisie's mental space is thus the impression on the older woman of the girl's isolation at Beale's and ultimately the inclusion of Mrs. Wix in Maisie's physical space. That is, the effects of telepathy produce a figurative collapse of the physical space between them, which results in a literal collapse of that physical space. The metonymic representation of telegraphy in the first passage at the end of chapter 6 conciliates the synecdochic naming of the telegraph-boys at the beginning of chapter 7, for what was the absence of telegraphy between Mrs. Wix and Maisie (imposed by Miss Overmore) was, in fact, the presence of its figurative expression in the telepathic communication that uncannily brings Mrs. Wix home. By way of her "troubled little current," Maisie has brought her "dingy" governess to the house in a moment of safety. The instant that safety collapses, so too does a fleeting consciousness of the telepathic effects by which it was enabled. Later in the novel, the narrator will resort to naming Mrs. Beale's "bounding" into and weakening their telepathic bond: when Mrs. Beale's "mighty mass" and "even her famous freedom loom larger," Maisie and Mrs. Wix "exchange with each other as through a thickening veil confused and ineffectual signs" (225). But Mrs. Wix's earlier refusal to submit further to Mrs. Beale's injunctions is crucial to this later battle of wits with the overabundant signs of her nemesis.

Maisie's "demonic foresight" is key to determining much of what the future holds for Mrs. Wix, including her final voyage into the world of Maisie's unknowable future. Their telepathic connection in the first part of the novel, for instance, places the governess in her young charge's boat as the novel closes. In a conversation with Maisie about her mother's immoral behavior, Mrs. Wix exclaims,

> "It serves me right to have held my tongue before such horrors!" What horrors they were [Maisie] forebore too closely to enquire, showing even

> signs not a few of an ability to take them for granted. That put the couple more than ever, in this troubled sea, *in the same boat, so that with the consciousness of ideas on the part of her fellow mariner Maisie could sit close and wait*. (87, emphasis mine)

The pronouncement that Maisie "could sit close and wait" recalls to us the waiting she has done within the habitable air of Mrs. Wix's profound silence quoted above. More important, though, is how Maisie's waiting gives an accurate depiction of future events. Less figuration than foresight, what Maisie sees here inscribes the text with a proleptic vision of the novel's final scene in which Mrs. Wix will sail away with Maisie into her "fellow mariner['s]" future.

And Mrs. Wix plays a profound role in articulating key aspects of Maisie's vision on their journey toward that vessel. Encouraging Sir Claude to make a home with her and Maisie, for instance, Mrs. Wix comes out with: "'The way's just to come along with us.' It hung before Maisie" (87), that vision she's held so closely within her. Seated securely next to Mrs. Wix in the boat that unites them at once figuratively and literally—placing diachronic events (one mental, one physical) in synchronic relation to one another—Maisie can leave the next move to Mrs. Wix, who gives voice to her vision. Because Mrs. Wix utters the content of Maisie's desire/design, her utterance precipitates a reversal in which the vision, "like a glittering picture," takes on the appearance of being "Mrs. Wix's way," and Maisie "clasps her hands in ecstasy. 'Come along, come along, come along!'" (87). It becomes virtually impossible to determine whence mimetic desire originates by virtue of the feedback loop telepathic communication entails. The question becomes how Sir Claude came to be the object of desire expressed in Maisie's ecstatic "Come along!"

The "clairvoyance" J. Hillis Miller perceives in Maisie establishes Sir Claude as guardian and object of desire. On first hearing of her mother's relationship with an unnamed companion, Maisie draws that gentleman into her ken long before her physical presence begins to challenge his powers of resistance. Learning from Miss Overmore that her mother "was accompanied on her journey [abroad] by a gentleman whom . . . she had—well, 'picked up'" (41), Maisie inscribes the text with another proleptic thought:

> *Familiar as she had grown with the fact of the great alternative to the proper*, she felt in her governess and her father a strong reason for not emulating that detachment. *At the same time* she had heard *somehow* of little girls—of exalted rank, it was true—whose education was carried on by instructors of the other sex, and she knew that . . . it would be thought an advantage to her to be more or less in the hands of *masters*. She turned these things over and remarked to Miss Overmore that if she should go to her mother perhaps the gentleman might become her tutor. (41, emphasis mine)

In this example of "foresight" or "divination," Maisie's mental activity includes not only the most crucial events she will face in the story but also the moral tenor of the situation they perpetuate. Her thoughts in this passage importantly acknowledge the manner in which her relationship with the yet unnamed and thus eminently narrat-

able Sir Claude is associated "somehow" with a sense of impropriety: sidling up to the improper, Maisie finds the view favorable to her vision and allows her mind to receive a blurred, indeed flawed, impression of Sir Claude the "master" who will tutor her in the pain of life's inevitable disappointments. The "somehow" is a marker of the narrator's posturing in the face of unorthodox, ineffable means by which Maisie comes to know: "Somehow in the light of Miss Overmore's . . . eyes," "She had heard somehow," "somehow it was brought fully to the child's knowledge" (25, 41, 67). The "somehow" enables the narrator to report nothing and imply everything. It leaves open the twin possibilities that Maisie either doesn't really know anything, or that she knows precisely what we think she knows. Without undermining the seriousness of his subject matter, I'd like to suggest that the narrator's posture is playful: maybe she's telepathic, he teases, maintaining all the while a subtle suggestion that any such assumption is merely an effect produced by his rhetorical skills. In fact, Maisie writes the events of the narrative simply by thinking them: by describing her visions, the narrator, despite himself, inscribes the text with its future.

With these proleptic visions in mind, I'd like us to return to James's paradoxical claim that Maisie works her wonders "without design." Maisie is confident that she can "sit close and wait" with Mrs. Wix seated securely next to her in that figurative boat for the events of a future with which her "demonic foresight" has inscribed the text. Though the design might exist somewhere below the level of conscious knowledge, it has been part enough of Maisie's consciousness to produce textual evidence early in the novel. The important division between story and discourse upon which Seymour Chatman and Gerald Prince, for instance, insist seems to be at once upheld (the first "divorce" of the New York Edition) and challenged. The vision belongs to Maisie, and the narrator's access to it provides him with an opportunity to put it into words. Thus, a character situated within the world of story is covertly authoring the events of plot. With evidence of the design—its past, present, and future—named within the space of Maisie's mind in the first third of the novel, it is difficult to argue that such a design doesn't exist.

Witness, for instance, how the effects of Maisie's initial, distant impressions of Sir Claude are reflected in their first actual meeting. He tells Maisie that he "knew her ever so well by her mother, but had come to see her now so that he might *know her for himself*. She could *see* that his *view* of this *kind of knowledge* was to make her *come away with him*, and, further, that it was just what he was there for and had already been some time" (55, emphasis mine). Lending primacy to that species of transcendent vision (obscured by the innuendo that will persistently penetrate their shared mental space) to which the narrator, Miss Overmore, and Mrs. Wix have had access, the description of their meeting secures Sir Claude's role in her narrative. What Maisie sees from within the shared perspective of her and Sir Claude's minds is a present and future act of the pair coming away from Mrs. Beale's home, setting the course for their future in Boulogne. Maisie's vision once again captures Sir Claude's future in a telepathic poetics that finds its narratological analogue somewhere between foreshadow and prolepsis. Unfortunately, however, if Sir Claude has been there for "some time" to take Maisie away, then perhaps he's been there too long: the appointed meeting time for Maisie's "com[ing] away" with him is in about five years, and the appointed place is Boulogne. As Derrida suggests, the telepathic event disrupts the ordinary flow of time, causing "an anachronism [that . . .] brakes or accelerates us as

if we were late with respect to that which has already happened to us in the future" (3). In a frequently cited passage discussed below, Sir Claude's absence in Boulogne will leave Maisie with a "foretaste of . . . death," an anachronism that nevertheless occurs right on cue.

So forceful is Maisie's transcendent vision during her introduction to Sir Claude that it impresses itself upon Mrs. Beale's consciousness, inciting a response that could just as easily have been uttered in that future, climactic hotel room scene in Boulogne: "'You seem so tremendously eager,' she said to the child, 'that I hope you're at least clear about Sir Claude's relation to you'" (55). Mrs. Beale ostensibly intends to suggest that Maisie's excitement might be premature in its assumption of filial intimacy because Sir Claude has not yet confirmed his marriage to Ida. What her observation ironically does, however, is preemptively emphasize the taboo imposed by the filial nature of their relationship, which will prohibit in Boulogne a different kind of intimacy that would threaten the future Mrs. Beale's status as Sir Claude's mistress. Maisie's first mental impression of Sir Claude, then, entails the several registers on which the young man and girl will relate to each other throughout the novel: those of the erotic, underscored by Maisie's acknowledgment of the improper and Sir Claude's innuendo (however unconscious); the filial, attenuated by its foundation in a second marriage and by the already apparent weakness of that marriage bond; and the platonic, made possible by the difference in age between them. As Maisie's maturation begins effectively to close the age gap between them, the viability of these last two registers shrinks with it. In answer to Mrs. Beale's charge, we find that it is precisely the tenuous filial nature of their relationship that determines the final events: yes, Maisie is "clear."

The eroticism that characterizes the bond between Maisie and Sir Claude should in no way undermine the fact that Sir Claude, like Mrs. Wix, genuinely cares for the girl. But their motivations differ: where Mrs. Wix certainly cares for Maisie, she is nevertheless spurred as well by a financial need that the governess position meets, as well as the economy of exchange Maisie offers for the loss of her daughter. Sir Claude, in contrast, has little if anything to gain by committing himself to Maisie, especially once Ida has obviously engaged in extra-marital affairs and after his relationship to Mrs. Beale has become more oppressive than rewarding. In fact, Sir Claude describes the relationship among Mrs. Wix, Maisie, and himself so as to reveal the manner in which her two guardians together support Maisie, even as he surreptitiously reveals his antipathy toward Mrs. Wix: "'Oh yes,' said Sir Claude; 'Mrs Wix and I are shoulder to shoulder'" (72). After all, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, they can't be seeing eye-to-eye, their visually impaired front metonymically represented by Mrs. Wix's two-way vision. In his careful posturing here, Sir Claude aligns himself with Mrs. Wix, gazing down upon their prized Maisie whose gaze of course mingles with and returns those of her joined compatriots. (We find evidence of this reversal late in the novel when Maisie is stricken with a "sharpened sense for latent meanings" that reveals "how much more even than she had guessed that her friends were fighting side by side" [189].) Sir Claude's tacit expression of discord produces a skewed mirroring effect between Mrs. Wix/Maisie and Sir Claude/Maisie. The difference between the two guardians' postures toward Maisie is born out in the shifting degrees of agency that manifest in relation to their charge: Sir Claude will move from a state of passivity to a state of agency in Maisie's world, while Mrs. Wix will journey the other way.

Sir Claude acts with at least some agency difficult to discern in any of Maisie's other guardians, lending a degree of authenticity to his posture, "shoulder to shoulder" with Mrs. Wix:

> "Dear Mrs Wix is magnificent, but she's rather too grand about it. I mean the situation isn't after all quite so desperate or quite so simple. But I give you my word before her, and I give it to her before you, that I'll never, never, forsake you. Do you hear that, old fellow, and do you take it in? I'll stick to you through everything." (91)

The beauty of this moment—perhaps the most authentic instance of compassion, empathy, and solidarity directed toward Maisie—is the core of her vision in which a sincere promise of love and security comes from the only person in the novel capable of bestowing it economically and emotionally. Sir Claude's speech act is rendered as foreshadow. Paramount to this moment is that it not only includes but calls attention to its dependence upon a witness, Mrs. Wix. As witness, Mrs. Wix is briefly aligned with the reader in a defining moment during which Maisie's penetrating telepathic effect on those around her diminishes: in the face of authentic utterances, telepathic effects withdraw. Expressed with the full force of the future it unleashes into their present "situation," Sir Claude's utterance proves to be true: he will not abandon Maisie but will instead be abandoned by her at the cost of his own freedom, sacrificed proleptically here with his verbal inscription on the text. This speech marks a shift in Sir Claude's comportment toward Maisie away from the restrictions of Victorian decorum and toward an acknowledgment of difference that is nonetheless unbounded by categorical constraints.

Introduced in the conjuring act that produces Sir Claude, telepathic effects contribute to the increasingly erotic quality of his encounters with Maisie. Sir Claude confesses his more than filial attraction to Maisie less than halfway into the novel: "'I *should* be in fear if you were older—there! See—you already make me talk nonsense,' the *young man* added" (96, second emphasis mine). And later in the presence of Mrs. Beale, "[I]f you hadn't had the fatal gift of beauty—!" (107). For all its explicitness, the content of Sir Claude's communication here is no more pregnant with responsibility than were earlier, unnamable expressions. The difference now is the presence of Mrs. Beale, a character witness for whom the utterance of the confession is a necessary condition. Importantly, these explicit expressions will soon prove illicit expressions, for Maisie's age will have begun to impose limitations on the namable even as it offers a new sort of freedom. Here in Beale's home, the present is shot through by the future in Boulogne when Maisie (roughly twelve or thirteen) and Sir Claude consider for a moment a life alone together. Later in Boulogne, when the possibilities that Sir Claude's pronouncements introduce are for an instant imaginable, the filial history, the past in which the expressions were voiced, prohibits their naming by Sir Claude, Maisie, or (especially) the narrator. At that later stage, all messages whose contents transcend the boundaries of filial love are by necessity restricted to the covert, fugitive mode of telepathic communication.

Thus, Sir Claude's and Maisie's thoughts are ultimately communicated almost exclusively by telepathic effects, with the reader resuming the witness posture. The narrative enacts telepathic impressions of mental visions of moving between Maisie and her father:

> [If Beale] had an idea at the back of his head she had also one in a recess as deep, and for a time, while they sat together, there was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision. What there was no effective record of indeed was the small strange pathos on the child's part of an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy. (145)

There's an "effective record," of course, and witnesses. In Boulogne, these kinds of impressions are all Sir Claude and Maisie require to "know [each other] for [them] selves," and Maisie "ha[s] not to put . . . into words" her responses to Sir Claude (55, 162). She observes that "He could be afraid of himself," and several pages later discovers that in fact "She was afraid of herself" (248, 257). Maisie and Sir Claude think as one, their physical tour through Boulogne the analogue to two minds marching in an identical stride:

> [N]othing came now but the intenser consciousness of their quest and their subterfuge. . . . She saw nothing that she had seen hitherto—no touch in the foreign picture that had at first been always before her. The only touch was that of Sir Claude's hand, and to feel her own in it was her mute resistance to time. She went about as sightlessly as if he had been leading her blindfold. If they were afraid of themselves it was themselves they would find at the inn. (259)

What Miller calls a "splendid example of Maisie's 'divination'" can be understood here as her ability to read Sir Claude's mind so thoroughly as to produce of the "young man" a double of the young woman (Miller 43; *WMK* 96).[8]

The couple mentally merges in the only way literary characters can: by the linguistic signs that gesture to an identical—though utterly unnamable and unknowable—signified located somewhere within the sign of "themselves." Most important, the signified to which they gesture exists in one mind and one mind only: the reader's. This is made possible not only by the telepathic effects that increasingly characterize their relationship but also by the profound absence of Maisie's physical characteristics. Words, after all, will always lead the witness further away from a positive identification of the double. Telepathic impressions are no different. Were the text to provide language denoting the contents of Sir Claude's and Maisie's minds, our interpretation of those words—these in Maisie's mind, those in Sir Claude's—could only serve to sever their telepathic bond. Instead, *Maisie* substitutes important telepathic impressions between characters with lacunae, ellipses, and underreporting such as the fissure between chapters 6 and 7.

The doubling effect of Maisie and Sir Claude, triangulated as it is by the reader/witness, is complicated by a further doubling effect that takes place at one diegetic remove: the doubling of dyads, Maisie/Sir Claude and Maisie/Mrs. Wix. The doubling of the dyads is a result of numerous telepathic effects. First, the relative absence of concrete attributes fosters Maisie's mutability. Additionally, the triangulation effect Sir Claude produced earlier in the novel, "shoulder to shoulder" with Mrs. Wix, breaks down as the novel progresses, for the Maisie with whom Mrs. Wix shares a relationship is increasingly distinct from the Maisie with whom Sir Claude shares

one. The doubling effect is also produced partly by the troubling of gender roles (Rowe, *Other* 124–32): Sir Claude is the feminized male who relies on the economic support of females and who imagines himself as an "old grandmother" (*WMK* 58); and in addition to the threat Mrs. Wix's physical appearance poses to conventional Victorian codes of femininity, her figuration as mother crumbles due to the absence of a father, the ghosting of Clara Matilda, and the financial basis of her relationship with Maisie. Because Maisie embodies half of each dyad, and because of the gender instability her two guardians represent, a new triangulation effect emerges that results in an oblique doubling, or mirroring, of Sir Claude and Mrs. Wix.

We register this doubling in the novelistic echoes of scenes involving the guardians and their charge. It would be difficult to divorce the scene when Sir Claude and Maisie, for instance, "collapsed so that they had to sink down together for support" near the end of their journey alone together in Boulogne from the earlier one in which Maisie and Mrs. Wix "touched bottom and melted" together in an example of homoerotic female companionship (263, 222). The doubling of Sir Claude and Mrs. Wix produced by this echo lends an unexpected air of hetero-eroticism to the bond between Maisie and Mrs. Wix that presents a challenge to the primacy awarded conventional erotic attachments (underscored by the superfluity of the qualifying marker "hetero"). And Sir Claude's bond with Maisie then announces a similar challenge: just as Maisie and Mrs. Wix's meltdown can be understood as hetero-erotic, so the eroticized collapsing together of Maisie and Sir Claude can be seen as homoerotic. The effects of telepathy rapidly diminish the boundaries between hetero- and homoerotic, filial, and platonic loves, along with boundaries among characters, recalling Juliet Mitchell's apt demonstration of the ways in which the characters, from the viewpoint of Maisie as artist, are all essentially mirrors of one another. One flows into the other, and the differences among them become a backdrop to the play of their sameness (176–77). As the site of telepathy, Maisie is the character whose difference begins to emerge. One of the ironies that distinguishes her is her characterization as the sign of a discrete, narratable mind.

Being Maisie

I'd like finally to return to the notion that the relationship between the narrator and Maisie is telepathic, providing the narrator and therefore the reader with access to the characters' minds that Maisie reads and influences. As Paul Dawson assesses in "The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction," "We are accustomed to an historical trajectory of the novel which holds that modernist and postmodernist fiction throughout the twentieth century can be characterized, in part, as a rejection of the moral and epistemological certainties of omniscient narration" (144). And in *What Maisie Knew*, the subjectivity typical of such fiction is redoubled by the second level of focalization (Sir Claude as the object of Maisie's focalization as the object of the narrator's focalization, for instance) that resembles embedded focalization (Bal 156–60). In such cases, Maisie's own mediation of other characters' minds further obscures their already flawed subjectivities to which the narrator has access only by means of Maisie. Essentially, telepathy serves as a guiding principle for producing such effects.

Miller posits that because of his exclusive access to Maisie's mind, the narrator is "exactly as much outside [of the other characters' minds] as Maisie is" (39). Miller's argument is equally true in reverse: the narrator is exactly as much *inside* of the other characters' minds as Maisie is. Because of the feedback loop telepathy brings about, Maisie's mind also influences the narrator in ways that render him more intradiegetic than might at first glance appear. A second triangulation of the reader function, then, is always in place at what appears to be an ontological level higher than that of the first (character-reader-Maisie): the triangulation of narrator-reader-Maisie, with the reader at the apex of each triangle. If we accept that Maisie has from the outset of the novel provided the mental leads that the narrator followed in shaping the narrative, then this triangulation essentially demotes the narrator to the same status as Maisie.

Maisie can therefore be understood as the double of the narrator who fails in the end to effect the "mobility and freedom . . . in relation to and at the expense of what it constructs as characters . . . with identifiable patterns of speech and behavior, and as physical entities distinguished by bodily features and details of clothing" (Jaffe 12–13). Maisie's musings about her own potential to know "All" (*WMK* 216)—contrasted at this stage in the novel with the narrator's limited view of her mind and the minds into which it sees—enable James to represent in her the untenable nature of omniscience, contributing to the novel's consciousness of itself that James thought necessary to its being taken seriously (*AF* 165):

> As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything. . . . She looked at the pink sky with a placid foreboding that she soon should have learnt All. They [Maisie and Mrs. Wix] lingered in the flushed air till at last it turned to grey and she seemed fairly to receive new information from every brush of the breeze. (*WMK* 216)

Maisie's "All" aligns her with the subject position of the self-deceiving omniscient narrator doomed to extinction. The ironic metaphor of the "road to know Everything" is laid on the sands of diachronic time, through which "Everything" will always slip. Indeed, "every brush of the breeze" with which knowledge floats into Maisie's mind threatens to brush it away again. The telepathic center of the novel can't hold fast to the position of omniscience any more than could her narrator. Further, the melancholy that finds its home in the "placid foreboding" of a pink sky suggests that knowledge floats inevitably toward its subject on untroubled water. Knowledge is placid, peaceful, quiet, dead, signaling Maisie's death and foreclosing on the omniscient narrator with whom James dispenses.

Among the strategies this narrator deploys, particularly interesting to critics has been his increasing refusal to disclose what Maisie is thinking. As Sheila Teahan puts it, the narrator is "[u]nable to report directly the contents of Maisie's consciousness" and can therefore "only articulate his inability to answer for her knowledge and its uncanny effects" (225). Here is an example: "Maisie had known all along a great deal, but never so much as she was to know from this moment on. . . . It was granted her at this time to arrive at divinations so ample that I shall have no room for the goal if I attempt to trace the stages" (*WMK* 159).[9] In my view, the narrator's proclamation

of Maisie's divination, as well as his pretense of its unreportability, produces the full irony of his relationship to Maisie. By causing the narrator increasingly to play up his authoritative role in choosing what to disclose, James ironically reveals how little agency the narrator has over the actual events Maisie's mind dictates. James bestows diegetic agency upon the so-called child (her conventional status as such undercut by her knowledge and influence) who otherwise struggles to lay claim to an audience and whose limited vocabulary would ordinarily restrict her command over narrative. The narrator behaves rhetorically as though his comportment toward Maisie—including a gesture toward telepathic disclosure ("divinations"), as well as a reluctance to report her mental stages of development—is merely a posture over which he has control. It turns out, however, that what he attempts to represent as a posture presents an accurate depiction of how Maisie's telepathy has reduced his influence over the discourse.

Consider Miller's observation on how completely the narrator is excluded from the knowledge that Maisie is a fiction (39). What we finally discover is that this "fiction," capable of seeing into minds the narrator can't access without her, is the narrator's double whom he mistakenly sees as "a phantom of his own ego" (Miller 39; Kittler 88). The "cunning strategies" that are "thoroughly masked" in order for the narrator to perceive Maisie as that projection are deployed, of course, by James (Kittler 88). Though the narrator pretends to effect Maisie's telepathic qualities rhetorically, those very qualities have ironically undercut his ability to shape the discourse. By the novel's conclusion, Maisie is the narrator's imagined double over whom he finally loses even the illusion of control.

The final lines of the novel—"Mrs. Wix gave a sidelong look. She still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew" (275)—have incited much debate, with critics such as Miller arguing that the narrator has lost access to Maisie's mind. In my view, nothing has changed: the evidence we have encountered now gives us every reason to believe—to witness—that her or his continued access to Maisie's mind once again provides the narrator with access to that of Mrs. Wix. Indeed, Maisie imbues Mrs. Wix's thoughts with that very "wonder" by which the girl was marked as early as the preface. And Mrs. Wix's "sidelong look" has always been in place, her wandering eye fixed on Maisie, pointing up her fixed position in the girl's life as friend, guardian, and loved one. As an alternative to Barbara Eckstein's final assessment that Maisie is "not free" and "does not ascend into artistry" (184), I would suggest that the freedom Sir Claude ironically repeals in naming "Maisie" in almost the same breath as he proclaims "You're free" is recuperated in two ways: in his offering of his own freedom in exchange for Maisie's (as he foretold), and, more important, in the amanuensis that Maisie's "nobody," Mrs. Wix, embodies (*WMK* 236). Breaking with Sir Claude, Maisie catches the steamer with Mrs. Wix, sinking "slowly and imperfectly" into their new narrative whose first scene Maisie's vision had analeptically inscribed on the text in that boat with her "fellow mariner" so many years before (274–75; 87).

The oft-quoted passage to which I gestured earlier, in which Sir Claude fails to appear at the appointed time and place in Boulogne, now takes its leading role: "She was yet to learn what it could be to recognise in some lapse of a sequence the proof of an extinction, and therefore remained unaware that this momentary pang was a foretaste of the experience of death" (223). A willingness to know what is visible to her literally and figuratively involves the final step in Maisie's full acceptance of her role as creator, conjurer, artist and unveils her preternatural ability to deny that last

of all things: death. Such a death is proleptically repeated upon the artist's completion of a work, a figurative death that proved especially difficult for James to brook in the "interminable little *Maisie*" (*CN* 167). Now, with the ability to overcome that final repressive impulse, Maisie as artist and readers as artists are free to acknowledge and empathize with others—to harness the figurative element of telepathy between self and Other, which Cameron and Robert Weisbuch essentially view as James's extraordinary linguistic invention—and to do justice to what that invention expresses. As James puts it in the preface to *Maisie*:

> The only thing to say of such lucidities is that, however one may have "discounted" in advance, and as once for all, their general radiance, one is disappointed if the hour for them, in the particular connexion, doesn't strike—they so keep before us elements with which even the most sedate philosopher must always reckon. (11)

If the narrator fails to make a success of that reckoning, Mrs. Wix and her readers still have a chance. We have the opportunity to acknowledge all of the wonderful and tragic impressions Maisie receives *directly* from adult minds and to appreciate the "glittering picture" she can make of them as she sets sail with Mrs. Wix. Despite James's comments in the *Notebooks*, it would be a mistake to overlook the important role her governess plays in Maisie's future. The chiasmus Mrs. Wix embodies finally crosses back toward itself: Maisie binds herself, as she had years ago foreseen, to the no-body—the figurative amanuensis whose actual, eroticized counterparts James first employed for *Maisie*—on whom she might now inscribe her narrative. It is Mrs. Wix, then, with whom Maisie replaces the narrator in her narratable future, but she allows the narrator to narrate his own exit through his final, borrowed vision of Mrs. Wix's mind.

NOTES

[1]For my purposes, "plot" emphasizes a nuanced version of the *causality* to which E. M. Forster calls attention. The thematic interest to which the events of plot give rise is thus, among other things, that of unmediated mental communication. I will use the alternate term "discourse" to describe Maisie's more generalized narratorial influence that results from her sublimation of the narrator, emphasizing Maisie's position on the "expression plane" of narrative (Prince 21). The world of "story," as I will employ it, includes the raw material of the narrative, stretching from well before we encounter Maisie at the age of six to well after she and Mrs. Wix set sail at the novel's close.

[2]In their different ways, Miller, Rowe ("Use"; *Other*), and Cameron all suggest that in James we find a covert, if not entirely intentional, attempt to control meaning. And yet Rowe and Miller also, along with Felman, suggest that in the final analysis James leaves open the possibility of indeterminate meaning. Hale describes the ideological and syntactic underpinnings of this effect in *Social Formalism*. My emphasis on the telepathic effects of *Maisie* presents a different avenue toward a similar understanding of James's project.

[3]I am indebted to Thurschwell's excellent work in *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking*, and my essay reflects the eroticism Thurschwell attaches to occult communication, as well as to the eroticized amanuensis figure. Menke illustrates the influence of media technologies such as the telegraph on the realist mode. In Menke's view, mimetic instances of what might seem to be telepathic communications are figurative representations of telegraphic communication that demonstrate the threats an overactive imagination, taken to the extreme, poses to James's Victorian ideology, potentially devolving into "a switchboard for fugitive and unconventional connections" (210). Alternatively, I suggest that his telepathic narratives represent what were for James the artistic, "prosocial" possibilities that the mimetic, figurative, and synthetic registers of telepathy offered, serving James's primary concern with developing among his readers an appreciation of alterity that Thurschwell and Hale emphasize (Keen). Expansive studies of the cultural, technological, and ideological underpinnings of occult and tele-transmissions can also be found in Luckhurst and Peters, among others.

[4]By comparison, Rowe argues that readers are "always implicit characters in [James's] work" ("Use" 55).

[5]Schantz is drawing on Kittler, whose overarching claim is that technology (and not the reader) is the additional witness to fictional events such as telepathy. See also Menke's view of fiction as "a medium and information system" that self-reflexively imagines itself as such (3). Apart from the obvious play on words, by "character witness" I mean a witness who exists on the same diegetic level as Sir Claude and Maisie. I'm drawing on Phelan, who refers to first-person, homodiegetic narrators as "character narrators" (see, for instance, "Redundant" and *Living*).

[6]In *The Uncanny*, Royle focuses his discussion of "telepathy" on its value in redressing the ideological, deistic implications imposed by the use of the term "omniscient" to describe the role of the heterodiegetic narrator. Royle convincingly argues that the narrator should be thought of as a human rather than a god-like construct. See also Culler and Nelles.

[7]Cameron's concept of consciousness extending beyond the bodily boundaries of one character and intermingling with those of another character deeply informs this work. For Cameron, to understand consciousness in James, we must understand it as a spatial entity that moves *between* characters, enabling what would otherwise be discrete consciousnesses to be shared. See also Thurschwell's call to imagine human "minds spatially" to better understand how intimacy was conceived in the 1880s and '90s (12). For Cameron's reading of *Maisie*, see pages 63–82.

[8]In Butte's view, these exchanges I focus on can be understood virtually always as instances of intertwining chiasm in the sense in which Merleau-Ponty conceives it, rather than as telepathic. Weisbuch, however, suggests that "characters respond with the utmost consequence to each other's verbal and physical nuances to the point where a kind of mystical telepathy without the mysticism gets created" (102).

[9]Discussing a similar quotation, Teahan argues: "In its interplay between literal and figurative ('the manner in which she figured'), the passage interrogates the status of figurative language in the novel as a whole. For if we have access to 'what Maisie knew' only through the narrator's figures for it, what is the literal term for Maisie's knowledge? . . . The narrator's relation to Maisie is one of catachresis in the sense of figure without the ground of a literal term" (226). What I'm suggesting is that the "literal" terms available to us are those pertaining to telepathy: "divinations," "foresight." And these literal terms, inasmuch as they include a mimetic component, bind the literal to the figurative aspects of their effects.

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