

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: *Houses of Fiction, Houses of Confinement: Character Introductions, Autonomy, and Domestic Spaces in Two Works by Henry James*

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My thesis examines a total of fourteen characters from *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Turn of the Screw*. Primarily, I have discovered an overwhelming pattern in these two works by Henry James; when characters make direct entrances—that is when they are not described or discussed in absentia by either the narrator or other characters before appearing on the page—they consistently maintain their autonomies, which is to say that they are relatively free from external manipulations and exhibit a relatively high degree of personal freedom throughout the work. They are not transformed to any large degree and in many cases they seem to undergo no transformation whatever. Those characters that enter indirectly, or are described before the reader sees them on the page, consistently lose their autonomy. Often, this change is quite dramatic, particularly for Isabel and the governess.

Chapter One examines nine characters in *The Portrait of a Lady*: Mr. Touchett, Gilbert Osmond, Ralph Touchett, Lord Warburton, Madame Merle, Countess Gemini, Mrs. Touchett, Henrietta Stackpole, and Isabel Archer. I

discover that, of the characters I study, Isabel alone makes an indirect entrance and loses her autonomy. Other characters not only serve to change her but, along with James himself, write her story. In Chapter Two I discover a different balance in *The Turn of the Screw*—one that has to do with presence and nonpresence in the House of Bly. Here, characters are divided almost equally between those who make direct and those who make indirect entrances. Here I examine five characters, the governess, the manuscript, the uncle, Miles, and Peter Quint, the last of whom emerges as the lone character that commands not only himself but the Bly estate and, indirectly, the residents within. Because houses and architecture play key roles in both works, I couch my thesis in James's allusion to the House of Fiction, a major theme in his preface to the 1908 New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*. The pattern I discern informs a re-envisioning of narrative privilege within the house of fiction, one in which James alone does not stand in a position of voyeuristic and literary power, but shares this privilege with certain characters who enter on their own terms, maintain their autonomies, and “write” the fates of those less fortunate.

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Houses of Fiction, Houses of Confinement: Character Introductions, Autonomy,
and Domestic Spaces in Two Works by Henry James

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Lisa M. Killips, Author

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Houses of Fiction, Houses of Confinement: Character Introductions, Autonomy, and Domestic Spaces in Two Works by Henry James

Introduction

In my thesis I present a hitherto unnoticed connection between entrances and autonomy in Henry James's 1881 novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (revised in 1908 for inclusion in the New York Edition series) and his 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, also revised in 1908. Specifically, I have noticed that when a character makes an indirect entrance he or she loses autonomy. When a character makes a direct entrance, he or she maintains autonomy. For my purposes, a character makes an indirect entrance if he or she is described at some length by the author or is discussed by other characters before appearing on the page. Isabel, for instance, becomes the topic of conversation primarily between Mr. Touchett and Lord Warburton before Ralph Touchett and the reader see her in "the ample doorway" of the expansive Gardencourt lawn (*Portrait* 25). I define autonomy in a manner similar to the Oxford English Dictionary: "liberty to follow one's will; control over one's own affairs; freedom from external influence, personal independence." While no man (or woman) is an island, my study looks at *the degree* to which a particular character changes over the course of the work.

Portrait has always been largely associated with its central character, Isabel Archer. The young woman so concerned with her independence is often seen as a solitary figure, most notably in her entrance at Gardencourt, her epiphanic vigil as Mrs. Osmond, and even her exit from the narrative, which finds her at the door to Gardencourt yet on the cusp of returning to Rome for reasons that seem clear only to her. I have discovered

yet another instance of her singularity; she is the only character to make an indirect entrance and lose her autonomy; her personality and worldview change drastically as a direct result of the negative influences that fill the pages of her story. All of the other eight characters I examine from *Portrait* make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies; they appear on the page without any narrative anticipation and will leave the novel with the same social, emotional, and physical characteristics as when they entered. The Jamesian pattern that I have discerned is consistent 100% of the time in this work.

The same pattern is present in *The Turn of the Screw*, though here the ratio of indirect to direct entrances is almost 50-50. The third of his four novellas, produced during James's more experimental phase, is not grounded in the realism of *Portrait*. It features alleged ghosts, an uncle whose presence is always felt though never realized, a manuscript of the story which itself functions as a character, and a denouement defined by the gruesome, yet inevitable death of a child. Moreover, the governess is the only character of either work that changes drastically yet also transforms others. She demonstrates that the loss of autonomy and the ability to transform the lives of others are not mutually exclusive. In the end, the manuscript, the governess, and Miles make indirect entrances and lose their autonomies, while the uncle and Peter Quint make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies.

The definition of autonomy cited above is complicated in the hands of Henry James. It seems that a character rarely either maintains or loses his or her autonomy beyond any point of uncertainty. For example, it could be argued that Ralph Touchett's autonomy is mitigated by his chronic, debilitating illness and his premature death. I would never argue that he displays any sort of physical autonomy; James has seen to it

that this has been taken from him. Despite these limitations on his life, Ralph presents a consistent character, is financially privileged, and exerts an influence over Isabel's narrative that outlives the man. As with all of the characters, the particular range of selfhood Ralph maintains is specified in the section that addresses the character. This naming of a particular autonomy—architectural, economic, epistolary—is defined by my subheadings, which are specified later in my introduction. An affirmation of autonomy does not obviate any subsequent discussion of a character's extent of power or personal freedom. The Jamesian possibilities of autonomy are many-layered and complicated, therefore my participation in this conversation is necessarily limited.

My study of entrance and autonomy—both as a relationship and as individual concepts—is informed by the idea and structure of the house. In *The Turn of the Screw* for instance, every living character in the house of Bly loses her autonomy to some degree, while those who are not bound by the property lines of the Essex estate maintain their autonomies. In *Portrait*, the houses in which Isabel lives illustrate first her hopefulness, then her resignation to virtual imprisonment in the confined space of Roccanera; the houses, in other words, track her loss of autonomy. The concept of the house—or really any defined space—is also a necessary component of the entrance. Entrance implies movement from one space to another—appearance in a place where one hadn't been only moments before. As Michael Gorra notes, “A door is a door and we don't need to see it symbolically to know that the act of walking through one can be momentous—a moment of passage, of transition” (3). Of course an entrance is not inherently defined as passage through a doorway, though this occurs overtly several times in *Portrait*. It can also be the governess leaving the framing narrative and entering the

story proper not as a distant memory described by Douglas but as author, narrator, and participant in her own story. The relational theme between entrance and autonomy that I explore can be understood against the backdrop of the architectural metaphor that so often drives James's thinking. For him, an entrance is fundamentally architectural because the houses he constructs exist within the house of fiction, the symbol of the artist's consciousness.

In his preface to the 1908 edition of *Portrait*, James describes the house of fiction as a "vast front" with a million windows. James immediately amends this initial assessment, saying, "They are windows at best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life." Behind the wall exists the show of the "human scene," the characters and events of a given piece of literary work. Looking in each aperture is "a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass" which allows for "an impression distinct from every other." These eyes, James tells us, collectively represent the consciousness of the artist (Preface 7). Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen illustrates the way in which the house of fiction and multitude of "perspectives available to the individual will" blends with the houses *within* the fiction:

The *ekphrastic* description of narrative discourse as architecture turns the exteriority of the literary form figured in the façade (the face of the house and its windows) into the face of the author. The eyes are the windows of the consciousness; they may even be "low-browed"; and, in the logic of architecture within the novel, houses take on the visual characteristics of their inhabitants, as for instance Osmond's hilltop villa...or the general fascination with the *faciality* of houses, as in Gardencourt's "magesterial physiognomy" (144, 147 original italics).

James's overarching architectural consciousness encompasses the houses that feature prominently in these two works—Isabel's house in Albany, Gardencourt, Osmond's villa, Roccanera, and the Bly estate. My argument, particularly as it concerns

entrances and domestic spaces, depends on the historical context of introductions in the Victorian Era. James's pattern of introducing those characters who seem to be in a position of reduced power mirrors the social mores of the late 19th century. This hierarchy is reflected in the presentation of the letter of introduction, wherein an individual of lower social status would request a patron of a particularly high social echelon to write a letter of introduction to a third party, who was generally of a higher social status than the subject, but lower than the letter writer.

James himself moved around Paris and London to the tune of permissive letters, which gained him access to a French ducal reception, Flaubert's intellectual *cenacle*, as well as a London breakfast club hosted by a Lord Houghton where James met Anthony Trollope (Edel 188-89, 209). "With this relationship established, introductory letters moved between his London and Paris connections," particularly between Lord Houghton, Turgenev, Flaubert, and Zola (Edel 210). It seems that perhaps James was only too happy to do this—to individuate himself from the French, who he observed, "have a habit of not introducing anyone to anyone else" (Edel 189). This intermediary role can be seen in the two works examined here. As though ascribing to the hierarchy of the letter of introduction, James presents the weakest characters to the reader through descriptive or speculative indirect entrances, but introduces the reader to those characters with the greatest power by denying the reader any social preamble, and thereby allowing the character to introduce him or herself. His house of fiction, observed by the consciousness of the author, cannot be divorced from the social conventions by which James lived and traveled.

James's social as well as literary sensibility results in the pattern that links entrance with autonomy, the focus of my present study. I reveal this consistency through a close examination of those characters that best illuminate an abundance or absence of self-possession in each work. In many cases, a thematic association emerges between two characters. When this occurs, I discuss them in succession under the same subtitle. In Chapter One my focus is *The Portrait of a Lady*. I analyze nine characters from this novel: Mr. Touchett and Gilbert Osmond are paired under the title "Architectural Authority: Direct Entrance and the Power of the Home," Ralph Touchett and Lord Warburton are brought together under "Narrative Authority: Direct Entrance and the Economics of Narrative," Madame Merle and the Countess Gemini come together under the title "Avian Authority: Direct Entrance and the Power of Song," and Mrs. Touchett and Henrietta Stackpole are paired under "'Here I Am': Direct Entrance and the New Woman." Finally, I examine Isabel in "Framed: Isabel's Indirect Entrance and the Evacuated Self."

In Chapter Two, I analyze the five characters from *The Turn of the Screw* that most clearly exhibit the link between entrances and autonomies. The manuscript and governess are discussed under "Framed: Author and Manuscript in Old Faded Ink" and "the master" and "the little master" are paired together in "'I'm Off': The Uncle, Miles, and the Usurpation of Authority." Once again, I finish with a single character in the section "In the Master's Waistcoats: Peter Quint and the Usurpation of Power."

Sara Blair asks "what difference it makes that James chooses to imagine his literary authority in a figure of domestic architecture, whose terms as such have gone virtually unchallenged by his readers" (Blair 60). My study broadens the conversation

about domestic architecture and space because it reminds the reader they are not just (layered) spaces, but spaces in which introductions, entrances, and exits take place. My investigation reveals not only a consistent relationship between entrance and autonomy, but also the manner in which domestic space predicts, informs, and limits the power a given character has. Though there is a marked link between entrance and autonomy, it is the architecture surrounding and within the writing that predicts how much power a character will have over herself and others. Ultimately, this internal power will require a restructuring of the house of fiction as well as a re-envisioning of the location of the artist's consciousness.

Chapter One

Narrative and Power Structures in *The Portrait of a Lady*

“Architectural Authority: Direct Entrance and the Power of the Home”

The sun’s angle at the “perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon” allows James to take advantage of the hour to play with light and shadow, painting a picture in which “the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, [and] the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf.” He gradually draws the eye from the two-dimensional shapes lengthening slowly along the “perfect lawn” to the three men taking afternoon tea at Gardencourt. The author first reveals the “old man sitting in a deep wicker-chair near the low table on which the tea had been served.” Descriptions of Daniel Touchett are interspersed with those of the Edwardian house “that rose beyond the lawn” (*Portrait* 17). The reader is shown the “patches of ivy” growing along its red brick complexion, as well as its “clustered chimneys [and] windows smothered in creepers” no less than she is shown the “faint smile that played upon [the] lean, spacious cheek and lighted up [the] humorous eye of its owner” (*Portrait* 18, 19). The histories of man and estate became intertwined twenty years earlier when the “shrewd American banker” purchased it “at a great bargain.” Despite Mr. Touchett’s initial grumbling at its incommmodity, he had come to develop an “aesthetic passion” for the centuries-old mansion, and over the years would learn every protuberance and the placement of every shadow, as well as its extensive provenance (*Portrait* 18). The American banker, now taking the rest “that precedes the great rest” and the British dwelling of “weary brickwork” have aged together, and now present a similar physiognomy (*Portrait* 19, 18).

Mr. Touchett's character is as stable as the Edwardian home. As the landowner of the idyllic (or, as Gorra points out, the Edenic) Gardencourt, as well as a father figure to Isabel, he becomes a symbol for innocence, hope, and stability (326). His autonomy lies in the strength and consistency of his nature.

Mr. Touchett's character as well as Mr. Touchett *as* a character displays the consistency of the grand estate. Though he is quite wealthy, his modesty and generosity are consistent and evident throughout the work. This means, most importantly, that his decision to leave Isabel seventy thousand pounds upon his death can be anticipated from his first appearance. In the opening scene, Ralph notes his father's generous nature: "He isn't very rich," he tells Lord Warburton. "He has given away an immense deal of money." After Lord Warburton's chiding response, Ralph adds, "He's very fond of pleasure—of other people's."

"The old man shook his head. 'I don't pretend to have contributed anything to the amusement of my contemporaries'" (*Portrait* 22).

In the final scene featuring Mr. Touchett, the reader learns that the dying man plans to leave Isabel five thousand pounds. Ralph is also slowly dying, and sees no point in the very generous inheritance his father plans to leave him. He wishes his father to divide this bequeathal in half, and pass on one portion, or seventy thousand pounds, to Isabel. Ralph claims he could never give his cousin half of his inheritance, (a gesture that would too directly express his feelings), but wishes his father to take all the credit. Mr. Touchett is concerned that such a fortune will make things too easy for her or that, conversely, she may be taken advantage of by fortune-hunters (*Portrait* 162). Moreover, Ralph makes it clear that he wishes to leave her the money partly for his own amusement,

a concept Mr. Touchett has difficulty understanding (*Portrait* 161). Ralph is nevertheless able to convince his father that, though she might spend the money quickly at first, Isabel will “remember she still has a lifetime before her, and live within her means.” Near the end of the scene, Mr. Touchett seems convinced that his son has given the matter considerable thought (*Portrait* 162). Though it isn’t revealed until after his death, Mr. Touchett of course does what his son asks, and makes Isabel a rich woman. He is generous with both his son and his niece. His consistent generosity—his autonomy—is finally what sets the events of the novel in motion.

Like Mr. Touchett, Ralph, and Lord Warburton, Gilbert Osmond enters as part of a tableau; while the scene at Gardencourt begins with extended shadows on an expansive lawn, Gilbert Osmond will first be revealed as part of an interior still life, “a small group that might have been described by a painter as composing well” (*Portrait* 195). The four characters painted into the villa are Gilbert Osmond, his fifteen-year-old daughter Pansy, and two nuns from the convent where Pansy has been educated. Though Osmond’s name doesn’t appear at the opening of the scene, the reader is immediately told that he is present in the house that will be described at some length. Like all three men at Gardencourt, Osmond has been present from the first word of the chapter that introduces him. Additionally, as with Mr. Touchett, the description of Osmond’s villa is in fact a description of its owner. Following James’s pattern, Osmond makes a direct entrance and does not lose his autonomy. Far from being manipulated or changed by others, he proves to be the main agent in the transformation of Isabel’s life.

One issue must be addressed before continuing. Earlier in the novel, it would appear as though Madame Merle and Isabel discuss Gilbert Osmond in his absence as

part of an extended and varied conversation. James, however, downplays the significance of Mr. Osmond in Merle's life as well as the conversation as part of the narrative structure in several ways. First, Osmond is brought up when Merle compares his indolence to that of Ralph Touchett. "The worst case" of such resistance to work, she claims, is her friend Mr. Osmond (*Portrait* 171). What follows is the negative space that remains of a true introduction. Merle can only say that he has "No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything." It is the very antithesis of a 19th century letter of introduction, which outlines these exact virtues. Merle seems to brag about Osmond's indolence, which, like Ralph's consumption, "amounts to a sort of position." She does say that he is a good father, but adds that perhaps this is of no more value than Ralph's snuff boxes. Moreover, James notes that Merle does not "deliver herself all at once of these reflections, which are presented in a cluster for the convenience of the reader" (*Portrait* 172). What seems like a condescending sidenote is in fact a crucial narrative detail; while we are presented with a cohesive though narrow description, Isabel is not even granted the benefit of cohesion. Not long after this conversation, Mr. Touchett will pass away and Isabel will learn of her inheritance. It is likely that, given these life-altering events, Isabel (and possibly the reader) will forget this rather forgettable quasi-figure mentioned as part of a stream of consciousness. Merle in fact presents only the shadow cast by the man and his hilltop villa, an image that will be filled in when Osmond makes his direct entrance in the commanding locus of his power. Finally, though Merle largely insults her friend, once she learns of Isabel's inheritance, she will—as we will see—sing a different tune.

It's appropriate that Osmond's true entrance should come on the heels of the death of Mr. Touchett—the man who has symbolized innocence, hope, and stability for Isabel. The deceptively languid scene in effect begins the novel over again, this time featuring the foil to Isabel's freedom that had once stretched out before her like a summer day. Turning from Mr. Touchett's death, coming as it does in the darkness of an English winter, James directs the reader's attention to Italy the following May and begins with the hint of an interior scene, only to pan out so as to provide the reader with greater perspective.

The Florentine villa in which Osmond lives is “a long, rather blank-looking structure” with an “antique, solid, weather-worn, yet imposing front”; it has, overall, “a somewhat incommunicative character.” This exterior is “the mask, not the face of the house.” The structure refuses to look at the viewer, but instead “look[s] the other way—look[s] off behind, into splendid openness and the range of the afternoon light” (*Portrait* 195). Further, the windows of the ground floor do not “offer communication with the world,” but rather “defy the world to look in” (*Portrait* 195-96). This, of course, is a description of the duplicitous Osmond himself. The art collector wears a mask rather than expose his true nature, which lies “hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers” (*Portrait* 360). Just as the windows offer only a challenge to discernment, standing ready to parry any attempt to learn more about the souls that reside within, Osmond's eyes, “at once vague and penetrating,” do not allow admittance to his inner psyche, but attempt to penetrate the viewer's own (*Portrait* 197). What should be a source of revelation—a window, an eye—is in fact a point of frustration for the viewer. There is an indistinct shape to Osmond's thoughts and intentions.

The first time Isabel visits him on his hilltop, the villa is placed against the backdrop of “the full maturity of the Tuscan spring.” Merle and Isabel leave Rome and drive between the “high-walled lanes into which the wealth of blossoming orchards overdrooped and flung a fragrance,” structures that do not suggest entrapment, but only amplify the beauty of the Tuscan afternoon.¹ In stark contrast, the “piazza, of crooked shape, where the long brown wall of the villa occupied in part by Mr. Osmond formed a principal, or at least a very imposing object” connotes a dreary sadness, as part of something crooked—or untrustworthy—of which Gilbert Osmond, naturally, is the principal object. Mr. Osmond meets Isabel in the cold ante-chamber, a room on which the month of May seems to have had no bearing (*Portrait* 218). It is not the room, the reader and Isabel will come to learn, but the owner’s presence that seems to usher in the chill of another season. “There was something grave and strong in the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in, you would need an act of energy to get out” (*Portrait* 217). Osmond’s villa conveys something of the containment to which Isabel’s freedom is destined to be subjected; his manipulation is a force with which Pansy and Merle are already familiar, though neither will articulate this knowledge—the former due to years of training in passivity, the latter as calculated effort against Isabel. As with the scene in which we first encounter Osmond, what begins with the promise and expanse of a spring day quickly transforms into what will prove to be a setting of limited movement.

On this visit, Isabel, Osmond, and Pansy are joined by Osmond’s sister—the Countess Gemini—and Madame Merle. After some conversation, Merle proposes to the

¹ One could also interpret the fragrance of the flowered walls as inducing a soporific trust—an olfactory version of the frontispieces that once told Isabel which books to choose.

Countess that they retire to the garden. Assuming they will join them, Isabel gets up, only to realize that Osmond has no intention of leaving the room. He stands like an “imposing object,” his daughter’s arm locked in his. While the two women “stroll across the fine grass of the garden,” Isabel chooses to remain indoors, looking “over the things scattered about her” (*Portrait* 223).² Osmond takes her on a tour of his “pictures, medallions, and tapestries,” one that takes them into “two other rooms, beyond the one in which she had been received, equally full of romantic objects” (*Portrait* 225). Mr. Osmond plays the role of the cicerone, showing off what he collects, always holding Pansy by the hand, as the infantilized, wholly dependent fifteen-year-old is part of his collection, too.³ Coming out to the terrace, the conversation between Osmond and Isabel turns to the possibility of the young woman spending some time in Italy. While she tells him she plans to visit, she is skeptical about living in the area, saying, “I wonder if I should forsake my natural mission if I were to settle in Florence.” After a bit more discussion, Osmond tells her, “I’m glad, at any rate, to hear you talk of settling. Madame Merle had given me the idea that you were of a rather roving disposition. I thought she spoke of your having some plan of going around the world” (*Portrait* 227). Osmond sees her plan as ridiculous and

² Her choice to remain (essentially) alone with a virtually unknown man reminds the reader of Mrs. Touchett’s admonishment at Gardencourt that Isabel should not socialize with her cousin and Lord Warburton unchaperoned. While Mrs. Touchett is present to warn Isabel when there is no threat, she is not present when a warning is most needed. Isabel does not seem to reflect on her aunt’s words during her association with a strange man.

³ Unfortunately, a discussion of Pansy Osmond and Ned Rosier could not be accommodated as part of my study. For numerous reasons, I would have paired these two would-be lovers; primarily they are both infantilized, particularly in each character’s introductory scene. Though both make direct entrances (strictly speaking) and both maintain a consistent set of defining traits, neither displays any autonomy to be maintained (or lost), which is my main reason for not including them. Nevertheless, Pansy in particular has some bearing on Isabel’s narrative. As demonstrated in the discussion above, Osmond uses his daughter to lure Isabel into his home and his life. Moreover, Pansy serves as a younger Isabel, likely the individual that Isabel would have become had she been raised in a similar environment. Perhaps most importantly, Pansy may be the reason that Isabel returns to Italy at the end of the novel. For additional discussion of Pansy, see Sanner and Weisbuch. For further discussion on Pansy and Ned Rosier, see Hughes.

would rather see her “settle” down, settle for a life she doesn’t want, settle for something other than what she truly wants for herself. He wishes her to settle for confinement, to become framed as a part of his collection. “James’s description of his own act of authorship *ironically* equates him, the beneficent author of Isabel’s infinite woe, with...his most notorious collector, Gilbert Osmond, whose vigilant ‘protection’ of his living bibelots constitutes an ongoing act of sexual aggression” (Blair 68). For Osmond, the domesticity of marriage is equivalent to the domesticity of a private collection—in both cases, an additional “choice object” will augment his collection socially and financially. Shortly before Osmond declares his love for Isabel, he meets Lord Warburton in Rome and, having learned that Isabel rejected his marriage proposal, perceives “a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand” (*Portrait* 258). Refusing such “a magnificent chance” only increases Isabel’s value as something “curious and precious,” something Osmond would like to own (*Portrait* 101, 225).

As she is about to leave Rome—not to travel around the world, but merely to Florence—Osmond is still fixated on her plans to see the world. He tells her, “You’re under no obligation to come back; you can do exactly what you choose; you can roam through space.” He does not want Isabel to visit himself and his daughter as simply part of this extended journey: “Don’t put us in parenthesis—give us a chapter to ourselves,” he tells her. “I don’t want to see you on your travels. I should like to see you when they’re over. I should like to see you when you’re tired and satiated. I shall prefer you in that state” (*Portrait* 261). Although Isabel is initially perceptive and forthright about his attitude towards her travels, his insistence that she go and be “triumphant,” followed by

his declaration of love makes him in her eyes, “beautiful and generous” (*Portrait* 262, 263). M. Giulia Fabi deftly articulates this change in Isabel: “Her dreams of singleness and independence lose value when nobody is opposing them, and that is why Osmond’s studiously passive courtship is so successful” (4). He ends the conversation by asking her to visit his daughter, the one piece in his collection he knows she can’t resist. A year later, when Isabel is staying with Merle in Rome, Osmond will “descend” from Florence and propose, though that word is not used at this time. Upon marrying Gilbert Osmond, Isabel will become trapped in the gilded frame of Roccanera.

Isabel and Pansy—who find themselves in the deepest interiors of Osmond’s machinations—have discovered that house and man together stand for captivity and isolation. This is will be all the more true after Isabel becomes Mrs. Osmond and the couple moves into Palazzo Roccanera. As Elizabeth Boyle Machlan observes,

Unlike many of her earlier realizations, Isabel's musings after her marriage are not melodramatic, but wistful, as if she has accepted her position at the mercy of "the consciousness of the artist...[his] pious desire to place [his] treasure right" (46-47). These lines from James's preface mirror Osmond's arrangements within the text, underscoring the sad inevitability of Isabel's plight due to the insurmountable walls "put up round" her by both artists (Machlan 406).

Roccanera (on a grander scale than Osmond’s Florentine villa) is not just a house of fiction, it is a house of confinement.

When Warburton and the elder Touchett engage in some friendly sparring about the qualities of Gardencourt versus Lockleigh, Isabel admits, “I don’t know—I can’t judge” (*Portrait* 29). This statement is particularly prophetic and ominous given Osmond’s introduction and Isabel’s movement through houses as the novel progresses. In her life, Isabel has moved from her grandmother’s house to Gardencourt to Roccanera,

the final being, as Machlan points out, a Gothic house, incorporating “all the essential elements of a Gothic plot [including] seduction, imprisonment, and terror” (405). It is a “domestic fortress, a pile which [bears] a stern old Roman name, [and smells] of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence” (James 307). Only a few weeks before arriving at Gardencourt, Isabel sat in the office of her grandmother’s house and read books based chiefly on frontispieces; she is wholly unprepared to live in a genre that she would not choose for herself. The word frontispiece, derived from the French architectural term for a building’s decorative façade, directly prefigures Isabel’s future inability to judge Roccanera for what it truly is—“the place where people had suffered” (Machlan 402).

Osmond’s cold, walled-off villa is a precursor to Roccanera. While Isabel is free to leave his house in Florence—despite the unmistakable signs of entrapment—her marriage to Osmond and residency in Roccanera removes any chance she once had to walk in the garden of her choosing. By moving her from house to house, and finally placing her in a grand structure of the Gothic genre, “James explores the structural implications of ‘design’ on knowledge and freedom”; just as James has his house of fiction, with its “vast front” and a million apertures, Osmond has the “long brown wall” of his villa and later the fortress of his choosing (Machlan 396). Both will serve to trap and observe Isabel, as though she is already a piece of art in Osmond’s collection. “Osmond’s dwelling bears a striking resemblance to the house of James’s Preface, ‘put up round my young woman while she stood in perfect isolation’” (Machlan 404). Together, James and Osmond look through the house of fiction and houses within fiction in order to see “the picture of a gracious lady” (*Portrait* 310).

“Narrative Authority: Direct Entrance and the Economics of Narrative”

Ralph Touchett and Lord Warburton both make direct entrances in the opening scene and maintain their autonomies throughout the work. Additionally, both men influence the narrative by virtue of the wealth to which they have access (and the ability to grant or withhold wealth from others). For these characters, fiscal authority plays a significant role in the narrative surrounding Isabel. While her cousin is forthright about his desire to watch Isabel’s life unfold, Lord Warburton unknowingly initiates her awareness of the conspiracy that has surrounded her for several years. Both of these characters not only maintain their autonomies, they also become privileged characters who (at least attempt to) “write” Isabel’s narrative alongside James.

Ralph so completely lacks any physical autonomy throughout the course of the novel that even his demise does not signal a change in selfhood for the sickly, yet philosophical Ralph Touchett. The narrative witnesses the final seven years of his consumption, a condition he acquired years before the opening of the novel. The increasingly delicate and demanding conditions of his health-related travel and decline into a perpetually bed-ridden state mean that his eventual demise merely marks the end of his suspension between life and death. Moreover, Ralph appears to Isabel as a ghostly figure on the eve of his passing, one whose observant nature is the extension of his character in life. In addition, his actions six years earlier continue to affect his cousin after his death. His ability to convince his father to leave her seventy thousand pounds transforms the money into a narrative tool the ramifications of which will echo in Isabel’s life even beyond the completion of the narrative.

In the opening scene, Ralph Touchett is described as “loosely and feebly put together,” with a visage that is at once “ugly, sickly, witty [and] charming.” He appears concurrently “clever and ill,” strolling the grounds with his hands in his pockets, a habit that will reveal itself throughout the work (*Portrait* 19). In the same scene, Lord Warburton lightheartedly tells Mr. Touchett that his son is “a wretched fellow to talk to—a regular cynic,” adding, “He doesn’t seem to believe in anything” (*Portrait* 21). The author himself will refer to Ralph as a philosopher, noting that the highly educated younger Touchett has been granted the key to “modern criticism” (*Portrait* 43, 44). Indeed, the thoughtful, humorous young man has “no aptitude for the banking mystery” and, as the reader learns in the final scene with Mr. Touchett, will have nothing to do with the industry (*Portrait* 159). What he does possess is a deadpan, Twain-like sense of humor about the world and his own mortality. In his final days and tired of his doctor, Sir Matthew Hope, Ralph tells his mother “to send word he was now dead and no longer in need of medical advice” (*Portrait* 475). These characteristics are evident in Ralph Touchett in his final moments no less than in the scene on the Gardencourt lawn in which we meet the prematurely dying Touchett. Moreover, his independence of thought will be a catalyst for Isabel’s transformation.

Six years after he persuades his father to leave Isabel seventy thousand pounds, Isabel learns the truth from Madame Merle, who attempts to injure her with the news that it is her cousin she has to thank for her misery (*Portrait* 464). In their last scene together, the truth comes out between the dying Ralph and Isabel. Ralph’s desire has been to see Isabel “meet the requirements” of her imagination, thereby meeting the requirements of his own (*Portrait* 160, 161). This imagination, taking shape long before he asks his father

to leave Isabel a large sum, is not without some thoughts of love: “the imagination of loving—as distinguished from that of being loved—had still a place in his reduced sketch” (*Portrait* 46). Though marriage has always been out of the question due to their familial relationship and his ill health, Ralph has always loved his cousin. His emotions, like his pocketed hands, are always present though not always visible.

When Ralph discovers that Isabel has become engaged to Osmond, he realizes that her life hasn’t played out the way he imagined. As Gorra notes, “His shocked response to her choice doesn’t simply mark his belief that she’s making a mistake, but also the fact that the story she’s about to write for herself doesn’t match the one he had sketched out; it’s as though his character had gotten away from him” (162-63). In telling his father that the bequest would be in part for his own amusement, Ralph sounds like “a novelist himself; as if, in the words of James’ preface, Isabel ‘hovered before him...interesting him and appealing to him by the simple virtue of what and who she is” (Gorra 109-110). Ralph sees it as his job to prolong her narrative fulfillment: “Hers—and his, and James’s own, and ours” (Gorra 110). In this way, the money isn’t just money, it becomes a narrative tool. It allows Ralph to have the “thrill of seeing what a young lady does who won’t marry Lord Warburton” (*Portrait* 133). It also allows James to finish his portrait—not of a lady—but of a young woman who will become a lady through experience and suffering. Finally, it allows the reader to unfold and realize this narrative, one that would have been entirely different had it not been for Ralph’s desire to observe from a deceptively close distance.

Ralph’s perpetually pocketed hands prefigure his request that his father leave Isabel the money directly, rather than receive half of Ralph’s inheritance. He wishes to be

completely “hands-off,” even as he becomes a catalyst for the events that will come to shape Isabel’s life. This desire to distance oneself from others is a trait he and his standoffish mother share, though the social younger Touchett will do so as a philosophical observer of life, one who is always aware that his stay will be brief.⁴ Early in the novel, Ralph and Isabel discuss the possibility of a ghost residing at Gardencourt. Though Isabel says she wants to see it, her cousin tells her, “It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge” (*Portrait* 52). Ralph has predicted his own behavior in the afterlife. The night he dies, Isabel sees in her room a hovering figure with “his white face—his kind eyes” (*Portrait* 479). It is appropriate that he should at last appear at Gardencourt as a ghost; it’s the sort of presence—unbound by flesh—that he always seemed to desire. He is now, and perhaps forever, able to look on without being involved.

His appearance beyond death is more meaningful than even Ralph could have presaged. Isabel’s “miserable knowledge” has come as an indirect result of her cousin’s actions in life. Ralph Touchett, a character created by James has in turn helped to write Isabel’s narrative. His desire to observe his cousin in her new monied existence has consequences beyond the famously “unfinished” and “uncertain” ending. Not only does he live beyond the reach of his own life, he lives beyond the reach of the novel.

⁴ Isabel’s other would-be suitor, Caspar Goodwood, wishes to be the more active participant in Ralph’s philosophy: while Ralph wishes to make her independent by giving her money, Caspar declares, “It’s to make you independent that I want to marry you.”

“That’s a beautiful sophism,” Isabel responds (*Portrait* 142). Neither marriage nor money will make Isabel as free as she was when she entered the novel.

Likewise, Lord Warburton, by maintaining power over money also maintains some power over the course of events. Warburton's financial autonomy (a strength that, as we saw with Mr. Touchett, is reified in his Lockleigh estate) translates into narrative determination not only for himself, but also for Isabel. His continued love for the young woman, years after her marriage to Osmond, will bring him to Roccanera, a house ruled by her husband's machinations, except—evidently—when it comes to the wealthy parliamentarian. Despite his undoubted political experiences with individuals who are less than forthcoming, it is Warburton who seems oblivious to Osmond's plot to see his daughter engaged to a man whose relation would make Osmond himself wealthy for life. Osmond's immense desire "to make sure of" Warburton, coupled with the British landowner's ability to nonetheless remain untouched by the dilettante art collector—affords Warburton narrative influence over Isabel's transformation from naïve girl to a young woman who will see some of the evil in the world. Like Ralph Touchett, Warburton's financial autonomy means narrative influence that, in his case, reaches beyond his own fortunate reality.

Before Isabel even appears in the doorway at Gardencourt, Mr. Touchett tells Lord Warburton, "Well, you may fall in love with whosoever you please; but you mustn't fall in love with my niece," a directive to which his son replies, "He'll think you mean that as a provocation!" (*Portrait* 23). Provocation or not, the idea seems to have been planted in the Parliamentarian's head. Like the governess in *Turn of the Screw*, Lord Warburton will "crop up" again and again in service of his affliction. Fortunately, his appearances do not augur increasingly evil intentions, but play out his declaration to Isabel that when he is affected by love, "It's for life, Miss Archer, it's for life" (*Portrait*

97). While it may seem that Lord Warburton is a weak character, he proves himself untouchable when faced with the duplicitous Gilbert Osmond. Isabel's would-be British suitor lives up to his description as "the fortunate Lord Warburton" (*Portrait* 65). While not intended, Lord Warburton's autonomy will also have an effect on Isabel's life; his short-lived, apparent courting of Pansy Osmond wakes up Isabel to the unnatural relationship between her husband and Madame Merle.

Having just arrived in Rome with the fading Ralph Touchett, Lord Warburton enters Roccanera on a Thursday evening amid the fray concerning Pansy Osmond and Ned Rosier. Though Gilbert Osmond doesn't see it right away (likely because he doesn't actually witness the meeting of Lord Warburton and his daughter, a moment the reader doesn't get to witness, either), he will come to realize that his wife has sexual influence over the owner of Lockleigh, influence that may displace his frustration with the young Rosier. On a previous Thursday, Osmond offered "little Ned Rosier" his left hand and, in a conversation with Merle, referred to him as a donkey and a nuisance (*Portrait* 309, 314, 315). The problem of course is that the childhood friend of Isabel's, who draws forty thousand francs a year, does not make nearly enough to satisfy the self-congratulatory artist who resides at Roccanera. Officially, he will only admit that Mr. Rosier is not what he'd "dreamed of for Pansy," but the reader knows Rosier is not what he dreamt of for himself.

After Isabel and Madame Merle converse on the subject of Isabel's role in Pansy's engagement to Lord Warburton, Osmond discusses the subject with his wife. Both conversations are manipulative and understated; nevertheless, both end with either spoken or tacit acquiescence on Isabel's part. She tells Madame Merle that she "should

be very glad indeed if, as regards Pansy, it could be arranged” (*Portrait* 347).

Furthermore, it is after the conversation with her husband that Isabel sits by herself in extended meditation. During this time—in the wee hours of the morning—Isabel only briefly considers Lord Warburton’s role in Pansy’s possible engagement. Preferring to give him the benefit of the doubt, she spends most of her time in contemplation of her husband’s ever-present, yet formless deception. Admitting that her money, at bottom, has been a burden, Isabel knows that her husband harbors only contempt for her (*Portrait* 358). She can take no pleasure in things; she has thrown away her life (*Portrait* 363). Departing at last for bed at four o’clock, she sees, like a fingerprint upon the room, the memory of “her husband and Madame Merle unconsciously and familiarly associated” (*Portrait* 364).

This imprint upon her marriage is of course seen not only in her marriage itself but more immediately the plot to marry Pansy to Lord Warburton. The chapter that follows Isabel’s overnight vigil is set at a dance attended by Pansy and Isabel, as well as Rosier (who is there for Pansy) and Warburton (who is ostensibly there for Pansy, but truly there for Isabel). In it, we learn that Warburton has yet to send—or possibly write—a letter to Osmond regarding his desire to marry his daughter, though he first brought it up to Isabel ten days earlier. The reader can well imagine that his hesitation is the result of Warburton’s strong, though likely unconscious awareness that he is not in love with Pansy, but Mrs. Osmond. Shortly after Lord Warburton met Pansy, Ralph articulated this very concern to his close friend. “I hope you’re sure that among Miss Osmond’s merits her being—a—so near her stepmother isn’t a leading one?”

“Good heavens, Touchett!” cried Lord Warburton angrily, “for what do you take me?” (*Portrait* 336).

Warburton’s defensive response echoes in the conversation between he and Isabel at the dance. The parliamentarian initially asserts his conviction that he still wishes to marry Pansy—despite Isabel’s suggestion that he will bore her and his continued awareness that another man—Ned Rosier—is also in love with Pansy. The point that causes him to blush is the confirmation from Isabel that Pansy returns Ned’s affections. “You told me she would have no wish apart from her father’s, and as I’ve gathered that he would favor me—!” he paused a little and then suggested “Don’t you see?” through his blush (*Portrait* 372). One can hear the panic in Warburton’s response; he is not fearful at the thought of losing Pansy, but Isabel. When Isabel suggests that he is not in love (she does not say with whom), Warburton responds, “Ah, yes I am, Mrs. Osmond!” (*Portrait* 372). Despite his feelings, the two will not converse again on the subject. Lord Warburton, evidently uncertain of his intentions to begin with, takes to heart the possibility that he is not what Pansy wants. Robert Weisbuch notes that “everyone seems determined to obliterate” Pansy’s existence (227). Warburton seems to be the exception to this observation. Like Osmond and Merle, he is in a position to take advantage of Pansy, in this case to allow himself to linger in the company of Mrs. Osmond. He declines for Pansy’s sake, however, a perspective no one else seems to consider.⁵ The

⁵ I would argue that despite the affection she claims to have for Pansy, Isabel also turns her back on Osmond’s daughter when Isabel’s own apparent integrity is at stake. In a scene following the dance, set appropriately in Pansy’s “virginal bower,” a large, Gothic chamber “with a dark, heavily-timbered ceiling,” Isabel assumes the role of gatekeeper (390). She tells Pansy that marriage to Rosier is impossible because her father doesn’t want it (391). She even suggests that Pansy and Rosier should not think about each other. In an ironic reversal, she tells her step-daughter that (because her father wishes it), she should make a better marriage, one to someone with a larger fortune than Ned Rosier’s. Using a similar logic as that cited by

letter is never sent, and the next time he appears in the Osmond drawing room, it is only to announce that he is leaving Rome.

As Warburton prattles on nervously about Mr. and Mrs. Osmond visiting Lockleigh, Isabel knows her husband sits “condemned to the sharp pain of loss without the relief of cursing” (*Portrait* 398). The political figure did not arrive in Rome for the purpose of torturing Osmond. Nevertheless, it seems he provided just enough hope to make his departure extremely painful for the one who wanted “to make sure of him” (*Portrait* 396). Warburton, it seems, was on the cusp of manipulating Isabel, but then considered his true intentions and also, likely, the importance of love. Unlike Isabel, Merle, Ned, and Pansy, Lord Warburton deals with Osmond and emerges unscathed. He leaves as easily as he arrived. Not only does he demonstrate his autonomy, but his behavior with regard to Pansy—brief as it is—leads to Isabel’s prolonged contemplation of her life and our exposure to what she understands—and has yet to understand.

For Ralph Touchett and Lord Warburton, financial autonomy ensures narrative authority. These two gentlemen, both of whom make their first appearances in the idyllic setting at Gardencourt, would seem to represent the life-long happiness that wealth can bring. Ralph does indeed make Isabel a wealthy woman, but not before Warburton proposes to her, a union that would ensure a fairy-tale ending of financial comfort. Though both of these characters—in addition to belonging to the elite class themselves—participate in the acquisition and aftermath of Isabel’s wealth, this involvement in her

Isabel upon her engagement to Osmond, Pansy replies, “How do you mean better . . . why should I look for a fortune?” (392). It’s when Isabel brings up Lord Warburton that Pansy displays her insight. “Lord Warburton won’t propose simply to please papa,” she astutely observes (393). Further, she reveals a mature awareness sadly not seen before or after this moment. She tells Isabel that as long as her father pins his hopes on the English aristocrat, “he won’t propose anyone else. And that will be an advantage for me.” Both Isabel and the reader see that Pansy has “a sufficient illumination of her own” (394).

narrative does not exist in the world of Dickens or Austin, where sudden wealth or marriage marks the beginning of the protagonist's happiness and the end of the narrative. Ralph ensures her inheritance in order to *begin* a narrative, one he is anxious to witness. Likewise, Warburton's sudden appearance at Roccanera is the continuation of his romantic narrative begun in the first scene. They are both able to affect Isabel's narrative—something not all characters are able to do, though they all make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies. Moreover, Warburton, the master of five homes, also proves himself the master of Roccanera, yet another fictional house in the work. These two men of financial privilege take a privileged position in the house of fiction.

“Avian Authority: Direct Entrance and the Power of Song”

Given that “merle” means blackbird in French, it is appropriate that the figure that first appears seated at the piano playing “remarkably well,” and “with a discretion of her own” should be named after a songbird known for its rich and melodious calls. Not only does her name prefigure her musical entrance, it is an apt moniker for her role in Isabel's life. From the moment she learns of Isabel's inheritance, Merle employs her artfulness—usually reserved for writing, painting, music, and embroidery—for entrapping the parvenu. She fools even the cynical Mrs. Touchett, who, in an effort to provide Isabel with opportunities, encourages her relationship with Madame Merle, declaring her “one of the most brilliant women in Europe” (*Portrait* 169).

If any character makes a direct entrance, it is Madame Merle, who appears as Mr. Touchett—an unequivocal father figure to Isabel—is dying. Unlike Lord Warburton and

Ralph, she does not receive even a brief description prior to her full appearance on the page. Nevertheless, James continues to tease his readers, not with shadows on a lawn but piano music emanating from the drawing room of Gardencourt before revealing the musician. Given Merle's duplicitous nature, the presentation of her "ample and well-dressed" back to both Isabel and the reader is prophetic. Moreover, despite her itinerant lifestyle, Merle is not introduced by the customary 19th century letter or even one she has authored, as is the case with Henrietta Stackpole. Though Isabel notes that she is often writing, none of these letters appear as requests for hospitality. She is not introduced in any manner, either by the author or another character. As with the uncle in *Turn of the Screw*, she seems to transcend any form of introduction. She is there—suddenly—to be dealt with on a dreary afternoon in autumn as death approaches.

Isabel learns that the woman she presumes to be French was in fact born in Brooklyn to an officer in the U.S. Navy. From the very beginning, Merle is not who she seems, though Isabel finds no fault with the revelation. During their socialization at Gardencourt, the narrating voice observes, "On many of her interlocutors Madame Merle might have produced a startling effect; it was disconcertingly difficult to surprise her." Isabel, however, is too taken with her to notice—"she was too interested in her judicious companion" to notice what others may have (*Portrait* 164). Even though her back is turned to Isabel as she plays the piano, Merle is still not startled, but in fact ready to leap: "the stranger turned quickly around, *as if* but just aware of her presence" (*Portrait* 151 italics mine). It's clear from the beginning that she knows everything before Isabel does.

Adding to this feeling of unspecified peril is the interior setting. As with the scene at Palazzo Roccanera when Isabel first meets Osmond, Isabel is trapped to a certain

extent, this time by the weather which was by now “altogether spoiled” (*Portrait* 150). Although she meets Merle at Gardencourt, the setting is nearly antithetical to the opening passage of the novel. Merle, Isabel, and Mrs. Touchett have tea indoors a bit later, though it is not that most agreeable “hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea” enjoyed in the “splendid summer” (*Portrait* 17). The expanse of possibilities for Isabel now seems contained in a single room, with not a family surrounding her, but a woman who has not always been as she currently seems. Moreover, the drawing-room at Gardencourt is an “apartment of great distances” (*Portrait* 150). While the ailing Mr. Touchett won’t be disturbed by the music, metaphorically it suggests that no one will hear this first encounter between Merle and Isabel. Granted, the perceptive Mrs. Touchett is present during part of the scene, but even she does not at this point see the possible danger posed by Merle. It is notable that when Isabel hears the music, she is looking for her aunt, then hopes that the musician is her cousin, which would suggest that “his anxiety about his father had been relieved” (*Portrait* 150). Instead she finds a stranger—a siren who will only steer her into rocks. Madame Merle will sing one song to Isabel, but the Countess Gemini will sing quite another.

The reader is introduced to Amy Osmond—the Countess Gemini—during Isabel’s first visit to Gilbert Osmond’s villa. Like Merle, the countess makes a direct, even startling entrance with her shimmering plumage and biting remarks about “poor Osmond, with his old curtains and crucifixes” (*Portrait* 219). She will only appear in a few scenes in the novel, though she is never less than forthright with her interlocutor. From the first moment of her appearance, Amy Osmond already knows the secrets her brother and Merle share and is therefore aware of their plans for Isabel. Her distressing

revelation to the young woman, taking place some twenty-seven chapters later, is presaged on her first visit: “I know too much already,” she tells her audience. “The more you know the more unhappy you are” (*Portrait* 220).

Gorra offers the understatement that “Amy Osmond’s presence isn’t as trivial as it seems” (*Portrait* 269). She provides humor, a balance to her deceptive brother, and a sort of Cassandra-like persona; while she doesn’t predict the future, she does know the truth. Nevertheless, she is ignored until it is too late. She is also, crucially, a counterpoint to Isabel; Gorra points out that Isabel’s willful ignorance is a “great bore” to the Countess (*Portrait* 276). Isabel does not wish to hear anything Pansy does not and tells Henrietta she does not wish to publish her mistake (*Portrait* 407). The Countess, by contrast, wishes only to say things no one wants to hear.

While Osmond is described physically as sharp, precise, and focused, his sister has the physical unpredictability of a wild animal, one that might behave erratically at any moment. She is, to be sure, unburdened by social conventions; in not getting up to welcome Isabel, it is clear that she does not “stand” on convention. After the Countess complains about what the hill to the villa has done to her horses and tells Isabel that, quite frankly, she doesn’t usually come to see her brother, in part because she is not invited, she warns her, “But don’t sit there; that chair’s not what it looks. There are some very good seats here, but there are also some horrors” (*Portrait* 219). This reminds the reader of the moment when Merle tells Isabel, “But when I’ve to come out and into a strong light—then, my dear, I’m a horror” (*Portrait* 168)! At the villa, the Countess Gemini delivers these remarks “with a series of little jerks and pecks, of roulades of shrillness.” Even her Italian accent seems “in adversity” with “good American” speech (*Portrait*

219). When Osmond remarks that his daughter is a “convent-flower,” his sister, “with a flutter of her ruffles,” cries, “Oh, the convents, the convents!...Speak to me of the convents” (*Portrait* 220)! She is, in no uncertain terms, a bird; the reader sees her avian features and hears the rustling of her colorful skirts, jewelry, and other accouterments as she calls out in her natural language whatever comes to her mind. As Gorra notes, “Merle worries about the Countess Gemini, worries about what that particular piece of flightiness might say” (*Portrait* 140). This characteristic alone places her in direct opposition to her brother, who is noted “not so much [for] what he said and did, but rather what he withheld” (*Portrait* 224).

The Countess Gemini will certainly “sing” to Isabel. She alone is the source of arrant truth. As Roslyn Jolly so importantly observes, the Countess “takes over the role of the narrator in being the custodian of the historical information that will override the plots of Isabel and her friends and enemies” (*Portrait* 56). She not only knows everything about Osmond, Merle, and Pansy, she has no compunction about divulging this information to Osmond’s wife. While Isabel, Mrs. Touchett, Ralph, Henrietta, and even the unassuming Ned Rosier each have their suspicions about Osmond and Merle, the Countess is the only one who holds the key to their suspicions; she is the seeming fool who in fact is the most knowledgeable.

“‘Here I Am’: Direct Entrance and the New Woman”

“The New Woman, a significant cultural icon of the of the fin de siècle, departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman. She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting.” Though the term was not coined until 1894 by feminist

writer and public speaker Sarah Grand (pseudonym of Frances Elizabeth Clarke), many traits of the late 19th century “New Woman” can be seen in Henrietta Stackpole, journalist for *The Interviewer* and Lydia Touchett, fervently independent wife of Daniel Touchett (Diniejko). Through her work, Henrietta supports herself as well as her widowed sister’s children. While spending time together in London, Isabel recognizes in her traveling companion an independent, adventurous leader: “Henrietta was a literary woman, and the great advantage of being a literary woman was that you could go everywhere and do everything. They would dine at a coffee house and go afterwards to the play; they would frequent the Abbey and the British Museum and find out where Doctor Johnson had lived, and Goldsmith and Addison” (*Portrait* 114). While she travels extensively for both work and pleasure, Henrietta Stackpole is rabidly New-World American and anti-Old World European. She abhors Mrs. Touchett’s habit of keeping servants at her Florentine palazzo and prides herself on being counted among “the companions of freemen” (*Portrait* 89). She sees herself as the companion of—and equal to—all free men of the United States and cannot countenance the sexual, social, and professional constraints put upon women. She can’t imagine herself as anything less than equal to any man granted the rights to travel, work, and speak as he chooses. As Ralph says of her, Henrietta smells “of the Future—it almost knocks one down!” (*Portrait* 88).

Though she does not support herself through her own work, Mrs. Touchett, who is old enough to be Henrietta’s mother, is intelligent and fiercely independent. She chooses to live in her Florentine villa, Palazzo Crescentini, much of the year, away from her husband at Gardencourt and largely separated from Ralph, though he travels to Italy every winter for his health. Born in the United States, Lydia Touchett is a blending of the

old world and the new. She adheres to traditional values, particularly concerning female social conventions, yet she is anything but a traditional wife. She values her physical, emotional, and intellectual independence above all else: “she believe[s], always, in seeing for oneself” (*Portrait* 35). As the author observes of Mrs. Touchett, she “might do a great deal of good, but she never please[s].” A “plain-faced old woman” with no tolerance for sentimentality, Mrs. Touchett maintains “an extreme respect for her own motives” (*Portrait* 30). Her indefatigable resistance to emotion seems a bulwark against the stereotype of her gender, though one suspects this is not conscious, but the inevitable display of her personality. Both strong female characters make entrances that, while complicated, ultimately display each woman’s source of strength. Henrietta Stackpole and Lydia Touchett both make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies.⁶

Mrs. Touchett’s entrance would seem to be mitigated by the fact that she is discussed by the gentlemen at Gardencourt before she is seen by the reader. One must keep in mind, however, that she is absent from afternoon tea because she has chosen, as she has numerous times before, to retire to her room immediately upon returning to the English estate. Moreover, much of what Ralph and his father discuss pertains to Lydia Touchett’s terse style of telegraphic communication. It’s a style that exemplifies Lydia’s peremptory, dispassionate character. (As we will see, Lydia Touchett and Henrietta Stackpole are each introduced through writing that succinctly illustrates her consistent, business-like nature.) A message that includes the phrase “impudent clerk,” for example,

⁶ For more on James’s position on women’s rights, see Habegger’s *Henry James and the Woman Business*. “Habegger effectively argues that with *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians*, James endorsed the very conservative views of his father...this excellent study nonetheless fails to point out that James created Henrietta Stackpole as a prototype of the New Woman and as a foil for a more traditional Isabel” (Mathews 193).

is enough to tell the Touchett men “she has given the hotel clerk a dressing” (*Portrait* 24). Though Lydia is talked about in absentia, the nature of the conversation is guided by the strength of her character. At one point, Mr. Touchett observes, “She never telegraphs when you would expect it—only when you don’t” (*Portrait* 24). He seems to anticipate his wife’s entrance not on the lawn at Gardencourt but in a subsequent chapter as an uninvited and unanticipated guest in Isabel’s childhood home. Mrs. Touchett will enter the novel on her own terms; she marches headlong into the narrative as she enters the Albany home owned by Isabel’s grandmother as though it was now and had always been hers. She does not enter the novel primarily as Mr. Touchett’s wife, but the obscure aunt of a young woman over whom she will have brief control.

Upon entering the Albany home, she does not cordially introduce herself to Isabel, but simply asks the rhetorical, “I suppose you’re one of the daughters” (*Portrait* 34). As Machlan points out, what follows is “perhaps the most prosaic exchange of the novel” (399). Mrs. Touchett asks the young woman how much money she expects to get for the house, a question the young woman isn’t remotely prepared to answer. Her aunt then insults the structure by calling it a “very bad house,” but suggests it might fetch a fair price due to its location; she tells Isabel whoever buys it will likely “pull it down and make a row of shops.”

“I hope they won’t pull it down,” Isabel replies; “I’m extremely fond of it” (*Portrait* 35). The sentimentality is lost on Lydia Touchett; she coldly reminds her niece that her father died here. To Isabel’s “crazy aunt Lydia,” this is reason enough for the house to be promptly abandoned (*Portrait* 34). This part of the exchange prefigures Lydia Touchett’s reaction to her own son’s death about seven years later. In her by now familiar

“disengaging” manner, she tells Isabel, “Go and thank God you have no children” (*Portrait* 480).

Perhaps because she doesn’t see much point in leaving the young woman in a house she has no idea what to do with, her aunt invites Isabel back to Florence (although they first make a stop at Gardencourt). The invitation is, nevertheless, somewhat ironic, as Mrs. Touchett—even at Isabel’s age, one suspects—would have stayed behind to take care of her property rather than go to Europe accompanied by someone she didn’t know who demanded that she “be very good and do everything” she was told (*Portrait* 36). It’s telling that she invites Isabel to Florence and not England; she wishes to see her niece in the Italian home where she enjoys her privacy rather than the estate where her husband resides. Lydia Touchett sees herself and we will see her as an independent woman, despite her married status. Being Mrs. Touchett does not preclude her from being an example of the New Woman among the characters in *Portrait*.

For all of her modern sensibilities, Mrs. Touchett still abides by certain gender-based, 19th century taboos. Shortly after Isabel’s arrival at Gardencourt, Mrs. Touchett, Ralph, Isabel, and Lord Warburton socialize until approximately ten in the evening, when Mrs. Touchett wishes to go to bed and insists that Isabel accompany her. She tells her niece, “You can’t stay alone with the gentlemen. You’re not—you’re not at your blest Albany, my dear.” Though “the gentlemen” consist of her own son and a trusted neighbor, Mrs. Touchett feels obligated to abide by the social etiquette of her adopted country. Insisting on her own preference, as Mrs. Touchett is wont to do, sometimes means following the rules that have been determined for herself and other women. Isabel tells her aunt that she always wants to know what one shouldn’t do, not necessarily to do

it, as Lydia Touchett supposes, but “So as to choose” (*Portrait* 67).

This will prove to be a prophetic statement. As we’ve seen, Isabel chooses to be essentially alone with Osmond in his villa; if the previous situation wasn’t threatening, her association with Osmond certainly is. Prior to this, however, Mrs. Touchett encourages the budding relationship between Isabel and Madame Merle, which, of course, will lead to Isabel’s destructive marriage to Osmond. Not long after Isabel and Merle meet, Mrs. Touchett tells her niece, “She is incapable of making a mistake; she’s the most tactful woman I know.” This observation is true enough, though not in the complimentary way Mrs. Touchett intends it. Merle’s care with language is in fact an indication of her disingenuousness. Lydia Touchett finishes her address with, in retrospect, a rather ominous set of statements: “I wish you to know her. I think it will be a good thing for you. Serena Merle hasn’t a fault” (*Portrait* 169). Though Isabel first meets Osmond at Palazzo Crescentini, “Mrs. Touchett was not present” (*Portrait* 212). Isabel’s aunt seems to not only approve of the meeting, but because Merle is present, Mrs. Touchett doesn’t feel the need to add her female as well as her protective presence for Isabel’s sake. Near the end of the novel, when Isabel has returned to Gardencourt as Mrs. Osmond, she tells her aunt that she and Merle are no longer close. “She made a convenience of me,” she tells her.

“Ah,” cried Mrs. Touchett, “so she did of me! She does of every one.” True to her persona, Mrs. Touchett does not apologize for leading Isabel down the wrong path; no hugs are exchanged, and Mrs. Touchett expresses very little emotion, either for her niece’s deplorable situation or her own folly. The brief conversation seems truncated, ending with Isabel’s relief “that her aunt’s questions were over” (*Portrait* 475). It’s

unfortunate that Mrs. Touchett's certainty about her own opinions translates into unwavering praise for Madame Merle. While Mrs. Touchett has no patience for Osmond, she is unable to believe the he and Merle might be aligned and is therefore blind to the threat against Isabel. Isabel would have done well to follow Lydia Touchett's concern for one's own finances, rather than her opinion of a single individual. The strength of Mrs. Touchett's character, however, renders such accurate judgments difficult for Isabel, and perhaps the reader as well.

In one of the more humorous scenes of the novel, Mrs. Touchett's opinion that American hotels are the worst in the world clashes with the equally strong, though antithetical opinion of Miss Stackpole. This discussion, occurring early in their acquaintance, sets the tone of the relationship between these two strong, modern women. In his introduction to the New York Edition, James apologizes for Henrietta Stackpole, claiming she was the result of an excess of his zeal, his tendency to *overtreat*: "Henrietta must have been at that time a part of my wonderful notion of the lively," he writes (*Portrait* 15). Lively is an understatement, yet the reporter in petticoats requires no apologies. Her unflinching—though at times contradictory—opinions provide not only comic relief but also a tether to the other side of the pond. She is as fiercely American as she is financially and emotionally independent.

It's little wonder, then, that the letter she has written to Isabel provides a template for her character. The missive exemplifies her manner of speech, a hurried, sometimes capricious nature, an inability (or unwillingness) to see people and places through rose-colored lenses, her attitude towards marriage (as it applies to others), and her frequently presumptuous nature. Even her salutation first draws attention to herself before her

addressee: “Here I am, my lovely friend” (*Portrait* 78). Miss Stackpole “writes” herself into the novel; she does not require and would likely not countenance a letter of introduction.

Further, in contrast to the money-based dynamic between Isabel and Ralph, no other character in the work will write Henrietta’s narrative. James himself admits that Henrietta’s full existence on the page is more than even he intended; her superabundance was not an element of his plan. His purpose was to avert any “thinness” that might otherwise creep into the work and satisfy a self-imposed obligation to be amusing (Preface 15). As Carolyn Mathews points out, “The comic tone saturating James’s descriptions of Henrietta Stackpole should be interpreted” as a strategy for “imagining and managing the threats of social change” (191).⁷ Despite the profession he grants her, it seems that James hedges his own bet; he can’t quite take her seriously and doesn’t expect his readers to do so. While it’s true that James provides some introductory comments describing the “van of progress,” the journalist rewrites this passage more succinctly in her own words and she will continue, throughout the work, to write for herself—both professionally and narratively (*Portrait* 55). James grants the writer within the work greater power than he at first supposes; while he begins by describing her as though she is a character he will be able to control, nothing but her own words will do. The New Woman and journalist in a new world of mass culture more than maintains her autonomy; she will act as a counterweight to the more traditional Isabel. Indeed, after Mrs. Osmond has departed the narrative, it is Henrietta who will have the last word.

⁷ Mathews also points out that “Isabel sees [Henrietta] as ‘brave: she goes into cages, she flourishes lashes, like a spangled lion-tame.’” The circus imagery, which James added in the 1908 version of *Portrait*, saturates Henrietta’s character and thus the aggressiveness of the “woman movement” with a comic light, but it serves to emphasize mobility, activity, and female high-spiritedness as well” (194).

Though Henrietta's missive is an entertaining summation of her character, the writer for the *Interviewer* is first seen disembarking from a train—that mode of transportation so closely associated with the transformation and modernization of the United States. Her arrival in the text is marked by a literal arrival—both of herself and a new era; from the very beginning she is, as Mathews notes, a moving picture (189). Contrast this with Isabel, whose arrival in England is never actually witnessed; she is simply placed by the author in the doorway at Gardencourt. Moreover, as we saw, Mrs. Touchett discovers Isabel in a house owned by her grandmother. The protagonist of the novel is found in the library, choosing a book based on the frontispiece, then retiring to that “mysterious apartment which [lies] beyond the library and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office.” Isabel, whose knowledge is based mainly “in the idleness of her grandmother's house,” lingers in child-like enjoyment of a book in both the intellectual and domestic space of previous generations (*Portrait* 33). Henrietta's self-authored introduction and arrival in modernity contrasts sharply with Isabel's preference for others' words and hesitation to leave the past.

While Isabel has resisted adulthood in an old house, Henrietta stands at the entrance to all that is new. “Osmond finds her as ‘odious’ as ‘a new steel pen,’ for she ‘talks as a new steel pen writes’ and she ‘thinks and moves and walks and looks exactly as she talks’” (Mathews 196). Though the connoisseur of all things traditional intends these words as only a harsh, biting insult, it's a metaphor the mass-market journalist and author of her own literary introduction would likely appreciate. She is a new brand, to be sure, a striking contrast to the more traditional Lady Pensil, who will never understand her. Like the steel writing instrument, she will not bend or break. She is something few

have ever seen. “While Isabel lingers in doorways that serve to fix and frame her, Henrietta constantly bursts through doors without knocking” (Mathews 193).

The young writer bursts onto the scene with certain ideas about marriage. In her letter to Isabel, she jokingly suggests that perhaps her friend has already married a lord (*Portrait* 78). Shortly after arriving, she tells Ralph that getting married would “improve” him, and adds that it’s everyone’s duty to get married (*Portrait* 85). (He doesn’t ask if this applies to Henrietta herself, though one suspects she would answer that it certainly does not.) This is as far as she gets in her efforts to marry off Ralph, though she makes a concerted effort to join Isabel and Caspar Goodwood in holy matrimony. A few days after Henrietta’s arrival, she tells Isabel that Goodwood has arrived in England on the same steamer as herself. Perhaps because he has traveled across the Atlantic of his own accord and entirely for the purpose of seeing Isabel, the journalist has taken up his cause. It seems she is in equal parts afraid that Isabel will marry “one of these fell Europeans,” and enchanted with the idea of her rightful union with “a thoroughly grand man” from Boston (*Portrait* 109). Hearing Isabel’s lack of concern for a man who has been “extremely attentive” to her, and to whom, according to Henrietta, Isabel once “gave great encouragement,” she attempts to employ Ralph’s help in bringing the two together under the roof of Gardencourt (*Portrait* 110, 109). Goodwood will decline Ralph’s invitation to join the group at the English estate, but that doesn’t mark the end of Henrietta’s plotting.

While in London, Henrietta conspires to have Goodwood visit Isabel at Pratt’s Hotel. When Isabel rejects him, Henrietta again expresses her frustration to Ralph. First, she describes her machinations: “It was a little plot of mine. I let him know that we were

in London, and when it had been arranged that I should spend the evening out I sent him a word—the word we just utter to the ‘wise.’” Her plan backfired, she tells him; Isabel “sent him back to America” (*Portrait* 149). This was, evidently, Henrietta’s last chance. In the next chapter, Isabel meets Madame Merle who takes over the plot of Isabel’s marriage.

Friend and foe alike attempt to write Isabel’s narrative. Her friends Ralph, Mrs. Touchett, and Henrietta have the best of intentions and attempt to improve Isabel’s life through money, advice on etiquette and appropriate friendships, and marriage to a well-suited American. Osmond and Merle, however, will write the most crucial chapters in her life. While the nefarious pair most acutely destroys Isabel’s life by successfully taking away her money, freedom, and happiness, her friends are not without faults or ulterior motives. Ralph wishes to see what Isabel will do for his own amusement; Mrs. Touchett encourages what will prove to be a destructive relationship with Madame Merle, whose artistic skills and social status blind Isabel’s aunt to her friend’s true nature, and Henrietta seems more bent on marrying Isabel to an American than seeing her happy. This doesn’t leave much for Isabel to determine for herself; it leaves a space where her selfhood once resided.

“Framed: Isabel, the Indirect Entrance, and the Evacuated Self”

My final section in this chapter concerns only one character for a very important reason: Isabel is the *only* major character to make an indirect entrance and the *only* one to lose her autonomy. Not only is she talked about before her entrance at Gardencourt, she is frequently discussed thereafter, primarily by Merle and Osmond, but first by her

friends, Ralph and Mrs. Touchett. Ralph twice asks his mother what she plans to do with Isabel (*Portrait* 46, 49). While Mrs. Touchett bristles at the suggestion that he treats her as a “yard of calico,” she cannot help but participate in the presumed ownership of the young woman she found in Albany: “She’s my niece; she’s not [Mr. Touchett’s],” she tells her son (*Portrait* 49, 46). Later, in a particularly illustrative articulation of James’s efforts, Madame Merle states, “I don’t pretend to know what people are meant for. I only know what I can do with them” (*Portrait* 207). Starting before Isabel’s entrance and continuing throughout the work, the reader is reminded that Isabel is an item to which something—perhaps many things—can be done.

“How much power Isabel has at any point in the novel directly correlates with how free she is to leave-or stay-wherever she currently resides” (Machlan 398). The reader follows Isabel from her childhood home in Albany, to Gardencourt, and finally to the hard, barren “black rock,” of Roccanera, and sees the corresponding change in her character (Sabiston 132). Leaving New York, Isabel abandons “the only house to which she has any real claim” (Machlan 400). Arriving in England in June under the auspices of Mrs. Touchett ensures temporary safety and the illusion of endless possibilities. The decent from Gardencourt to Roccanera is the erection of architectural and narrative walls. She is the predominant figure behind the “vast front” wall of James’s house of fiction. Isabel’s movement from one house to another in fiction takes place within the house *of* fiction. In each location, Isabel lingers in a room—or many rooms—and doorways, the structure of houses and portraits coming together to frame the subject of study. Her three distinct entrances illustrate her fall from an Edenic garden to the Gothic space where “her genre and dwelling are chosen for her” (Machlan 402).

If Isabel hasn't been seen prior to her moment in the first doorway, she has been talked about by the men having tea on the lawn. Prior to meeting her, they speculate on the meaning of her independence. Ralph enumerates: "is it used in a moral or financial sense? Does it mean they've been left well off, or that they wish to be under no obligations? Or does it simply mean that they're fond of their own way?" His father asserts, "What ever else it means, it's sure to mean that" (*Portrait* 24). It's particularly meaningful that Isabel is being discussed and will enter a scene occupied by men. She literally stands on the threshold of a world dominated—financially, politically, and sexually—by men. While she has crossed the Atlantic accompanied by her aunt, she has been set adrift at Gardencourt, responsible for finding her own way around.

Isabel makes two additional entrances in Italy that are not unlike her appearance at the English estate, though there are also significant differences. The first of these takes place in Mrs. Touchett's Florentine villa, Palazzo Crescentini, to which Isabel has been brought and to which Merle has been invited to stay for a month. Gilbert Osmond visits the two women because Madame Merle has, at this point, twice expressed the hope that Isabel "might know him":

Gilbert Osmond came to see Madame Merle, who presented him to the young lady lurking at the other side of the room. Isabel took on this occasion little part in the talk; she scarcely even smiled when the others turned to her invitingly; she sat there as if she had been at the play and had paid even a large sum for her place. Mrs. Touchett was not present, and these two had it, for the effect of brilliancy, all their own way...It all had the rich readiness that would have come from rehearsal (*Portrait* 212).

As she did at Gardencourt, Isabel lurks at a distance from those who would speak to and of her; she enters the scene before entering the conversation. At the moment she first

enters the novel, she is newly arrived in England; at Palazzo Crescentini (once again under the auspices of Mrs. Touchett), Isabel is a recent arrival in Florence. Finally, in both instances, the characters with whom she will interact are presented in the chapter preceding her appearance; in each case, there is much ado about Isabel's particular situation in the preceding chapter.

Though her hesitant entrances are similar, Isabel is reticent in the presence of Osmond and Merle; at Gardencourt her language is a continuous, lilting, almost child-like expression of thoughts. Upon her arrival, there is a good deal of conversation at Gardencourt, while there is almost none at Crescentini. Indeed, Osmond speaks the only lines of dialogue recorded at the scene in the villa, and these flow as a paragraph interrupted only by his own, momentary caesura. What follows this pause is an appeal to pathos as well as an echo of Merle's request. "I should be so happy if you could know my daughter," he tells Isabel, who consents not only to this, but to visiting his hill-top villa, and thereby removing herself even further from the protection of Mrs. Touchett (*Portrait* 213).

Both Gail Marshall and Michael Gorra describe the scene in theatrical terms. Marshall observes that "Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle, more seasoned performers [than Isabel and Pansy], have to negotiate their occupation of the exquisitely conjured domestic spaces they inhabit and in which they most self-consciously act. Initially, Isabel is their intrigued spectator" (266). Unlike the scene at Gardencourt where Isabel makes her first entrance on the stage, the performance here is well-rehearsed, but only by Merle and Osmond. For his part, Michael Gorra notes, "Isabel isn't always onstage, and she isn't the only character whose mind James allows us to enter. But she's what the other

characters talk about, even or especially, when she's off the page" (66). Before the reader, Mr. Touchett, Ralph, and Lord Warburton see her at Gardencourt, the gentlemen on the lawn have been discussing the possible manifestations of Miss Archer's status as "quite independent" (*Portrait* 24). Prior to her appearance before Osmond and Merle, Isabel is discussed with as much enthusiasm, but for those who would conspire against her, the only ramification of independence in question is that of money. Merle tells Osmond, "There's no doubt whatever about her fortune. I've seen it, as I may say" (*Portrait* 209). For Osmond and Merle, vulnerability is the only hoped-for result of youth, independence, and possibility.

Her (re)entrance over three hundred pages into the novel reminds the reader of her entrance at Gardencourt. On one of the Osmond's social Thursday evenings, Ned Rosier meets "Mrs. Osmond coming out of the deep doorway." At Gardencourt she wore a black dress; now, as Mrs. Osmond, she wears "black velvet," looking, according to Ned, "high and splendid" yet "radiantly gentle" (*Portrait* 309). If Isabel looked out upon the expansive lawn at Gardencourt—the multitude of possibilities before her—her life has now been narrowed to the walls of Palazzo Roccanera. Her first entrance takes place within an "ample doorway"; in the villa, she is framed by the more stylish "gilded doorway." She strikes Ned Rosier "as the picture of a gracious lady," yet the reader will see that her new life has not transformed her for the better (*Portrait* 310). Gorra writes of this third entrance, "The repetition is unobtrusive, but James means us to notice it and it serves to mark a difference; almost as if her story were starting over" (224).

She has no compassion for Ned on this first meeting; when he tells her he wishes to talk to Pansy, she replies, "I can't help you there" (*Portrait* 310). She in fact mimics

the harsh, condescending language of both Merle and Osmond towards her childhood friend. Merle has told him that he won't burn up with his love for Pansy. When Ned tells Mrs. Osmond that her husband is cold-blooded, she smiles the now familiar "mystical smile" and tells him, "You can't expect every one to be as hot as yourself" (*Portrait* 319). Osmond, in conversing with Merle about Ned, says, "Oh, he's a nuisance—with his eternal majolica" (*Portrait* 315). When it's her turn to have a conversation with Merle about Ned, Mrs. Osmond declares, "Mr. Rosier's a nuisance" (*Portrait* 346). She won't help Ned even though she knows it would be disingenuous for Lord Warburton to marry Pansy. Nevertheless, she feels beholden to her husband: "It seemed to Isabel that if she could make it her duty to bring about such an event she should play the part of a good wife" (*Portrait* 348). Her perceived independence at Gardencourt has been narrowed to a single option. Even when she returns to Gardencourt to be with Ralph in his final hours, it is not the place it once was. Isabel is made to wait for Mrs. Touchett in the drawing room like a stranger, the objects around her taking on a consciousness and "watching her trouble with grotesque grimaces." Even in the place that gave her so much joy, she finds only "wide brown rooms" (*Portrait* 471). She returns to Rome because there are walls everywhere now, and one is the same as another. Throughout the novel James has built up houses around her, though for Isabel there has never been ownership of the space she occupies. This arrant lack of control over domestic space means her complete loss of autonomy. James builds the house in Albany, as well as Gardencourt, Osmond's villa, and Roccanera within the framework of his "square and spacious" house of fiction, eternal home of his "vivid individual" and seals it up, "brick upon brick" (Preface 8, 11).

As we have seen, the characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* exhibit power through

different means. Daniel Touchett and Gilbert Osmond, who so uncannily resemble the houses they own, possess the ability to fill Isabel's life with hope and tranquility or fear and deep regret. James is certain to put this dichotomy front and center by pairing each man with his property from the moment of his introduction. Unfortunately for Isabel, the edenic Gardencourt setting and Daniel Touchett will only figure in her story near the beginning. Moreover, it is significant that Mr. Touchett is first seen outside and Gilbert Osmond comes to the reader as part of an indoor stillife. Touchett's placement in the idyllic outdoor setting connotes nearly endless possibilities; Osmond's entrance connotes the limitations imposed by the walls of the structure in which we find him. He is, in fact, nearly always seen indoors. More importantly, with a single brief exception at his villa, Isabel is always indoors when she is with him. The money bestowed to her by her kindly uncle as he dies in the house he has come to love is not the happy Dickensian ending, but the beginning of her fall that ends in the gilded doorways of Roccanera.

Ralph Touchett and Lord Warburton, meanwhile, have an economic and narrative influence over Isabel. While it is Mr. Touchett's money she receives, this would not have happened without Ralph's interference. His actions change the trajectory of her narrative. Along with James, Ralph is writing Isabel's story; he, as much as James or the reader, wants to see what will happen to her. The hopeful opening setting and admiration of the insightful, humorous, Ralph Touchett belie the tragic ending he both enables and witnesses.

After she has become Mrs. Osmond, Lord Warburton will attempt to get close to her (perhaps unconsciously) by feigning a courtship with Pansy. It may be Isabel's ability to witness Osmond and Merle's deep, unnatural concern for Pansy's engagement to the

wealthy parliamentarian from a distance that leads to her meditation and epiphany about her husband and a woman she once considered a friend. Lord Warburton's money is dangled in front of Osmond just long enough for Isabel to see what a temptation her own money must have been for her duplicitous husband. Her realization of Osmond and Merle's "familiar" relationship, affected by Lord Warburton, is the narrative precursor to a later and more detailed revelation.

Merle—the blackbird of rich, languid calls, and the Countess Gemini—the loud, shrill, tropical bird—both sing to Isabel. Merle's song is one of persuasion, while Gilbert Osmond's sister sings the truth. Again, James puts a rather fine point on each woman's musicality by introducing Merle and the Countess in the very context of her greatest power. The duplicitous Merle does not present her face to Isabel, but has her back to her as she plays the lilting melody. The Countess, on the other hand, looks at Isabel directly when she tells her that the appurtenances of the room are not as they appear. She delivers her warnings with a series of shrill musical notes marked by the "jerks and pecks" of a bird following its natural inclinations (*Portrait* 219). The author creates symmetry by placing one woman of commensurate power on either side of Isabel, who follows the call that seems more melodic.

Lydia Touchett and Henrietta Stackpole form another pair of female characters who make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies. Though they are of different generations, both women represent the arrival of the New Woman. Each character determines her own entrance in the novel; Mrs. Touchett lets herself into Isabel's home and immediately expresses her personal and economic assessment of the structure and its resident. As a "journalist in petticoats," Henrietta introduces herself through her own

words and later descends from a train, that new and transformative mode of transportation. The more traditional Isabel would have done well to follow the strong-willed, independent nature of either woman.

The four thematical sets leave Isabel to stand “there in perfect isolation” (*Portrait* 8). This also makes evident the fact that Isabel, the lone focus of James’s work, is the only character that exhibits an indirect entrance and the loss of autonomy; all of the other characters make a direct entrance and maintain their autonomy. The perfect alignment of these narrative elements means that there is an imbalance of power. Isabel is “plotted against” from every angle (Bell 753). Not only is she the focus of the overall plot of the novel, “she is “victimized by both a well-meaning secret plot to endow her with money and a wicked one to marry her for that money” (Bell 752). Moreover, she is never allowed her own machinations, even to improve her life; she is only allowed to stand still and be framed by “the narrative ideas of what she will be and do,” ideas imposed by other characters, James himself, as well as the reader (Bell 753). It’s fitting that a young woman who grew up so captivated by novels would find herself framed by a narrative structure as she steps onto the lawn at Gardencourt. Fitting, yet tragic, as she alone has become both subject and object of multiple voyuers at multiple windows in multiple houses.

No such singular figure of tragedy is the focus of *The Turn of the Screw*, which is not to say that it is not a tragic story. It is only to say that there is plenty of tragedy to go around. Within the text, a young woman transforms into a murderer, an eight-year-old girl becomes ill and a ten-year-old boy dies. Prior to the events of the story there was tragedy as well. Mrs. Grose tells the governess that Peter Quint behaved inappropriately

with Miles and the former governess, Miss Jessel, died while an employee of the Bly estate. Though she did not die in the house, it is likely that the indirect cause of her demise took place in the house. Peter Quint also died while working at the Essex estate, the victim of an icy path and too much drink. This is the legacy that the governess inherits when she arrives at Bly, one she will augment through her transformation and subsequent actions.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the equal distribution of direct and indirect entrances—autonomy maintained and autonomy lost—in addition to the dark seclusion of Bly, means a more subtle and varied examination of my theme. I find that the characters who occupy a story not grounded in reality also exist in a realm where neither entrance nor autonomy is absolute. I will again identify pairs of characters based on entrance. In the case of the novella, these subsets are not only linked thematically, they are also, happily, linked by concurrent entrance. This happens even when one character makes a direct and the other an indirect entrance, such as the pairing of the uncle and Miles. My examination of this work reveals a pattern between autonomy and entrapment in the Bly estate—the fictional house within the house of fiction.

Chapter Two

It's Coming From Inside the House: Bly and Autonomy in *The Turn of the Screw*

The first nine pages of *The Turn of the Screw* establish the context of the story's telling, the story of the original manuscript, one "written in the most beautiful hand," as well as the many layers of transcription that have been required to bring the written narrative to the reader. The framing story also introduces nearly all of the characters, several in only the most cursory way. Those who occupy the immediate, Christmas-time fireside scene include Douglas and the unnamed narrator of the prefatory tale. Also filling these pages are the guests required for the party. Douglas teases his listeners by alluding to certain elements of the "quite too horrible" story—one, he claims, none but he has ever heard (*Turn* 3). It is a tale set at Bly, an English country estate owned by a man known only as "the uncle." The owner does not live at Bly, but chooses to live in London, leaving his orphaned niece and nephew, Flora and Miles, to exist in the sprawling house with various servants. One of the "downstairs" servants is Mrs. Grose—"an excellent woman" who had formerly been maid to the uncle's mother. The children also live with the memory of a governess, "a most respectable person—until her death." It is the main character and original author of the manuscript, an individual known only as the governess, who will replace her. It is to this young woman that Douglas will dedicate the most time (*Turn* 8).

Years after the Christmastime gathering, the narrator will inherit the manuscript read by Douglas. He copies it, and adds what the reader will come to regard as the framing narrative. Like the governess, who is both author and narrator of her tale, the

unnamed narrator pens as well as narrates this introductory scene in addition to transcribing the manuscript. By adding to the story proper, the narrator concurrently enhances and obscures the reader's understanding of the events that follow. Douglas's glowing terms for the governess—colored by his feelings of love as a young man—represent the reader's introduction to her, yet it soon becomes clear in the story that her near perfection must be questioned.

Douglas strongly suggests that she had fallen in love with the uncle when she applied for the position. Despite the mysterious circumstances of the previous governess's demise and the natural concern a new applicant would have for "necessary danger to life," Douglas tells us that the most agreeable governess "faced the music, she engaged." A double entendre quickly becomes evident; after considering the salary, she succumbs to "the seduction exercised by the splendid young man." Douglas tells his listeners that other applicants had not succumbed due to the all-too-difficult condition that the children's governess should never trouble, appeal, complain, or write to the uncle about anything. The issue of the letter concerning "Little Miles" will prove to be a challenge to this request. Nevertheless, to the governess and children alike, the uncle will remain off limits (*Turn 9*).

Like Douglas and the narrator, who only appear in the prefatory pages, the uncle only appears in his London home. Though, in the former case, the characters exist within a particular narrative frame, and the latter in a particular geographical location, all three add a phantasmagoric element to the work by virtue of their concurrent presence and non-presence. The uncle, in fact, is described as one who might appear to the "anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage" as a figure from "a dream or an old novel" (*Turn 7*). He is seen,

yet not quite real. While the uncle's absence from Bly is very likely a factor in the young woman's behavior, I will examine the governess's transformation in light of her interactions with the alleged ghosts, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel.

Quint is the only character not mentioned in the opening pages. (It is impossible to know whether Douglas fails to mention him or the narrator intentionally leaves him out of the introductory words.) Nevertheless, Quint's bearing on the events is undeniable; his notable exclusion means that the reader will first encounter him in the darkness of ignorance, just as the governess does as she walks the grounds at night. Because all other characters are mentioned, Quint's appearance and the uncovering of who he was in life come as quite a shock to the reader. The effects of this particular appearance are fleshed out in the section on the governess.

“Framed: Author and Manuscript in Old Faded Ink”

I consider the manuscript to be a character for several reasons. Primarily, James wants the reader to view the manuscript as an entity separate from the events that make up the story as well as the 1898 novella entitled *The Turn of the Screw*. The degree to which the governess's manuscript was created for the purpose of documenting events after they took place or as a largely fictionalized work will never be known. Whatever the case, it is the work within the work, and forms the basis for the expanding *mise en abyme* effect within the novella. Additionally, while there are a number of power dynamics that exist within the story, it is the manuscript that is most manipulated, both in its creation and revelation. All of the characters “exist” within the manuscript; any changes that are made to dialog, characters, or events are done *to* the manuscript. At the same time, the

written work discussed in the framing narrative and serving as the basis for the story proper is the most sublimated and protected yet most handled of any character in the work. The manuscript makes a grand and indirect entrance because it is hidden and protected—it must be retrieved from both memory and physical location in order to be read allowed to an audience or read privately. In so doing, the manuscript manifests its purpose as an object to be handled—both in its creation and revelation. (Even the word “manuscript” has its roots in “manus,” Latin for “hand.”) The manuscript’s indirect entrance and loss of autonomy illustrate its deep sublimation and its arrant objectification.

While it is the men at Gardencourt who discuss the meaning of Isabel’s independence before she enters the novel, it is those gathered around a Christmastime hearth—largely the narrator and Douglas—who discuss the beauty of the manuscript and its author before its arrival; the manuscript’s extended and grand, yet indirect entrance anticipates the story itself, just as characters and readers alike anticipate Isabel. While there is much ado surrounding the entrances of both the manuscript and Isabel Archer, the manuscript also takes on a ghostly quality; the reader never actually sees it, yet its contents are never absent. Its concurrent presence and non-presence align it with Miss Jessel, Quint, and the uncle, though it most closely resembles the uncle, whom the governess never sees at Bly, yet whose words never leave her.

Though it reaches Douglas “on the third of these days,” the reader hears of this second hand and some years after the event. In addition, there is no textual description of its arrival or the group’s (presumably excited) response. Additionally, the reader is reminded that she is not reading the manuscript, but the narrator’s transcription of it.

Though there is much anticipation surrounding it, the layers (preface, memories, transcription) placed between the manuscript and the reader suggest that it is too fine a thing to be handled directly—physically or emotionally. Nevertheless, the manuscript is handled—in a very literal sense—several times. It is written by the governess and years later given to Douglas, who then locks it away. Decades later, wishing to read it at the Christmas gathering, Douglas must contact his man, send him the necessary key, and wait for the manuscript’s arrival.⁸ We learn as well that the narrator will transcribe it after inheriting the original writing upon Douglas’s death. The manuscript, like Flora, Miles, and Mrs. Grose, is manipulated and handled according to the needs of others. Because it is described in absentia, however, its introduction more closely resembles that of the governess and Isabel. Following James’s pattern, the manuscript, which makes an indirect entrance, loses its autonomy.

The framing tale begins with the words “the story,” though the phrase refers not to the tale at hand, but rather a ghost story told by a minor character named Griffin. Upon hearing it, Douglas feels he can do one better: “If a child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children?” he asks of his captivated Christmas Eve audience (*Turn 3*). He describes his tale as unmatched for dreadfulness, “uncanny ugliness and horror and pain.” The reader first becomes aware of Douglas’s story as a written entity when, to the chagrin of those gathered, he announces that he cannot relate his tale just now; “the story’s written. 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

⁸ One may also see a similarity between manuscript and other largely unseen characters from Victorian novels, such as Bertha Rochester—hidden away for 60 years.

finds it.” The narrator of the framing story tells us, “He had broken a thickness of ice, the formation of many a winter; he had his reasons for a long silence” (*Turn 4*). It’s not clear whether the unnamed narrator has these thoughts at the time, after he hears the story, or perhaps only upon transcribing the manuscript he will inherit from Douglas.

The manuscript, penned by the governess, is “in old faded ink and in the most beautiful hand” (*Turn 4*). The fading ink (for both the manuscript and governess) suggests the loss of autonomy. It represents the impermanency and transformation of both author and written work. While both are subject to the passing of time and the events that occur in *Bly*, the relationship between manuscript and governess will always be present. Just as Mr. Touchett and Gardencourt are described together in the opening pages of *Portrait*, the manuscript and governess are described in intertwining language that inextricably link the two—even beyond death.

The governess is introduced in conjunction with the manuscript in the framing narrative. Here she is discussed in absentia, though at the very beginning of the tale proper, she becomes both author and narrator. Around the fire, she is Douglas’s favorite subject, though she is no less the subject of her own tale. Not only is she featured in every chapter as a participant, chapters 9, 13, and 15 consist entirely of interior monologue, and therefore feature the governess exclusively. Her mental stability and sexual naiveté are ubiquitous subjects, not only within the text itself, but throughout a century of criticism.

The governess makes an indirect entrance and loses her autonomy. She transforms from a naïve, innocuous daughter of a parson to, by all accounts, a delusional murderess. The events she records begin in June and end in November—a mere five months, yet the transformation from the lovely “summer sweetness” to the gray skies, withered garlands

and other “dull things of November” illustrate not just the governess’s state of mind, but the bloom of health and coming of death within the walls of Bly (*Turn* 11, 113). Though the governess’s transformation is profound, the question of who or what causes it remains. Most critics have argued for one of two possibilities: the ghosts are real or the ghosts are a product of the governess’s imagination, projections largely due to her love-sick heart.⁹ Those of the former category—the apparitionist camp—believe that the ghosts relentlessly manipulate the governess (and, some believe, the children), driving her to do their bidding. Those of the “psychoanalytic” camp believe we are witnessing the dark descent of the deranged female mind (Brooke-Rose 151-152). I will argue that the truth lies somewhere in between—that the ghosts can be both real and products of her impressionable, yet potentially sinister mind. Jonathan Flatley notes that the governess “experiences a particularly attenuated state of ‘autonomy without autarchy’ in the sense that while she can do what she wants at the estate, she has little or no power to determine what problems come her way or to change the nature of the problems she is inheriting from the past” (111). She deals with this predicament, I argue, by manipulating the image of Quint and conjuring the image of Miss Jessel altogether.

The governess arrives at Bly seemingly from the framing narrative; the reader assumes that the woman in the carriage shown at the beginning of the story proper is that most agreeable person who will in the future serve as governess to Douglas’s sister. One particular moment on her first day is easy to overlook though crucial to future events in

⁹ Arthur Boardman is a critic of the apparitionist camp. Those of the psychoanalytic camp include Robert Hill, Helen Killoran, Jonathan Flatley. Chistine Brooke-Rose states, “I shall not argue for the ghosts or hallucinations, but try to show that the text is structured on poetic principles that function in both hypotheses” (158). For more on this debate, see Shoshana Felman’s critical work, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation.”

the story as well as the governess's drastic transformation. As the youngest daughter of a parson, and coming from a "meager" home, she sees herself in what appears to be more than one full-length mirror for the first time; she merely mentions "the glasses" among the items in the stately, impressive bedroom. While she states that it is the first time she can see herself "from head to foot," the reader receives no description of what she witnesses. One imagines that, coming in the 20th year of life, this unexpected ability would warrant at least some description of her clothing, hair, face—even what it is like to see the totality of oneself in the same moment. Nothing is provided, however, and one must take her word that she sees anything at all. This is the governess's opportunity to show her reader who it is that has arrived at Bly, yet she does not—or cannot—meet herself face to face. The trope of reflections and the governess's inability to meet these reflections will reveal itself repeatedly in the work, particularly in scenes featuring Peter Quint or Miss Jessel. The governess's autonomy—measured largely against the appearances of the alleged ghosts—would seem to depend heavily on whether or how she sees herself.

While she is not able to meet her own reflection in the long glasses, she is able to meet Quint's visage directly and steadily, an encounter that will prove to have a transformative effect on the young woman.¹⁰ Given the numerous changes that take place in and for the governess after the "straight mutual stare" exchanged between herself and Quint, it becomes clear that this, for her, is the traumatic moment that triggers the series of "sightings" of Quint and Jessel that will illuminate her transformation (*Turn* 24). After seeing Quint, the governess estimates that, "in circling about the place [she] must have

¹⁰ See section on Quint for details of the encounter.

walked three miles.” This is the first of three instances in which “agitation” drives her to walk in such a manner.¹¹ Returning to the house, the governess notes that “darkness had quite closed in,” a signaled change from the “golden twilight” of one reality to the obscurity and dread of another (*Turn* 26). Over a period of several days, she manages to convince herself that a stranger had intruded on the grounds of Bly and that he would never be seen again. Not only does she experience a new sense of dread, but she seems to keep track of the sources of anxiety that have gathered themselves in her life. “I had more pains than one,” she tells the reader. Several weeks after receiving the letter from the head master, she considers again the possible reason behind Miles’s expulsion, deciding that it was his innocence that doomed him: “he was only too fine and fair for the little horrid, unclean school-world, and he paid a price for it.” She goes so far as to accuse the head master of being vindictive. She is also receiving “disturbing” letters from home, “where things were not going well” (*Turn* 28). Added to the anxiety of not wanting to say anything to the uncle about Miles’s expulsion and what we know in truth to be her continued anxiety about the stranger, her mind itself becomes that which “gathers and crouches” before the “spring of the beast,” a metaphor she uses to describe the relative stillness before the chaos she will come to know (*Turn* 22). The governess, as author of her own woe, places this descriptor immediately before she sees Quint on the tower, seemingly as a literary pointer for the trauma that is to follow. In both a physical and psychological sense, he is “above,” or superior to her.

In the next chapter, the governess admits that, since her encounter, she has been

¹¹ The second comes after her conversation with Miles, when the governess walks “round the church, hesitating, hovering” (*Turn* 79). The third instance comes in anticipation of getting a confession from Miles, now that Mrs. Grose and Flora have left. The governess “wanders” all over Bly for one or two hours prior to Miles’s final meal (*Turn* 109).

“remarkably afraid of becoming” nervous and has, on a number of occasions, shut herself up to think (*Turn* 27). As she, Mrs. Grose, and the children are about to leave for church on a gray day, she enters the dining room and sees Quint on the other side of the window. She goes outside and mimics Quint’s behavior, surprising and scaring Mrs. Grose (*Turn* 42). It is the moment in which the governess embodies Quint. The window becomes the reflective surface that takes the place of the full-length mirror in which the governess ostensibly saw herself. The reader and Mrs. Grose alike get a much better view of the governess when she replicates Quint’s behavior. The governess has brought Quint *inside* both the house and herself. She will never return to the house the same as she was before, nor, as the reader will note, will she again set foot in the house of the lord. After describing the figure at the window and on the tower with a laundry list of details to Mrs. Grose, the governess learns that they are the markings of the now deceased former valet. She has seen Quint twice before learning that she cannot possibly have seen a living human being.

Her next sighting is of Miss Jessel at the lake on a warm day. In stark contrast to her first sighting of Quint, the governess does not directly meet whatever visage may be present, but provides only speculative language about her experience. She makes such statements as: “*I became aware* that on the other side of the sea of Azof we had an interested spectator,” “I began to take in with certitude and *yet without direct vision* the presence, a good way off, of a third person,” and “There was no ambiguity...as to what I *should* see straight before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes” (*Turn* 40 italics mine). It is only in the final line that the governess tells the reader that she faced what she had to face, yet as with the long glasses, there is no report of what she

sees, if anything (*Turn 41*). Additionally, the lake itself serves as a sort of mirror. Though the governess claims to attempt to see the figure directly and not in the reflection of the water, the reflective surface reminds the reader of the governess's seemingly unrealized encounter with herself in the stately bedroom. Her inability to look directly at the figure on the other side of the reflective surface is another way of illustrating her inability to face herself.

In their conversation following the sighting, the governess does not provide for Mrs. Grose any details of what she saw, but merely tells her that it was her "predecessor—the one who died" who showed herself not only to the governess but also to Flora (*Turn 43*). She tells the housekeeper that Miss Jessel "fixed" the young girl from the other side of the lake (*Turn 44*). This "post-sighting" conversation differs considerably from the one in which she provided extensive details of Quint for Mrs. Grose. While, as far as the reader witnesses, the governess never looks directly at the figure across the lake, and can provide no details, she claims to be certain of who it is she saw. Until she describes Quint to Mrs. Grose, she doesn't know that he's dead, yet this is *all* she knows about her predecessor; learning that she has seen the specter of a dead man prompts her to perceive the presence of an individual she already knows to be dead.

She next sees Quint on the stairs. Having read until the wee hours of the morning, the governess suddenly turns her attention to her door, with the sense "of there being something undefinably astir in the house." As with the previous encounter, the setting includes a large window. Several details are reversed in this encounter compared to the first sighting of Quint: The governess first saw Quint at twilight, though here she is aware of dusk becoming "earliest morning" (*Turn 56*). Whereas the former valet first appeared

high above the governess, she is now at the top of the stairs while he is on the landing below. Most importantly, Quint again fixes her, but she makes it clear that she fixes him right back: “that dread had unmistakably quitted me and...there was nothing in me unable to meet and measure him” (*Turn* 57). Not only is she without fear, but she senses that he knows this. Having switched places with Quint at the window, the governess has brought him “inside” the house and herself. We also begin to witness the reversal of power that takes place between (the projection of) Quint and the governess.

The second time the governess sees her predecessor it is on the stairs. The narrator and author recounts the brief encounter after it happens: “looking down from the top I once recognized 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.” Though the governess claims that the figure vanishes without turning around, she knows “exactly what dreadful face she had to show” (*Turn* 60). Here again the alleged spirit has come inside, leaving her spot on the far side of the lake and taking up her place on the stairs. Additionally, the governess stands above her, not below, connoting her power to conjure and manipulate. The governess’s seeming awareness of some dreadful yet unseen visage again reminds one of her earlier unacknowledged reflections in the full-length mirrors. Miss Jessel, with her back to the governess, is another manifestation of a reflection the governess can’t quite bring herself to see.

Her next two encounters will also be with Miss Jessel. The first of these takes place in the schoolroom after her conversation with Miles; the mere mention of his uncle causes her to drop down upon a stone slab in the graveyard outside the church. By the time she enters the house, she considers surreptitiously abandoning her post. She finds

herself “sinking down at the foot of the staircase,” and then “with a revulsion, recalling that it was exactly where, more than a month before, in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things” had been “the most horrible of women” (*Turn* 80). Though her mimicry of Quint’s behavior is intentional, she also replicates that of her true predecessor, Miss Jessel.

Entering the room, now filled with “noonday light,” she sees what, at first blush, she takes to be a housemaid who has found some time to write a “letter to her sweetheart,” a seemingly simple activity the governess has been incapable of doing. The figure then stands, revealing herself to be the “vile predecessor” Miss Jessel. The governess demands such an equality through language that the two haggard figures of “unutterable woe” seem to be one in the same. The governess *fixes* the “[d]ishonoured and tragic” image, thereby immediately conveying an equality. In a single moment, the ostensible predecessor communicates to the governess that each woman has an equal right to sit at the schoolroom table. Indeed, a chill runs through the governess as she feels that it is the living who intrudes on the dead (*Turn* 81). The author of the manuscript ends the chapter with these words:

It was as a wild protest against it that, actually addressing her—‘You terrible, miserable woman!’—I heard myself break into a sound that, by the open door, rang through the long passage and the empty house. She looked at me as if she heard me, but I had recovered myself and cleared the air. There was nothing in the room the next minute but the sunshine and the sense that I must stay (*Turn* 81).

The only person who hears the protest is the governess herself. She then recovers herself and “clears the air.” If she possesses the ability to clear the air, it suggests that the image is of her own making and will disappear at the governess’s command.

Before continuing to her final ghostly encounters, I would like to more closely examine the transformation of the governess in the context of Quint and Jessel. A succinct examination of these encounters will aid in seeing the incremental, yet overall transformation of the governess. It will also reveal her hierarchical position between Quint as ghost and the subsequent projections of Quint and Miss Jessel. While her introduction to each takes place at a considerable distance and in an outdoor setting that connotes each figure's gender, the former valet and governess soon make their way into the structure of Bly. There is, additionally, a marked difference concerning who "fixes" whom between primary and subsequent encounters; in both cases, the current governess seems to come to a position of power. Finally, perspectives change. In their first encounter, Quint is considerably higher than the governess. It is the only time he fixes her from aloft. At the window, the two meet eye to eye, and on the stairs (Quint's first appearance inside), the governess looks down at him from the top step. When she first sees Miss Jessel, the two are nearly on the same plane, though the present governess is seated on a stone bench, while her predecessor stands on the other side of the lake. In the next brief encounter on the stairs, the governess now stands while her predecessor sits "on one of the lower steps," her back curved in a position of woe, a position the governess later replicates. In the third encounter, Miss Jessel is initially found sitting at the schoolroom desk, while the governess stands before her. The seeming specter then stands only briefly before disappearing. With Quint, there is a clear and nearly effortless reversal of power, while Miss Jessel and the governess struggle in a competition of equals.¹²

¹² Brooke-Rose notes that see-saw-like power struggle is described in the opening description of "a

Her fourth sightings of Miss Jessel and Quint enable her final actions against Flora and Miles. In the final sighting of her predecessor, the governess and Miss Jessel will again be on an equal plane as they stand on opposite banks of the lake. Unlike the first sighting at the lake, the governess is able to look directly at her as she had been in the previous encounter in the schoolroom. Now with an audience, however, the governess feels she is in a position to judge others for not seeing, resulting in her belligerent tone with the young girl and housekeeper. In truth, of course, the governess is able to face her true self. As Christine Brooke-Rose points out, the final encounter finds the governess (and Mrs. Grose and Flora) on the opposite bank relative to the first scene at the lake. Miss Jessel, then is on the near side of the lake, where the governess and Flora had spent a summer afternoon (Brooke-Rose 170). It is, in other words, a mirror image. One could interpret this as the governess completing her transformation into a thing opposite what she had been upon her arrival at Bly, or the revelation of her true nature, one antithetical to what Douglas suggested. Either way, it is the drastic change necessary to get rid of Mrs. Grose and Flora and secure a confession from Miles, whatever the cost.

In her final encounter with Quint, the governess again sees him through the dining room window. While this is the second time she will project Quint at this location, language in this scene reminds one of the first encounter with what was then a ghostly form. Moments before Miles confesses to taking the letter, the governess observes, "Peter Quint had come into view like a sentinel before a prison." When she thinks she is about to learn what it was he said to his classmates, she feels that the boy's answer is stayed by

succession of flights and drops" (163). Additionally, see Brooke-Rose for discussion on the positioning of Quint and Jessel relative to the governess at each encounter (165-166).

the “white face of damnation.” She writes, “I felt a sick swim at the drop of my *victory* and all the return of my *battle*, so that the wildness of my veritable leap only served as a great betrayal” (*Turn* 121 italics mine). Her use of such language suggests an appropriation of his original superiority, a final assertion of the power reversal that has been taking place between Quint and the governess. While, in the line quoted above, it seems like the projection of Quint will prevent her victory over Miles, she will take the boy in her arms—“it may be imagined with what a passion”—and end his life, thereby cementing her victory (*Turn* 122). Additionally, like the second projection of Miss Jessel at the lake, the second projection of Quint at the window signals a mirror effect. When the governess saw Quint in the window the first time, she ran outside and replicated his behavior. As I discussed earlier, this means that she brought his intentions inside both Bly and her own mind. In the second encounter at this location, the governess will see Quint in her own reflection. It is an evening in November, and therefore dark outside; the governess would be unable to see anything except what is inside. “The hideous author of our woe—the white face of damnation” could only be herself. She claims that Quint has come to the window “for the last time,” but in fact *she* has come to the window for the last time (*Turn* 121). Her attempts to protect Miles from what she has always imagined to be Quint’s designs on the boy result in his ultimate stasis of knowledge and sexual development. Just as Quint’s apparition seemed to stop the very cawing of the rooks in the evening air, the governess has silenced the natural phenomenon of the heart. Her final act—the suffocation of Miles, is the ultimate manifestation of her triumph and the transformation of both. The governess is the only character in either novel to lose her autonomy yet actively change the lives of those around her. She has the most acute effect

on Miles, but also causes Mrs. Grose and Flora to flee Bly. She is, in this sense, truly the author of others' fates as well as participant in her own story, which will leave her a figure antithetical to the one described by Douglas.

“‘I’m Off’: The Uncle, Miles, and the Usurpation of Authority”

The uncle never makes an actual appearance in the novella. While he would seem to be introduced by Douglas, his description here is arrantly superficial. Meanwhile, the closest the uncle comes to appearing in the story proper is through his own brief letter that accompanies the one from the headmaster. Nevertheless, the terse missive serves as the uncle's entrance as well as a display of his autonomy. Despite Douglas's efforts, the uncle will introduce himself through a hastily written letter; his appearance in the story proper will not be presupposed by another character and his exit will occur in the same moment. Moreover, his absence from Bly predicts his almost complete freedom from the influences of others. The owner of the country estate is the only living character in the story proper that remains beyond the property's reach. He commands from a safe distance outside a house that will remove all ability to determine one's fate.

The uncle not only makes a direct, though limited entrance, he in fact seems to transcend any sort of introduction, either in the framing narrative or the story proper. In the former, Douglas offers not a circumspect description, but one that borders on the hyperbolic; he tells his listeners that the uncle “proved a gentleman” of a type that “never, happily, dies out.” Douglas uses such adjectives as “handsome and bold and pleasant, off-hand and gay and kind” in his effusive description, and finally elevates the uncle to the realm of the fantastic, claiming that “such a figure...had never risen, save in a dream, or

an old novel.” In addition, the reader learns of his wealth, extravagance, high fashion, and “charming ways with women,” traits the governess specifically recounted to Douglas based on her two interviews with her soon-to-be-employer (*Turn 7*). Forty years on, Douglas is really a mouthpiece for the governess; his description of the uncle’s physical appearance and comportment in his home only provides the reader with the governess’s impression of him, not our own, which will differ considerably. Additionally, as fondly as the governess no doubt reflected on the uncle while she lived, Douglas may well be embellishing on a decades-old memory. The most that can be offered in the prefatory pages is not a person, but an illustration of an (almost) imagined figure.

Just as we receive a second-hand, glowing account of the uncle in the prefatory pages, his presence in the novella could best be described as paralytic; he is mentioned three times in quick succession at the beginning, and then only sporadically throughout the work so that his absence will become his defining characteristic. The moment that best illuminates the uncle comes in a letter he has written to accompany another from the head master of the school Miles has been attending. This is the *single* time we hear from the uncle directly, and it isn’t in person. The uncle writes, “This, I recognize, is from the head master, and the head master’s an awful bore. Read him please; deal with him; but mind you don’t report. Not a word. I’m off” (*Turn 16*)! Though it would seem, in an oblique way, that the uncle is introduced through a letter, the circumstances and tone of the communication are antithetical to the 19th century letter of introduction. Not only does it not demonstrate epistolary etiquette, it is in fact a succinct rendering of a distant, unconcerned guardian, rather than an individual writing cordially on behalf of a friend or colleague. The uncle seems to thumb his nose at Douglas’s generous words as well as the

possibility of a “proper” epistolary introduction; his writing is an accurate representation of the uncle’s refusal to be “on stage,” signified by the peremptory phrase “I’m off” (*Turn* 16). This final and imminently memorable phrase implies several possible shades of meaning. “I’m off” could suggest not being mentally stable, on the verge of leaving, or being incorrect by some amount or for some particular reason. Most relevant here is the suggestion that the uncle is off the page—both the letter and the manuscript. His power lies in his ability to be off—to be an external figure—to both the Bly estate and the manuscript, neither of which can contain him.

His command that he never be disturbed about anything concerning his charges or his house is maintained; the owner of the estate never sets foot in Bly and he is never contacted. Though the governess seems to write a letter to the uncle concerning Miles, the boy steals the letter and destroys it (*Turn* 117-18). The uncle’s earlier missive is written entirely on his terms and he will not be made aware of the governess’s letter, the contents of which are never revealed to the reader. Even in writing, the uncle seems impervious to disruption; he writes only what he wishes to, and will not have to read anything he doesn’t wish to see. The uncle, in fact, enters and exits the novella in virtually the same moment. He “enters” with his first word of his note, and exits on the last. His power—his autonomy—lies in the character’s ability to *not* appear on the page. The owner of Bly is physically and narratively beyond the reach of any unpleasant events that may have taken place within the house. He makes a direct entrance, but more importantly his peremptory exit signals Miles’s passive entrance through the inner note of the headmaster. The absent master has, in his stead, placed the “little master” squarely in the way of danger, ensuring the boy’s loss of autonomy—and life.

Consistent with James's pattern, Miles makes an indirect entrance and loses his autonomy. Because he is a child—especially one in a work by Henry James—it's not surprising that he is manipulated and transformed by those around him.¹³ Miles transforms first from “the incredibly beautiful” boy in the “bloom of health” the governess first meets as he disembarks from the coach to what Hill describes as a strangely informed, likely manipulative “young master,” to, ultimately, a limp, febrile, vulnerable boy in the arms of a woman who may sincerely believe that Quint's ghost is looking in the window, coveting the child—perhaps as he did in life.

While Miles is mentioned in the framing narrative and briefly discussed in absentia by Mrs. Grose and the governess on the third page of the story proper, his true introduction comes in the form of a letter from the headmaster of his school, enclosed within an informal note from his uncle. Arriving by the evening post on the first day of the governess's tenure, both would seem to contain the promise of some sort of introduction, though neither resembles the cordial 19th century display of etiquette, each one provides.

As one unfolds the other, the governess, naturally, reads the outer one first. This is the terse, though illustrative missive written by the uncle. As discussed earlier, the brief communication not only introduces the impatient guardian, but succinctly adumbrates his most defining characteristic—his unwavering nonpresence. The second letter, its seal still unbroken, is from the headmaster. The governess tells the reader that “with great effort” she breaks the seal and reads it before going to bed, but does not, at this point, say what it contains (*Turn* 16). Like the manuscript itself, the contents of the inner letter can only be

¹³ Other examples are Morgan Moreen in the “The Pupil” and Maisie Farange of *What Maisie Knew*.

accessed after some effort has been made. Miles is introduced not by a sublime letter, but by a set of missives that illustrate the way he, in his final moments, will be enfolded by the governess. In my exploration of the boy's fate, I will follow the path of letters—whether or not any written communication is verifiable. The governess's obsessive, yet unconscious linking of ghosts and letters means that Miles will literally die for nothing.

Of the letters just mentioned, only the uncle's words are recounted in the manuscript. While the governess summarizes the contents of the headmaster's letter for Mrs. Grose, she does not mention the accompanying note from the uncle. Nevertheless, she has evidently either memorized its contents or kept the uncle's missive during the intervening years, and includes his words in her own writing.¹⁴ Either way, she has kept the letter—not just its contents, but its very existence—to herself. Additionally, after her conversation with Mrs. Grose, she considers Miles's innocence and is left bewildered with the contents “of the horrible letter locked up” in a drawer in her room (*Turn* 20). The hidden letter reminds one of the manuscript itself, hidden away for decades before the revelation of its dreadful contents. The first two pieces of written communication display the governess's participation in the *mise en abyme* of writing: the letters arrive within the context of the story recorded in the manuscript, which is in turn an imagined work within the novella. Given that these first two letters not only concern but introduce Miles, the boy is immediately and permanently linked with correspondence and the governess's obsession with what is both written and unwritten.

Christine Brooke-Rose observes that, “in the governess's eyes, the word ‘horror’

¹⁴ The governess's statement that, relative to her twenty-year-old self, she is now “older and more informed” suggests that she is writing the manuscript at least a few years after the events (14).

defines both what the ghosts *are* and what the letters sent/unsent *suppress* [or] leave out” (167 original italics). As we have seen, the governess “sees” Miss Jessel write a letter to her sweetheart, something the governess is unable (read: not allowed) to do. This unsent letter from the governess, as well as the act of writing it, is expressed in her projection of her predecessor. We will see a similar phenomenon take effect at the convergence of Miles’s confession and Quint in the final scene.

In order to arrive at this fatal endpoint, one must follow—or read—the string of “letters” that makes up the governess’s documentation of a ghostly tale.¹⁵ When Mrs. Grose asks the governess what she will do in response to the information conveyed by the headmaster, the governess provides her memorable and self-congratulatory triad of the same response: “Nothing at all” (*Turn* 20-21)! The letters, their less-than-forthright content, and the boy’s future are all, with this succinct answer, linked to “nothing”—that which is unknown or unspoken. The word also evokes the projections, which to anyone but the governess are nothing. Though they have very real effects for her, as projections they are intangible; they are the “nothing” on which her transformation turns and Miles’s life depends.

After she has seen Quint and Miss Jessel two times each and the dead season of autumn has begun to descend on Bly, the governess becomes noticeably more obsessed with letters and their connection to Miles. Near the end of chapter 13—a meditation of increasing anxiety—the governess writes of the manner in which she and the children entertain the hope that the uncle might “at any moment arrive” at Bly. While she allows

¹⁵ I will limit my present examination to letters as they particularly effect Miles. For additional discussion of this trope, see Shoshana Felman’s chapter “The Scene of Writing: Purloined Letters” in the collection *Turn of the Screw and What Maisie Knew*.

them to write letters to their uncle, she lets them understand “that their own letters [are] but charming literary exercises.” She notes of this theoretical correspondence,

They were too beautiful to be posted; I kept them myself; I have them all to this hour. This was a rule, indeed, which only added to the satiric effect of my being plied with the supposition that he might at any moment be among us. It was exactly as if our young friends knew how almost more awkward than anything else that might be for me (74).

The manner in which she keeps the letters for herself reminds one of her behavior regarding the uncle’s note. Further, the beauty of the children’s writing reminds one that the governess first observed Miles’s incredible beauty. The final two sentences illustrate the governess’s increasing paranoia; she feels that the children’s letters—an assignment that seems to be at her suggestion—are created to exacerbate her anxiety about the uncle’s presence at Bly. She seems to feel, additionally, that Miles and Flora themselves are aware of what they are doing to her. At the close of the chapter, the governess writes that, given her tension and “their triumph,” it’s a wonder she didn’t hate the children in her charge (*Turn* 74).

At the close of chapter 16, after once again discussing the issue of Miles’s expulsion, Mrs. Grose implores the governess to write to the uncle. It is first suggested that the housekeeper will “write”—which means providing dictation to the bailiff. In another example of her need for control over letters and writing, the governess bitingly asks her, “And should you like him to write our story?” (*Turn* 84). Despite her anxiety over this very issue, the governess concedes to “write” a letter to her employer, it seems, only to prevent her words from being usurped by another. She reluctantly agrees and that evening sits in her room “for a long time before a blank sheet of paper” listening to the

wind-blown rain outside. Leaving, she crosses the hallway and, after standing outside his door for perhaps a few seconds, is admitted with the very adult, “I say, you there—come in” (*Turn* 85). The conversation that ensues, one tinged with erotic undertones, would seem to be between two adults, each with his own agenda.¹⁶ While Miles wants to push the issue of returning to school (not his previous institution, but “a new field,”) the governess wants to know what happened to the boy, both at Bly and school. Despite his growing belligerence, she only maintains an attitude of pity, as if for “some wistful patient in a children’s hospital,” a metaphor of considerable import given his physical reaction to the events of the final scene, let alone his death (*Turn* 87, 86). Miles tells his governess, “My uncle must come down and you must completely settle things.” Miles seems to know that she has done nothing to ameliorate the situation: “You’ll have to *tell* him—about the way you’ve let it all drop,” he tells his governess (*Turn* 87). At last she tells him, “I’ve just begun a letter to your uncle.”

Miles responds, “Well, then, finish it” (*Turn* 88)!

Rather than reprimanding him for his insolence, the governess gushes, “Dear little Miles, dear little Miles...I’d rather die than give you a pain or do you a wrong...Dear little Miles...I just want you to help me to save you!” (*Turn* 88). The scene ends with what the governess describes as “an extraordinary blast and chill...and a shake of the room as great as if, in the wild wind, the casement had crashed in” (*Turn* 89). In truth, Miles has blown out the candle. Compared to what she senses has taken place, *nothing*

¹⁶ There are a number of parallels between this scene and the chamber scene in *Hamlet*. In the early 17th century play, Gertrude and Hamlet argue about his uncle, Gertrude’s new husband, in her bedchamber. In this scene, also taking place in a bedroom, mother and son figures argue—or are on the brink of arguing—about the boy’s uncle, the governess’s love interest. Additionally, it is the “son” in each case that is more verbally aggressive. One wonders if James was aware of these similarities as he wrote this scene, or if they are an effect of the Bard’s most famous play on the literary collective unconscious.

has happened. The exaggerated effect depicts the governess's profound anxiety over writing to the uncle, combined with the scene Miles has painted of her confessing everything to the one individual whose approval (and love) she seeks. Once again, the tropes of letters and nothing find confluence in Miles.

The next day, Mrs. Grose asks the governess if she has written. She tells her she has, though she does not tell her that the result, "sealed and directed," is in her pocket. This is yet another instance of the governess keeping a letter to herself, both in the sense of not sharing information about it and keeping it hidden on her person. Immediately before leaving the house to look for Flora, the governess places the letter on the great hall-table for Luke to take and post. The next day, the governess learns that the letter, never picked up by Luke, is missing. Both women immediately assume it was Miles who took it. Mrs. Grose leaves with Flora immediately after this conversation and the governess is left alone with Miles to extract a confession.

It is in the final chapter that Miles confesses that he stole and burned the letter. He took it, he claims, to discover what she said about him. The governess doesn't ask him what he found in the missive, but, elated at both his confession and the pointlessness of his act, tells him, "And you found nothing!"

He concedes, "Nothing."

"Nothing, nothing!" the governess says again.

"'Nothing, nothing,' he sadly repeated" (*Turn* 118).

The governess has told Mrs. Grose that the letter contained "only the bare demand for an interview," scant information that surely would have been disappointing to Miles. It is also possible that, given the pattern of "nothing" in the novella and the above brief

conversation in which the word “nothing” appears six times, there was literally nothing written in the alleged letter. The only time we see any attempt at this particular correspondence is when the governess sits over a blank sheet of paper at her desk; as far as the reader can attest, the letter is not only devoid of particular information, it’s devoid of any words at all.

Nevertheless, the governess has become obsessed with what is now the intersection of this alleged correspondence and Miles’s confession not only concerning the letter, but his transgression at school. The final scene takes place in the dining room, featuring the window through which the governess saw, then replicated Quint’s unsettling behavior. Once again, Quint—as projection, as “nothing”—appears to the governess at the beginning of the scene, though she doesn’t say anything to Miles about his presence until after he confesses. At the governess’s cries of “No more, no more, no more!” Miles asks if Miss Jessel is among them (*Turn* 121). This is the first time he mentions her name. She then tells him it is not Miss Jessel, but Quint who appears on the other side of the window. The “nothing” of the letter (as well as the absence of an answer she and the reader get when the governess asks Miles what he said to his classmates) seems to fade as Quint’s presence becomes stronger. As the governess becomes more adamant about his (re)appearance at the window, Miles’s death draws closer, until the demand for confession is replaced by a demand that Miles see what the governess sees. Finally, the passion with which she holds him (kills him) replaces both.

The “ghosts” and letters seem fill in each other’s negative spaces. As Brooke-Rose points out, “Could it not be said that the ghosts are in reality nothing other than the letters’ *content* and that the letters’ content could thus itself be nothing other than a *ghost-*

effect (167 original italics)? Additionally, she notes that “the link with writing is made by the governess herself: ‘So I saw [Quint] as I see the letters I form on this page’... Thus to see ghosts [is] to see letters” (Brooke-Rose 167). Given the governess’s growing obsessions with the projections of Quint and Jessel, Miles’s introduction through an ominous set of missives prefigures his loss of autonomy and tragic demise. Just as Miles is captured in the house of Bly, he is also captured in the governess’s blended obsession with “ghosts” and letters. He is captive both in the house of fiction—the story itself—written by both James and the governess, (a construction of letters) as well as the governess’s house of letters—both written and unwritten, sent and unsent.

“In the Master’s Waistcoats: Peter Quint and the Usurpation of Power”

Strolling the grounds “at the end of a long June day,” the governess is startled by a figure at the top of one of Bly’s crenelated towers (*Turn* 23). It is not the man she met in Harley Street, as she initially supposes, but a stranger who fixes her even as he crosses to the opposite corner of the battlement (*Turn* 24-25). Reader and governess alike will later discover the stranger matches the description of the now deceased Peter Quint—former valet at Bly. Of all the characters in the novella, Quint makes the most direct and startling entrance. He is the only one not mentioned in the framing narrative, making his tacit, distanced appearance in the “clear twilight” all the more intriguing (*Turn* 23). His initial elision belies his significance in the work; his first appearance sets in motion the future projections and mental decline of the governess—events that will conclude with the death of Miles while Quint ostensibly looks on.

It is difficult to discuss both alleged ghosts in the context of autonomy. While the major critical question in *Turn of the Screw* – whether the ghosts are “real” or projections that haunt only the governess – is not my major subject here, it is nonetheless relevant to questions of autonomy and entrance. If they are ghosts, it is possible to ask whether Quint and Miss Jessel are relatively free from external control and influence. If they are projections of the governess, they are necessarily under the control of her mind, even if their creation is unintentional. I propose that when Quint appears on the tower, he is a specter haunting Bly. Thereafter, he is a projection in the mind of the governess. In this section, I will only be discussing Quint as he appears on the tower.

As Christine Brooke-Rose points out, “the main obstacle for the hallucination theory” is the “identification of Quint” (140). Stanley Renner claims that the details the governess provides are merely those she has gleaned from the bible and popular works of fiction. He posits that Quint is the projected result of sexual hysteria. It is largely a convincing argument, though he never explains how it is that Mrs. Grose recognizes the red, close-curling hair, long, pale face, short whiskers, dark, arched eyebrows, sharp, small eyes, wide mouth, and thin lips as the markers of one Peter Quint (*Turn* 33).¹⁷ The illiterate housekeeper could not have read the same works and, at this point in the story,

¹⁷ While Renner poses a convincing argument that the governess could be projecting Quint based on literary and biblical references, he does not account for the fact that James himself has constructed this familiar amalgam of physical traits for his gothic ghost, and not the governess. After listing a number of fictional works that include a character (usually evil) with traits similar to Quint, Renner concedes that, given that the events in the novella take place in the 1840s, the governess couldn't possibly have been familiar with several of the more Quint-like figures. What she sees, then, may not be her own projection, but the projection of that “other” author writing over 50 years later. Moreover, Renner summarily fails to account for the fact that Mrs. Grose recognizes Quint. At this point in the book, and at various points until her departure, Mrs. Grose asks logical, penetrating questions of the governess; she does not simply take her at her word. Therefore, if the governess's description hadn't matched that of Quint, Mrs. Grose would not offer this explanation, and would instead be worried, as the governess initially was, that a living intruder has invaded the sanctity of Bly.

she is not given to taking the governess at her word. (The housekeeper in fact may never be entirely gullible. Even as she flees governess's madness, it is possible that her final words are meant only to placate someone she now fears.) Moreover, as Maria Tatar points out, if information concerning or provided by a potential apparition, particularly one the viewer could have "no apprehension of, nor any means of knowing," can be "corroborated by reality, then it must indeed figure as the agent of 'supernatural intelligence' and can rightly join the ranks of authentic spiritual phenomena" (168). It is in fact the *recognition* of the physical details, not the provision of those details that most strongly suggests the figure of Quint is the apparition of the deceased man.

With this established, it is possible to discuss the limits or reaches of Quint's autonomy—his self-possession beyond death. From some of the novella's earliest criticism, it has been noted that the specter materializes atop a phallic symbol. While this position serves to suggest sexual hysteria on the part of the governess, it in fact better serves to describe Quint's manipulative behavior in life. His lofty position, then, becomes a symbol for his autonomy in life as well as death. His location of haunting is indicative of how Mrs. Grose describes him and the manner in which he likely treated Miss Jessel and Miles. The housekeeper tells the governess "Quint was much too free."

"Too free with *my* boy?" returns the governess.

"Too free with every one" (*Turn* 37).

There is little debate that this conversation concerns sexual abuse. Mrs. Grose tells the governess that she hesitated to say anything to the uncle because, as he recently made clear to the young employee, he did not wish to be disturbed by any concerns at Bly. Further, the uncle evidently took to Quint, allowing him to work at the estate because the

country air was a presumed benefit to his health. Mrs. Grose adds, “Quint was so clever—he was so deep.” After discussing Quint’s possible effects on “innocent little precious lives,” the conversation ends when the “poor woman burst into tears.” Over the course of the following week and after additional conversations on the same topic, the governess notes that Mrs. Grose had fears “on every side” regarding the deceased valet (*Turn* 38). Though the exact nature of Mrs. Grose’s intellect and personality has been sharply debated, there is little evidence to suggest she is particularly cunning. While I readily concur that she knows more than she tells the governess, and that she *might* successfully convince the young woman that she will support her even as the housekeeper hastily departs from Bly, it is unlikely that she was as crafty as Quint, who evidently used his cunning and threatening ways to scare Mrs. Grose into remaining quiet about his inappropriate behavior with Miles.

Not only does this “impudent, assured, spoiled, depraved” individual manage to convince the uncle to give him a job as his personal servant, Quint evidently uses the opportunity to steal some of his master’s waistcoats (*Turn* 45, 34).¹⁸ The man Mrs. Grose remembers as being far less than a gentleman appears to the governess in clothes that nevertheless assume this posturing. The governess suspects that the uncle was not particular about some of the company he kept; perhaps Quint learned, in his association with the uncle, that there were two young children at Bly and that the owner didn’t like to be bothered with any issues concerning the estate or its residents (*Turn* 37). Mrs. Grose tells the governess that after the uncle left Quint was in charge. Though Quint was no

¹⁸ Because he was killed by a fall on the ice after leaving a public house, there is reason to suspect that Quint was also an alcoholic, though nowhere else is it suggested that he suffered from this addiction.

gentleman, it seems he now had control over the country estate. (Quint may have engaged in his abusive behavior during the evidently brief time the uncle lived there. Whether or not the uncle happened to be at Bly, however, he would not like to have been told about such things.) Further, Quint manages to keep his egregious behavior a secret from his boss by instilling fear in Mrs. Gross—fear that continues to haunt her even after his death.

Finally, there is his manipulation of Miss Jessel, with whom Quint was also much too free. After the governess sees her predecessor for the first time, conversation between her and Mrs. Grose turns to the two former employees. Though Mrs. Grose tells the young woman that both Quint and Miss Jessel were “infamous,” she also makes it clear that it was the former governess who “paid for it” (*Turn* 44-45). Mrs. Grose suggests that, despite the marked difference in their social positions, the two had a sexual relationship, though it’s not clear if this was consensual; the housekeeper again states that Quint “did what he wished” (*Turn* 45). She tells the governess that Miss Jessel left Bly one day under pretense of a vacation and never returned (*Turn* 19). When pressed, Mrs. Grose concedes that she knew “her real reason for leaving.” She tells the governess, “Oh yes—as to that. She couldn’t have stayed. Fancy it here—for a governess” (*Turn* 45). In the notes to his article, Robert Hill posits that Miss Jessel dies after an attempted abortion (71). Moreover, Mrs. Grose has already noted that Miss Jessel was a lady—one, presumably, who could not have made public her pregnancy by a low-class servant.

For all of these reasons, it is appropriate that Quint, as a spirit of his former self, would appear at a considerable height and atop an unmistakably phallic symbol. He manipulated two social superiors—the uncle and Miss Jessel—into getting what he

wanted financially and sexually, and struck fear in the heart of Mrs. Grose to make sure his lascivious behavior with Miles was not reported to the uncle. The crenelated tower—a location from which he can maintain a masterful view of the property—could be the only place of his genuine haunting. Having manipulated the uncle in life, Quint became the real master of the house—physically, sexually, and intellectually. This commanding position is what he sought (and attained) in life and continues to exhibit in death.

By usurping power at Bly, Quint participates in a posthumous authorship of the story that takes place on his watch. It is a story that no other “master” can write in conjunction with the governess: the uncle wants nothing to do with the place and the “little master” has no say in his own safety, let alone the lives of others. In the Freudian tradition, Christine Brooke-Rose argues that there is a traumatic event—that moment that is “too painful to be retained in the consciousness” (159). While she believes the traumatic event in this work is the moment in which the governess sees herself in the full-length mirrors of the stately bedroom, I argue it is the moment(s) that she encounters Quint. It is this experience that causes her to project the future ghostly “sightings” and subsequently transforms the governess and seals Miles’s fate. Quint, as a ghost, maintains his own autonomy and moreover still has power over others; as mentioned, he continues to instill fear in Mrs. Grose and, more importantly, his visage and very presence set in motion the governess’s subsequent visions and declining mental stability. The reader will note that Quint’s appearance *as a ghost* takes place outside and in a location that defines his character. He is outside of and atop Bly—both literally and figuratively. In direct opposition to all of the characters who exist within the estate, Quint does not just escape the effects of the Bly, he initiates such events. Each time the governess projects Quint—

at the window, on the stairs, and again at the window—he is brought down to her level (or below). As we have seen in the section on the governess, each vision (of both Quint and Jessel) meets an emotional need of the new employee. It is only when Quint becomes a projection that she is able to manipulate him. As a wraith, Quint only needs to stand atop the tower to manipulate others. It is here that he will always maintain his autonomy.

Conclusion

In her essay on the metaphor so integral to James's oeuvre, Sarah Blair writes, "At the literal and conceptual center of the Preface stands James's most powerful figure—in effect, his master trope...the figure of the house of fiction. In impassioned, densely metaphorical prose, James celebrates the 'boundless freedom' exercised, and the 'moral' reference' secured, through the artist's ultimately social activity" (Blair 59). His position on the outside of the wall illustrates "his insistence on authorial 'will' and 'freedom' [which] might be said to activate tropes of the watcher as a romantic 'seer,' whose privileged capacity for 'consciousness' secures unmediated access to higher categories of experience" (Blair 60). What this observation suggests is that James *alone*, as artist, is in the privileged position of boundless creative freedom, moral judgment, and authorial will over the characters and events taking place on the other side of the wall. It also suggests that, by virtue of his singular consciousness, he alone "sees," or understands that which he has created. He becomes the "the author-surveyor," suggesting both a position of uncontested creator and overseer of everything he has just created (Blair 59). The metaphorical wall sets up an either/or situation; only the artist is on the side of privileged, higher consciousness while all other figures exist on a homogenous, inverted plane of awareness. James's house of fiction doesn't allow for intermediary positions of consciousness. My study, however, reveals that James's metaphor is itself privileged with a far more complex architectural design than "mere holes in a dead wall." Through my analysis of entrance and autonomy, I have discovered a connection between entrance, power (both in the form of self-possession and power over others), and characters that "write," or attempt to write, the fates of others. These factors, taking place *within* the

fiction, will reconstruct the house *of* fiction, rendering a multi-level, multi-room location of the mind, not unlike the fictional homes in James's works.

Of the nine characters examined in *The Portrait of a Lady*, all but Isabel make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies. Moreover, six of these characters—Ralph and Lydia Touchett, Lord Warburton, Henrietta Stackpole, Madame Merle, and Gilbert Osmond—attempt to write, or determine Isabel's fate, with the final two, unfortunately, having the most success. Nevertheless, eight of the nine figures do not simply enter the narrative on their own terms; their entrances describe the powers they will exhibit throughout the work. The “incommunicative character” of Osmond's villa, for example, with its “imposing front”—a façade offering only the “Mask, not the face of the house,” one “defying the world to look in”—describes the duplicitous, self-important Osmond (*Portrait* 195). His ability to hide his true nature will prove to be Isabel's downfall. Likewise, Merle is first seen playing the piano in the drawing room at Gardencourt, only her “ample and well-dressed” back presented to Isabel and the reader. Her physical positioning, musical talents, and even her name—French for “blackbird”—all suggest her beguiling nature, and the destructive song she will sing to Isabel.

My analysis of five characters in *The Turn of the Screw* offers the same connection between entrance and autonomy, though in a different ratio: only two characters make direct entrances and maintain their autonomies, while three make indirect entrances and lose their autonomies. Nevertheless, the entrances of the uncle and Quint predict the influence they will have over other characters and the narrative as a whole. As we've seen, the uncle's concurrent entrance and exit through his terse missive, and particularly the phrase, “I'm off!” not only deeply affects the governess's decline into

madness, but also usurps any autonomy Miles—“the little master”—might have maintained. The uncle’s ability to remove himself from the page—both the page of the manuscript and his letter—places Miles directly in the arms of the governess’s growing obsession with letters, the uncle, and the “ghosts” of Bly. The single appearance of Quint atop a crenelated tower of the English estate has a similar effect. Like the uncle, Quint only appears once in the novella (after which he becomes a projection of the governess). Nevertheless, this single appearance will “write” her fate (and that of Miles), even though the governess, according to the framing narrative, is the author of the manuscript.

The level and type of power described by character entrances in these two works both requires and accounts for the transformation of James’s dead wall and the simple dichotomy it creates. The various degrees of power exhibited by characters within *Portrait*, for example, necessitate multiple levels of authorial consciousness. Given the expanding architectural metaphor, think of them as stories in a house. Osmond, who is far more skillful at writing Isabel’s fate, exists on a different level than, say, his sister, the Countess Gemini, who does not even attempt to manage her narrative. By the same token, Ralph has more influence over Isabel’s fate than Mr. Touchett. Ralph convinces his father to leave Isabel a large sum of money, an action prompted by his own desire to see what she will do. Her narrative, however, will prove to evade the good wishes he has for his cousin. Ralph, who fills her sails, but does not plot a course for her life, exists on an authorial level within the house of fiction in between that of Osmond and the Countess Gemini. Not all of the characters in *Portrait* exist on the same level of authorial consciousness, and therefore should not be grouped together on the same (presumably) ground level behind a simple wall. The handful of examples above begins to address the

framework of the new, multi-level house of fiction, though these levels must be divided into rooms that contain and exhibit narrative power.

There are, in fact, numerous entryways, stairways, hallways, drawing rooms, sitting rooms, dining rooms, and bedrooms in our metaphorical house. These spaces, which allow for entrances and exits, provide spaces for the “inner workings” of the narrative. With the new, complex design of the house of fiction, the word “design” takes on architectural, literary, and potentially nefarious implications. The house of fiction—a space that is both product and location of creation—does not represent a single, univocal consciousness of the author, but a chorus of voices and even unexpressed thoughts that resound in the chambers and hallways of a structure that houses characters that, having been created, take part in writing—or attempting to write—the fates of other characters. Within the metaphorical house we find the sitting room in Osmond’s villa, the office in Isabel’s childhood home in Albany, as well as the dining room and crenelated tower of the Bly estate, among many others. We don’t encounter these rooms simply because they are rooms, but because they are places of power. Character entrances are in fact the “location” of their power within the house of fiction. This is why, when a character does not make a direct entrance or one that describes his or her power, the locus of their power is difficult to discover.

So then what of Isabel? What of the manuscript, the governess, and Miles? Where in the house of fiction does a character exist who has no autonomy over her own life, let alone others’? These characters in fact see more of the house of fiction than most. They move among the rooms according to James’s narrative plot and the plotting of her fellow characters. This may explain why Isabel in fact makes three entrances, each one

further removed the promise of freedom. As Isabel Archer's name suggests, she is constantly standing in or moving through doorways and archways "that serve to fix and frame her." Similarly, the governess enters the framing narrative where she, as well as the manuscript, serves as one of Douglas's subjects. The manuscript, traveling with the governess, is transformed at every turn in the narrative as well as the house of fiction. Moving from the room of the framing narrative, the governess becomes author, narrator, and subject of the story proper. Even so, she's at Quint's mercy, who directs the path of her narrative. Miles, also without a room in the house of fiction, plays with his sister in a hallway until she leaves with Mrs. Grose. Taking the hand of the governess, his fate is sealed in the room of the governess's greatest power—the dining room.

This just leaves James himself. Faced with a house that resembles the houses of his fiction, one that exhibits the autonomy and authorial consciousness of his characters, James can no longer stand in isolation on the other side of a simple wall. The plotting of the author blends with the plotting of characters within the narrative; the authorial consciousness is no longer a separate, singular phenomenon. Consciousness becomes integrated with "design"; the design of the house—the positioning of characters and the locations of their powers—becomes inextricable from the designs of both James and those of his characters. His master trope can become one of integration rather than one of separateness and a simplified hierarchy. Instead of looking through holes in a dead wall, James walks the halls of his house of fiction, peaking in rooms, hands behind his back, the artist's consciousness passing between himself and the residents of his house of fiction.

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