

Henry James on Education



Peter W. Musgrave

Monash University

*The novelist, Henry James (1843–1916), wrote several works which reveal his views on education. Especially significant were *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Awkward Age* (1899). After examining some earlier works these three novels are considered to show that, though more subtle, they add little to his earlier views on education. James was critical of the education of upper middle class children in their families, particularly of girls, largely because it did not encourage social or moral roots. James himself, however, neither outlined a systematic theory nor made any constructive suggestions to address his observations.*

Henry James was born in 1843 in Albany, New York State. He built a major international reputation as a novelist, short story writer and critic, and in 1876 settled in London. Thereafter he lived mainly in England and in 1915 was naturalised, receiving the Order of Merit just before his death in 1916. Despite his active social life he never married.

In 1890 James decided to stop writing novels to concentrate on work for the stage, producing only enough short stories to earn his living. By 1895 he had written six plays, none of which had reached the stage. In early 1896 *Guy Domville* was staged and proved a failure, a section of the audience jeering the author on his curtain call. As a result James suffered a near-breakdown and returned to the full-time writing of fiction. Over the next four years James wrote several of his best-known novels and stories. During this period his output was marked by an interest in children. He seemed to be working through his own personal crisis by considering in his fiction the problems of bringing up the young.

After 1899 James remained more settled mentally until 1908 when once again a perceived failure in his professional life provoked an apparent personal crisis. This second 'breakdown' followed the initial lack of success of the twenty-four volume New York edition of his collected works. After this he again returned to a consideration of childhood, writing two volumes of autobiography, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) and *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914).

These two latter works together with those of the years 1896-99, more particularly three major novels *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Awkward Age* (1899), can be read to provide some indication of James' views on education. A number of other stories from those years provide a further source, as do two earlier novels, *Watch and Ward* (1871) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). James' ideas on education have been considered previously particularly in regard to his focus on the corruption of innocence. Indeed, the centrality of children to writers' views of James is highlighted by Beerbohm's Jamesian parody, 'The Mote in the Middle Distance' (1912), in that this is about two children.¹ This paper will attempt to uncover James' views on the education of children and adolescents, bearing in mind that adolescence lasted much longer, particularly for girls, at the time when James was writing his major works.

James' Education

James' *A Small Boy and Others* was chosen by the *New York Times Review of Books* (30 November, 1913) as one of 'The Hundred Best Books of the Year'. In it and its companion of 1914 James gave his 'recollections' of his childhood. He was born the second of a family of five, four boys and a girl. His father was in very comfortable circumstances, never needing to work for his income, but living the life of an independent intellectual and writer. He was a convinced Swedenburgian and despite the loss of a leg in adolescence was an active man. There was a close relationship between Henry Senior and his son. The family travelled much in Europe and the children had little formal education. James speaks of 'our small vague spasms of education' (*A Small Boy*, XIII)². What there was took place in several countries and followed varied methods, including a succession of tutors, who accompanied the family as it travelled. The informality of this upbringing was seen by James as crucial. He writes of the 'freedom of pressure that we enjoyed in every direction' (*Notes of a Son*, VI). James was also very close to his mother who called him 'angel'³. This tendency to emphasise the feminine side of his personality was strengthened within this relatively contained family because from early years Henry's brother, William, older by fifteen months and later to become a famous psychologist and philosopher, seemed to him so much stronger and more active in every way. The result in the critic Edmund Wilson's view was that:

There was always in Henry James an innocent little girl whom he cherished and loved and protected and yet whom he later tried to violate, whom he even tried to kill.⁴

Throughout this protected childhood James had little contact with industry or commerce—'we were never in a single case, I think, guilty of a stroke of business'. (*A Small Boy*, XIV) James' choice of career could have been postponed by the Civil War, but partly due to his temperament and, more openly, because of a mysterious adolescent back injury he, unlike one of his younger brothers, did not volunteer. Henry followed William's first choice of career and began, rather dilatorily, to train as an artist. Soon both went to Harvard, where Henry read law for a year, before beginning to write literary reviews and ultimately stories for American journals.

Henry James clearly had a broad and in many respects self-chosen education. Intellectually his family environment was permissive, though morally less so. In discussing William's mistaken career choice Henry commented that criticism 'was not the way things happened among us', but he was

not sure that the kind of personal history most appealing to my father would not have been some kind that should fairly proceed by mistakes... than straight and... declared felicitous (*Notes of a Son*, V).

The form of 'civility' (*A Small Boy*, III) to which his parents aspired was in moral terms basically puritan. Yet, James himself felt strongly that

no education avails for the intelligence that does not stir in it some subjective passion, and that on the other hand almost anything that does so act is largely educative, however small a figure the process might make in a scheme of training (*A Small Boy*, II).

James' education was wide and privileged, based strongly in and on his family. It encouraged his individuality to grow, largely through self-learning. This familial basis, it should be noted, was the usual practice in those years before the foundation and acceptance by wealthy Americans of exclusive boarding schools.

'Watch and Ward' and the 1880s

James' earliest account of education was in his first novel, *Watch and Ward*, published as a serial in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1871 and in a revised form as a book in 1876, but not seen by James as worthy of inclusion in the New York Edition. In *Watch and Ward*, Roger Laurence, a wealthy bachelor, proposes to, but is refused by, Isabel Morton. Soon after he adopts ten year old Nora Lambert, orphaned in tragic circumstances, with the hope of raising her to become his wife. Some years later Isabel, now Isobel Keith and a widow, offers to take Nora, nearly

out of her adolescence, to Europe for a year. During these later years Nora is attracted both by Hubert, Roger's clergyman cousin, and by her own plebeian cousin, George Fenton, but ultimately mutual love is born between Roger and Nora, who, the reader is left to assume, will marry.

Roger saw education within the family as important, 'He determined ... to lay the smooth foundation stones of Nora's culture' by himself teaching her the Three Rs (II). A rural setting was also judged crucial; Roger moved to the country after adopting Nora. Hubert thought her to be 'growing up a hoyden', but to Roger

she grew up more hardy and lively, more inquisitive, more active. She tasted deeply of the joy of tattered dresses and sun-burnt cheeks and arms and long nights at the end of lived days (II).

Even after attending Miss Murray's small school her confined family setting ensured that Nora

had known so few young men that she had not learned to be fastidious and Fenton represented to her fancy that great collective manhood from which Roger was excluded by his very virtues (IV).

Meeting with Hubert, however, gave Nora another lesson, as James ironically put it, 'indispensable to a young lady on the threshold of society, of talking for half an hour without saying anything' (V). Mrs Keith thought that Nora needed the influence of 'a wise woman' because '(m)en, when they meddle with a young girl's education, are veriest old grandmothers' (V). She took Nora to Rome, but prior to their leaving Hubert warned Nora, introducing one of James' recurrent themes, that she might 'lose this blessed bandage of American innocence' (V). Nora escaped this danger and on their return Mrs. Keith described her to Hubert in these words: 'And she's as good as gold. It's her nature. After all, unless your nature is right, what are you?' Here James first intrudes heredity, as opposed to environment, as an important influence on education.

In 1881 James again both expressed these views and reflected his own upbringing in *The Portrait of a Lady*, a long novel about Isabel Archer, a young American heiress, her trip to Europe with her aunt, Mrs Touchett, her settling there, her various suitors, and her marriage. Isabel, though offered the chance of regular schooling when small, 'protested ... and had been allowed to stay at home ... in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where she had the uncontrolled use of a library full of books ...' (III). She had a migratory youth: 'They lived with nurse-maids and governesses (usually very bad ones) and had been sent to superficial schools' (IV). By fourteen Isabel had visited Europe three times.

Her cousin, Ralph Touchett, lived in England, but, because of his father's intention not to 'disamericanise' (V) him, was sent to America to school and university; and yet after this, three years at Oxford and two in Europe more or less achieved what his father had hoped to avoid. Eventually Isabel married Gilbert Osmond, an American widower resident in Italy, whose daughter, Pansy, was fifteen when the couple first met. Gilbert called Pansy a 'convent flower' (XXIV). He disagreed with Isabel's view of 'bringing her forward', believing 'young girls should be kept out of the world'. Isabel had not seen 'a little person of this pattern; American girls were very different—different too were the maidens of England' (XXVI). Such a comparison will later be seen to be central to *The Awkward Age* (1899).

In these years before the three major novels about children were written James revealed his views about education *en passant* in one other novel, a *novella* and two short stories. The hero of the novel *Princess Cassimassima* (1886), Hyacinth Robinson, unlike James' usual heroes, was from the working class, though the illegitimate son of an aristocrat, a characteristic that allowed the author to speculate concerning the effect of heredity. When his mother, a French prostitute, went to prison for the murder of his father, Hyacinth was adopted—another anomalous upbringing—by Miss Pinsent, a poor London dressmaker, who by hard work enabled him to build on his interest in art to become a bookbinder.

Daisy Miller (1878) is one of James' best known *novellas*. One aspect of Daisy's indiscreet flirting that leads to her death from malaria is seen to be the permissiveness of American parents when travelling in Europe. Not only did her mother exercise so little guard over her daughter as to be 'unprecedented in the annals of parental vigilance' (V), but she allowed her son, Randolph, untrammelled freedom to become a spoilt brat. James returned to the subject of travelling Americans in *The Pupil* (1891). In this short story the Morveens hire a tutor, Pemberton, to care for their delicate and sensitive eleven year old son, Morgan, to whom his parents are basically indifferent. Pemberton remains with them until Morgan is fifteen, when, because of the Morveen's irregular payment of his low salary, he leaves, but after a year of tutoring an 'opulent rich youth', he returns to Morgan in Paris. Then the Morveens, unable for once to jump their hotel bill, are evicted from their accommodation and Morgan dies of shock. Morgan 'had the quality of a child for whom life had never been simplified by school, ... and a whole range of refinement and perception ... begotten by wandering round Europe at the tail of his migratory tribe'. Morgan saw and took in much, but for his tutor 'the real problem (was) ... how far it was excusable to discuss the turpitude of parents with a child of twelve, of thirteen, of fourteen'.

In one other story *Owen Wingrave* (1892), written late in this period, James contrasted an individual's personal desire with the powerful combined effects of family, tradition, friends and near-fiancé. All expected Owen to become a soldier, 'the profession of all his family'. His friend Lechmere 'always thought he intended to see it through, simply because he had to'. Owen did not do so; in him individuality overcame twenty years of social conditioning, though in the end at the cost of his own life.

By the end of the 1890s James' focal interests when thinking about education were well-established. There were five foci, all based around the process of growing up, but these were in no way systematically interrelated. The foci were: the corruption of (American) innocence through experience, especially of (European) travel; the central place of the family rather than formal schooling and, as an extension, the effect of anomalous upbringings; an emphasis on girls rather than boys; the important place of self-learning particularly from personal and often self-chosen experiences; and, finally, a growing belief that personal characteristics as well as environmental influences were important in upbringing. This approach was obviously firmly based in his own education.

The Three Major Novels

Volume IX of the New York Edition which included *The Pupil* also contained *What Maisie Knew* (1897), the first of the three major novels about childhood. This novel was James' first major novel for some years. He began it in 1896. He had already decided that he wanted to leave London to live in the country and in September, 1897 he took a twenty-one year lease on Lamb House in Rye, Sussex. Prior to moving in the last four months of 1897, he wrote *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). On arrival in June 1898, in Rye, he started *The Awkward Age* (1899).

James' biographer, Leon Edel, believes these works were not intended to form a series despite the common theme of children growing up, but were written 'one by one'. Edel claims that in their writing James, at a time of self-doubt after his failed attempt to become a playwright, 'underwent a kind of self-analysis ... conducted subliminally'.⁵ Strangely two other great men, Freud and Proust, were simultaneously following a rather similar course. Freud in Vienna was working through a self-analysis that led to his path-breaking work in the next decade—a major emphasis of which was infant sexuality, in a sense the opposite of childish innocence. James, however, seems to have had no direct contact with Freud or his ideas until 1911 when, during his second period of mental difficulty, he consulted a Boston neurologist, Dr. Putman, Professor of Neurology at Harvard, who was in touch with Freud and Ernest Jones, who was at the University

of Toronto from 1908 to 1913.⁶ Furthermore, there is little reason to think that James had knowledge of Freud through his brother, whose psychology gave no place to the Freudian unconscious.⁷ In Paris, Proust, though in these years embroiled in the Dreyfus affair, was beginning his attempt to recreate his memories of childhood. Between 1895 and 1900 he wrote *Jean Santeuil*, the earlier parts of which formed a draft for the initial chapters of his subsequent *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Again, it was not till the last years of his life that there is the least suspicion that James knew of Proust.⁸

There is, therefore, no doubt that James on his own initiative developed a fictional way of considering children's growth. It was of great depth and much more attention than in his previous work in the years prior to Oscar Wilde's trial (1895) was given to sex, usually implicitly rather than explicitly, albeit as Edmund Wilson has said, 'in a queer and left-handed way'.⁹ It is on these three novels, that grew from James' self-analysis, that I shall now concentrate, though as an addendum prior to drawing conclusions about what James added to his previous views on education one other little known novel of this period, *The Other House* (1896), will be briefly considered.

What Maisie Knew (1897)

In James' notebooks for 1894-95 there are 'the two most extensive series of notes for single works' that he ever made, those for *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and for *What Maisie Knew*. Here he reported the source of the latter novel to be a story told in November, 1892 at dinner by the sister of his host, James Bryce.¹⁰ In his Introduction to this novel in the New York Edition James wrote:

The accidental mention had been made to me of the manner in which the situation of some luckless child of a divorced couple was affected by the remarriage of its parents.

From the notebooks we know that he decided 'to make the child ... a fresh source of dramatic situations' so that she became, in the words of his introduction, 'a centre and a pretext for a fresh system of misbehaviour (which would) spread and ramify'. Technically this novel was innovative in that James decided that 'EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE BEFORE MAISIE'.¹¹ Maisie was the small daughter of Beale and Ida Farange, a couple on the edge of London's fast set. After their divorce she spends time alternatively with each, cared for by various governesses, one of whom soon marries Beale. In turn Ida marries Sir Claude. These two remarriages quickly show stresses and soon the situation is resolved

symmetrically by Sir Claude and the former Miss Overmore forming a relationship. As the *New York Review of Books* (27 November, 1897) put it, the characters

are a queer lot certainly, and about their high average of 'horridness' there can be no doubt. Maisie herself is an innocent enough small monster, but still a monster; the four or five others ... pair, unpair and pair again with the calm unmorality[sic] characteristic of the barnyard.

In his Introduction James indicated that he purposefully made the central figure a young girl rather than a boy

since, beyond the fact that little boys are never so 'present', the sensibility of the female young is indubitably, for early youth, the greater, and my plan would call on the part of my protagonist, for 'no end' of sensibility.

Maisie, aged ten, saw

much more than she at first understood, but also even at first (understood) much more than any little girl, however patient, had perhaps ever understood before(1).

She shuttled between parents and step-parents who, except for Sir Claude, cared little for her; she was confined to the 'schoolroom' (10) under governesses, though once her father suggested to Miss Overmore 'the urgency of sending her to school' (6)—mainly to give them more freedom in their lives together.

Not surprisingly Maisie had learnt 'to keep her thoughts to herself'. This her mother wanted, but she also suspected Maisie 'of a horrid little critical system, a tendency in her silence to judge her elders (3). She was silent and forlorn, but manipulative. A good example of this is seen when, whilst walking in Kensington Gardens with Sir Claude, they met her mother with 'the Captain', one of Ida's men. Sir Claude and Ida withdrew to talk, leaving Maisie with the Captain. Maisie asked,

'You do love her?'

'My dear child—I' The Captain wanted words.

'Then don't do it only for just a little.'

'A little?'

'Like all the others.'

'All the others?'—he stood staring.

But only minutes later when answering Sir Claude's questions about what had been said between them Maisie replied, 'Well I'm afraid I didn't attend to him very much' (10).

Mrs Wix, James' 'frumpy governess'¹² tried to teach Maisie what she called 'moral sense'. On this occasion Maisie was 'vague even to the point of imbecility', fully aware that she was for the first time using on Mrs Wix 'an intellectual ineptitude to meet her—the infirmity to which she owed so much success with papa and mamma' (26). She was, as the *New York Times Review* noted, 'a monster', but in her circumstances to be so was one way of surviving. In the final scene Maisie has to choose with whom she will live, Mrs Wix or Sir Claude. In the discussion Mrs Wix makes much of her attempt to instil 'moral sense' in Maisie, accusing Sir Claude in his time with her of 'kill(ing) it when it had begun to live', to which he replied, 'I've not killed anything. On the contrary I think I've produced life'.

Here is found the tension between knowledge learnt and what that knowledge should be used for. James certainly did not believe that Maisie should become like her parents and step-parents, but neither was Mrs Wix, a somewhat common and vulgar woman, to be a model. Maisie was learning constantly. After one interview between Sir Claude and Ida, Maisie's mother, at Folkestone, James wrote, 'Maisie had known all along a great deal, but never so much as she was to know from this moment on ...' (20). The last words of the novel, referring to Mrs Wix are, 'She still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew' (31).

As so often James used ambiguity to make his reader work, but this means that uncertainty remains about what Maisie should know and what she should eventually become. She had been innocent, but she had learnt much, thus, her ignorance was partially dispelled by the ending of her innocence. Though James makes clear his dissatisfaction with modern, permissive London society, particularly because in these circumstances anomalous upbringings outside the family became common with cruel consequences for the young, yet he never, even by implication, suggests how to replace what he so brilliantly criticises.

The Turn of the Screw (1898)

In January, 1895, five days after the failure of *Guy Domville* James visited E. W. Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury, and discussed ghost stories. Benson told James of an incident he had heard about years before of two small children in the country to whom the ghosts of 'bad' servants seemed to have appeared, luring them in various ways to their destruction. The novella that James wrote from this starting point has a nightmare quality and a pervading sense of evil.

The story was presented after dinner by a host to his guests from documents in his possession, written by an unnamed governess. She was employed by a wealthy and handsome bachelor to care for his nephew,

Miles, and niece, Flora, at his country house where the children were in the care of Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper; their former governess, Miss Jessel, had left. On taking charge of the children she 'was dazzled by their loveliness' (IV) and initially had excellent rapport with them, but soon problems emerged.

Miles, the only male main child character in James' novels of this period about children, has been expelled from school. The reason is never explicit, although there are vague sexual overtones to the matter. Miles, oddly for a boy aged ten, never talks of school or of friends there or elsewhere, although he does eventually ask when he will go to a school, since his life at home with a governess is 'so unnatural for a boy' (XV). There are also various sexual hints in his relationship with Peter Quint, the former butler, now dead. The governess in talking with Mrs. Grose about the expulsion initially sees the reason as, despite his real goodness, 'the outbreak in him of the little natural man' (VIII), that is an apparently inborn, not a learnt quality. Eventually the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint appear to the governess several times, but are not seen by the children or Mrs. Grose. In this situation both children lose their trust in the governess. Flora withdraws from her and Miles, after disagreements and difficult discussions, dies in her arms.

There have been many readings of this tale. Edmund Wilson, adopting a Freudian approach, saw the governess as 'a neurotic case of sex repression' and the ghosts as 'hallucinations' in her mind; Bohlmeijer, using Jungian concepts, found the intensity of the tale to depend upon 'the presence of the archetypes'.¹³ Yet James himself has the narrator in the introduction say of the governess, 'She was the most agreeable woman I've ever known in her position'. He clearly saw *The Turn of the Screw* as a conscious exercise in story telling. In his introduction to the version in the New York Edition he called it 'a fairy tale pure and simple'. 'The ghosts' had 'laid on them the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of evil'. In a letter written in December, 1898, to H. G. Wells, he detailed the technical problems of his mode of presenting 'the grotesque business' and 'childish psychology' through the governess, concluding 'but the thing is a pot-boiler and a *jeu d'esprit*'. To W. H. Myers, himself much interested in psychic phenomena, he repeated his view that the *novella* was 'a very mechanical matter ... a shameless potboiler'.¹⁴

Here James was perhaps being ingenuous about this tale, but certainly he seemed to see it at the conscious level and so it is here viewed. He was again examining the corruption of childish innocence and, once again, in anomalous family circumstances. Yet, the process of dispelling ignorance is not so central as in the other two tales. Nor is there the same

emphasis on morality as there had been in *What Maisie Knew* and was to be in *The Awkward Age*. Though Coveney's judgement that *The Turn of the Screw* is a 'disorderly phantasy'¹⁵ can not be accepted, he is correct in his view that it stands apart from the other two novels and there is no doubt that it adds little to our discussion of James' views on education.

The Awkward Age (1899)

The Awkward Age began as a short story in 1895, but grew by 1898 into a long novel, initially serialised in *Harper's Weekly*, and then published in Britain and the USA in hardback form.¹⁶ Initial reviews were neither enthusiastic nor bad, but in reviewing Volume IX of the New York Edition in which this novel was reprinted, the *New York Review of Books* (30 May, 1906) commented in a more favourable tone: 'It is all the more regrettable that this book at first failed, and was treated with disrespect'. In London, Heinemann's first and only print run was of 2000 copies; in New York, Harper's first printed 1000 copies and then made a second issue of unknown size.¹⁷

The idea for the story came from George Meredith. In 1894 he told James of a meeting between one 'man who celebrates his own great feats and triumphs of love', based on Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate (1896–1913), and another 'who really had immense success in his younger past and has kept deeply silent about them[sic]', based on Admiral F. A. Maxse, a friend of Meredith's. James soon saw that he could develop this idea as opposing 'the French attitude' and 'the English attitude',¹⁸ a comparison reminiscent of his treatment in *The Portrait of a Lady* of the upbringing of Isabel Archer and of her step-daughter, Pansy Osmond. Technically *The Awkward Age* was innovative in that there were ten sections, each focussing on one of the main characters, the whole aimed to throw more light on the developing plot.

The outline is simple and in James' words in his Introduction for the New York Edition centred on

the difficulty made in certain friendly houses and for certain flourishing mothers by the sometimes dreaded, often delayed but never fully expected coming to the forefront of some vague slip of a daughter.

The awkward age was that in adolescence of moving from schoolroom to dining room. Nanda Brookenham, the eighteen-year old daughter of a smart London hostess, 'comes down' and starts to hear all the gossip. One of Mrs B's friends, the Duchess, of Italian extraction, brings up her daughter, little Aggie, so that she, much as Pansy Osmond

had been, was in seclusion. Even in late adolescence 'she has to be back in the schoolroom by seven' (V). Aggie marries one of Mrs B's set, Mr. Mitchett ('Mitchy'). Nandy nearly marries Vanderbank, a very (too?) close friend of Mrs B's; he holds back, mainly because she has inevitably come to know more than a 'nice' girl should before marriage—the crucial incident involves the reading of a yellow-backed French novel. Nanda then leaves London, as James had recently done, to live in rural Suffolk in the house of Mr. Longdon. He is a straightforward bachelor of fifty-five—James' age at the time—and the former suitor of Nanda's grandmother, whom she closely resembled.

The difference between the two ways of educating girls is great. Little Aggie, as the Duchess tells Mrs B, 'has been brought up under an anxious eye ... and with what she was not to learn—till the proper time—looked after quite as much as the rest' (V). Nanda summed up to her mother, 'Yes, the Duchess isn't a human is she? She's a standard' (XXIII). The result as Nanda told Mitchy was that '... the beauty of Aggie is that she knows nothing—but absolutely utterly; not the least little tittle of anything,' adding 'Ah, say what you will—it is the way we ought to be!' (XXV) Mrs B said of her, 'She says nothing to anyone, ... that's just her type and her charm—just, above all, her education' (XV). The Duchess' views on marriage were not unlike those of Mrs. Touchett in *The Portrait of a Lady* who 'took ... not the sentimental, but the political view of matrimony ...' (XXVI). Aggie married Mitchy and she changed rapidly to the surprise of many in the small set, but the Duchess commented, 'I married her ... exactly that she should ('come out') If it has taken her a short time ... to which of you did I (ever pretend) ... that it would take her a very long one?' (XXX)

The Duchess told Mrs B her view of the English way of educating girls: 'It's all a muddle, a compromise, a monstrosity' (V). Nanda explained to Mitchy how different from Aggie she was:

Why, I got the benefit of the fact that there never was a time when I didn't know something or other and that I became more and more aware, as I grew older, of a hundred little chinks of daylight. (XXXVII)

Nanda was never innocent in her own eyes, only more or less ignorant. Mr. Longdon noted that Nanda 'struggled with instincts and forebodings' (XVIII)—all was not environmental influence.

Edmund Brookenham did suggest to his wife that Nanda could have 'sat downstairs' a year earlier, to which Mrs B replied, 'She was ready—yes. But I wasn't. I am now' (VI). Both wisdom and selfishness probably determined this decision. Nanda, however, knew that her mother 'wants me not any more to see only with her eyes. She's throwing me into

the world' (IX). Nanda told Mr. Longdon she wanted 'to hear all the talk ... it helps to form the young mind' (XXII). Mitchy told Mrs B that 'the modern girl (was) the product of our hard London facts ...' (XXII). However, Mrs B told the Duchess:

The sort of man I know anything about ... (is) not looking for mechanical dolls. They are looking for smart, safe, sensible English girls (V).

This was an unlikely outcome of her way of educating her daughter. As Vandebank said of Nanda to Mitchy: 'She knows everything, everything' and 'the longer she's in (her world) the more she'll know ...'. He considered that '... for the non-marrying girls (such an education)...doesn't particularly matter (.) For the others it's such an odd preparation' (XXVI). What is, perhaps even odder is that for James at a conscious level neither type of education achieved its aim as Aggie's marriage was not happy and Nanda did not immediately marry.

The Times reviewer (15 August 1899) commented that but for Nanda, 'a very loveable and pathetic figure', *The Awkward Age* 'would be ... a scathing satire on a section of society that is ... utterly rotten and detestable at the core beneath a very smart exterior'. Indeed, this environment is what James went to Rye to study anew and from afar. Edmund Wilson writes of 'a creepy atmosphere of scandal'. James himself described the novel in a letter to the French novelist, Paul Bourget, in December, 1898 as 'a fable of superior quality'.¹⁹ James knew he was hiding something. At the unconscious level Ediel believes that Mr. Longdon, as did James,

harboured within his house ... the spirit of a young adult female, worldly wise and curious, possessing a treasure of unavailable virginity and innocence and able to yield to the masculine active world-searching side of James an ever-fresh and exquisite vision of feminine youth and innocence.²⁰

This echoes Wilson's view quoted earlier.²¹ Yet from our point of view we must beware of the word 'innocence'. James himself in his notebooks wrote in March, 1895, of Nanda's effect on Mr. Longdon: 'All her ignorance, to his sense, is gone'.²² Innocence, a feature of personality, is contrasted with ignorance, which, as was the case with both Aggie and Nanda—and Maisie too, was changed into knowledge of different types by their differing experiences. As Nanda herself said to Mr. Longdon in explaining why she was not like her grandmother: 'If we're both partly the result of other people, her other people were so different' (XVII).

The Other House (1896)

James' notebooks for December, 1893, show that he had the idea for a story about a man with a young daughter whose wife dies, making him promise that he will not remarry. Eventually, after various trials he does to someone he really loves. This idea James originally converted into a scenario, never used, for a play, 'The Promise', then into a novel, *The Other House*, first seen as a serial in *The Illustrated London News* prior to publication in London and New York, though not included in the New York Edition, and, finally, in 1908-9 into a play which was never produced.²³

The New York Times Review considered this novel 'a master-piece' (31 October, 1896) and it certainly is a fine psychological thriller, dramatic in both form and feeling. Effie, the daughter, was brought up by a stepmother and at a 'horrid school at Weymouth'. As a child she was reunited with her great friend and cousin, Rose Armiger, 'by one of the strongest of ties—the tie of a common aversion', towards her stepmother who was also Rose's aunt (III). The promise that Effie's mother had extracted from her husband, Tony Beaver, on her deathbed not to marry again in Effie's lifetime was based on, as he says, 'the vision of my perhaps giving the child a stepmother' (VII). Tony dedicated himself to bringing up the child. Jean Martle, Mrs Beaver's niece, is also much involved and they are in his words 'in danger of spoiling her' (XVII). Rose is in love with Tony and, partly out of jealousy for Jean who she recognises is also in love with Tony, though she does not realise it, drowns Effie, believing no one has seen her act. There were, however, two witnesses. Tony takes the blame to allow Rose to escape with a former suitor, although all involved know the true story.

The noteworthy characteristic of this novel is that at the very time when James was beginning to write and think about *What Maisie Knew* and *The Turn of the Screw* he wrote *The Other House*, also a study of the problems implicit in anomalous upbringings. James was apparently concentrating in another way on the place of rootedness in education that he also considered in his constant return to the effects that European experience had on American travellers.

Conclusion

James' three major novels of the late 1890s about children added nothing new to his way of considering education, but gave his thought much greater depth, though still no real systematisation. Furthermore, though James had always been an ambiguous writer this characteristic became much more pronounced in these works. In 1909 James admitted

to his heart specialist that he used ambiguity to make the reader's imagination 'run riot and depict all sorts of horrors'.²⁴ There never was, for example, a resolution in his mind between the American and European ways of life. His use of ambiguity ensured that he never needed to come down on one side or the other on many of the moral or educational issues he raised.

His educational attitudes were formed in outline in 1871 when he published *Watch and Ward* and were isolated earlier as four foci. These were fleshed out in his later work, though after 1895 two prior minor emphases were given much attention. These were his new emphases on morality and on what today might be called sex education. However, these two developments can be subsumed within the five main characteristics of his treatment of education that are presented here.

We may start from the characteristic that Coveney and others have noted, the treatment of the innocence of the child. The case has been argued that this concept is too narrow to reveal James' view in full, but that innocence must be contrasted with ignorance, thereby allowing both heredity and environment, the fifth focus isolated earlier, a place in the development of the child. Experience dispels ignorance, bringing 'knowledge', a word much used by James and not only of Maisie. Innocence need not be corrupted by knowledge unless the knowledge is inappropriate or ill-used. James gives us no criteria to judge when this consequence may occur.

The next characteristic in James' treatment of education is his emphasis upon the family. It is not the school, but the family and the schoolroom in the family home that is the usual source of knowledge. In part this is because he was in the main dealing with the upper middle classes, though even in the case of Hyacinth Robinson in *Princess Cassimassa*, his upbringing in an albeit anomalous family is important. James also made clear how much more difficult a familial education was for those travelling overseas, an experience he himself had undergone.

The third characteristic isolated here is James' stress on roots. This was present in his earlier work but now became more central. It is most obvious in his comparisons between American and European families, but can also be seen in his great use of anomalous settings for the education of his child characters: Nora, Pansy, Effie, Miles and Flora are all examples. Furthermore, James left London for Rye in 1897 to view urban society, which he saw as rootless and unstable, more clearly from relative rural solitude. He placed several of his child characters in the country to gain the rootedness he valued, but may have missed in his own upbringing, marked as it was by much movement, both within the USA and in Europe; Nanda and Miles and Flora are obvious examples.

Fourthly, James treated the education of girls more fully than that of boys. As hinted there are explanations of this at the unconscious level; those by Edmund Wilson and Leon Edel have both been cited. James did, however, consider the cases of Miles, Morgan Morveen, Ralph Touchett and Owen Wingrave. He himself claimed in the case of Maisie that the role of girls in society as then perceived allowed him to make the points he wanted more easily and this purely technical reason may be seen as the conscious reason for James' emphasis on girls' education.

Lastly, in a letter written in October, 1898, James in referring to *The Turn of the Screw* spoke of 'the helpless plasticity of childhood'.²⁵ There is some ambiguity here on two counts. First, he did occasionally allow for heredity. Second, he wished his children to have experience and to begin to think and learn for themselves, the fourth focus isolated earlier. He wanted them to make choices for themselves as he had done in his education. That was why a 'moral sense' was important for Maisie. Yet James never specified the direction in which those choices should be made nor the knowledge needed to make these decisions.

Edel has suggested that *The Awkward Age* may be read as a 'theory of education' for the female young.²⁶ If his reviewers are any index neither this novel nor any of James' other work was so read at the time. The case presented here is that James had no developed theory of education. In the final analysis he criticised the contemporary upper middle class on a number of grounds for the manner in which they brought up their young, but made no systematic or constructive suggestions about how they might mend their ways.

NOTES

1. See for example, Ch.8, 'Innocence in James', in P. J. Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1967. This account of the three major novels of 1897-9 is contained in a work originally (1957) entitled *Poor Monkey*, a description applied by her mother to Maisie in *What Maisie Knew*; M. Beerbohm, 'The Mote in the Middle Distance' in *A Christmas Garland*, Heinemann: London, 1912.
2. Because of the many editions of James' work the convention has been adopted in this paper of citing chapters rather than page numbers. In addition all James' works are identified on their first citation by their year of first publication alone, thereby retaining academic integrity, but avoiding a long bibliography. Italics in quotations are always in the original sources.
3. L. Edel, Henry James: *The Treacherous Years 1895-1901*, Hart-Davis: London, 1969, p.199. Many of the biographical details about James in this paper are drawn from the five volumes of Leon Edel's great biography of James, written between 1953 and 1972, though only the last two are cited here.

4. E. Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1962, p.147.
5. L. Edel, *The Treacherous Years 1895-1901*, pp.247 and 249.
6. L. Edel, *Henry James: The Master 1904-1916*, Hart-Davis: London, 1972, p.452; P. Grosskurth, *Melanie Klein Her World and Her Work*, Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1986, pp.155-7.
7. See G. Allport, 'Introduction' to W. James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*(1892), Harper: New York, 1961.
8. See L. Edel (ed.), *Henry James Letters. Vol. IV: 1895-1916*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge (Mass.), 1984, p.782.
9. E. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.125.
10. L. Edel, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1987, pp.102, and 71.
11. *Ibid.*, p.149 (capitals in original).
12. L. Edel, *The Complete Notebooks*, p.150.
13. E. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.102; A. Bohlmeijer, 'The Intruder: Henry James and *The Turn of the Screw*', *Encounter*, LXIX (1), 1987, p.47. It is also worth noting two operatic interpretations, namely, *The Turn of the Screw* (op.54) in 1954 and *Owen Wingrave* (op.85) in 1970; by Benjamin Britten; in the latter Britten concentrated on pacifism, but in the former on the corruption of innocence.
14. L. Edel (ed.), *Henry James letters Vol. IV: 1895-19*, pp.88 and 86.
15. P. Coveney, *op. cit.*, p.214.
16. See L. Edel (ed.), *Henry James Letters Vol. IV: 1895-1916*, pp.23 (Note 3) and 61 (Note 1).
17. L. Edel and D. H. Laurence (eds.), *A Bibliography of Henry James*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1982, pp.115-6.
18. L. Edel (ed.), *Henry James Letters Vol. IV: 1895-1916*, pp.88 and 91.
19. E. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.126; L. Edel, *Henry James Letters Vol. IV: 1895-1916*, p.89.
20. L. Edel, *Henry James: The Treacherous Years 1895-1901*, p.244.
21. See supra at footnote 4.
22. L. Edel (ed.), *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, p.118.
23. L. Edel (ed.), *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, pp.82; L. Edel, 'Introduction' in H. James, *The Other House*, Hart-Davis: London, 1948, pp.vii and xiv.
24. L. Edel, *Henry James, The Master, 1904-1916*, p.435.
25. L. Edel (ed.), *Henry James Letters. Vol. IV: 1895-1916*, p.84.
26. L. Edel, *Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1883*, Hart-Davis: London, 1962, p.242.