A Rhetoric of the Unreal

Studies in narrative and structure,
especially of the fantastic

CHRISTINE BROOKE-ROSE

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

5

The encoded reader

1. Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère

After a long period when the actual (flesh and blood) author had been enthroned by criticism, his every 'laundry-list' (as Pound called biography) scrutinized, he was, in true carnivalesque fashion, unthroned, the wild and happy crowd of actual readers taking over – but, as is the way with carnival, only for a time. Extremes bring natural reactions, and the two polarities, called at the time the intentional and the affective fallacies, seem to have compromised on a safe buffer state called the text as object, an apparently autonomous unit that encodes not only its author (implied), and its reader (implied), but also (or) its narrator and its narratee.

Buffer states, however, rarely remain safe or buffer, and wars (or carnivals) continue, as we have seen in chapter 2. To simplify I shall restrict myself here to the reader as encoded in the text, although this again is bound to be 'my' reading of the reader as so encoded; nor do I claim to escape professional deformation any more than others have, though many try.

First, I shall retain the more neutral term, the 'encoded reader', which makes my option for the textual buffer state clear. Second, I shall stick to very simple problems in simple narratives, on the grounds that these reveal encoded structures more easily than do complex poems or even complex narratives. Finally, I shall divide my material into three broad categories: texts in which a code is over-determined, texts in which it is under-determined, and texts in which it is non-determined or so haphazardly determined as to be in effect non-determined.[1] These are operational terms: the contrast needed to reveal the first category will automatically touch on the second (so that the first section will be longer); and the last may turn out to be a transient category.

2. A code over-determined: hypocrite lecteur

A code is over-determined when its information (narrative, ironic, hermeneutic, symbolic, etc.) is too clear, over-encoded, recurring beyond purely informational need. The reader is then in one sense also over-encoded, and does in fact sometimes appear in the text, dramatised, like an extra character: the 'Dear Reader'. But in another sense he is treated as a kind of fool who has to be told everything, a subcritical (*hypo-crite*) reader.

2.1. A folk-tale: over-determination of action and mystery codes

I shall start, not with the pure fantastic but with an ultra-simple example from an American short story very like a folk-tale, in which narrative information, both proaieretic (the action) and hermeneutic (the mystery), is over-determined.[2]

In Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*, Rip wakes up from his adventure on the mountain, and the reader naturally supposes that this happens the next morning. No indices suggest otherwise, or rather, the time indices are carefully unspecified, under-determined, although this could escape a first reading (my italics):[3]

> *On waking*, he found himself on the green knoll whence he had first seen the old man of the glen [reader assumes he was transported there after drinking from the flagon]. He rubbed his eyes – *it was a bright sunny morning* ... 'Surely', thought Rip, 'I have not slept here *all night*.' [counter-index 1, = one night, but in character's view-point]. He recalled the occurrences *before he fell asleep*.

And he gives (like the reader), a 'natural' explanation: 'Oh, that flagon! That wicked flagon!' From narrator to reader, Rip's 'all night' is a false clue (Barthes's *leurre*) but, on second reading, a character-error.

There follows a long series of thirty indices, all partaking of both the action and hermeneutic codes, and upon any one of which any actual reader may guess the truth, long before Rip.

In the mountains

Index 1:	his gun is rusty	could all receive natural explanation (one night)
Index 2:	his dog Wolf is gone	
Index 3:	he is stiff in joints	

Index 4:	he can't find amphitheatre	s.t.s.p. 1 (suggestion of time supernaturally passed, no. 1), but could still have natural explanation	
Indes 5:	the landscape has changed (stream where none before,) etc.)		
In the village			
Index 6:	he meets people he does not know	s.t.s.p. 2	
Index 7:	they stare at him in surprise and stroke their chins	s.t.s.p. 3	
Index 8:	stroking his chin, he finds his beard is a foot long	s.t.s.p. 4	see later for implausibility
Index 9:	(change to external viewpoint) strange children hoot at him and point to his gray beard	s.t.s.p. 5	
Index 10:	the dogs are unfamiliar	s.t.s.p. 6	
Index 11:	the village is altered (more populous, old haunts gone, new houses built)	s.t.s.p. 7	
Counter-Index 2:	the mountains and river are unaltered	provokes both natural explanation (flagon) and supernatural (bewitched)	
Index 12:	his own house is decayed	s.t.s.p. 8	
Index 13:	'A half-starved dog, that looked like Wolf', shows his teeth. Rip feels his very dog has forgotten him.	clearly presented as other dog, hence character-error. As such no s.t.s.p., only in context: s.t.s.p. 9	
Index 14:	the village inn (his refuge) is different	s.t.s.p. 10	
Index 15:	it has a different name and owner: 'The Union Hotel, by Jonathan Doolittle'	s.t.s.p. 11. Here a *specific time code* (s.t.c.) is added (post Revolutionary War): s.t.c. 1	
Index 16:	it has a different flag (description)	s.t.s.p. 12+s.t.c. 2	
Index 17:	the sign has changed, from King George in red coat and		

	sceptre to same face but in buff and blue coat with sword (etc.), legend: George Washington	s.t.s.p. 13 + s.t.c. 3
Index 18:	the drowsy tranquillity has become bustling disputation	as such no s.t.s.p. or s.t.c., only in context: s.t.s.p. 14 + s.t.c. 4
Index 19:	his old friends (named) gone	s.t.s.p. 15
Index 20:	people speak in a 'Babylonish jargon'	s.t.s.p. 16 (later revealed as election talk but no s.t.c. here)
Index 21:	'The appearance of Rip, with his long grizzled beard, his rusty fowling-piece, his uncouth dress...'	repeat of Indices 8 and 9 (also with external viewpoint) and of Index 1
Index 22:	questions about how he voted, Federal or Democrat, and why he brings a gun to an election	s.t.s.p. 17 + s.t.c. 5
Index 23:	accused of being a spy and threatened	as such no s.t.s.p., only in context: s.t.s.p. 18 + s.t.c. 6
Index 24:	Rip protests, only looking for neighbours, names them and himself asks questions: where are they?	
	(a) Nicholas Vedder (dead eighteen years)	s.t.s.p. 19
	(b) Brom Dutcher (killed at war)	s.t.s.p. 20 + s.t.c. 7
	(c) Van Brummel (now in Congress)	s.t.s.p. 21 + s.t.c. 8
Index 25:	'Does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?' They point to a counterpart of himself (identity crisis for Rip, who still clings to his one night supposition)	s.t.s.p. 22
Index 26:	young woman appears with child in her arms, whom she calls Rip	s.t.s.p. 23
Index 27:	Rip's memories aroused, asks her name (Judith Gardenier), then her father's name (Rip Van Winkle, who left home twenty years ago)	s.t.s.p. 24

Index 28:	Rip has tumbled to the truth, and only asks: 'Where is your mother?' (dead, though recently)	s.t.s.p. 25
Index 29:	Rip embraces his daughter and reveals himself as her father, much to general amazement	s.t.s.p. 26
Index 30:	an old woman recognises him: 'Why, where have you been all these twenty long years?'	s.t.s.p. 27

Then comes the 'explanation', by an old inhabitant who turns up and tells the legend of Hendrick Hudson in the Kaatskill Mountains. The explanation is supernatural.

Clearly any actual reader, first identifying with Rip in his puzzlement, must quickly unidentify (probably at index 8, and possibly before); without knowing the exact explanation, he knows that time has mysteriously elapsed and starts watching Rip's puzzlement instead of sharing it. The encoded reader, however, is encoded throughout the thirty indices, in an over-determined way, at least as regards hermeneutic information (the aesthetic pleasure derived from the details of the changed village is another question).

Interestingly, it is at index 8 that the narrator 'cheats', as it were, in the *vraisemblable* necessary to the supernatural, with the implausibly late realisation by Rip about the length of his beard (one must surely *see* one's own beard if it is a foot long, especially if one is picking up a gun from the ground, looking for a dog, a path, etc., but I am ready to be corrected by any long-bearded man). And at index 9 the narrator switches to an external view of the beard for its colour, repeating the procedure at index 21. Such a change of viewpoint (the only examples), justified only by the need to delay Rip's recognition, is like an extra encoded wink which increases the distance between hero and encoded reader. And of course the specific time codes (s.t.c.) about the Revolutionary War, belong to Barthes's referential code, which appeals to our general knowledge.

This over-determination of the hermeneutic and action codes is of course specific to the fairy-tale, as when an adult, telling a story to a child who knows it but wants to hear it again, may overplay a known formula, giving the equivalent of a heavy wink. But *Rip Van Winkle* is more than a children's story, and if we want to account for this, the over-determination of the action and hermeneutic codes

inevitably shifts the actual reader's interpretation powers onto other codes: the semic, slightly (the build-up of Rip's character through semes, good nature, laziness, etc.), the referential (historical, general, such as indirect reference to the virago wife as a type), and the symbolic.

I realise that this sounds like the desperate teacher or critic who, unable to excuse the 'bad' (or here, naive) aspects of a classic, takes refuge in the symbolic, a sin also besetting critics of contemporary fiction in those innumerable studies of the symbolism, allegory and thematics of otherwise mediocre works (see 5, *Codes non-determined*). But that is only the abuse of a theoretically valid procedure. As Barthes (and Frye) have shown, a work, genre or period can exploit one code (or mode) more than others, but can be read in each or all of them, the dominance of any one or more becoming highly relevant to generic expectation. Realistic fiction tends to over-determine the referential and the semic codes, and could, but might not, under-determine the proaieretic and/or the hermeneutic and/or the symbolic. A folk-tale will over-determine the proaieretic and sometimes (as here), the hermeneutic, but under-determine (or not code at all) the referential, the semic, the symbolic.

Rip Van Winkle is a relatively sophisticated folk-tale, for all its over-determination, and it appeals to us as a folk-tale with sophisticated variants. Without using any complex (Greimasian or other) analysis, we can recognise most of Propp's functions (see above, chapter 2, p. 19), occasionally displaced (*e.g. pursuit* and *rescue* shifted to the beginning as Rip's wife chases him from home and then from his refuge, the inn; *interrogation* shifted to the end and fused with *task*; *victory* shifted to the end); or if not displaced, transmuted.

There is first an exposition of the initial situation, in the iterative mode, made up in fact of all the elements that turn up later (reversed) as indices. The *transgression* is transmuted as not serious, a charming transgression of an implicit (social) injunction to work. Dame Van Winkle is a wicked-stepmother figure indirectly responsible for Rip's escape into the mountains. Rip's 'transgression' does not cause an explicit *misdeed* by a villain, nor a *lack*, but his indolent nature does create a lack of marital happiness. The *mediation* (call for help) is not the king's but is assumed by the hero and motivated by his own reaction to that unhappiness. The hero *departs*, is *tested* by a 'donor' (call for help by the old man of the glen), *reacts*, indirectly receives a *magic auxiliary* (the drink, albeit

taken sub-reptitously), which *translocates* him, it seems only in space (back to the knoll), but actually in time. The *struggle* is shifted to a more metaphysical level, but is first presented as a physical struggle with the situation, and only later becomes a struggle with his own identity. There is naturally no immediate *victory*, as in Propp, but there is a physical *marking* (of age), and there is an *arrival incognito*, a *false hero's claim* (society threatening him, in his identity), a *task*, assimilated to the struggle with identity in time (he solves the task and wins the struggle by asking questions himself), a *solution*, first for himself then for others (though the encoded reader knows the answer, as in the folk-tale), followed by *recognition*, through his daughter in the role of the princess whose 'marking' of the hero (identity through name and blood) leads to the identification and is the more metaphysical counterpart to the physical marking of age.

Above all there is an (ironic) *transfiguration*; Rip is no longer the reckless young fellow but a respected patriarch, and as an (ironic) *reward* (Propp's 'wedding' function) he goes to live with his daughter, and as a respected patriarch is not required to work. This is also his victory; he has all the peace and comfort of marriage (albeit incestuous) without the responsibility and the nagging. He has paid a heavy price for it, that of his youth and lived experience, but he is evidently happy to pay it.

Even if the actual reader has not read Propp he will, from a general as opposed to a skilled literary competence (and this general competence is the closest analogy to linguistic competence), be familiar with and recognise these folklore elements. But they are under-determined, they have as it were shifted into the symbolic code. The 'villain' (and, ambiguously, the 'hero') is in fact really time, itself ambiguous (an antithesis transgressed): (a) working time (society versus laziness), and (b) free time (society and Rip's good relations with it – he helps everyone except himself). His wife, often thought to be the villain, is merely a specific manifestation of the real villain, society in its bad aspect. She is punished by death (time). He is rewarded by the free time of old age, but is also punished by the loss of youth (time). Good society (for him) has won, even if bad society (for others) goes on (wars, elections, disputations). What we have is not, as some critics have argued, an attack on the American Woman, but a typical American story of the hero opting out of society. And all this, including the carefully balanced rhetorical structure, belongs to the symbolic code, which is under-determined.

I have spent some time on a simple narrative in order to over-determine my point about over-determination. With or without a Proppian (or any other) analysis, and even if this reading can be disputed, it is clear that over-determination in one area does not alter our feeling of something else being there, less immediately accessible, which gives the story its charm and quality (to use evaluative words, or (to avoid them) its underlying structure and coherence.

If this is true, we can only conclude that whatever over-determination may occur in any one work or genre, some under-determination is necessary for it to retain its hold over us, its peculiar mixture of recognition–pleasure and mystery.

In other words, the function of the over-determined part of a text is to make things clear to the Dear Reader who is encoded as hypo-critical, while the function of the under-determined part is to blur, to keep something back (and it may be much more in a complex text), so as not to insult the Dear Reader's intelligence enough to alienate him.

So I shall turn to a very different kind of text, Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), which uses a very sophisticated form of over-determination, in the best Sterne tradition.[4]

2.2. The playful text: over-determination of the symbolic code

The novel opens with the I–narrator's reflections on narrative openings:

> Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression. I reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and interrelated only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings.
>
> *Examples of three separate openings – the first*: The Pooka MacPhelliney, a member of the devil class, sat in his hut in the middle of a firwood meditating on the nature of the numerals and segregating in his mind the odd ones from the even. He was seated at his diptych or ancient two-leaved hinged writing-table with inner sides waxed. His rough long-nailed fingers toyed with a snuff-box of perfect rotundity and through a gap in his teeth he whistled a civil cavatina. He was a courtly man and received honour by reason of the generous treatment he gave his wife, one of the Corrigans of Carlow.

The second opening: There was nothing unusual in the appearance of Mr John Furriskey but actually he had one distinction that is rarely encountered – he was born at the age of twenty-five and entered the world with a memory but without a personal experience to account for it. His teeth were well-formed but stained by tobacco, with two molars filled and a cavity threatened in the left canine. His knowledge of physics was moderate and extended to Boyle's Law and the Parallelogram of Forces.

The third opening: Finn MacCool was a legendary hero of old Ireland. Though not mentally robust he was a man of superb physique and development. Each of his thighs was as thick as a horse's belly, narrowing to a calf as thick as the belly of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was large enough to halt the march of men through a mountain-pass. (p. 9)

The symbolic code is gloriously evident throughout, in the transgression of narrative levels (see chapter 2, p. 38, and chapter 12, pp. 333–5 here): the narrative inside a narrative but both from the same narrator, with the passage from one to the other emphasised by titles in italics. Within this transgression there is a rhetorical stylisation in the parody of literary models, all 'realistic': the initial 'portrait', the non-functional detail ('*a firwood meditating on the nature of numerals ... His rough long-nailed fingers toyed with a snuff-box of perfect rotundity*,' etc.; *two molars filled ... Boyle's Law ...*'), and explanatory description ('*his diptych or ancient two-leaved hinged writing-table with inner sides waxed*' – also perfectly pointless, parodying the effect of the real).

This parody of realism, however, is about 'unreal' characters: a member of the devil class, a man born at twenty-five, a legendary hero of old Ireland. Two models (legendary/realistic) are thus juxtaposed and interparodied; another antithesis transgressed. And within the legendary model, the relative measurements of the giant Finn MacCool (a relativity about which Swift was so meticulous), are wrong (if his thigh is as thick as a horse's belly his backside can hardly stop an army), recalling Rabelais rather than Swift.

Thus the symbolic code contains or is made up of a referential code, that is itself rhetorical, that is, it refers to our knowledge of opposing literary conventions, transgresses the oppositions. This symbolic code is highly determined (assuming our knowledge of the rhetoric or cultural conventions), except perhaps for Mr John Furriskey, the significance of whose adult birth and memory 'without a personal experience to account for it' is only implicit, but will be over-determined later; for that, of course, describes fictional characters though realistic fiction gives them a past in pluperfect

analepsis. This is the only functional 'detail', none of the others playing any part in the 'story' (what there is of it) or recurring later.

It may be noted that since it is technically impossible to have more than one beginning to a narrative, owing to the linear sequential nature of language, the three 'examples' have to be given consecutively, so that the second and the third are not textually 'beginnings' (except under each subtitle), and none of them is the beginning of the I–narrator's narrative. Further transgression: a beginning is not a beginning.

The I–narrator then takes over again in an extremely episodic narrative about himself (a lazy student), his uncle, his friends, his uncle's friends: a non-narrative, in fact, that is frequently broken into by, and frequently breaks back into, other narratives produced by the student while he pretends to work in his room; these narratives are often discussed with his friends, and concern, among others, the above three personages.

The first of the narratives, however, is about a Mr Dermot Trellis, author, who lives at the Red Swan Hotel with the characters he creates, and who locks them up at night so that they won't be up to any mischief while he sleeps. Mr Trellis, like the narrator, writes in bed, and creates characters fully grown (such as Mr Furriskey, and as does any novelist), which amazing scientific feat calls for extracts from the press, including a medical correspondent, who claims however that some of the research was done by a Mr William Tracy, another author. This is where the implicit element of the opening rhetoric becomes over-determined. It turns out that most of the characters in the book (except those at the student–narrator's level) have been created by Mr Trellis (himself created by the narrator), and that some of them also remember episodes experienced in Mr Tracy's books. The narrator had earlier expressed certain views of the novel according to which: 'Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another ... The modern novel should be largely a work of reference. Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before – usually said much better' (p. 25). Characters are not only said to be 'used' or 'employed' by an author, but 'hired'.

Mr Dermot Trellis creates the Pooka MacPhelliney, Finn MacCool, Mr Furriskey and his friends, some of whom tell stories about other characters or quote poets who then appear in the 'story' (such as it is). Finn tells ambling and incoherent legends, mostly about Sweeney, a travelling outcast bird-creature who utters poems.

At one point Finn appears to be Mr Trellis, half asleep in the same room. Mr Trellis also makes an indecent assault on one of his own characters (to protect whose virtue he had created her brother), the result of which is Orlick Trellis, to whose birth at the Red Swan all the other characters travel, coming across each other on the way. Orlick Trellis is of course also born adult, and Furriskey and his friends, perceiving that their author Dermot Trellis is becoming immune to the drugs they give him to keep him asleep while they act independently, induce Orlick to write a narrative against his father. After various false starts this narrative gets going and poor Dermot is beaten about, tortured and finally tried by all the other characters, including twelve judges acting also as witnesses and jury, the evidence against him being produced from their past 'employment' in other books.

What we have then is constant and deliberate transgression of narrative levels, a procedure not in itself new (see chapter 12), but so complicated, with so many levels (stories within stories and transgressions of narrators from one level to another), that it would be almost impossible to follow if the procedure itself, as part of a symbolic code super-encoded, were not thoroughly overdetermined.

Thus we are given, at the mere level of the student–narrator's narrative, constant rhetorical headings followed by colons, such as:

'*Description of my uncle*: Red-faced, bead-eyed, ball bellied. Fleshy about the shoulders . . .'; '*Quality of rasher in use in the household*: Inferior, one and two the pound.'; '*The two senses referred to*: Vision and Smell'; '*Nature of chuckle*: quiet, private, averted'; '*Name of figure of speech*: Anaphora (or Epibole)'; '*The texts referred to, being an excerpt from "A Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences", volume the thirty-first*' (etc.).

There are, as well, marked transitions to other levels: '*Extract from my typescript descriptive of Finn MacCool and his people, being a humorous or quasi-humorous incursion into ancient mythology*' (this notwithstanding the fact that Trellis is later said, in a synopsis for the late-coming reader, to have created Finn); '*Further extract from MS, Oratio Recta*'; or, for returning to the student–narrator level: '*Biographical Reminiscence, Part the First*'; '*. . . the Second*'; '*. . . the final*'; '*Conclusion of the book antepenultimate*'; '*. . . penultimate*'; '*. . . ultimate*'. (Nor of course are these three 'conclusions' real endings in any traditional sense.) And all the interruptions at all the levels end with a similar marking, such as '*End of foregoing*'.

The book is funny in much the same way that *Tristram Shandy* is

funny, each being in different ways concerned with the difficulty and absurdity of writing fiction. A 'real' reader (Dylan Thomas) recommended it to a 'fictionally real' reader in these terms: 'Just the book to give to your sister, if she's a loud, dirty, boozy girl.' But for the loud, dirty, boozy girl to follow, there is a heavy over-coding on the rhetorical level, which does not detract from the book (as the over-determination of the hermeneutic code in *Rip* does not) but is necessary to its comprehension (unlike *Rip*). More important, it also constitutes one of its chief delights. It is an integral part of the delight in the constant transgressions, transgressions being delightful only if the rules are both clear and firm. Once again, but in a very different way, over-determination is counterbalanced by under-determination, but here it is the proaieretic (action) code which is under-determined, not only by the carnivalesque structure (society turned upside down, insertion of other genres, see chapter 2, p. 43 above, and p. 370 for Bakhtin) and by the constant transgression of levels, but also by its ambling, non-proaieretic nature at every level, including the narrator's. The transgression of narrative levels, calling attention to narrative procedure, is then itself thoroughly over-determined rhetorically, in the symbolic code (which is about the practice of *écriture*), and by the same token 'unconfuses' the proaieretic code, so as not to alienate the Dear Reader (the very much encoded reader), with the result that he is flattered by his own understanding. Without the under-determined area, the over-determined one would alienate him as an insult to his intelligence.

3. A code under-determined: hypercrite lecteur

In order to emphasise the balance needed by over-coding, I have necessarily and unhermeneutically encroached on this second category (though as we shall see the two are inversely linked), and so will analyse only one example (pure fantastic) and give more space to theoretical discussion.

Just as the function of over-determination is to make clear, so the function of under-determination is to blur. The encoded reader is then required to cooperate actively, to be hyper-critical. This indeed was one of the avowed purposes of the *nouveau roman*. A more popular and obvious example is the detective-story, in which the whole art is to give all the clues but in such a way that the important ones pass unnoticed. Here too there must be a careful balance between over-determination and under-determination, but

the under-determination is stronger, either remaining so throughout or remaining so till the last few pages. And of course when a narrator cheats, as in the much cited instance of Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, where the reader is allowed inside the detective's thoughts throughout and then finds that the detective 'dunit', he feels this not only as a transgression of the implicit contract to keep the fair balance: the hermeneutic code is over-determined for wrong clues (through the wrong viewpoint), but under-determined (through the hidden fact that the viewpoint is wrong) for the 'truth'.

The clearest type is the truly ambiguous text, such as, among others, the *nouveau roman*. There seems, however, to be an important difference: the detective-story in general blurs by simply over-determining false clues and under-determining right ones (a code within the hermeneutic code, which the adept soon learns to look for); the ambiguous text, on the contrary, *seems* to over-determine one code, usually the hermeneutic, and even to over-encode the reader, but in fact the over-determination consists of repetitions and variations that give us little or no further information. The over-determination functions, paradoxically, as under-determination, provided there is also a strong element of under-determination within the same code.

The classic example is James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in which the over-determination of the enigma (ghosts vs. hallucinations) is constant yet unresolved and can be read both ways each time (see chapters 6, 7 and 8 below). Here I shall use a shorter text, Poe's 'The Black Cat' (1843),[5] which Todorov places 'perhaps' in the generic category of the pure fantastic (wholly undecidable as to whether the supernatural is indeed supernatural or can receive a natural explanation), even though he places Poe's tales as a whole in the category of the uncanny (natural explanation). I shall look only at the hermeneutic code, since the ambiguity depends on this code alone, the others being clear and relatively unexploited.

There are, throughout most of the text, only three enigmas (E) introduced from the start, but three more are introduced at the end. Here is the first paragraph (p. 390):

Title: THE BLACK CAT
For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen,

(E1: What – later which – black cat?)
E2: is it wild or homely? (supernatural/natural)

I neither expect nor solicit belief.	$E2^a$: wild (+reader encoded)
Mad indeed would I be to expect it,	$E2^b$: (2^a reversed): is *he* wild (mad)? = natural explanation (+reader encoded)
in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence.	$E2^a$: reversed: supernatural
Yet, mad I am not – and very surely I do not dream.	$E2^a$: still reversed: madness denied, so supernatural
But to-morrow I die,	E3: why?
and to-day I would unburthen my soul.	$E2^{ab}$: from madness? (natural explanation) or from supernatural?
My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment,	(reader encoded)
a series of mere household events.	$E2^b$: homely
In their consequences, these events have terrified – have tortured – have destroyed me.	$E2^a$: homely→wild; $E2^b$: mad? E3: how destroyed?
Yet I will not attempt to expound them.	(reader encoded)
To me, they have presented little but Horror –	$E2^{ab}$: homely→wild; $E2^b$ (supernatural) or mad? (natural explanation)
to many they will seem less terrible than *barroques* [Poe's italics]	$E2^b$: homely (+reader encoded)
Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace –	$E2^b$: his fantasy (natural explanation) + $E2^b$: homely (+ reader encoded)
some intellect more calm, more logical and far less excitable than my own,	$E2^{ba}$: $E2^b$ mad; or $E2^a$: events are wild (supernatural) and have merely horrified him (+reader encoded)
which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe,	$E2^a$: wild (+reader encoded)
nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.	$E2^b$: homely; therefore $E2^b$; mad (+reader encoded)

Enigma 1 (what cat?) is *apparently* solved at the beginning with the introduction of *a cat* (in italics), called Pluto, and does not recur

till after the murder of Pluto and the appearance of the second cat.

$E2^a$ and $E2^b$ are not two separate enigmas but merely the narrative/narrator aspects of the same enigma: are the events supernatural (wild) or has the narrator (mad) imagined natural events as supernatural? This and what enigma 1 becomes (which black cat? Are there two or one?) will not be resolved. Enigma 3 will be reposed only twice, once clearly ('even in this felon's cell'), and once soon after a contextually clear premonition, the white splotch on Cat 2 that grows to the shape of the gallows.

Enigma 2 is very much over-determined, as we can see here, since it is the basis of the pure fantastic. In seminar work[6] we have discovered that, in general, the short story uses few semes of any one code (and of the semic and hermeneutic in particular), but that they recur often, a form of semantic over-determination also found in poetry (see note 1 above). But over-determination also seems to apply to the pure fantastic text, whether long or short (and most tend to be short, in order to sustain the ambiguity to the end). Obviously a pure fantastic short story will be particularly marked in this way.

The reader, too, is over-encoded. But contrary to the example of *Rip Van Winkle*, he is over-encoded not for over-clarity, but for further confusion. Far from being ahead of the protagonist, he lags behind, the main enigmas being merely repeated, reversed and re-reversed. Nevertheless he is flattered ('some intellect ... etc.'), and has to be thus flattered, rather grossly, since he is not allowed, as in *Rip*, to feel more clever than the protagonist.

The story will continue to repeat enigma 2, from the wife's superstition that all black cats are witches in disguise (supernatural) to the narrator–protagonist's 'wild' and dual behaviour (mad, i.e. natural explanation) and his constant comment upon it in terms of split personality ('the Fiend Intemperance'; 'the fury of a demon seized me'; 'the spirit of PERVERSENESS'; 'half horror, half remorse', etc.). This natural explanation (mad) is more emphasised than the supernatural one. The first clear suggestion of the supernatural does not occur until after the hanging of Pluto, with the image of a gigantic cat, a rope around its neck, impressed on the wall after the (fortuitous?) fire; but a 'natural' explanation, wholly implausible, is immediately given, to be followed by ambiguous phrases about 'fancy', 'the phantasm of the cat', and so on.

It is with the appearance of the second cat, its splotch of white on the breast (unlike Pluto) gradually growing to the shape of the gallows (E1, E2, and E3) and like Pluto after the narrator's first

cruelty, deprived of one eye, that the element of the supernatural makes itself felt. Here it is worth noting that the narrator cheats a little (as in *Rip*, with the beard), in not giving us the highly visible detail of the cat's missing eye either at the moment when he sees, strokes and describes the cat in the 'den of more than infamy' (though this is justified *a posteriori*, in analepsis, and the den appears to be dark), or in his account of their later relationship; rather, it is after these two passages that he states: 'What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home (justification), that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes.' The ellipsis (under-determination) functions as a *leurre* (false clue: two cats) for the reader, but the subsequent analepsis draws his attention (over-determination) to the possibility of the second cat (who is never named) being the ghost of Pluto. It is, however, the only example of over-determination for E1, and only as a possibility.

E3 (why must he die?) is solved towards the end, the moment the narrator, tripped by Cat 2 in the cellar and prevented by his wife from venting his rage on the beast, buries his axe in her brain. And, because E3 is introduced at the outset, we also know, *un*hermeneutically, that he will be caught, but not how. A sick calm invades him as he entombs the body in the wall. Enigma 4 is then introduced: where is the cat? It has disappeared, and the narrator expresses his profound relief. Four days later the police arrive, 'very unexpectedly' (E5 – why? Inquiries and a search had already satisfied them.) This is never answered: it can be regarded either as hermeneutically obvious, from unstated continued inquiries (ellipsis) or as hint of the supernatural action by the cat, a hint reinforced by the ellipsis, by the now uncanny atmosphere and by one ambiguous phrase at the end, the cat's 'informing voice', which ostensibly refers to its action after the wall-tapping, but could *also* suggest action before. They search the house. In the cellar the narrator is hideously calm ($E2^b$) and he praises the solid walls, tapping on them, whereupon:

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-fiend!	$E2^b$:	split personality
	E1:	THE CAT (connoted)
No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into the silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!	E6:	whose voice? dead wife's? or cat's?

– by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child,	$E2^a$: wild
and then finally swelling into one long, loud and continuous scream,	$E2^a$: wild
utterly anomalous and inhuman	E6: inhuman = ghost, dead human? or animal?
– a howl – a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph,	E6: cat's or wife's triumph? + $E2^a$: wild (horror)
such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.	$E2^b$: mad? $E2^a$: wild (hell) E1: IF CAT (E6): = ghost of Pluto?
Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak [. . .]	$E2^b$: mad (+ encoded reader)
a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood before the eyes of the spectators.	$E2^a$: wild
Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire,	$E2^a$: wild
sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder,	E4: (where is the cat?) resolved $E2^b$: split (mad)
and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman.	E3: solution repeated; E6 (whose E6: (voice?) E5 (why?) resolved E5: supernatural reinforced but ambiguous
I had walled the monster up within the tomb!	E4: explained $E2^{ab}$: wild, mad.

What we get ostensibly is a 'natural' explanation: Cat 2 (fortuitous) hated by the narrator out of guilt for (madly) murdering Cat 1, got walled up by mistake in the further madness of the murder and entombment of his wife. It remained half alive and screamed when the wall was (madly) tapped. E2 (madness or objective horror) is continuously encoded, E4 (where is the cat?) and E6 (whose voice?) are simultaneously solved, E3 (why does he have to die?) having been solved at the moment of the murder and being merely repeated here in the final chord. E5 (why do the police arrive?) remains ambiguous. It is: either resolved realistically by obviousness (ellipsis); or a momentary hint of the supernatural

(through the same ellipsis, which is thus ambiguous, and through an ambiguous phrase).

There remains E1: which black cat? And E1, unlike E2, has been under-determined, with mere suggestions that Cat 2 is the ghost of Cat 1 (the noosed impression of the wall after the hanging of Cat 1, the weird appearance of Cat 2 in the den, the gallows mark, the one eye, his oppressively haunting behaviour). All these elements of course could receive natural explanations, and also belong to E2 (madness), which is over-determined but is itself in the end unresolved: either the narrator is mad and the events are 'natural'; or he is not mad, merely unbalanced and cruel, the latter traits being exacerbated by 'supernatural' events.

In other words, the balance of over-determination and under-determination is once again essential. But whereas in the folk-tale the balance was between two or more codes (hermeneutic and proaieretic over-determined, symbolic under-determined), as it was in Flann O'Brien's playful text (proiaeretic under-determined, symbolic over-determined), here the balance operates within one code (the hermeneutic), but between enigmas: the first two are essential to the pure fantastic and remain unresolved, E1 (which cat?) being under-determined, E2 (supernatural/natural) over-determined; the others are incidental and resolved: the third, introduced with the first two, is under-determined but is clearly resolved toward the end; the fourth and sixth, under-determined, are introduced only at the very end, and are immediately resolved; the fifth (a minor engima), introduced just before the last paragraph, is under-determined and unresolved (or half-resolved: natural explanation obvious but elided/supernatural explanation hinted).

Beginning	E1	under-determined			unresolved
	E2	over-determined			unresolved
	E3	under-determined	resolved		
End	E4	under-determined	resolved		
	E5	under-determined	resolved	+	unresolved
	E6	under-determined	resolved		

4. The balance of determination and the dialogical text

This difference in the balance of over and under-determination (between codes for the first, ostensibly over-determined category, between enigmas of one code for the second ostensibly under-determined category of ambiguous texts) may be a fortuitous and

empirical result of the texts analysed, and only further research can show whether the hypothesis is correct. The main difference is, as I have said, one of relative dominance in the final result: for the over-determined code of the first type of text, the under-determined area lies *in the reader's interpretation* (if he wishes); for the under-determined code of the second type of text (ambiguous), an area seems to be over-determined but in fact remains under-determined *within the text* (unless, as in the detective-story, it is neatly over-determined right at the end).

The ambiguous text is essentially 'dialogical': in the dialogical novel (e.g., Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, as opposed to Tolstoy), the author has a constant metatextual dialogue with his characters, and characters with each other; above all, the character has a dialogue with himself as against an imagined other.[7] The author in practice refuses to 'delimit' his character, to have the last word on him (as in the monological novel), and for that matter he refuses to delimit himself. The character revolts, as it were, against his own author's tendency to delimit him, and Flann O'Brien's comic treatment of this in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a dramatised (explicit, over-determined) version of what is done more metatextually (or with an over-determined enigma unresolved, as here) in the dialogical novel.

I shall analyse types of metatext in detail in chapter 8 on *The Turn of the Screw*, and will say no more about it here. But in the case of the ambiguity that must remain unresolved in the pure fantastic, this dialogical metatext is clearly generated by the underlying balance of the over-determined and under-determined unresolved enigmas, whereas the marvellous (supernatural accepted, as in *Rip*), in which this particular ambiguity does not exist, will contain only a minor (and over-determined) hermeneutic code, which can generate only a monological and minor metatext, although the under-determined other codes, often symbolic, can generate other metatexts. In this respect the marvellous is often more akin (*apart* from the element of the accepted supernatural) to realistic fiction: witness the heavy over-determination of the referential and symbolic codes in Tolkien's trilogy, which has all the trappings of the realistic novel, and encourages symbolic, thematic, historical, etymological criticism of a traditional kind (cp. ch. 9). Here again we find yet another link (over-determination) between the marvellous (to the right of Todorov's schema, see p. 64 above) and the realistic novel (to the extreme left, off-diagram, i.e. upon which opens out the uncanny).

The kind of over-determination examined in *Rip* is surely the counterpart, in the marvellous, of the 'redundancy and foreseeability' which Hamon regards as specific to realism. There the over-determination occurs chiefly in the referential code (e.g. 'conjugating the virtual paradigm' of a character's status, cultural conventions, or literary conventions, seen in 'description-openers' etc.). In the marvellous it occurs in the action and hermeneutic codes.

The 'pure fantastic' is not, of course, the only type of ambiguous text, as I pointed out in chapter 3 (p. 65), with reference to James, and to Robbe-Grillet. The novels of Robbe-Grillet function, though differently from those of James, on a similar balance of apparent over-determination and under-determination, as do other types of *nouveau* and *nouveau nouveau roman*. Or again, in Alphonse Allais's *Un drame bien parisien* (see chapter 2, p. 44 above), for instance, the joke-ambiguity does not depend on a supernatural/natural enigma but on an over-determination, followed by a sudden under-determination (based on non-coreference, as Eco has shown) within the ultra-simple action code. And no doubt other codes are similarly exploitable.

The monological narrative, which delimits its characters and its ideological position, is the only type which, by over-determining a stance, say 'unpleasant' to an actual reader, produces the questions: 'where does the author stand?' This question simply cannot be asked of a dialogical text. In the case of Poe's 'unpleasantness', the fact that the question cannot (or should not) be asked is often attributed to his 'irony'. No doubt. But few critics seem to take Bakhtin's theory into account when discussing irony, and some dismiss it.[8] I think, however, that it is essential to any consideration, not only of the encoded rader, but of the ways in which the reader is encoded as I have tried to examine them here.[9]

5. Codes non-determined: hypnocrite lecteur

I really do not have a great deal to say about this category, nor do I propose to analyse examples. It not only must exist theoretically, once the two previous categories have been posed, but does exist, in the effects we know: namely that the reader, not being properly encoded, is or feels free to read everything, anything, and therefore also nothing, into the text.

Theoretically this type of reading should only occur with texts in which the balance of over-determination and under-determination

is apparently (but see below) not respected or structured, some codes being over-determined here, under-determined there, with no other reason than the author's whim.[10] In other words, it is not necessarily a *non*-determination of codes which makes this kind of text; on the contrary, *all* the codes may be over-determined (or under), therefore producing no structured metatextual tension for an encoded reader, hence no encoded reader. It is haphazard determination rather than a total absence of determination that results in non-determination, so that the actual reader then takes over, with his feelings and ideology, his period-bound enthusiasms and limitations, his fashionable prejudices and his moral alienation, which as it were hypnotise him, turn him into a *hypno-crite lecteur*.

I know that this is a thorny topic, many critics having in various ways, from damnation to reticence, condemned an author for his 'views', not sufficiently 'distanced' from those of the hero, for 'not making it clear where he stands' or on the contrary for making it too clear. I should like briefly to digress on this actual reader in the light of my analysis of the encoded reader and previous remarks. This is in response to a particularly interesting essay by Susan Suleiman,[11] devoted to Drieu la Rochelle's novel *Gilles*, in which she analyses specific manipulating devices that negate certain values such as foreignness, Jewishness, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and portray them as decadent and sinister. She frankly (and honestly) analyses her *own* process of 'dissent' from the values posited by the text and comes to the conclusion that

(1) Ideological dissent from works of fiction is a reading experience involving the 'perception' of certain formal devices as masks for the novelist in his role as manipulator of values.
(2) A formal device of this type (i.e. identifiable ... as a mask ...) is a device of ideological manipulation. (Suleiman 1976a: 173)

She at once puts forward the objection that a reader might share those values *and* be aware of the manipulating devices, but counter-objects that since the 'perception' of a device 'is a quasi-wilful *act of non-cooperation with the text* on the part of the reader', a reader who shared the values embodied in *Gilles*, though aware of the devices, 'would not find it difficult to cooperate with the text' and to 'act as if' he were unaware of them, 'as if' he did not perceive them.

This may well be true, since political manipulation is so easy, but the circularity of the argument makes that ease even more depressing (perception of device = non-cooperation; cooperation can occur despite perception of device). And what bothers me is that it seems

to be true only of certain texts (i.e., 'those belonging to this third category), this is in two ways:

> (1) It is perfectly possible to disagree totally with a *past* author's ideology (say Dante's religious and political beliefs, or Langland's or Milton's, or even Shakespeare's violence) *and* to perceive the devices of over-determination, and *yet* not to 'dissent' in the way described. After all we may perceive the devices of all literary works. Can a Catholic really not read Du Bartas or a Methodist Donne? This could be due to the passage of time since the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, the Papal Schism or the Religious Wars; but (2) the same is mysteriously (though more complexly) true of, say, Pound's political views, or Eliot's or Wyndham Lewis's, or for that matter Neruda's, or Lawrence's or Henry Miller's extravagant (over-determined) treatment of sex, or Burroughs's similar treatment of drugs. Pound's over-determination is at times extremely unpleasant, and we perceive it, yet we do not have that same easy reaction as the one Susan Suleiman describes with *Gilles*. Why?

I should like to suggest that it is after all a question of the balance of encoding I have described, and of the metatextual (dialogical) tension produced for the encoded reader by this balance. The text over-determines certain codes, but must compensate either by under-determining others (as I have shown, in easier terms, with *Rip Van Winkle* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*), or by over and under-determining within the same code but in such a way that the final result is under-determined ('The Black Cat'). Drieu's devices, which amount to an over-determination of the semic code and of the referential code, are not only 'patent' (Suleiman), they are also uncounter-balanced by non-determination in any other codes that would open up areas of mystery and above all dialogise the characters. The referential code which backs the semic code is, if anything, both over-determined, and under-determined in the sense that it is simply taken for granted, and hence cannot allow for ideological dissent or evolution of ideas. I would suggest that Susan Suleiman reacted as she did, not, or not only, from ideological dissent, but also, or even chiefly, from intelligence: the actual reader could not coincide with the encoded reader, who is either over-encoded as hypocrite, or haphazardly encoded, if at all, as hypnocrite (which in a sense is what she means by his not perceiving the devices he does perceive). In fact the encoded reader, insulted in his intelligence, is so alienated that he withdraws, becomes passive, and leaves a great gap for the actual reader to take over – from the contemporary reader whom the author takes for granted as sharing his prejudices

to the adverse or later reader who will dissent because of these prejudices, or who on the contrary will blindly reverse them, like the critic Suleiman quotes who regards Drieu's portrait of *Gilles* as 'one of the most damning documents about French fascism of our time'. The implied or encoded author, by the same token, tends to be eliminated and leave a gap for the actual author of traditional criticism.

Contemporary hypnosis, however, leads me to close this digression on the actual reader and return to my non-determined category. I said above that in this case the balance of over-determination and under-determination is 'apparently' not respected or structured. It is clear, however (as Jauss states in other terms, see chapter 2, p. 43 above) that an 'apparent' non-determination of codes (i.e. an apparent unbalance, producing no metatextual tension) may in some instances turn out to be a mere contemporary blindness to an unfamiliar form of this necessary balance, the encoded reader being as it were invisible, for a while, to the actual reader, until later actual readers discover him; whence a lack of comprehension, a lack of reaction, or on the contrary, sometimes, over-reaction, but for the wrong reasons.

The category of the non-determined code is, in other words, a transient category: either the text, after a fashionable success, dissolves into limbo because of its unstructured or non-existent balance between over-and under-determination; or the apparent non-existent balance turns out to be a structured balance, in which case the text will rejoin one of the first two categories, and keep critics happy for generations.

6

'The Turn of the Screw' and its critics: an essay in non-methodology

The Turn of the Screw (1898), by Henry James, is one of the rare texts which more than perfectly illustrates the narrow definition of the pure fantastic given by Todorov: the hesitation of the reader must be sustained to the end. It must not be resolved, either by a natural explanation of the supernatural events (the uncanny, which includes certain types of detective-stories), or by the simple acceptance of these events as supernatural 'the marvellous), see chapter 3 above.

And it is precisely because of the perfect ambiguity (undecidability) of the text that, paradoxically, I must here adopt the position of 'limited pluralism' (see chapter 2, p. 48 above) and say that no, all interpretations are *not* equally valid, and yes, there *are* aberrant (or partly aberrant) readings. Some are due, simply, to weak criticism, and to a certain extent some of the critics examined here are easy Aunt Sallies. But the 'case' of *The Turn of the Screw* is also particular in that, (a) the very undecidability was for a long time unperceived, or, when perceived, seems to have exacerbated critics into taking up positions for or against one of the interpretations; and, not unrelated, (b) the text invites the critics unconsciously to 'act out' the governess's dilemma. But 'acting out' a text is a tribute to its 'life' (in Ingarden's terms), and I also have to say that 'aberrant' readings are necessary, are part of this life, and that it is also thanks to them that the text lives and gives rise to greater understanding; Bacon is necessary to Shakespeare. And, of course, the current interpretation of absolute ambiguity, which I accept, may one day turn out to be itself aberrant, though naturally I hope to show this is unlikely.

As to the hesitation of the experiencing character, Todorov poses it as a non-obligatory constituent element of the genre. In *The Turn of the Screw* it is rapidly resolved on the side of the supernatural. The hesitation of the reader, however, is encoded in the ambiguity of the text, and so efficiently that it has continued for three quarters of a

century, building itself up into a literary 'case'. It is with this 'case' and the innumerable interpretations of the text arising out of that hesitation that I propose to deal here, partly as a study of non-methodology (how not to read), and partly to release the text from the entanglements of traditional criticism, before proceeding to a more objective type of analysis.

A preliminary distinction must be rigorously made between the reader encoded in a text (see chapter 5 above) or what Genette (1972) has called '*le narrataire*', and the specific individual reader or – more easily available – the specific readings that have been made of a text. This chapter will deal exclusively with the latter, and not with the encoded reader except in so far as he gets woven into the specific readings.[1]

Until very recently the readings of TS have been those of traditional criticism, that is to say, discussions about:

(1) the author's intentions (in the sense defined below)
(2) 'psychoanalysis' of the author
(3) the characters in the text, the events in the text
(4) the significance (moral, theological, allegorical, poetic) of the text.

These of course constantly overlap, and are separated here for operational purposes: I shall in fact further separate (1) and (2) from the others, since the errors of reading I shall be analysing occur chiefly in (3), contributing to the confusion which inevitably affects (4). And cutting across (3) and (4) (and occasionally (1) and (2) as well) is the psychoanalysis of the central character, the governess, who is also the narrator.

I shall not dwell on the first two, which do not concern textual analysis, except for a brief clarification.

1. The author's intentions

Edna Kenton (1924) was the first to suggest that TS was not a simple ghost-story but an author's joke at his reader's expense ('an *amusette* to catch those not easily caught' as James describes it in the Preface). Although her essay is a declaration of the author's intentions rather than a demonstration, it is still one of the best in that it insists on the importance James attached to the reader's attention and participation.

Edmund Wilson (1934) then took up the idea but vulgarised it considerably, concentrating however (at least for TS) on the text itself. I shall return to him later and mention him here because he

really launched the whole 'case', not only setting the tone but leaning heavily on the side of one interpretation (the psychological or natural explanation), despite his insistence on 'The Ambiguity of Henry James', which is also the title of his essay, and thus destroying the ambiguity essential to the pure fantastic.

Since then, the discussions have continued to opt for or against the supernatural.[2] Among the arguments on both sides are found declarations of supposed intention, with the same quotations from the Preface, the *Notebooks*, the Letters, and sometimes from other prefaces and other writings. We are constantly plunged into the 'intentional fallacy' as fallacy, by which I mean, either (a): critical appeals to author's intentions expressed extra-textually (which I shall ignore, for the reasons given below); or (b) unwarranted, unsubstantiated or even erroneous appeals to the author's intentions as supposedly clear in the text; for example, the narrator being confused with the author:

> There are times when the governess herself questions her sanity, but in every case she is faced with *what James considered* [=what *she* considers] irrefutable proof that she is on the right track. (Reed 1949: W 196, italics mine.)[3]

As to (a), extratextual intentions, each critic quotes what suits him. The objections for this particular text, however, are evident:

1.1. The idea jotted down by James (12 Jan. 1895) in his *Notebooks* (1947), with its source or supposed source (for even this has been questioned, by Wolff (1941, and again by Cargill 1956) antedates the execution by over two years, and James does not even keep to his intention, explicitly stated, of having a narrator exterior to the action – a change which of course largely constitutes the compositional principle mentioned by Perry and Steinberg (see note 2 above): this principle being the inability to decide between the two interpretations.

Moreover, and this has not been remarked upon, there is no other note on this idea or its execution, despite James's habit of enthusiastic expansion on his ideas and the problems they produce. Further, the *Notebooks* are interrupted from October 1896 to December 1898 (before the writing and after the publication of TS); between January 1895 (the original jotting) and October 1896 (the interruption) he expands considerably on his other ideas and works in progress.

The *Notebooks* therefore are eloquent only by their silence.

1.2. The Preface was published, like the other Prefaces, in 1908, that is (for TS) ten years later, and belongs to the author's post-factum reflections and not to the preliminary 'intentions'. *A fortiori* it also belongs to the joke, if joke there is. In practice the Preface is as ambiguous as the text, as already noted by Edna Kenton ('its exquisitely ironical Preface') and thus sustains the hesitation of the reader(s).

1.3. Obviously the same applies to the few letters which James wrote about TS.

2. The 'psychoanalysis' of the author

Wilson mentions the fact that an Austrian novelist (Franz Höllering), to whom he had given the tale, had read it as a ghost-story but had remarked that the author was a *Kinderschänder* (child-profaner). And when discussing *The Wings of the Dove* he quotes a study of James (in general) by a Dr Saul Rosenzweig, who discusses the 'partly neurotic' origin of the author's backache, his guilt and the theme of impotence in his work. Wilson comments:

> One can agree with Dr Rosenzweig that a castration theme appears here ['An Extraordinary Case', 1868] – one recognizes it as the same that figures through the whole of James's work; but that work does not bear out the contention put forward by Dr Rosenzweig that James was to suffer all his life from unallayed feelings of guilt for not having taken part in the war . . . etc. (1934: W151).

Since then, poor James as author of TS has been put through the lot, except, oddly enough, the castration theme, peculiarly relevant to this text (as part of *textual* analysis, not author analysis), but taken up again, after this one hint, only by Katan (1962: 334ff) and very naively. We even get, in Katan, 'little Henry's' primal scene traumatism ('little Henry' being identified with the child in the ghost-story reportedly told by Griffith, at the beginning of the prologue, a story which leads to the other story, of *two* children, read to his listeners by Douglas, i.e. the untold story of TS. Thus the author is identified with a character in an untold story which merely frames the frame of TS.) This primal scene traumatism is then read into the text in such a confusing way that 'little Henry' is barely distinguishable from little Miles. I shall leave all this aside as irrelevant to textual analysis, though I shall return to the 'Freudian' interpretation later.

3. The characters and events

Here there occurs a phenomenon almost as 'hallucinating' as the narrated events themselves, and worth studying in some detail: the state of the governess is contagious.

The critics reproduce the very tendencies they so often note in the governess: omission; assertion; elaboration; lying even (or, when the critics do so, let us call it error). Since there are many critics (as opposed to one narrator) these tendencies have caused much flowing of ink. Some errors and omissions are never noticed, some are picked up and corrected by others later, but so many years after the publication of the story, that the author (if joke there was) must be laughing in his beyond (if beyond there is), or maybe lamenting at these many examples of the reader's inattention.

These errors of reading can be divided into four methodological categories:

- the rehandling of the signifier
- the fallacious argument
- the extratextual argument
- the tone or uttering act (*énonciation*).[4]

In practice this last occurs throughout the other three. I shall therefore not deal with it separately but give two examples here, then print at least the adverbial type of 'shifter' in bold-face without further comment in subsequent quotations.

Several critics for instance have pounced on the governess's 'clearly' in the scene in which she looks out from a room inside the tower and sees Miles:

> looking up to where I had appeared, looking – that is, not so much straight at me as at something that was **apparently** above me. There was **clearly** another person above me – there was a person on the tower. (James 1966: 45)

The narrator's habit of sliding from supposition (**apparently**) to assertion, precisely for what ought to be supposition, deserves (and will get) an analysis in itself. But as I have said, the governess's state is contagious, and the critics constantly do the same thing, using **somehow, in some manner or other, in a manner of speaking**, etc., where precision is required, and **evidently, clearly**, etc. (not to mention simple assertion, as we shall see) for what is only supposition. Sometimes this is combined with psychoanalysis of the author (see Katan 1962: 334), or with the 'intentional fallacy' as defined above:

Clearly, James did not intend to portray the governess as a sex-starved spinster, a hysterical personality subject to hallucinations, a deliberate liar ... [nothing is less clear than this]. (Jones 1959: W 317)

I shall now deal with the other three methodological categories, with reference to the characters and events.

3.1. The rehandling of the signifier

The above phrase is translated from Lacan ['*le remaniement du signifiant*'] (1966: 577), and I am using it in the subtitle only to stress the fact that it is itself a neurotic process, that is, a specific version of our general propensity to use the meaning-making machine of language to alter one meaning with a new meaning, another 'version' (in neurosis, a more 'acceptable' version). In critical practice it means paraphrase, retelling in one's way, which is usually loaded with subjective interpretation.

3.1.1. The characters. The distinction between actant and action is of course crucial in purely structural analysis. Characters and events, however, at a more surface level, and as textual creations, are easily fused, since characters are not only 'supports of actions' in the Proppian sense, but are constructed partly out of their own actions, which on this level function in much the same way as Barthes's semic code.[5] And traditional criticism fuses them easily, not in theory but in the practice of a certain logorrhoea when 'analysing' characters, their faults and qualities, their physical features and their psychic states as well as their actions. Since I am quoting such critics I shall be forced to consider characters chiefly under events, and will cite here only a few examples of 'critical' description, one for each character. All show how inextricable subjective interpretation is from this kind of description (bold-face for 'shifters' and italics for other types of subjective interpretation are mine throughout, unless otherwise stated):

THE GOVERNESS: '"One of the thoughts," wrote the *little* governess in her desperate diary [sic] ... So the *little* governess says ...' (Kenton 1924: W109, 111; which does not prevent Muriel West 1964, from arguing later that the governess is big and strong and killed Miles with the physical strength of her last embrace.)

QUINT: 'who has red hair and red whiskers, the conventional guise of the *Devil*' (Fagin 1941: W157; repeated by Porter, in Porter, Tate and Van Doren

1942: 163 who add 'strange pointed eyebrows' and '*the evil eye*'.) Compare Van Doren in the same symposium: 'I am also interested in the fact that he is pale – that he has a pale face with light hair. If he is the devil, at least he *is a very special sort of devil*; he's not swarthy or grimacing; his face is rigid. He has a thin face and light curly red hair.' (1942: W164)

FLORA: 'And little Flora *is another Beatrice Rappaccini*, outwardly marvelously beautiful, but *inwardly corrupted by the poison of evil*.' (Fagin 1941: W158)

MILES: 'And **somehow** the "rose flush of his innocence" is never so intense as when he is most actively engaged in *positive evil*.' (Evans 1949: W211 – no demonstration.)

THE CHILDREN TOGETHER: 'How *completely innocent and natural* the children **really** were through all these earlier passages of the drama anyone will see who will divest himself of the suggestion that the governess has planted in his mind.' (Goddard 1957: W260)

MRS GROSE: 'If she is the incarnation of practical household sense and homely affection she is **utterly** *devoid of* worldly experience and *imagination*.' (Goddard 1957: W258; cf. Cargill 1956: W229: 'it is Mrs Grose ... who embroiders ...' quoted below, and the text: 'She couldn't have stayed. Fancy it here – for a governess! And afterwards I imagined – and I still imagine. And what I imagine is dreadful' James 1966: 33.)

MRS GROSE AND THE UNCLE: 'Mrs Grose, a simple, illiterate, *undiscerning* person ... The rôles of the uncle and Mrs Grose have less significance; primarily they help the physical story; secondarily, they represent *lack of vigilance, nay, indifference* (especially the uncle) to the possibilities of evil.' (Fagin 1941: W157, 158)

THE UNCLE: 'Having provided Bly and its staff, *a new Eden*, he *withdraws* to his worldly pursuits *as completely as the Old Testament God withdraws to heaven*, leaving behind him a state of being which seems to him satisfactory for anyone in *a condition of innocence*, and rules which make him inaccessible to any attention but the most distant and *awestricken worship*. He does not provide for the fact that *probable change in the state of innocence* will require his assistance, yet *he does provide the agents* – Quint and Miss Jessel – *even as the Old Testament God provided the snake – which will assure the fall from innocence. That fall occurs, and when it does, he turns his back, providing*, not a new moral code based upon the assumption of knowledge, but the governess, *a priestess of an old moral code*, based on an assumption of innocence and its desirability, in a state where innocence no longer exists ... *Unlike many of his priests, God recognized the inadequacy of Eden to a state of knowledge*, but the Harley Street uncle does not. He employs as governess a woman *competent only to preserve an innocence that no longer exists*, just as many priests who have served in the name of God have sought to preserve an innocence which could survive only in an Eden without a serpent:' (Firebaugh 1957: W293)

This last quotation shows how inextricable analysis is from that of events, and thus serves as a useful transition. The critic is so enthralled by his biblical analogy that he misrepresents the events: the uncle had not 'withdrawn' when he appointed Quint and Miss Jessel; on the contrary, the text specifically states that he was often there with them (and that Quint stole his waistcoats). It also presupposes that he was aware of all that Mrs Grose tells the governess about the goings on at that time, an awareness which the text leaves wholly ambiguous. Apart from this it is both theologically and theoretically weak (God does not 'recognize the inadequacy of Eden to a state of knowledge', he simply forbids knowledge of good and evil, a type of command which, as Propp has shown in his analysis of the folk-tale, 1928, must be transgressed for a tale to begin). I pass over the subjective anti-clericalism which is part of the American Puritan and anti-Puritan tradition.

3.1.2. The events. The rehandling of the events by the critics is truly amazing. On both sides of the critical controversy (ghosts versus hallucination), the story is retold, not only less well but in order to prove what the author leaves unproven. The paraphrases are not only loaded but frequently erroneous. The most flagrant example is that of Wilson (1934: W115ff). Extracts from the first two pages of his article (quoted below), set not only the tone but the method of error, beginning with a gross misrepresentation of Edna Kenton (1924):

'I believe that Miss Edna Kenton ... was the first to write about it ... The theory is, then, that the governess who is made to tell the story is *a neurotic case of sex repression*, and that the ghosts are not real ghosts but hallucinations of the governess.' (Wilson 1934: W115)

[Edna Kenton certainly does not express herself in these terms, rather: 'exquisite dramatizations of her little personal mystery' (1924: W113.]

'The boy, she finds, has been sent home from school for reasons into which she does not inquire but which she colors, *on no evidence at all*, with a significance **somehow** ominous.' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[True, but Wilson ignores the cultural code: a boy is not expelled, without explanation, for no reason.]

'As she wanders about the estate, she thinks often how delightful it would be if one should come suddenly round the corner and *see the master just arrived from London*: there he would stand, handsome, smiling, approving.' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[The text (James 1966: 15) is much more subtle: the immediate subject of 'would appear' is 'some one'; the less immediate subject – a whole paragraph away – is 'he ... the person to whose pressure I had responded'. In other words a fantasy, presented as such – 'the person', 'some one' – would simply 'appear' (like a ghost), and certainly not have 'just arrived from London', an interpolated detail that suggests transport, baggage, timetables, wholly incompatible with a fantasy.]

'She is never to meet her employer again, but what she does meet are the apparitions. *One day when* his face has been vividly in her mind ...' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[The narrator, more honestly, does not separate her rambling fantasies from the day in question, the day occurs – 'It was plump, one afternoon ...' (James 1966: 15) – then the fantasies are told in the iterative, which expresses habit, the often, the usual, the sometimes, then she takes up the singulative event.]

'she *comes out* in sight of the house'. Wilson 1934: W116)

['I stopped short on emerging from one of the plantations and *coming into view* of the house' (James 1966: 15).]

'and, looking up, sees the figure of a man on a tower, a figure which is not the master's. Not long afterwards, *the figure appears again* ...' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[an independent subject, not as object of 'sees', and therefore contradicting Wilson's own theory.]

'She sees him at closer range and more clearly: *he is wearing smart clothes but is obviously not a gentleman.*' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[This is revealed only later, in conversation with Mrs Grose, a technique which will be crucial.]

'The governess tells her [Mrs Grose] about the apparition and *learns that it answers the description of one of the master's valets*, who had stayed down there and who had sometimes stolen his clothes.' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[the identification of Quint by Mrs Grose being the greatest obstacle to the hallucination theory, as Wilson admits later and from which he extricates himself clumsily, this paraphrase of a complex and subtle scene is wholly inadequate.]

'*The valet had been* a bad character, *had used* "to play with the boy ... to spoil him"; *he had finally been* found dead, having apparently slipped on the ice

coming out of a public house – though one couldn't say he hadn't been murdered.' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[These details appear from the paraphrase to be given at once, and all by Mrs Grose, but in fact they are not given till the following chapter, and the details of the valet's death are given by the narrator herself, in free indirect discourse, an important point which I shall comment on later.]

'The governess *cannot help believing* that he has come back to haunt the children.' (Wilson 1934: W116)

[Another wrong impression of order: she had the impression already before the identification that the apparition 'had come for someone else'; the elaboration of the children's danger comes before the identification and partly provokes it.]

'Not long afterwards, she and the little girl are out on the shore of a lake, the child playing, the governess sewing. The latter becomes aware of a third person on the opposite side of the lake. But she looks first at little Flora, who is turning her back in that direction and who, she notes, has "picked up a small flat piece of wood, which happened to have in it a little hole" [... Flora's game].' 'This **somehow** "sustains" the governess so that she is able to raise her eyes: *she sees a woman "in black, pale and dreadful"*.' (Wilson 1934: W116–17)

[Then I again shifted my eyes – I faced what I had to face' (James 1966: 30). End of chapter. The elaboration comes as always in conversation with Mrs Grose. (The same misrepresentation occurs in Cargill 1956: W228.)]

The paraphrase continues in this way after a reminder that only the governess sees the apparitions: 'The housekeeper insists that she does not see them; it is **apparently** the governess who frightens her. The children too, *become hysterical*, but this is **evidently** the governess' doing' (Wilson 1934: 117). This is followed by an explanation of the sexual character of Flora's game and a crude interpretation of the identification obstacle (later withdrawn). I shall not continue the analysis but will simply quote two typical phrases: '*she is now, it seems*, in love with the boy' and '(*He has*, in spite of the governess's efforts, succeeded in seeing his sister and *has heard from her of the incident of the lake.)*' The parentheses in no way excuse this interpolation, into a certitude, of a possibility which is only very subtly suggested in the text.

This urge for transforming possibility into certainty is of course what the governess is most blamed for, but the critics are rarely free of it themselves. Here is a selection, presented in the order of events:

According to the introduction, little Henry suffered from nightmares when he shared the bedroom with his mother. (Katan 1962: W334)

A total confusion of fiction and 'biography' (extrapolated from the fiction): the introduction starts with a report (by the I–narrator) of another ghost-story just told by one of the party. It is the boy in this (untold) ghost-story who has nightmares and sleeps with his mother (Cp. pp. 144–5 below).

But to add to the intensity of the situation the young woman falls instantly and *passionately* in love with the man who has inserted the advertisement. *She scarcely admits it even to herself*, for in *her heart she knows that her love is hopeless, the object of her affection being one socially out of her sphere.* (Goddard 1957: W249)

The 'passionate' love is an interpolation of the guests (represented as silly) and Douglas is very ambiguous as to whom she was in love with. Nor does she 'scarcely admit it', she admits it easily, as many critics have remarked, to Mrs Grose, in non-passionate terms ('I'm easily carried away, I was carried away in London'), and in the fantasy already quoted. In itself 'easily carried away' is ambiguous since it could merely mean 'easily persuaded to take the job'. But the context (the way Mrs Grose understands it and the governess does not contradict her) tend to lift that ambiguity. Never for one moment does she elaborate it in terms of hopelessness or social impossibility. In this connection it is interesting to note that James carefully places his narrative (written in 1897) fifty years back, 1847 being the date of *Jane Eyre*, in which a governess does marry her employer.[6]

But even this is not all. *In her overwrought condition, the unexplained death of the former governess, her predecessor, was enough to suggest some mysterious danger connected with the position offered, especially in view of the master's strange stipulation ... Something extraordinary, she was convinced, lurked in the background. She would never have accepted the place if it had not been for her newborn passion; she could not bring herself to disappoint him when he seemed to beg compliance of her as a favor* ['of her as a favor' is italicised by Goddard] – *to say nothing of severing her only link with the man who had so powerfully attracted her.* (Goddard 1957: W249)

This introductory part of the story (James 1966: 5–6) is filtered through the I–narrator reporting Douglas's words, partly in free indirect discourse (see chapters 2, and 4, p. 94 above), partly in dialogue. The danger is suggested by *him*, in a question, and Douglas's reply is ambiguous: 'Necessary danger to life? ... "She did wish to learn, and she did learn. You shall hear tomorrow what

she learnt. Meanwhile . . .''' The conversations between the governess and Douglas being extratextual we cannot know the exact process of her hesitation, which is told in quite other terms: 'Meanwhile of course the prospect struck her as slightly grim. She was young, untried, nervous: it was a vision of serious duties and little company, of really great loneliness.' She asks for two days to consider and accepts for purely financial reasons. It is only at the second interview that he tells her that other applicants had found the conditions prohibitive, were 'somehow, simply afraid. It sounded dull – it sounded strange; and all the more so because of his main condition', which is given only now (at least by Douglas, but he is all we have), and which she accepts without hesitation, feeling 'already rewarded' when he thanks her for her sacrifice, holding her hand. Goddard's version is highly coloured.

> [she] takes seriously *an accusation made against the little boy* by the head-master of the school when he is sent home with *a note saying that he had been an immoral influence* (Porter *et al.* 1942: W164).

The note says nothing, there is no accusation. This is the governess's later interpretation (rectified by Hoffmann 1953: W216).

> an inadvertent hint *about Peter Quint* dropped by the housekeeper, Mrs Grose, is just the seed that that soil requires . . .' (Goddard 1957: W250)

> The hint that the housekeeper dropped of *an unnamed man in the neighborhood* has done its work. (Goddard 1957: W252)

> has already dropped an unintentional hint of *someone in the neighborhood* who *preys* on *young and pretty governesses*. This man, to be sure, is dead, but the new governess, who did not pay strict enough attention to Mrs Grose's tenses, does not know it. (Goddard 1957: W253)

Goddard mixes viewpoints: Mrs Grose's hint *about Peter Quint* (unnamed then) is from *her* viewpoint, i.e., about Quint before his death, therefore he cannot be 'in the neighborhood'. From the governess's viewpoint the second quotation is correct, but then it cannot (at that moment) be Peter Quint, nor a dead man. Goddard is obliged to repeat the whole argument a page later with an explanation that could have been avoided (but he has already 'sown the seed' himself, and wrongly, in his reader's mind). Nor does he pay attention to his own tenses: from Mrs Grose's viewpoint it cannot be *preys*, only from the governess's viewpoint. Mrs Grose anyway says 'liked', or rather (with the famous confusion of pro-

nouns), she is thinking of Quint and the governess of her employer: 'Oh he *did*' to the governess's 'He seems to like us young and pretty' (p. 12) and adds 'it was the way he liked everyone' (i.e. not just governesses).

Mrs Grose is still far from convinced [about Miss Jessel]. This seems a trifle odd in view of *the fact* that Peter Quint *is known to be haunting the place* ... (Goddard 1957: W253)

Known by whom? It is the governess who asserts it. Mrs Grose appears to believe her (according to the governess–narrator, previous chapter, 8 [James 1966: 34]), but the impersonal passive here, together with *the fact*, are misleading (and against Goddard's own hallucination thesis).

But when she tells Mrs Grose *about Quint* [= about apparition]. (Porter *et al.* 1942: W163)

When we learn later that Bly *is really haunted* ... (Lydenberg 1957: W278)

It is Mrs Grose, out of the petty jealousy common to domestic servants [only?], who at the prompting of the governess, *embroiders* the tale about a relation between the pair; *it is the governess who gobbles every morsel* of this and *invents* the theme of their evil designs upon the children. (Cargill 1956: W229)

This notion, expressed with a highly coloured word, that Mrs Grose is a liar, has given rise to an interpretation by Knight Aldrich (1967) according to which Mrs Grose is the villain of the piece (see my remarks in section 3.3., pp. 147ff, on extratextual arguments).

When she [Mrs Grose] balks, as she does on several occasions, the governess faces her, and us, with *one undeniable fact*: '... I had only to ask her how, if I had "made it up," I came to be able to give, of each of the persons appearing to me, a picture disclosing, to the last detail, their special marks – a portrait on the exhibition of which she had instantly recognized and named them'. (Reed 1949: W196; James 1966: 34)

The identification of Quint (the main obstacle for the hallucination theory) has been explained in various ways, but here Reed takes upon himself the governess's patent lie as to Miss Jessel (she has done the identification herself and certainly does not describe her 'special marks' and 'to the last detail', but in conventional ghostly terms). This lie has been picked up by several critics.

but with the *realization* by the governess that the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel have come for the children ... (Hoffmann 1953: W219)

Once she realizes that she does not know enough to teach the boy, it occurs to her to seek out a school for him. But she does not do so. This would be to put him 'on his own' – *it would thwart her determination to return him to a state of innocence – or*, as she puts it, *to 'save' him from knowledge superior to her own.* (Firebaugh 1957: W295)

Pure interpretation. The word 'save' is used in a much more imprecise way (James 1966: 65) even if the school was ostensibly in question in the preceding conversation.

Why do the children *deny seeing the ghosts? Such denial*, according to the governess, shows the extent to which the children have been corrupted. (Reed 1949: W197)

When, in the tension of the final scene, Miles utters the corrupting servant's name, *which he has so long withheld* . . . (Reed 1949: W198)

Both Miles and Flora *have denied seeing the ghosts*, but the governess is convinced they *are lying*. (Hoffmann 1953: W220)

The children have never had the slightest occasion either to 'deny seeing' except once, in the governess's imagination ('They're here . . . I would have cried, "and you can't deny it now!" The little wretches denied it with all the added volume of their sociability and their tenderness' p. 52), or to 'withhold the name' of the previous servants (or ghosts), since the governess restrains herself from ever mentioning them directly to either, and her indirect efforts are so ambiguous (narrator) or so clumsy (character), that it is perfectly possible for them, if they are innocent, to understand them differently (the nocturnal pranks or the business of the school).

The horror of the situation is heightened, moreover, by *the fact that* the boy has been corrupted by the male servant; the girl, by the female. Peter Quint's abnormality is hinted at ('There had been matters in his life . . . secret disorders, vices more than half suspected'), and *Mrs Grose says in so many words* that he had been 'much too free' with little Miles [. . .] Then there is the *unambiguous* dialogue between the governess and Mrs Grose. (Evans 1949: W209–10)

All these 'facts', so 'unambiguous' here, are filtered not only through Mrs Grose but through the governess as narrator, and could in themselves be innocent (the children had no one else to talk to, Miss Jessel was after all Flora's governess, and Miles, not wanting to spend all his time with his young sister, could have struck up a perfectly natural friendship with the valet. Of course the interpretation of corruptness is also possible and indeed *could* have

come from another source, the (interpolated, extratextual) witnessing of the primal scene (Katan 1962) rather than homosexuality; or both. It is the language of the critic I am objecting to, for it reduces James's filtering subtlety to zero.

Cut off from all information, Miles will seek any means of getting it [...] Subject to a teacher who has *no knowledge to give*, and who would cut them off from other sources of knowledge, the children are trapped. They seek ways of asserting the independence they have been denied. *Failing* [?], they *find imposed on them the governess's visions of sin* – Quint and Miss Jessel. (Firebaugh 1957: W296).

Highly coloured and based on the same presuppositions as the previous quotation. The children do not 'fail', they assert their independence continually. The governess's 'visions of sin' are never overtly 'imposed on them', witness the shock at the end, which *could* be due (certainly for Flora) simply to the sudden mention of the dead governess's name, death alone being a shock for so young a child, and soon repressed. The final scene with Miles is also much more complex, intertwined as it is with the pressure for a confession, ostensibly about what happened at school.

under the *enforced* [?] demonstrations of a *conventional* [?] love *smolders a resentment and hatred* that will burst out all the more violently because *so long suppressed.* (Lydenberg 1957: W283)

Totally unwarranted by the text. Same remarks as above.

With the governess as narrator, *the children can never speak for themselves*: according to her they at first appear cherubic, later fiendish. Indicatively, *the one positive trait* which makes them lower than angels *depends upon their aping vocabulary.* Mrs Grose condemns Flora: 'On my honour, Miss, she says things – !' Miles, likewise, pleads guilty to his obscure behavior at school; 'Well – I said things.' (Enck 1966: K265)

A nonsensical argument since *everything* is told by the governess, including all that Mrs Grose tells her (who also 'says things', and that's the trouble). Through the governess as narrator the children also and elsewhere have a complete autonomy of expression which surprises her each time.

And 'as if to blight his confession and stay his answer,' Peter Quint *appears.* Miles *acknowledges his presence*: the governess has triumphed; *Miles is saved, Peter Quint has lost.* But the experience – the fright, the horror, the recognition of evil – is too much for Miles. He utters an anguished cry of horror and dies in the governess's arms. (Hoffmann 1953: W221)

Hoffmann has just declared (previous paragraph) that 'Miles's death is caused by the governess' insistence on his confession; the confession is wrested from him, but he dies from the shock.' Peter Quint 'appears' only to the governess. Miles does not 'acknowledge his presence' but answers a question. The whole scene is highly charged with ambiguity and the theological implications are the governess's interpretation.

> The climax of his *disease* [?], the binding together of all the strands we have been tracing, is his malevolent cry *to the governess* – 'you devil!' (Heilman 1948: W183)

The recipient of that cry is wholly ambiguous in the text: 'Whom do you mean by "he?"' 'Peter Quint – you devil!' (James 1966: 88). The same error occurs in Cargill (1956, see below). In any case, this so-called confession or 'proof' ends with a question: '"Peter Quint – you devil!" His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. "Where?"' (p. 88). As for the notion of Miles's illness, it arises (as Heilman has just demonstrated) from the metaphors and comparisons of the governess–narrator, but Heilman at once takes them over in a literal sense, as does Evans, more correctly: 'it is suggested to the reader (always through the medium of the governess, to whom the impressions occur in appropriate images) that little Miles is *sick*, spiritually sick' (Evans 1949: 209, italics author's own). The 'suggestion' however, only too easily generates 'fact':

> Along with precocious sexuality, they [the Freudians] ignore the clear signs of extreme repression in Miles's *illness*. (Spilka 1963: K248)

Such constant rehandling of the signifier through subjective paraphrase induces not only errors of interpretation (or at least biased interpretation which destroys the ambiguity), but also errors of reading, such as, for instance, Lydenberg's assertion that a long quotation he has just given (1957: W277) comes after Quint's *first* appearance (in fact the second), or Edna Kenton's mention of the governess's narrative as a *diary* (1924: W109), or her quotation out of context ('There were states of the air') to imply that the governess 'came to know the moods that brought them [the apparitions] which moods would in fact bring them' (1924: W112). In fact that quotation is followed by 'But they remained unaccompanied and empty' (James 1966: 52), and comes in the middle of a long period when she does not see the ghosts. And from errors of reading to misquotation there is but one step. For example Katan, whose

argument is based on the primal scene between Quint and Miss Jessel, supposedly witnessed by the children:

> Mrs Grose also supplies further corroboration: 'the children *saw more things*, terrible and unguessable, that *came* from *passively watching intercourse* in the past. 'I think James's choice of words speaks for itself.' (Katan 1962: W325)

Unfortunately not, and for three reasons. First, these words do not come from Mrs Grose but from the governess in free indirect discourse, without any allusion to Mrs Grose. She is thinking of what the children are *now* seeing (i.e., more than *she* sees), referring to the contact she supposes them to be having with Quint and Miss Jessel), a contact allegedly prolonging the one they had when the servants were alive. Second, Katan misquotes (errors in italics). Here is the text:

> What it was least possible? to get rid of was the cruel idea that, whatever I had seen, Miles and Flora saw *more* – things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past. (James 1966: 53 – James's italics on *more*.)

There is not only no 'more things' but no 'passively watching', and 'sprang' is more to the point than 'came'. And the 'intercourse' refers to the children's contact, albeit 'corrupt', with Quint and Miss Jessel when they were alive.

Third, the word 'intercourse' is never used in the modern sense by James, either here or elsewhere (e.g. in the first few pages of *Daisy Miller*), but always for contact, conversation, social intercourse (a sense still valid in Virginia Woolf). For example communication with the ghosts:

> He appeared thus again ... with a nearness that represented a forward stride in our intercourse and made me, as I met him, catch my breath and turn cold. (James 1966: 20)

> 'Surely you don't accuse *him* – '
> 'Of carrying on an intercourse that he conceals from me? Ah remember that, until further evidence, I now accuse nobody'. (p. 37)

> ... if ... I were the first to introduce into our perfect intercourse [with Miles] an element so dire? (p. 47)

The stress in the second quotation for instance is not on 'intercourse' but on the fact that Miles keeps such contacts secret. Of course the 'Freudian' interpreters would argue that contact with the ghosts does 'symbolise' sexual intercourse, as would contact with Miles. But it is only in the twentieth century that the legal term

'sexual intercourse' loses its adjective and becomes sufficient on its own for this meaning, so much so that today it is the adjective 'social' which has to be added. And even if the sexual connotation existed in colloquial language at the time, James would surely not use it in print, let alone lend it to the governess, in this sense; at most there would be ambiguity. But nothing justifies the *changes* made by Katan.

Clearly the rehandling of the signifiers directly influences interpretation (and vice versa) as well as readings. I shall return to the question of 'significance' later and pass straight on to the fallacious argument.

3.2. The fallacious argument

There are fewer of these, and I shall drop the subdivision into characters and events, which as we have seen is not rigorous enough in this type of criticism. The point here is again that what the governess is accused of is contagious:

> It seems to me that the story would shrink a great deal in power and significance if it were merely a story which *psychoanalyzed an old maid.* (Porter *et al.* 1942: W162)

The premises are false: the narrative does not 'psychoanalyse' anyone; the governess is twenty and pretty at the time of the events (which is the time Van Doren in Porter *et al.* refers to, rather than the time of her narration ten years later). Wilson had thrown out this notion but it has been frequently rejected.

> *In a manner of speaking* Mrs Grose is the testing ground for just how far the reader may be expected to go in accepting the tenuous evidence of the governess. *To the degree that Mrs Grose accepts the evidence, so are we as readers to accept it.* (Reed 1949: W196)

Why? (This is followed by the 'one undeniable fact', quoted from Reed previously.) The notion that the reader must identify with the good but foolish (or, in Knight Aldrich's 1967 interpretation, wicked and cunning) Mrs Grose is illogical, theoretically indefensible, and here absurd since Mrs Grose accepts the ghosts wholly and finally for an illogical reason: Flora's language, which can just as easily be explained by the very 'facts' from the past, told by Mrs Grose herself, which the child would have forgotten but which would have returned to her under the shock of the governess's behaviour in naming Miss Jessel to Flora for the first time, in the

second and last lakeside scene. This same illogical reason is however a proof for Reed since he himself identifies with Mrs Grose ('These broken phrases show that Mrs Grose, although she has not seen the ghosts, agrees with the governess as to their corrupting influence' [1949: W197].) This is true in itself, but according to the preceding argument the reader must agree also. He goes on:

> Such corroborating testimony is not all. The governess has been so shaken by the events of the story that she demands positive proof that her deductions are sound. When, in the tension of the final scene, Miles utters the corrupting servant's name, which he has so long withheld [already commented], the governess has *her conclusive proof* that demons did exist for the boy – either visually or mentally [?] – *since otherwise* he certainly would not have had the slightest inkling of the meaning of her pressing insinuations. (Reed 1949: W198)

This final scene is interpretable and has been interpreted differently (Goddard 1957: 265; Jones 1959: 316), and remains inexorably ambiguous. Moreover nothing in it tells us that the governess 'has her conclusive proof' – for one thing she hardly needs it. My point is, however, that the argument slides from the 'corroborative testimony' of Mrs Grose to the implication of a similar 'corroborative testimony' of Miles (for the governess, whose conviction the reader has long been aware of, but not necessarily shared); but the opening statement about corroborative testimony is so categorical, together with the previous argument about reader identification with Mrs Grose, that the reader is implicitly assumed to take over the governess's conviction as well. Evans also uses Mrs Grose as proof, but in a different though equally insidious way:

> One could not, incidentally, wish for stronger evidence of the stability of the governess's personality than the fact that, although the housekeeper herself has seen nothing, she does not doubt that her friend has – a point which James, who certainly sees the necessity for it, drives home again and again. (Evans 1949: W206)

The critic calls the author in aid of his own argument, which does not hold water. At a more abstract level: X (say a psychoanalyst) admits that Y (say a patient) 'sees' Z, therefore Z exists. Hoffmann repeats the same argument even more insidiously: 'Her belief in the *existence* of [i.e., no longer the mere fact that the governess sees] the ghosts is important corroborative evidence for both the governess and the reader' (1953: W217).

Another illogical argument from the 'horrors' uttered by Flora is applied to the governess's influence, together with Miles's final (ambiguous) address:

> It is Mrs Grose ... who ... embroiders ... it is the governess who gobbles every morsel ... That she carries her insinuations to the children themselves (despite what she says to the contrary) *is indicated by* Mrs Grose's declaration, after she had taken over Flora, that she has heard 'horrors' from the child. Miles also betrays that the governess has implied an evil relationship between him and Quint, *for* when in the last scene she calls his direct attention to her specter (Miles 'glaring vainly over the place and missing wholly'), the boy guesses at what she means him to see and *names her as a fiend*: 'Peter Quint – you devil!' (Cargill 1956: W229–30)

Mrs Grose's declaration *could* but does not necessarily indicate this, and the last scene is interpretable in at least two ways as well as this one. The influence of the governess on the children is much more ambiguous than a simple corruption by insinuation of corruption: until the last lakeside scene, when she names Miss Jessel and frightens Flora so much that the child falls ill (two possible interpretations), the governess's whole behaviour could have been seen by the children as eccentricity, nervousness and possessiveness, and by Miles in particular as an excessive curiosity about his school and excessive possessiveness about his person.

3.3. Extratextual arguments

These are of the type: 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' They have been chiefly invoked in connection with the identification of Quint by Mrs Grose, but also for various other interpretations, and they raise an important theoretical principle.

Wilson (1934: 117–18) explains the identification with the possibility of a resemblance between Quint and the master (extratextual), but withdrew this very inadequate argument later to accept that of Silver (1957: 242, the governess has inquired in the village). But other critics have sought elsewhere:

> The details that the governess supplied the housekeeper after the second occasion *must have come from another source – from the prattle of her youngest charge and from her own seemingly artless prompting to the children.* (Cargill 1956: W229)

Flora had indeed shown her the house 'secret by secret' (which Cargill italicises for emphasis) at the end of the first chapter (her arrival), but the narrator tells Mrs Grose explicitly that the children

have never mentioned the previous servants. Her 'artless prompting' is so artful as to be incomprehensible to them if they are innocent (as Cargill supposes).

Of course, she may be lying, but on that level the entire story can be a lie (which has also been suggested). In reading a fiction, and especially an ambiguous fiction, the theoretical principle is that we may take into account only the lies encoded in the text.

In particular, Silver tries to demolish the two chief objections to the hallucination theory: that the governess gives a detailed description of Peter Quint, and that she has never previously heard of him. First, he cites the governess' remark concerning the stranger on the tower – how she had 'made sure' he was 'nobody from the village.' Silver considers this evidence [sic, = *as* evidence] that she has been asking questions in the village, and thereby presumably learning about Quint. *Actually it probably means that she has been making inquiries among other servants at Bly.* (Jones 1959: W305)

Why? Silver's explanation is encoded in the text, as well as the information that the village is only twenty minutes away (James 1966: 20, just before the second apparition). The information that she has *not* made inquiries among the servants is also explicitly stated (James 1966: 18, just before the second apparition, when her explanation to herself is as yet purely social). An imprecise time has passed, rendered by a description of her classes with her charges, before the second apparition, and the 'I made sure' to Mrs Grose would refer to this period, as a partial and internal analepsis (see chapter 2, p. 36, and also below).

It is true that Silver's explanation is insufficient in the sense (which no one has picked up) that if she had learnt so much about Quint's physical appearance she would also have learnt that he was dead, and would therefore not have expressed so much fright, after her description, in learning that fact from Mrs Grose: 'Died! I almost shrieked.' But here we touch on the whole question of the narrator's *énonciation* and time of narration (*instance narrative*) which I shall analyse in chapter 8.

It is also important to make a distinction between the extratextual which can be inferred from elements encoded in the text (like Silver's argument), and the extratextual which cannot, or which are inferred from elements specifically denied (as in Cargill and Jones above). Jones continues:

Second, Silver considers it significant that the governess can discuss Quint's death although we never witness Mrs Grose supplying her with these facts; *he feels James would not 'suppress' a scene of such importance.* But that is absurd ⊥

Mrs Grose undoubtedly held many 'off-stage' talks with the governess, and Quint's death may well have been discussed during the conversation mentioned at the beginning of Chapter VI. Moreover, although *Silver suggests that Mrs Grose might not have known the facts of Quint's death,* such ignorance is almost inconceivable under the circumstances. Therefore, we can only conclude that he has neither proven his case against the governess nor demonstrated that the ghosts are unreal. (1959: W305)

The conclusion does not follow but that is beside the point here. At first sight this argument seems to be of the second extratextual type, and inadmissible, like his earlier argument about the inquiry at Bly, and certainly the first part of the second italicised sentence about 'off-stage' talks in general is of that type. The whole argument is confused, and typical of the way traditional critics will talk of characters in fiction as if they really existed, had a life of their own outside the text, at the same time sliding back to the author's technique and or intentions. When one looks at it more closely and refers back to the text, however, one can see that in the second part of that sentence Jones is right (and of course Silver's argument in the third italicised sentence is also a non-inferable extratextual argument, and inadmissible).

What is in question here under the vague phrase 'Quint's death' are the detailed circumstances of Quint's death, pondered over by the governess in her room (chapter 6). A conversation with Mrs Grose has just taken place (in dialogue, not just 'mentioned' as Jones says), about Quint, and ends (in the text) with Mrs Grose bursting into tears. The next paragraph speaks of the control necessary the next day and the following week when the two women frequently re-discussed the subject. Then the narrator returns in time to that night, after the conversation, when she couldn't sleep and suspected Mrs Grose of having kept things back [James's italics]:

It seems to me indeed, in raking it all over, that by the time the morrow's sun was high I had restlessly read into the facts before us almost all the meaning they were to receive from subsequent and more cruel occurrences. What they gave me above all was just the sinister figure of the living man – the dead one would keep a while! – and of the months he had continuously passed at Bly, which, added up, made a formidable stretch. The limit of this evil time had arrived only when, on the dawn of a winter's morning, Peter Quint was found, by a labourer going to early work, stone dead on the road from the village: a catastrophe explained – superficially at least – by a visible wound to his head; such a wound as might have been produced (and as, on the final evidence, *had* been) by a fatal slip, in the dark and after leaving the public-house, on the steepish icy slope, a wrong path altogether,

at the bottom of which he lay. The icy slope, the turn mistaken at night and in liquor, accounted for much – practically, in the end and after the inquest and boundless chatter, for everything; but there had been matters in his life, strange passages and perils, secret disorders, vices more than suspected, that would have accounted for a good deal more. (James 1966: 27–8)

Such an abundance of detail can have only two sources: the village (i.e., before the second apparition and the ensuing conversation with Mrs Grose, which would resolve the problem of the identification but poses the problem of her shriek of terror on learning that Quint is dead); or Mrs Grose, with whom she has just talked, in which case she is mulling it over in free indirect discourse, a perfectly legitimate technique.

Also perfectly legitimate is the omission of one or more parts of a conversation (or even of narration), the ellipsis being filled in later by analepsis. Here the analepsis as *information* is complete, but as fact of a conversation more detailed than what is given having taken place, it is only implicit, though the phrase that introduces the conversation makes it clear enough ('We had gone over and over every feature of what I had seen', p. 25), and the passage of time is minimal. The conversation is given, but not terminated by an exit of Mrs Grose, just as, for that matter, the conversation that ends the preceding chapter is not 'terminated': the narrator does not give us her final or continued reaction to Mrs Grose's statement 'Yes, Mr Quint is dead.'

The source of the details, then, is an inferable extratextual conversation, inferable not only from the circumstances and the small time elapsed, but from the free indirect discourse in which the facts are given.

Extratextual arguments which are inadmissible are the theory of Knight Aldrich (1967: 375), according to which Mrs Grose is the mother of the children and therefore the villain of the piece, and the following paragraph by Katan:

> Flora does not stop at simply removing herself from the influence of the governess. In the subsequent hysterical outburst *she accuses the governess of everything that Miss Jessel had done in reality*, thus identifying her present governess, not without reason, with the dead governess. *In this way Flora makes it clear* that the governess has, at least in fantasy, the same sexual desires as Miss Jessel had. (1962: W332)

The conclusions may well be acceptable psychoanalytically and in a sense so general that they are obvious, but nothing in the text justifies the italicised premises. The same applies to the supposedly

hereditary madness of the governess's father, extrapolated from the word 'eccentric' (Cargill 1956: 230; Goddard 1957: 248).

Another equally unjustified statement by Cargill, about the extent of the governess's relationship with Douglas as explanation for the existence of the narrative, raises an interesting problem:

> But she herself *had realized the danger of a recurrence of her madness, and when Douglas had urged marriage upon her and she had repeatedly refused,* she had resolved upon writing out the history *of her aberration* in order that *he* might understand [*he* italicized by author]. Is not this the most plausible explanation to account for his possession of the narrative? [From which he further argues that her honesty makes her a heroine not a villain.] (1963: K159)

Nothing in the Introduction of course justifies the lines I have italicised, but this type of extratextual argument is linked to that of Rubin (1964: 350ff), according to which Miles is Douglas (and therefore did not die, the whole story being concocted, or at least 'altered' as to its ending, by the governess to tell Douglas how much she loved him, both as child and adult). Such arguments, though strictly inadmissible, could be said to be *partially* encoded in the very presence of the elaborate frame provided by the author. The whole question of the frame, as developed by Lotman and Uspensky, will be discussed in chapter 7.

4. The significance of the narrative

From these quotations it is clear that the interpretations are multiple, nor have I distinguished them, or even the main two theories, since the same faults of paraphrase and argument are found on both sides and my main purpose here is methodological. I shall therefore end this chapter with a brief summary of the two main groups (ghosts/hallucinations) and a consideration of the theoretical principles involved.

4.1. The ghosts are 'real'

Here the interpretations are moral, theological, allegorical, poetic (otherwise it's a 'mere' ghost-story). It is a tale of horror, of corrupted innocence, an allegory of good and evil, of the fall (pride and the desire for knowledge versus Edenic innocence). Only the nuances change. Either Quint is the devil (evil pre-exists), or evil (though represented by Quint and Miss Jessel) is brought about by

the pride, curiosity, possessiveness and incompetence of the governess. For Dorothea Krook (1962) the story is a Faustian allegory: the governess is Faust in her pride and desire for knowledge but also, in her efforts to protect the children from evil, the angel who tries to save Faust.

For Heilman (1948: 174ff) the narrative is a poem. Unfortunately he demonstrates this mainly in symbolic terms (the children are 'symbols' of the human condition), and by listing the metaphors and comparisons, which are not particularly original since they are part of the governess's *énonciation*, e.g., adjectives like 'divine' etc. (cp. chapter 3, p. 68 and note 5, for Todorov's constraint on a poetic reading of the pure fantastic).

4.2. The hallucinations

Here one is mainly in the 'Freudian' interpretation, that is to say, psychoanalysis of the governess, though few critics seem to have read Freud (even those against, e.g., Porter *et al.* 1942: 167: 'quite beyond the Freudian explanation . . . Here is one place where I find Freud completely defeated').

Wilson was the first to vulgarise the governess as 'a neurotic case of sex repression' and to assume that falling in love and 'repressing' it (which the governess does not) could be a cause of hallucination, and many critics followed suit, in terms so naive that I forbear to quote them.

As for the few critics who are more knowledgeable, they fall into other errors, from the point of view of literary theory. Cargill (1956: 223ff) relies on author-intention but argues persuasively that James had good reasons to wrap his history in ambiguity, namely the hysterical case of his sister Alice, to whom he was very close and whose journal he must have read after her death in 1892. Certainly James was in touch with the psychiatric circles of his time, both through the doctors treating her and through his brother William, and Cargill tries to show that he may have had at least indirect access (through a review by his friend F. W. F. Myers) to *Studien über Hysterie* by Freud and Breuer (1895), in which the case of Miss Lucy R. is described, a governess who was victim of (olfactory) hallucinations and in love with her employer.

Alexander Jones refutes this, discussing the differences between the two cases and Freud's whole description of conversion hysteria, for the development of which two conditions were necessary (to

Freud then): 'first, a memory too painful to be retained in the consciousness; second, an actual traumatic moment', at which the suddenly emergent incompatibility is repressed back into the subconscious. He shows that neither of these conditions is met in TS:

> James's governess had no painful memory of her employer; to the contrary, she thought him charming. Moreover, she made no attempt to repress her infatuation but poured out her feelings freely to Mrs Grose. Finally, she thoroughly enjoyed her life at Bly until her encounters with Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. Lest it be thought that these encounters might qualify as traumatic moments, let us remember that traumatic moments must *precede* [Jones's italics] any related hallucinations; the latter are symptoms or effects – they cannot be their own causes. Since Freud explained his theory clearly and fully, it seems unlikely that James would compose a study of hysteria in which none of the basic requirements for hysteria are present. (1959: W304ff)

In the revised version of his 1956 essay, Cargill (1963: K145ff) has strengthened his case. He regards the letter from the headmaster, forwarded unopened by the Master, as the traumatic moment which reveals to the governess his indifference not only to the children but to herself, thus paralleling Miss Lucy R.'s similar realisation. I doubt whether this, as expressed in the text, can on its own qualify as a traumatic moment, but Cargill does make the point that an author is not a scientist. He also gives more convincing evidence for the possibility that James was aware of the Freud–Breuer work.

In spite of the appeal to James's (unknown) intentions, both these critics have at least read Freud, but each derives from him a different diagnosis. Jones asks: 'Why are Freudian critics content to depict the governess as hysterical?' and answers, not without irony: 'Using their present methods one could "prove" that she is afflicted with pedophilia erotica and is therefore attempting to seduce little Miles' (which is often suggested). He then goes on to show that very possibility and concludes that his evidence is 'as solid as much of the data presented by Wilson, Cargill, Silver and Goddard. Yet it does not constitute unassailable proof [of course]; rather, it demonstrates the shortcomings of excessive ingenuity.' Whereupon he falls back into the (real) intentional fallacy:

> The odds are astronomical that James was *not* writing a tale of sexual abnormality. What, then, was he attempting to do? Goddard has asserted that James's conscious intention is unimportant ... Nevertheless, before we examine the tale, it is interesting to note James's own comments. (1959: W308)

The very notion of 'unassailable proof' in psychoanalysing a character who does not exist except as marks on paper (who has no past, no dreams, no transfer to an analyst) is absurd, but I shall return to this in a moment.

John Lydenberg (1957: W273ff) who holds a median position between ghosts and hallucinations (the ghosts exist but the real evil comes from the governess), uses the word 'hysterical' many times but comes up with a Frommian diagnosis:

> she appears as an almost classic case of what Erich Fromm calls the authoritarian character: masochistic in that she delights in receiving the tortures as an 'expatiatory victim' ... and at the same time sadistic in her insistence on dominating the children and Mrs Grose. (1957: W278)

Naturally this does not account for hallucinations but it doesn't try. He concludes (without attempting to explain the co-presence of compulsive neurosis and hysteria, two opposing though in *some* cases not incompatible types of neuroses) that the governess is 'hysterical, compulsive, sado-masochistic' (1957: W290).

As for M. Katan, M. D. (1962: W319ff), his 'causerie' is so naively and ramblingly expressed (though printed in *The psychoanalytic study of the child*), that I forbear to quote him extensively. In spite of the colossal error cited earlier and his absurd remarks about 'little Henry', he does make some interesting points about the primal scene as supposedly witnessed by the children (extratextually of course, but the text is certainly ambiguous enough to allow such an 'interpretation'). He is confusing, however, in his terminology, using the word 'psychotic feature' with reference to the delusion of being watched, and applying it to the fact that 'the man on top of the tower does not take his eyes off the governess' (1962: W326).[8] Similarly he talks about a delusion shared by two as '*une folie à deux*', which changes (in this case) to '*une hallucination à trois*' and later to '*une fantaisie à trois*' (meaningless in French, the correct term being *fantasme*). 'The ghosts are the result not only of the guilty conscience of the governess but also the guilty conscience of the children!' (1962: W329). He finally arrives, by an extratextual argument which takes the prize, at '*une fantaisie à quatre*':

> In the past, when the ghosts were still living persons, the bachelor had visited the children many times. Now that these persons are dead and the children need the bachelor's guidance more than ever, he does not want to have anything to do with them. What other conclusion can we draw than that these dramatic events have frightened him and that as a result he withdraws from the situation, that he shies away from the ideas which are

already shared by the governess and the children [the governess whom he hasn't met yet and who hasn't yet seen any ghost]? Thus the bachelor is – and this causes us no small surprise – the fourth participant in what then becomes *'une fantaisie à quatre'*. He runs away from the obscure stirrings of the oedipal feelings which have so strongly aroused the other three. Clearly, the bachelor is modeled after the illustrious example of the author himself (1962: W330).

Caught between being God the Father and the illustrious author, the gay and irresponsible bachelor doesn't seem to please the critics much. They are nevertheless right, but in a sense of which they are unaware, as we shall see in chapter 7 (p. 181).

There is also a later article by Mark Spilka (1963), which is disappointing despite its seductive title: 'Turning the Freudian screw: how not to do it'. Spilka accuses the Freudians chiefly of not being sufficiently Freudian, which is true enough, but he has little to contribute himself. The Freudian critics, he says, 'seem oddly Rousseauistic: they believe in Original Innocence ... Hence they minimize or rationalize Miles's dismissal from school, Flora's verbal horrors, and the reports of earlier evils, as childish peccadilloes' (1963: 248). Or again:

A second Rousseauistic notion, that the governess exacerbates quiescent evils, seems equally untenable. So far as one can see, neither the ghosts nor the children need incitement. What the governess does, out of egoistic righteousness, is to force rather than ease two drastic confrontations. Her flaw is one of character, not compulsion. (1963: K249)

But the Freudian theory would be precisely (or ought to be) that she exacerbates quiescent evils or, in Freudian terms, provokes the return of the repressed (in herself, in the children), and the statement that the children need no incitement is irrelevant (and unwarranted by the text). As for the ghosts, well, yes, Spilka returns to the ghost theory, insisting on the social aspect already evoked by Wilson and treated by Lydenberg, and above all blaming the Freudian critics for their lack of rigour:

In their fidelity to a system crudely applied and narrowly conceived, they have themselves failed to 'throw light upon imaginative truth'. More specifically, they have failed to allow for secondary elaboration, for infantile sexuality, for civilization and its discontents – for those Freudian principles, in short, which *can* be made to subserve imagination in appraising James's story. As I hope this paper attests, such principles can be of enormous service to criticism, especially with the literature of the last two centuries. (1963: K253, italics author's own.)

Unfortunately the paper attests nothing of the sort, apart from these quotations and the undeveloped, unused phrase, thrown in there as if by chance, about secondary elaboration. But the conclusion is admirable, and will serve to precipitate my own, which is this:

Without going here into the present controversy as to what precisely constitutes a literary text, I assume as empirically evident that a literary text, and more especially an ambiguous one, does inevitably produce many interpretations, whereas a non-literary text does not. This particular text, however, has for its brevity produced a veritable 'case' which is particularly revealing in its confusions.

Allowing for the passage of time since some of the more traditional pieces, a text which can generate, not only different interpretations but so many erroneous readings can indeed be regarded, on the one hand as an author's 'intended' test of his reader's inattention, a text composed on the very principle of ambiguity; but on the other, also as a text structured (intentionally or not) on the same principle that a neurosis is structured. I am not opting here for or against the ghosts, the governess's narrative is neurotic in both hypotheses. And the structure of a neurosis involves the attempt (often irresistible) to drag the 'other' down into itself, into the neurosis, the other being here the reader. This structure is successful, as we have seen, which is why I called the governess's state (her language) 'contagious'.

Whether the success is due to conscious (intended) or unconscious skill it is not my purpose here to argue, and if I have quoted so fully from so many critics, it was primarily as a study in non-methodology, but also to clear a path through the tangled bush of traditional criticism, to free the text from these many layers of misreadings (not the readings, some of which I shall accept 'as read'), to dispose of them as it were, so as to be able once again to look at it as a text, and above all to bring out a few theoretical principles without which no text can be analysed in a clear perspective, and which can be reduced here to three broad principles:

(1) a respect for the genre to which a text ostensibly belongs, even if that genre is in any one instance transgressed;

(2) a rigorous distinction between the metalanguage (the language of the critic) and the language of the linguistic object examined. This means not only avoiding traditional paraphrase, but understanding the elementary and not so elementary techniques of a literary text and the terms that poetics (as one type of metalanguage) has elaborated for these, employing

those terms and not the language of the object, except in quotation (if possible correct);

(3) a respect for the textuality of the text.

It is in the light of these three principles that I shall now analyse *The Turn of the Screw* (chapters 7, 8).