

It is in the epoch of capitalism that ideology emphasizes the value of individual freedom, freedom of conscience and, of course, consumer choice in all the multiplicity of its forms. The ideology of liberal humanism assumes a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals whose unfettered consciousness is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. It is in the interest of this ideology above all to suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject, and its own role in the interpellation of the subject, and to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity. Classic realism, still the dominant popular mode in literature, film and television drama, roughly coincides chronologically with the epoch of industrial capitalism. It performs, I wish to suggest, the work of ideology, not only in its representation of a world of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge and action, but also in offering the reader, as the position from which the text is most readily intelligible, the position of subject as the origin both of understanding and of action in accordance with that understanding.

It is readily apparent that Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, from Wordsworth through the Victorian period at least to Eliot and Yeats, takes subjectivity as its central theme. The developing self of the poet, his consciousness of himself as poet, his struggle against the constraints

of an outer reality, constitute the preoccupations of *The Prelude*, in *Memoirium* or *Meditations in Time of Civil War*. The 'I' of these poems is a kind of super-subject, experiencing life at a higher level of intensity than ordinary people and absorbed in a world of selfhood which the phenomenal world, perceived as external and antithetical, either nourishes or constrains. This transcendence of the subject in poetry is not presented as unproblematic, as I shall suggest in Chapter 6, but it is entirely overt in the poetry of this period. The 'I' of the poem directly addresses an individual reader who is invited to respond equally directly to this interpellation.

Fiction, however, in this same period, frequently appears to deal rather in social relationships, the interaction between the individual and society, to the increasing exclusion of the subjectivity of the author. Direct intrusion by the author comes to seem an impropriety; impersonal narration, 'showing' (the truth) rather than 'telling' it, is a requirement of prose fiction by the end of the nineteenth century. In drama too the author is apparently absent from the self-contained fictional world on the stage. Even the text effaces its own existence as text: unlike poetry, which clearly announces itself as formal, if only in terms of the shape of the text on the page, the novel seems merely to transcribe a series of events, to report on a palpable world, however fictional. Classic realist drama displays transparently and from the outside how people speak and behave.

Nevertheless, as we know while we read or watch, the author is present as a shadowy authority and as source of the fiction, and the author's presence is substantiated by the name on the cover or the programme: 'a novel by Thomas Hardy', 'a new play by Ibsen'. And at the same time, as I shall suggest in this section, the form of the classic realist text acts in conjunction with the expressive theory and with ideology by interpellating the reader as subject. The reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation. This model of intersubjective communication, of shared understanding of a text which re-presents the world, is the guarantee not only of the truth of the text but of the reader's existence as an autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects. In

this way classic realism constitutes an ideological practice in addressing itself to readers as subjects, interpellating them in order that they freely accept their subjectivity and their subjection.

It is important to reiterate, of course, that this process is not inevitable, in the sense that texts do not determine, like fate, the ways in which they must be read. I am concerned at this stage primarily with ways in which they are conventionally read: conventionally, since language is conventional, and since modes of writing as well as ways of reading are conventional, but conventionally also in that new conventions of reading are available, as I shall suggest in Chapter 6. In this sense meaning is never a fixed essence inherent in the text but is always constructed by the reader, the result of a 'circulation' between social formation, reader and text (Heath 1977-8: 74). In the same way, 'inscribed subject positions are never hermetically sealed into a text, but are always positions in ideologies' (Willemen 1978: 63). To argue that classic realism interpellates subjects in certain ways is not to propose that this process is ineluctable: on the contrary it is a matter of choice. But the choice is ideological: certain ranges of meaning (there is always room for debate) are 'obvious' within the currently dominant ideology, and certain subject-positions are equally 'obviously' the positions from which these meanings are apparent.

In what follows I have drawn very freely on work on film in *Screen* magazine, probably one of the most important sources for the development of critical theory in Britain. I have not always attributed specific insights and I have not hesitated to adapt others. The debate in *Screen* was more complex and subtle than it is possible to indicate in an argument which inevitably modifies and abridges much of what it borrows.

Classic realism is characterized by illusionism, narrative which leads to closure, and a hierarchy of voices which establishes the 'truth' of the story. Illusionism is by now, I hope, self-explanatory. The other two defining characteristics of classic realism need some discussion. Narrative tends to follow certain recurrent patterns: Classic realist narrative, as Barthes demonstrates in *S/Z*, turns on the creation of enigma through the demonstration of disorder, which throws into disarray the conventional precipitation of order, which throws into disarray the conventional cultural and signifying systems. Among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of plot in classic realism are murder, war, a journey

or love. But the story moves inevitably towards closure which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a reinstatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself.

The moment of closure is the point at which the events of the story become fully intelligible to the reader. The most obvious instance is the detective story where, in the final pages, the murderer is revealed and the motive made plain. But a high degree of intelligibility is sustained throughout the narrative as a result of the hierarchy of voices in the text. The hierarchy works above all by means of a privileged voice which places as subordinate all the utterances that are literally or figuratively between inverted commas. Colin MacCabe illustrates this point by quoting a passage from George Eliot (*MacCabe* 1974: 9-10). Here is another. It concerns Mr Tulliver, who has determined to call in the money he has lent his sister, Mrs Moss. They are discussing Mrs Moss's four daughters who have, as she puts it, 'a brother a-piece':

'Ah, but they must turn out and fend for themselves,' said Mr Tulliver, feeling that his severity was relaxing, and trying to brace it by throwing out a wholesome hint. 'They musn't look to hanging on their brothers.'

'No; but I hope their brothers 'ull love the poor things, and remember they came o' one father and mother: the lads 'ull never be the poorer for that,' said Mrs Moss, flashing out with hurried timidity, like a half-smothered fire.

Mr Tulliver gave his horse a little stroke on the flank, then checked it, and said angrily, 'Stand still with you!' much to the astonishment of that innocent animal.

'And the more there is of 'em, the more they must love one another,' Mrs Moss went on, looking at her children with a didactic purpose. But she turned towards her brother again to say, 'Not but what I hope your boy 'ull allays be good to his sister, though there's but two of 'em, like you and me, brother.'

That arrow went straight to Mr Tulliver's heart. He had not a rapid imagination, but the thought of Maggie was very near to him, and he was not long in seeing his relation to his own sister side by side with

Tom's relation to Maggie. Would the little wench ever be poorly off, and Tom rather hard upon her?

'Ay, ay, Critty,' said the miller, with a new softness in his tone; 'but I've allays done what I could for you,' he added, as if vindicating himself from a reproach.

(*The Mill on the Floss*, Chapter 8)

The distinction here between the dialogue and the authorial and therefore authoritative exposition of its psychological import illustrates the distinction made by Benveniste between 'discourse' and 'history' (*histoire*) (Benveniste 1971: 205–15). History narrates events apparently without the intervention of a speaker. In history there is no mention of 'you' and 'I': 'the events seem to narrate themselves' (p. 208). Discourse, on the other hand, acknowledges a voice; it assumes a speaker and a hearer, the 'you' and 'I' of dialogue. In third-person narrative fiction like *The Mill on the Floss* the voices are placed for the reader by a privileged, historic narration which is the source of coherence of the story as a whole. Here Mr Tulliver is more aware of the 'truth' of the situation than Mrs Moss – we know this because the fact has previously been related as history: 'If Mrs Moss had been one of the most astute women in the world, instead of being one of the simplest, she could have thought of nothing more likely to propitiate her brother. . . . But he has less access to the 'truth' than the reader, whose comprehensive understanding is guaranteed by the historic narration: ' . . . he was not long in seeing his relation to his own sister side by side with Tom's relation to Maggie. . . . ' The authority of this impersonal narration springs from its effacement of its own status as discourse.

At the same time the passage is interesting as an example of the way in which the reader is invited to construct a 'history' which is more comprehensive still. The gently ironic account of Mr Tulliver's treatment of his horse is presented without overt authorial comment. The context, however, points more or less irresistibly to a single interpretation which appears as the product of an intersubjective communication between the author and the reader in which the role of language has become invisible. Irony is no less authoritative because its meanings are implicit rather than explicit. Indeed, the frequent overt authorial intrusions and generalizations of George Eliot are much

easier to resist, since they draw attention to themselves as propositions. First-person narration, therefore, or the presentation of events through the perceptions of centres of consciousness within the fiction, however 'unreliable', are not necessarily ways of evading authorial authority. But they seem to offer the reader a meaning which is apparently not in the words on the page. Through the presentation of an intelligible history which effaces its own status as discourse, classic realism proposes a model in which author and reader are subjects who are the source of shared meanings, the origin of which is mysteriously extradiscursive. It thus does the work of ideology in suppressing the relationship between language and subjectivity.

Classic realism, then, is what Barthes in *S/Z* defines as the readable (*lisible*), the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century, no longer 'pertinent' since then and yet still the prevailing form of popular fiction today, the accomplice of ideology in its attempt to arrest the productivity of literary practice. Classic realism tends to offer as the 'obvious' basis of its intelligibility the assumption that character, unified and coherent, is the source of action. Subjectivity is a major – perhaps the major – theme of classic realism. Insight into character and psychological processes is declared to be one of the marks of serious literature: 'it is largely the victory of character over action that distinguishes the high literature of modern times' (Langbaum 1963: 210).

Conversely, inconsistency of character or the inappropriateness of particular actions to particular characters is seen as a weakness. It is because Emma is the kind of person she is that she behaves as she does; Sir Willoughby Patterne acts as he does because he is an egoist. Whether influenced by family relationships and upbringing, or simply mysteriously given, character begins to manifest itself in the earliest years of Maggie Tulliver, Jane Eyre and Paul Morel, for instance, and it proves a major constraint on their future development, on the choices they make and the courses they pursue.

In the more arbitrary world portrayed in earlier literary forms, pairs of characters, barely distinguishable from each other except by name, demonstrate the differences that result from circumstances and accidents of choice: Palamon and Arcite, Helena and Hermia, Rosalind and Celia seem to have everything in common except their destinies (and

in the last two cases their physical heights). If pairs of characters appear in classic realist texts, however, it is more often with the effect of showing how the differences of character between them are the source of their differing destinies. When Dorothea rejects Sir James Chetnam and Celia marries him, their respective actions are seen as consistent with the character-patterns established for them at length in the opening pages of *Middlemarch*. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are naturally different, and if Marianne acquires at nineteen the sense that she lacked at seventeen, it is at the price of a considerable period of illness and convalescence.

The illness marking such adjustments of character was to become a convention of nineteenth-century fiction and the problem of change it symbolizes forms a striking contrast to the rapid transformations of, for instance, Shakespeare's erring prodigals, Prince Hal, Angelo and Bertram, who are able to enter so promptly into the possession of virtue, a quantity equally and readily available to all repentant sinners. Their tragic counterparts in Renaissance drama fall equally readily into vice: Faustus, Beatrice-Joanna and Macbeth need not be understood as characteristically depraved, though a mode of criticism based on the dominance of classic realist literature has until recently been inclined to analyse them in terms appropriate to the novel. If Lawrence did indeed do away with 'the old stable ego of the character', it was in search of a deeper form of subjectivity that he did so. It is difficult to imagine Miriam becoming like Clara, Gudrun like Ursula or Gerald like Birkin. Equally, the overt project of *The Mill on the Floss* is most 'obviously' intelligible in terms of a difference of character between Tom and Maggie.

Classic realism presents individuals whose traits of character, understood as essential, constrain the choices they make, and whose potential for development depends on what is given. Human nature is thus seen as a system of character-differences existing in the world, but one which none the less permits the reader to share the hopes and fears of a wide range of kinds of characters. This contradiction – that readers, like the central figures of fiction, are unique, and that so many readers can identify with so many protagonists – is accommodated in ideology as a paradox. There is no character in *Middlemarch* with whom we cannot have some sense of shared humanity. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is

appalled to find in the jungles of the Congo a recognition of his own remote kinship with primeval savagery: 'And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future' (Section 2). 'The mind of man', infinite and infinitely mysterious, homogeneous system of differences, unchangeable in its essence however manifold its forms, is shown in classic realism to be the source of understanding, of action and of history.

The consistency and continuity of the subject provides the conceptual framework of classic realism, but it is characteristic of the action of the story, the narrative process itself, to disrupt subjectivity, to disturb the pattern of relationships between subject-positions which is presented as normal in the text. In many cases the action itself represents a test of identity, putting identity in question by confronting the protagonist with alternative possible actions. In others a murder, marital infidelity, a journey, or the arrival of a stranger commonly disrupts the existing system of differences which constitutes human nature as represented in the microcosm of the text. To this extent classic realism recognizes the precariousness of the ego and offers the reader the sense of danger and excitement which results from that recognition.

But the movement of classic realist narrative towards closure ensures the reinstatement of order, sometimes a new order, sometimes the old restored, but always intelligible because familiar. Decisive choices are made, identity is established, the murderer is exposed, or marriage generates a new set of subject-positions. The epilogue common in nineteenth-century novels describes the new order, now understood to be static, and thus isolates and emphasizes a structural feature which is left implicit in other classic realist texts. Jane Eyre tells her readers, 'My tale draws to its close: one word respecting my experience of married life, and one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently recurred in this narrative, and I have done' (Chapter 38). Harmony has been re-established through the redistribution of the signifiers into a new system of differences which closes off the threat to subjectivity, and it remains only to make this harmonious and coherent world intelligible to the reader, closing off in the process the sense of danger to the reader's subjectivity. This characteristic narrative

structure, which deserves more detailed exposition, is discussed in the context of a full analysis of the film, *Touch of Evil*, in Stephen Heath's 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis' (1975).

Jane Eyre addresses itself to the reader, directly interpellates the reader as subject, as the 'you' who is addressed by the 'I' of discourse. This interpellation (address) in turn facilitates the interpolation (inclusion) of the reader in the narrative by the presentation of events from a specific and unified point of view. The meeting between Odysseus and Nausicaa in *The Odyssey*, or the death of Priam in *The Aeneid*, provide no specific position in the scene for the reader. But classic realism locates the reader in the events: we seem to 'see' Mr Brocklehurst through the eyes of Jane as a child:

I looked up at – a black pillar! – such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital.

(Chapter 4)

Besides emphasizing the concern of the text with subjectivity, this technique also limits the play of meaning for the reader by installing him or her in a single position from which the scene is intelligible. This is not an inevitable consequence of first person narrative – Aeneas recounts the death of Priam – nor is it confined to that particular form. Here is an episode from *Oliver Twist*:

The undertaker, who had just put up the shutters of his shop, was making some entries in his day-book by the light of a most dismal candle, when Mr Bumble entered.

'Ah! said the undertaker, looking up from the book, and pausing in the middle of a word; 'is that you, Bumble?'

'No one else, Mr Sowerberry,' replied the beadle. 'Here, I've brought the boy,' Oliver made a bow.

'Oh! that's the boy, is it?' said the undertaker, raising the candle above his head, to get a better view of Oliver. 'Mrs Sowerberry, will you have the goodness to come here a moment, my dear?'

Mrs Sowerberry emerged from a little room behind the shop, and

presented the form of a short, thin, squeezed-up woman with a vixenish countenance.

'My dear,' said Mr Sowerberry deferentially, 'this is the boy from the workhouse that I told you of.' Oliver bowed again.

'Dear me!' said the undertaker's wife, 'he's very small.'

(Chapter 4)

The scene (since again the narrative is full of visual detail) is viewed from a quite specific point of view, just inside the door of the shop. The raising of the candle, the emergence of Mrs Sowerberry and her appearance are all 'presented' to this single place, the place of Oliver, who is the centre of consciousness of the episode. We 'see' what Oliver sees, and to this extent we identify with him. But we also see more than Oliver sees: we are aware of his bow, narrated in the third person; we know that the undertaker has just put up the shutters, and that he pauses in the middle of a word.

This information has no obvious place in Oliver's consciousness, and the more comprehensive point of view that it permits the reader sets up a tripartite relationship between the reader, the fictional character and the implied author. The reader participates not only in the point of view of the subject of the *énoncé*, the subject inscribed in the utterance, Oliver, but also in the point of view of the subject of the *énonciation*, the subject who narrates, who 'shows' Oliver's experience to the reader, the implied author. In a similar way the conventional tenses of classic realism tend to align the position of the reader with that of the omniscient narrator who is looking back on a series of past events. Thus, while each episode seems to be happening 'now' as we read, and the reader is given clear indications of what is already past in relation to this 'now', nonetheless each apparently present episode is contained in a single, intelligible and all-embracing vision of what, from the point of view of the subject of the *énonciation*, is past and completed.

In this way heterogeneity – variety of points of view and temporal locations – is contained in homogeneity. The text interpellates the reader as a transcendent and noncontradictory subject by positioning him or her as 'the unified and unifying subject of its vision' (Heath 1976: 85).

This construction of a position for the reader, which is a position of identification with the subject of the enunciation, is by no means confined to third-person narrative, where authorial omniscience is so readily apparent. In distinguishing between 'reliable' and 'unreliable' first person narrators, the reader assumes a position of knowledge – of a history, a 'truth' of the story which may not be accessible to a dramatized narrator who, as a character in the text, is a subject of the *roman*. Jane Eyre as a child often has less understanding of the implications of her experience than the reader does. In *Wuthering Heights* the inadequacies of the perceptions of Lockwood or Nellie Dean do not prevent the reader from seeming to apprehend the real nature of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff.

Browning's dramatic monologues, to cite an extreme example, invite the reader to make judgements and draw conclusions not available to the speaker. Robert Langbaum perfectly describes the common reading experience in which the knowledge of the reader seems to surpass the knowledge of the speaker, but to be a knowledge shared with the author, so that author and reader independently produce a shared meaning which confirms the transcendence of each:

It can be said of the dramatic monologue generally that there is at work in it a consciousness, whether intellectual or historical, beyond what the speaker can lay claim to. This consciousness is the mark of the poet's projection into the poem; and it is also the pole which attracts our projection, since we find in it the counterpart of our own consciousness.

(Langbaum 1963: 94)

Irony thus guarantees still more effectively than overt authorial omniscience the subjectivity of the reader as a source of meaning.

The dramatic monologue is compelled by the logic of its form to leave the recognition of irony to the reader. The classic realist novel, however, has a surer way of establishing its harmonious 'truth'.⁴ Perhaps the commonest pattern in the novel is the gradual convergence of the voices of the subject of the *roman* and the subject of the enunciation until they merge triumphantly at the point of closure. At the end of the detective story, reader, author and detective all 'know' everything

necessary to the intelligibility of the story. Nineteenth-century protagonists learn by experience until they achieve the wisdom author and reader now seem to have possessed all along. (Paradoxically the protagonist's discovery also has the effect of confirming the wisdom of the reader.) Wayne Booth describes the position of the reader who has completed *Finnegans*:

'Jane Austen' has learned nothing at the end of the novel that she did not know at the beginning. She needed to learn nothing. She knew everything of importance already. We have been privileged to watch with her as she observes her favorite character climb from a considerably lower platform to join the exalted company of Knightley, 'Jane Austen', and those of us readers who are wise enough, good enough, and perceptive enough to belong up there too.

(Booth 1961: 265).

Bleak House must be one of the most interesting instances of converging voices. The story itself concerns social and ideological contradictions – that the law of property set up in the interests of society benefits only lawyers and destroys the members of society who invoke it in their defence; that the social conception of virtue promotes hypocrisy or distress. The narrative mode of *Bleak House* also functions contradictorily, initially liberating the reader to produce meaning but finally proving to be a constraint on the process of production. The novel has two narrators, Esther Summerson, innocent, generous, unassuming and sentimental, and an anonymous third-person narrator, detached, ironic, rendered cynical by what he knows about the Court of Chancery. Neither is omniscient. The anonymous narration is in the present tense, and claims little knowledge of feeling. At the beginning of *Bleak House* the two narratives form a striking contrast. The first section is by the worldly, knowing narrator, and is succeeded by Esther's immediate insistence on her own lack of cleverness but strength of feeling: 'I have not by any means a quick understanding. When I love a person very tenderly indeed, it seems to brighten . . .' (Chapter 3).

The reader is constantly prompted to supply the deficiencies of each narrative. The third person narration, confining itself largely to behaviour, is strongly enigmatic, but provides enough clues for the

reader to make guesses at the 'truth' before the story reveals it; Esther's narrative frequently invites an ironic reading: we are encouraged to trust her account of the 'facts' but not necessarily her judgement:

She was a good, good woman. She went to church three times every Sunday, and to morning prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and to lectures whenever there were lectures; and never missed. She was handsome; and if she had ever smiled, would have been (I used to think) like an angel – but she never smiled. She was always grave, and strict. She was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of other people made her frown all her life. . . . It made me very sorry to consider how good she was, and how unworthy of her I was.

(Chapter 3)

Thus, a third and privileged but literally unwritten story begins to emerge, recounted by the reader, who grasps a history and judges soundly.

Gradually, however, the three narratives converge. The childlike spontaneity of Mr Skimpole, which enchanted Esther in Chapter 6, and which rapidly emerges as irresponsibility in the narrative of the reader, is dismissed by Esther in Chapter 61 with a briskness worthy of the ironic narrator:

He died some five years afterwards, and left a diary behind him, with letters and other material towards his *Life*: which was published, and which showed him to have been the victim of a combination on the part of mankind against an amiable child. It was considered very pleasant reading, but I never read more of it myself than the sentence on which I chanced to light on opening the book. It was this, 'Jarndyce, in common with most other men I have known, is the incarnation of Selfishness.'

It is Esther, and not the ironic narrator, who recounts the black comedy of the completion of the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, while the anonymous narrative softens, as if as a result of its encounters with the innocence of Jo, the crossing-sweeper, the Bagnet family and Mr George:

A goodly sight it is to see the grand old housekeeper (harder of hearing now) going to church on the arm of her son, and to observe – which few do, for the house is scant of company in these times – the relations of both towards Sir Leicester, and his towards them.

(Chapter 66)

The three narratives thus converge to confirm the reader's apparently extra-discursive interpretation and judgement.

By this means, *Bleak House* constructs a reality which appears to be many-sided, too complex to be contained within a single point of view, but which is in fact so contained within the single and non-contradictory invisible narrative of the reader, which is confirmed and ratified as Esther and the ironic narrator come to share with the reader a 'recognition' of the true complexity of things. By thus smoothing over the contradictions it has so powerfully dramatized in the interests of a single, unified, coherent 'truth', – *Bleak House*, however critical of the world it describes, offers the reader a position, an attitude which is given as non-contradictory, fixed in 'knowing' subjectivity.

Classic realism cannot foreground contradiction. The logic of its structure – the movement towards closure – precludes the possibility of leaving the reader simply to confront the contradictions which the text may have defined. The hierarchy of voices ensures that a transcendent level of knowledge 'recognizes' the contradictions in the world as tragic (inevitable), as is predominantly the case in Hardy, or ironic, as in *Bleak House*, or resolved as in *Sybil* or *Jane Eyre*. When contradiction exists in classic realism it does so in the margins of a text which, as Pierre Macherey argues in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978), is unable, in spite of itself, to achieve the coherence which is the project of classic realism.

It may prove persuasive to rehearse some of the preceding arguments very briefly in relation to a single text. Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* is a story about degrees of knowing: it is precisely an analysis of subjectivity. Maisie's subjectivity is given. She becomes sharper, more acute in the course of the novel, but her radical innocence, integrity and sensitivity are understood to be simply there and unalterable, just as the weakness of Sir Claude is there and cannot be changed, however hard anyone, including Sir Claude, tries to change it. The shallow,

self-seeking natures of Ida, Beale and Mrs Beale are also given, and the novel is intelligible in terms of a concept of human nature as a system of differences existing in the world. Society can exert its influence only on what is understood to be natural and essential, and in the case of Maisie herself this influence is powerless to corrupt her.

The action of the novel constitutes above all a test of Maisie's identity. There are events, but the climax of the events is climactic as the test of Maisie's nature, her subjectivity. What is presented as supremely important is what Maisie is.

The hierarchy of voices is readily apparent. The narration is in the third person, presented largely but by no means entirely through Maisie as a centre of consciousness. The superficial voice of the fashionable world is patently shallow, over-emotional, inadequate; the imperative moral voice of Mrs Wix is in a kind of symmetry with the sensitive but ineffectual voice of Sir Claude. Maisie subsumes both, transcending the 'moral sense' of Mrs Wix and able to participate in the self-awareness of Sir Claude's 'fear of himself' without succumbing to it. Not 'knowing' in the worldly sense the clinical facts of sex, Maisie 'knows' at a level which is seen as more profound.

But beyond this hierarchy of knowledge within the *énoncé*, the irony constructs a knowing position for the reader, who suspects Mrs Beale of falsehood from the moment she is introduced into the text (as Miss Overmore):

Miss Overmore never, like Moddle, had on an apron, and when she ate she held her fork with her little finger curled out. The child, who watched her at many moments, watched her particularly at that one. 'I think you're lovely,' she often said to her; even mamma, who was lovely too, had not such a pretty way with the fork.

(Chapter 2)

The events which Maisie perceives but initially misinterprets or misjudges are intelligible to the reader, so that at the moment of closure, when Mrs Beale is unequivocally revealed by Maisie as predatory and destructive, *énoncé* and enunciation converge to produce an intersubjective consensus which confirms at once the autonomy of the reader, Maisie and Henry James as sources of recognition of the 'truth'.

The social comment which the text makes explicit is thus placed: the scandal of the child as an object of exchange is contained within the transcendent position of knowledge constructed for the reader, a position which is in itself non-contradictory and which is seen as the guarantee of moral autonomy, immunity from contamination by a corrupt society.

Initially (and continuously) constructed in language, the subject finds in the classic realist text a confirmation of the position of autonomous subjectivity represented in ideology as 'obvious'. It is possible to refuse that position, but to do so, at least at present, is to make a deliberate and ideological choice.