

CHILDREN IN NOVELS

AKIKO HIGUCHI

Henry James, *What Maisie Knew*¹ (1897)

Maisie's Growth in Relation to Her Surrounding Adults

The novel begins when Maisie is a young girl. Her parents, Beale Farange and Ida Farange, are constantly quarrelling; their marriage life is an "unbroken opportunity to quarrel." (37) Maisie becomes the centre of their dealings. The divorce-court orders them to share their daughter half a year by turns, as Beale Farange cannot raise twenty-six hundred pounds to his wife.

Maisie becomes "a centre of hatred and a messenger of insult" (43) of both parties who hate each other. Her "innocent lips" (42) convey such expressions as these.

He said I was to tell you, from him, . . . that you're a nasty horrid pig! (42)

That's what mamma says I'm to tell him—"that he lies and he knows he lies." (44)

Your father wishes you were dead—that, my dear, is what your father wishes. (174)

I don't speak of your father's infamous wife. (175)

She begins to feign stupidity, "with the determination to be employed no longer. She would forget everything, she would

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repeat nothing." (43) Her parents think she has grown "shockingly dull" (43), but this kind of "concealment" (43) is "a moral revolution" (43) to protect her self-respect, shunning "the feeling of danger". (43) Her mother encourages concealment.

You had better indeed for the future...learn to keep your thoughts to yourself. (45)

Of course Maisie learns this, and as the result, it irritates her mother. For Maisie, "concealment had never necessarily seemed deception." (54) It is after all the necessary means to protect her peace of mind, not to be buffeted by both parents. Henry James says it is her "moral resolution." (43) Usually, concealment is something not to be recommended; but here, ironically enough, it becomes morally necessary for her mental health. A child is supposed to be "simple and confiding" (45); yet how can she stay so in such circumstances? She must know things around her and must take measures to cope with them. This she has to learn first; concealment is what she learns first in her life.

When the novel starts, Maisie is six years old. How old is she when the novel ends? No critic can be certain. It is said to be "the death of her childhood". (Preface, 28) Henry James is ambiguous about the time scheme; we can't tell how long it takes from one incident to the next. It isn't clear how old she is at certain stages of the novel as follows, and it makes this novel not easy for us to read, though the reader's difficulties arise much more from the obliquity of James' narration and his abstract style.

She was now old enough to understand how disproportionate a stay she had already made with her father; and also old enough to enter a little into the ambiguity attending this excess, which oppressed her particularly whenever the question had been touched upon in talk with her governess (Miss Overmore). (57)

We merely guess her calendar age and her mental age. What, after all, is "Maisie's mental age? This is never very clear."²

Mr Beale Farange is a person of weak character, as his succession of lovers or wives and his financial instability suggest. Mrs Ida Farange also has seven lovers and husbands. The parents' dreadful moral lives are a conspicuous contrast to the purity of the child. They pretend that they have wanted to look after Maisie, but actually they are more delighted "in hurling Maisie at (the adversary) than in snatching her away." (46) What they really want is money as well as new sexual partners, not their daughter.

The process of knowing is firmly connected with one's mental development. Therefore knowing becomes the central theme of this novel, as the title suggests. Each stage of Maisie's knowledge shows her intellectual and emotional development. The reader discovers how far and in what way the small girl will be taken into enlightenment.

Maisie has two governesses; first Miss Overmore, and next, Mrs Wix. The former becomes Mrs Beale, and later, Sir Claude's wife. Miss Overmore is pretty, well-dressed, and seems to be qualified as a governess, but she is more interested in catching husbands. She seems to be attached to Maisie more than her real mother. Maisie feels that "*her* affection at least was a gage of safety." (59) It is deplorable for a child that "[p]arents had come to seem vague, but governesses were evidently to be trusted." (59)

Mrs Wix, squint-eyed, plain, poor, "illiterate and unprofitable" (59), is not quite qualified as an intellectual educator. She has a certain moral sense which gives Maisie a sense of safety together with "passion and anguish." (48) She is also "a mother, and this was something Miss Overmore was not, something (strangely, confusingly) that mamma was even less." (48) Therefore Maisie

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learns nothing whatever "under Mrs Beale and Susan Ash" (75) who is a housemaid. On the other hand, Mrs Wix teaches her 'moral sense'. For instance, when everybody including her real parents and her step-parents are excited with 'being free', as Mrs Beale says, "I'm free, I'm free!" (219) and that "He's [Sir Claude] as free as I am!" (220), Mrs Wix warns Maisie, "Well, . . . no body . . . is free to commit a crime." (207) Maisie is as "interested in Mrs Wix's moral sense as Mrs Wix could possibly be in hers," (225) although Mrs Beale wants to blame Mrs Wix for "having no moral sense". (258) Nearly at the end of the novel, Maisie is pressed to choose whom to live with, and she replies, "I feel as if I had lost everything." (260)

Mrs Wix looked dark. 'Do you mean to say you *have* lost what we found together with so much difficulty two days ago?' As her pupil failed of response she continued: 'Do you mean to say you've already forgotten what we found together?'

Maisie dimly remembered. 'My moral sense?'

'Your moral sense. *Haven't* I, after all, brought it out?' She spoke as she had never spoken even in the schoolroom and with the book in her hand.

It brought back to the child's recollection how she sometimes couldn't repeat on Friday the sentence that had been glib on Wednesday, and she dealt all feebly and ruefully with the present tough passage. Sir Claude and Mrs Beale stood there like visitors at an 'exam'. She had indeed an instant a whiff of the faint flower that Mrs Wix pretended to have plucked and now with such a peremptory hand thrust at her nose. Then it left her, and, as if she were sinking with a slip from a foothold, her arms made a short jerk. What this jerk represented was the spasm within her of something still deeper than a moral sense. She looked at her examiner; she looked at the visitors; she felt the rising of the tears she had kept down at the station. They had nothing—no, distinctly nothing—to do with her moral sense. The only thing was the old flat shameful schoolroom pleas. 'I don't know—I don't know.'

'Then you've lost it.' Mrs Wix seemed to close the book as she fixed the straighteners on Sir Claude. 'You've nipped it in the bud. You've killed it when it had begun to live.' (260)

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Her education at home consists of little more than "the puzzle of cards and counters and little bewildering pamphlets". (80) These are for playing games. Later, she attends a few lectures at "an institution" (138) where she feels "so uplifted" (139) by "the fountain of knowledge" (139), though we don't know what she obtains from such casual open lectures at London University; we don't know at what age and for how long, or what kind of lectures she attends there, either.

What her parents teach her is mainly how to please one parent by displeasing the other. She retains "an echo of parental influence... one of the sacred lessons of home... with force... that there were things papa called mamma and mamma called papa a low sneak for doing or for not doing". (206)

Maisie knows much now: indeed "Mrs Wix saw her as a little person knowing so extraordinarily much". (212)

She judged that if her whole history, for Mrs Wix, had been the successive stages of her knowledge, so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which the knowledge would overflow. As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything. She had not had governesses for nothing: what in the world had she ever done but learn and learn and learn? She looked at the pink sky with a placid foreboding that she soon should have learnt All. (212-213)

This is a very important moment in her spiritual experience that leads Maisie to the final utterance of "Oh I know!" (266)

Maisie plays a role as an innocent go-between with her father and her governess, Miss Overmore, just as Adèle did for Rochester and Jane Eyre. The situation is the same with her mother and Sir Claude and other lovers. The settlement between the guardians that Maisie herself should choose with whom to live comes nearly at the end of the novel. At this stage it seems that she is old

enough to think and judge, though we are not informed how old she actually is, which annoys me. She needs to understand and interpret the difficult situation she is put into by the misbehaviour of mature figures who are "too stupid, . . . too vain, . . . too thin." (Preface, 30)

There is a social and moral hierarchy. Ida's low-cut dress and obvious make-up suggest her immorality, and Beale Farange seems to be a gambler. Mrs Beale and Sir Claude, Maisie's one-time step-parents, look a little nicer but unsatisfactory guardians. Eventually Maisie refuses them, choosing Mrs Wix as her protector. The "Countess" is morally awful, implying a demi-monde. She is physically repulsive to Maisie.

It is amazing how Maisie is not corrupted by the "vulgar and empty" (Preface, 29) adults who surround her, aggravating her life into a more "'painful', 'unpleasant', and 'disgusting'" (Preface, 30) one. Somehow she manages to keep her unselfishness, freshness and a certain naïve sensitiveness. Perhaps the gift of her keeping her distance with people helps her to be independent and solitary without being victimized. At least Mrs Beale and Mrs Wix generously love her in their own ways. Sir Claude seems to be too much interested in her, "plainly sexual" (Introduction by Paul Theroux, 16) in the end. "'I love Sir Claude—I love *him*.'" (264) Maisie *knows* that she is attracted by him.

However, *what Maisie doesn't know* preserves her innocence. The social climate prevents Maisie from knowing about sex completely, even though her father talks about his "honeymoon" and Mrs Wix tells her all about it in detail (67); even though Mrs Beale tells her "the idea of getting what one wanted . . . by 'making love'" (225); or even though she thinks she knows what 'amour' means. (215) She is kept ignorant about sex, and is completely innocent in her pre-puberty period. She has no

idea of what is going on in her parents' beds.

What Maisie doesn't know is sex, as it is completely hidden from her. Unlike Leo of L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*, she never knows it all through the novel. Sex is a taboo here, and all the adults strangely agree in keeping her ignorant. If she, a child, knew sex, it might possibly become a nightmare, just as Leo. Including her real parents, all the adults exploit Maisie. *What she knows* is the ugliness of adults' egotism.

Henry James has created a small innocent girl, victimized by those who ought to have protected and loved her and yet has not been destroyed by them. Paul Theroux writes in his Introduction:

Maisie know better. Her innocence and decency allow her to find peace in the notion of freedom. It is her fascination and impartiality that aid her in knowing, and knowing gives her the detachment and calmness that enable her to understand. She doesn't blink, she doesn't take sides, she remembers, she is uncommonly curious, she is tactful, she is solitary: she has the makings of a writer. (18)

As Mrs Wix wonders at "what Maisie knew" (266), Maisie shows us "What is morality but high intelligence?"³

¹All citations, numbers in parentheses, are from the following.

Henry James: *What Maisie Knew* (London: Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, 1988).

²S. Gorley Putt, *The Fiction of Henry James: A Reader's Guide* (Harmondworth: A Peregrine Book, Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 218.

³*Ibid.*, p. 21. Cited from *The Golden Bowl*.

Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*⁴ (1903)

I. Parents' Roles in the Growth of Ernest Pontifex

There may be a long discussion as to what traits of certain main characters are similar to or different from the model characters, because the relationship between Ernest Pontifex and

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his father Rev. Theobald Pontifex is so far from what is supposed to be natural affection. There is a fierce discrepancy between what the parents expect from their son, and what the son actually provides and vice versa. Even a mother's affection for her baby is said to be something learnt and not innate. Then, does Theobald really love Ernest as he declares so often, or does he behave selfishly according to his desire regardless of his son's real necessity?

What kind of man and wife were Ernest's parents? His mother, Christina, said that her principal duty to her husband was "to love him, honour him, and keep him in good temper." (60)

She would have chopped Ernest or anyone else into little pieces of mincemeat to gratify the slightest wish of her husband, but she would not have chopped him up for anyone else, and so long as he did not cross her she was very fond of him. By nature she was of an even temper, more willing to be pleased than ruffled, very ready to do a good-natured action, provided it did not cost her much exertion, nor involve expense to Theobald. (299)

Theobald was comfortably settled in his home, as 'his home was his castle' (89) like other Englishmen. Therefore,

unnatural tension in public was followed by exhaustion when tension is no longer necessary. His children are the most defenseless things he can reach, and it is on them in nine cases out of ten that he will relieve his mind. (89)

He was unable to control his own feeling, and to the weakest and nearest, he vented his bad temper in passion. He gained his emotional satisfaction by torturing one poor soul, Ernest, the first born, whom he could most easily gain access to. There is no indication as to whether Theobald treated his second son and daughter as severely as Ernest, but it would seem that he did not.

When he was a child, Theobald had beaten and teased a nurse, saying, "I'll keep you on purpose to torment you." (16) Teasing could be understood to be a lesser degree of tormenting.

When Theobald's son became rich and independent, he was irritated because he felt himself "to have been robbed of his power to tease him." (313) I think he had a sadistic tendency towards obtaining pleasure and relief by tormenting the weak. He was a type who was affable to everybody except his family, especially his sons. This was the main reason why he was disliked by both Ernest and Joey. "Incompatibility of temperament" (313) was deeply rooted, causing a fatal relationship between father and sons. Since the tormented were not faulty nor delinquents, being young children, I think Theobald was much to blame.

Before Ernest could well crawl he was taught to kneel; before he could well speak he was taught to lisp the Lord's prayer and the general confession. (74)

When Ernest was in his second year, his father "began to teach him to read" (76) and "began to whip him two days after he had begun to teach him." (76) When he pronounced "tum" for "come", he was severely punished. When he was only a little over five years old, he was repeatedly beaten by his father over "prayers and hymns and sums and happy Sunday evenings." (88) At twelve, he knew the Latin and Greek grammars by heart. We can imagine how many times he had been beaten and whipped by then. What rationalizes Theobald's rigorous treatment was the universally admitted proverb that "to spare the rod was to spoil the child." (24) Yet I cannot help feeling that Theobald's violence against his son was a physical form of child abuse, more out of selfish self-satisfaction than affection. For him "the greatest nuisance to mankind is man" (59) and Ernest was the scapegoat. Yet they thought there had never been two parents "so self-denying and devoted to the highest welfare of their children." (75)

Theobald's father "thrashed his boys two or three times a week and some weeks a good deal oftener, but in those days

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fathers were always thrashing their boys." (24) Human beings tend to do to others just as has been done to them. So Theobald's violence towards his children might have been an unconscious mimicry of his father. Mr. George Pontifex had checked "the first signs of self-will while his children were too young to offer serious resistance" (24) in order to let them acquire "habits of obedience." (24)

Because Theobald did not resist his own parents in his younger days, he was "encouraged to expect the most implicit obedience for his own children, ... for ... no duty could be more important than that of teaching a child to obey his parents in all things." (73) Theobald thought it his duty to train his children from their earliest infancy. "The first signs of self-will must be ... plucked up." (74) Ernest was fond of his mother, as well as his nurse, kittens and puppies during his childhood, but his father's severity and violence gave rise to his "fear and shrinking" (74) toward his father. It provoked the father's regret.

He is not fond of me, I'm sure he is not. He ought to be, after all the trouble I have taken with him, but he is ungrateful and selfish. It is an unnatural thing for a boy not to be fond of his own father. If he was fond of me I should be fond of him, but I cannot like a son who, I am sure, dislikes me... (99)

Being humiliated by his father, Ernest began to think that "Papa and Mamma ... are much better and cleverer than anyone else, but I ... shall never be either good or clever." (100) "He hated Papa, and did not like Mamma." (101) Such was his relationship as a result of his father's "long and savage cruelty ... due to the ignorance and stupidity of his parents in his childhood rather than ... deliberate malice." (214).

Liberated from his parents' direct control, he suffered another pain at Roughborough School, where he was called "an audacious reptile." (103) Here punishment was by way of

"copying out lines of Virgil." (105) He began to smoke at the age of fourteen. He held himself "much too cheap" (126) and was "listless and unhappy". (126) Once Dr. Skinner teased him, "Pontifex, . . . do you never laugh? Do you always look so preternaturally grave?" (127) He was, on the whole, regarded as "Idle, listless, and unimproving on almost all subjects. . . . Not satisfactory, on account of his real unpunctuality and inattention to duties" (128) in his general conduct.

Being at home on vacation, he was questioned by his parents about his watch that he had given to Ellen, and about his school-mates' misconduct. He confessed and then was betrayed. He always felt "the ever-watchful eye and protecting hand of his father laying burdens on him greater than he could bear." (153)

After spending an unhappy childhood and school days, Emmanuel College in Cambridge was the first place he was "consciously and continuously happy." (154) Here he encountered several books including Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which threw doubts on Christianity.

In 1858, when he was twenty-three, he was ordained a Deacon, and became the junior curate of a High Church rector. His senior curate, Pryor, wanted to organize a College of Spiritual Pathology. Consequently, Ernest trusted and gave Pryor £5,000 to invest for him. He started house-to-house visits in a poor district of London. He tried hard, but his life did not bring him happiness or satisfaction. Having both Pryor, the poor curate, and Townley, a rich friend at Cambridge, he saw an impassable barrier between the lower and upper classes.

A misunderstanding concerning Miss Maitland drove him into "imprisonment with hard labour for six calendar months". (213) Ernest was distressed when he thought of the disgrace he brought upon his parents, and he determined not to see them any more. Besides it turned out that Pryor lost all the money

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Ernest had entrusted for him to manage, and disappeared with the rest of the money.

He confirmed that he could not believe the stories concerning the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, along with other miracles. Thus, he could no longer remain as a priest, so he renounced his faith. He resolved to part with his parents forever, who "would wish to appear kind and forgiving." (227) Unless he was completely independent, his parents would hinder him from his spiritual growth and spiritual independence, which should be "his truest and most lasting happiness." (230) His parents were now regarded as "the most dangerous enemies he had in all the world". (235)

Marrying Ellen, his mother's former maid servant to whom he had given his watch, a knife and some pocket money, Ernest felt "supremely happy". (252) Their second-hand clothes shop prospered and he could even save a little money. Then his wife turned out to be a habitual drunkard, and their economic condition deteriorated. He lost his buoyant spirit. A daughter was born in 1860, and a boy in 1861. He was proud and happy with his children, but his financial status and his relationship with Ellen worsened. He could never again regain peace and a calmness of mind. While in 'the bottomless pit', he happened to meet John, the former coachman of Ernest's father, who confessed to him that he had married Ellen in 1851. At last Ernest was freed from his life with Ellen; and as she did not want their children, Ernest found a fisherman's family to care for them. He wanted his children to be brought up in "the fresh, pure air, and among other children who were happy and contented." (272)

Although he had lost a man's most important possessions such as money, health and reputation, he returned to the civilized intellectual life of his nature with Mr. Overton's help. He now spent most of his time with his writings and music. On his

twenty-eighth birthday in 1863, he received £70,000 bequeathed by his deceased aunt Alethea. This upset Theobald because he had lost "his power of plaguing his first-born". (284) He wanted his son to return to him "as any respectable, well-regulated prodigal ought to return—abject, broken-hearted, asking forgiveness from the tenderest and most long-suffering father in the whole world." (286) His parents were once "the enemy". (240) In spite of the fierce disagreement with his parents, after Christina's death, Ernest had "excellent terms" with Theobald till his death. The Battersby minister had been beloved by his acquaintances including the village doctor and the family solicitor; yet he had been hated by Joey, his second son, who had once been a curate to him. Joey even refused to pay only three or four shillings for his father's Harmony of the Old and New Testaments along with a huge collection of his MS. sermons. Ernest could not keep on good terms with his brother Joseph who had a cold disposition and was "illuminated with no spark of Bohemianism". (288) Ernest did not feel any affinity or affection for his sister Charlotte throughout his life, either. He thought of her as "the most disagreeable young woman in the whole circle of his acquaintance". (168) She was classified as a "very clever" girl, since she was neither "pretty" nor "sweet". (168)

II. Narrator and Money

The whole story is told by Mr. Overton, the godfather of the protagonist, beginning with Ernest's grandfather who was about eighty in 1807, when the narrator was about five. Mr. Overton starts the family history in a detached way, but gradually he becomes closer and closer to Ernest's private life. Especially whenever he was in trouble about money, religion, and woman, the godfather appeared, as if he had been evoked,

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to save him from his plight. Not only that. He was entrusted to manage the legacy that Ernest had taken over from Aunt Alethea, his godmother. She was spiritually his mother, encouraging him and bringing him into his natural way of life, for example, by building an organ by hand.

Alethea, the incarnation of Miss Savage, played the role of a warm-hearted helpful mother for his mental growth and comfort. Unlike the model, Alethea is idealized as having attractive looks. It was Miss Savage who had encouraged Butler to write this book, giving him her lifelong friendship. It was said that Butler was unable to 'love' her, but their mutual friendship was highly esteemed by the author till her early death.

As time passed, Mr. Overton not merely watched him as a narrator, but also became physically closer, travelling together after Ernest was released from prison and securing a room in a house for him in London so that they might spend some time together. Mr. Overton being eighty, and Ernest forty-seven, the latter was "a son and more than a son" (316) for the former. He was a spiritual father whom Theobald failed to be for Ernest. Without Mr. Overton's cordial help, the protagonist could not have survived and enjoyed financial prosperity and a free life. Samuel Butler seems to have faith in money; it can compensate for various damages and add value to life. For example, when it was disclosed that Ernest had been bequeathed £70,000, his mother thought:

This piece of good fortune... quite wiped out the disgrace of his having been imprisoned.... Oh! yes—he would become a county magnate now; a man with nearly £4,000 a year should certainly become a county magnate. (290)

Ernest inherits an enormous sum, which gives him freedom from poverty, from uncongenial work and from anxiety. It is a power and prestige for him.

He says:

... will anything bring me as much peace at the last as money will? They say that those who have riches enter hardly into the Kingdom of Heaven. By Jove, they do... they live and live and live and are happy for many a long year after they would have entered into the Kingdom of Heaven if they had been poor. (283)

I recall a Japanese saying, "Money is the key that opens all doors".

This also reminds me of how Jane Eyre was liberated from poverty, from the uncongenial work of teaching village girls, and obtained the power to marry Rochester. She could please her cousins and free Mary and Diana from being governesses which enabled them to marry, too. In *The Mill on the Floss* and *Great Expectations* the prominence is given to money, too, as in many other 19th Century novels. The 19th Century was a period when people were making huge sums of money and trying to climb socially as a result of wealth; thereby, giving rise to all sorts of social conflict. But also many lost money with devastating results.

The Way of All Flesh is a sort of *Bildungsroman* which tells not only about Ernest, the protagonist, but also his posterity. While Ernest's childhood is full of sufferings described very realistically, his children are depicted as if they were living in an idyllic fable. George and Alice are brought up by the Rollings with their children in a healthy and happy atmosphere. Just contrary to Ernest's over-educated, intellectually-obsessed father, Ernest is a stranger to such intellectual sadism to his children. He seems to pay scarcely any attention to their intellectual growth as a reaction to his own unhappy experiences. Despite his concern for his own spiritual conditions, he seems to feel assured that they have no anxiety whatsoever.

Alice marries the eldest of the Rollings. George became the owner of a steamer at the age of twenty-one. It was unusual luck

for a country lad just as in a fairy story. However, we know that Ernest's wealth made it real. The power of money as a means of social climbing has been scattered in the whole novel displaying concrete numerical value. The comparison between Theobald's thrifty family finances of five members and those of Ernest's wealthy single life attracts striking attention.

The people Ernest was involved in his parish in London during his short clergymanship are depicted vividly in a Dickensian touch. Mrs. Jupp and Ellen, the bigamist, are two well described characters.

III. Philosophy

Though Ernest himself was once ordained and worked very hard, I'd rather say too hard, as a clergyman in a poor quarter of London, he couldn't be without doubts about Christianity. Like a heretic, he argued and attacked what he thought the hypocrisy of a clergyman. Theoretically, he should have known how to interpret and understand these points at issue, but he couldn't really believe in them. This showed how sincerely and honestly he searched for a true faith, aspiring towards things that were true and not false:

why should they not put a clergyman in prison for pretending that he can absolve sins, or turn bread and wine into the flesh and blood of One who died two thousand years ago? (222)

Canon Butler, the author's "narrow-minded"⁵ clergyman father, was also the aim of his son's attack. The attitude of Theobald as a professional priest who made a good job of life by being a priest sickened Ernest of his father's insincerity of both his religious life and his way of living in general.

Doubtless Theobald saw these looks (an almost incessant conflict within) and knew how to interpret them, but it was his profession to know how to shut his eyes to things that were

inconvenient—no clergyman could keep his benefice for a month if he could not do this; besides he had allowed himself for so many years to say things he ought not to have said, and not to say the things he ought to have said, that he was little likely to see anything that he thought it more convenient not to see unless he was made to do so. (152)

Through Overton, the author declared the unsatisfactory elements in the Church Catechism. It had to do with the idea of the original sin; “the wickedness at birth” of the young, which “savours more or less distinctly of the nature of sin”, was “but very imperfectly wiped out at baptism.” (31) Against this unhappy theory for children, the author liked

to see children taught that they should not say they like things which they do not like, merely because certain other people say they like them, and how foolish it is to say they believe this or that when they understand nothing about it. (31)

Duty and responsibility were two of the main virtues of Victorian people. It is wellknown that George Eliot professed them embodied in her heroines. In the apparent *Zeitgeist* required of the people to evaluate these ascetic principles in the conventional society, Butler wanted to be liberated from such fetters which choked his human nature. He, I think, was fed up with the duties and responsibilities which an eldest son of a famed clergyman was expected to pursue. He now thought it reasonable to engage in “seeking all reasonable pleasure and avoiding all pain that can be honourably avoided.” (31) His philosophy concerning pleasure was something like ‘pleasure for life’s sake’. In order to live a good life, one must enjoy it, and the pleasure principally meant material prosperity in his case. Pleasure constituted a barometer to estimate how a person lived well. It was “the safest test of virtue” (71) and “a safer guide than either right or duty.” (71)

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All animals, except man, know that the principal business of life is to enjoy it—... He has spent his life best who has enjoyed it most. (69)

For most men, and most circumstances, pleasure—tangible material prosperity in this world—is the safest test of virtue. Progress has ever been through the pleasures rather than through the extreme sharp virtues, and the most virtuous have leaned to excess rather than to asceticism. (71)

Pleasure, after all, is a safer guide than either right or duty. For hard as it is to know what gives us pleasure, right and duty are often still harder to distinguish and, if we go wrong with them, will lend us into just as sorry a plight as a mistaken opinion concerning pleasure. (71)

... prudent people will follow after pleasure as a more homely but more respectable and on the whole much more trustworthy guide. (72)

A life may be successful if we can accommodate our lives to our circumstances, for this state of good accommodation gives us comfort and satisfaction. Therefore, the ability of adapting oneself becomes very important in our lives.

All our lives long, every day and every hour, we are engaged in the process of accommodating our changed and unchanged surrounding; living, in fact, is nothing else than this process of accommodation. ... A life will be successful or not according as the power of accommodation is equal or unequal to the strain of fusing and adjusting internal and external changes. (237)

The good of being great, too, is virtuous because you can give pleasure to others.

What, then, it may be asked, is the good of being great? The answer is that you may understand greatness better in others, whether alive or dead, and choose better company from these and enjoy and understand that company better when you have chosen it—also you may be able to give pleasure to the best people and live in the lives of those who are yet unborn. (78-79)

IV. Conclusion

C. D. Cole comments in his book:

Butler's grudge at never being encouraged or allowed, . . . either to follow his natural bent or to think things out fairly and objectively for himself.⁶

This may be the deep-rooted dissatisfaction toward his father. In this spiritually autobiographical novel, Theobald's disapproval, discouragement, denial and refusal of the natural tendencies of Ernest drove the son into unhappiness. Butler protests against the general trend of those days in which education was often given by the father's judgement without much regard to the fitness of his sons.

Rev. Theobald Pontifex is so strongly obsessed with such a Calvinistic view he believes that children are born with the original sin and therefore they should be corrected through the ruthless repression of their self-will by total subordination and obedience to their parents, teachers, and all in authority.

Ernest Pontifex's father is Samuel Butler's father incarnate. Theobald's physical violence, which is considered a crime as the child abuse now, left him an indelible scar. What is most impressive in this novel is Ernest's fierce struggle for his spiritual, mental, psychological and financial independence, and conflict with his sense of filial duty.

⁴Samuel Butler: *The Way of All Flesh* (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., 1965). All citations, numbers in parentheses, are from this edition.

⁵G. D. Cole: *Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh* (London: Home & Van Thal Ltd., 1947), p. 41.

⁶op. cit., p. 47.

Postscript

During my stay at Cambridge, I studied some novels under Mrs. Elizabeth Brewer, concentrating on child figures and child-parent relationships. (Facts are stranger than fiction—she had taught me in my college days. Now, after so many years, miraculously enough, she gave me her kindest supervisions to which I owe greatly.) *What Masie Knew* placed myself in a parent's place, and *The Way of All Flesh* in both a parent's and the eldest child's place. The latter became especially familiar to me since Ernest was supposed to be a student at Emmanuel College where Prof. Derek Brewer was the Master. Another good luck I had was my identifying the cover picture of *What Maisie Knew* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. It was a part of "The Daughters of Edward D Boit, 1882" by John Singer Sargent, American, 1856-1925.

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