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Speech and Silence within Limits: Conversation in Henry Jame's "Brooksmith"

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Reciprocity of speech is a central theme in Henry James's short story "Brooksmith," and related to other prominent elements and themes such as dialogue, loss of space, extinction of voice and speech/silence dichotomy. The fact that dialogue in the story appears more as a subject than as a form, more talked about than actualized in writing, makes it the main concern of the narrative, which depends on it whether it is present or lacking. Obviously the idea of conversation itself is more prominent than any specific subject of conversation, and it is more valued due to merits like interestingness and coherence as an element of social life. Reciprocity of speech is essential as a subject to the continuity of narration; and it is important to the characters in relation to their concern about securing their habitual states and feeling situated, which becomes the focus of narration. Its significance is generally apparent in the celebration of its presence and the lamentation and longing in its absence, and more closely demonstrated in the experiences of the three main characters. Mr Offord, whose house is the scene of an elite social life, his butler Brooksmith, and the narrator, who is a close friend of both, are long accustomed to routine meetings consisting of a select circle. As their positions show, their lives are adjusted to a distinguished type of social life in a definite place, which suggests reciprocity's association with the concepts of centre and limit. These two elements are represented by the two residents of the house, who hold the community together by maintaining the atmosphere of conversation. Reading "Brooksmith" with the help of the two mentioned concepts is useful for seeing their capability of meaning making by focusing and distinguishing, and also in understanding how they function in making dialogue a matter of concern and a directive force in the characters' living. This essay will try to explain the interrelatedness of the concepts of centre and limit (along with their connotations like internal/external, speech/silence etc.) with voice, communication, reciprocity and ability/inability to speak in the mentioned work. It also aims to suggest that with the extinction of the central figure of social life, there occurs a dissolution of unity and a loss of coherent conversation. However, it is not simply due to a lack of centre, but also to the inability of the limit –the peripheral figure– to function

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without a centre, with no more need to separate the outside from the inside or make a connection between them. It is this very lack of utility and even of justification of existence that Brooksmith faces after he loses the world he has been habituated to. In addition, his search for an atmosphere of reciprocity turns out to be in vain because he cannot provide himself his former position of a peripheral figure: a position in which he is silent in the presence of discourse; near and around conversation yet never participating in it. In the story, Brooksmith's situation makes it clear that the theme of reciprocity does not only refer to the coherent dialogue of speakers, but also points to the mutuality of speech and silence, with an emphasis on their spatial aspect.

The story begins with sentences implying a past sense of unity and a common attachment to a place among a group of people: "We are scattered now, the friends of the late Mr Oliver Offord; but whenever we chance to meet I think we are conscious of a certain esoteric respect for each other. 'Yes, you too have been in Arcadia,' we seem not too grumpily to allow. When I pass the house in Mansfield Street I remember that Arcadia was there."[1] These sentences obviously associate the sense of community with a central figure and a definite place. It is understood from the very beginning that what used to keep the people in the group together and their communication alive were Mr Offord's presence in his house. Another emphasized characteristic of Mr Offord's social circle is its being composed of frequent visitors, forming a regular community in its time. This aspect of it, in addition to gathering around a centre in a limited space, reinforces the idea of a distinguished community apart from the world outside, and a sense of privacy proper to it. The narrator's impression of his days there makes it clear that regularity and particularity are two identifying features of the group of guests: "Any visitor who came once came again . . . His circle, therefore, was essentially composed of habitués, who were habitués for each other as well as for him, as those of a happy salon should be."[2] Almost all the people meeting in Arcadia are acquainted with each other and share a bordered and maintained atmosphere of communication. As a close-knit group they expectably have common habits and interests, although not detailed in the narrative. However, one important quality of their routine meetings is that they are well-known with the quality of conversation, and lack of boredom. It may even be said that the point of the meetings is conversation itself. The people's being habitués implies that this society represents language in its regular functioning. The importance attached to

1. Henry James, "Brooksmith," in Milton Crane (ed.), *50 Great Short Stories* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983), p.43.
2. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.44.

conversation and its coherency emphasizes the effectiveness of communication among them. Looking at the social circle of Arcadia from this aspect also seems to suit the implications of the concept of "community", as it is put by J. Hillis Miller. According to Miller,[3] "[the] word implies beliefs and assumptions shared, held in common, taken for granted, by a group". The description suggests the presence of an agreed and commonly obeyed code, connecting the ones who know it, like a language. Also attributes like habitualness, continuance and being "an ordered and prosperous community"[4] altogether point to an ideal state. Although the days of gatherings are over at the time of narration, the depiction of the circle and its habits, along with the perfect service and arrangement, gives a sense of permanence. This is evocative of Miller's description of an ideal community, the members of which "live together under the aegis of shared beliefs, institutions, laws, and assumptions" like "monks in a monastery or people living together in the same rural village or (sometimes) city neighbourhood."[5] Besides shared rules and continuance, there is another significant element contributing to the idea of a well-functioning communicative state. As it is apparent both in Miller's examples and James's narrative, enclosure is another essential part of having a defined area of communication with an identified group of members in it. Keeping an enclosed place and residing in it is presented in the story as the first condition of maintaining a social circle; and it is devotedly done by Mr Offord and Brooksmith. Especially Mr Offord's residence in Arcadia is told with an emphasis on his almost constantly being indoors, in a state of retirement, only enjoying the company of frequenters. According to the narrator:

> [He] had recognised . . . that if you wished people to find you at home you must manage not to be out. He had in short accepted the fact which many dabblers in the social art are slow to learn, that you must really, as they say, take a line and that the only way to be at home is to stay at home. Finally his own fireside had become a summary of his habits. Why should he ever have left it?[6]

Mr Offord's choice suggests that the way to keep discourse focused and clear is to procure a fixed centre for its sustenance. The choice also involves a sacrifice, which is confinement, a limitation of one's area of reach and communication. It is necessary for creating a sphere of discourse that functions as desired. Then the model of community seen in Mr Offord's house presents the necessities for reciprocity in speech as gathering

3. J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), p.86.
4. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.46.
5. J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, p.87.
6. Henry James, "Brooksmith," pp.44-45.

around a central figure, having a stable and finite place, and a regular party. However, the rest of the story draws more particular attention to the elements of centre and limit in close association with roles pertaining to the realm of dialogue, especially the two that preserve the meeting circle and represent the two main positions. In addition to the positional aspect of their roles, Mr Offord and Brooksmith function as centre and limit in a way that foregrounds speech and silence, the states adopted by the two figures respectively. Hence it is understood that reciprocity is not only the one between conversers, but also the one that occurs between speech and silence, the latter providing the needed space and receptivity to the other. This is where Brooksmith's role comes into view.

As the narrator reflects upon the order and harmony prevalent in the salon, his attention is especially drawn to the easiness and perfection in the managing of the guest group and the air of conversation. His questioning of what "the secret of such perfection"[7] has been leads him to the persuasion that there has been a law functioning below all the casual activity. The observation of perfection also makes him credit the authors of it, both the gentleman and the servant of the house, with mastery in a sort of craft. It is known that Mr Offord is the main figure of dialogue among other participants, and indispensable for the continuation of it. However, when it comes to perfection or excellence in performing a task, it is Brooksmith rather than Mr Offord that is talked about. Brooksmith is not a speaker among the salon crowd, yet the place and the people occupying it owe their orderly and comfortable state to his service, even to the point of being regarded by the narrator as the butler's work of art: "Mr Offord's drawing-room was indeed Brooksmith's garden, his pruned and tended human parterre, and if we all flourished there and grew well in our places it was largely owing to his supervision."[8] Regardless of his position as a servant and his lack of voice in parties, Brooksmith is a revered figure whose authority in the salon's social life is recognised. An important reason for this is that Brooksmith provides for the group the comfort and easiness that makes the distinguished atmosphere of conversation possible, special care and arrangement improving their condition (hence the metaphor of "parterre"). His attention and almost unnoticeable work among the guests keeps them away from cares about everyday trivialities or possible inconveniences. Brooksmith's service therefore opens a space that is quite convenient for a distinguished social life, disposing of disruptive factors that can be encountered outside. The comfort provided by this service is described in some detail:

7. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.45.
8. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.44.

> How was it, for instance, that we never were a crowd, never either too many or too few, always the right people with the right people . . . always coming and going, never sticking fast nor overstaying [. . .]? How was it that we all sat where we wanted and moved when we wanted and met whom we wanted and escaped whom we wanted [. . .]? Why were all the sofas so convenient, the accidents so happy, the talkers so ready, the listeners so willing, the subjects presented to you in a rotation as quickly fore-ordained as the courses at dinner? A dearth of topics would have been as unheard of as a lapse in the service. These speculations couldn't fail to lead me to the fundamental truth that Brooksmith had been somehow at the bottom of the mystery. If he had not established the salon at least he had carried it on. Brooksmith, in short, was the artist! [9]

The number of people inside, their encounters, the liveliness and fluency of conversation are all somehow dependent on Brooksmith's accurateness. The inside that is attended by him is protected and hardly subject to difficulty, boredom or inconvenience but always fluid, interesting, and enjoyed. This quality of the salon is highly ascribable to particularity and distinction. Choosing the right people (for the place and each other), the right topics of conversation, the right moment for guests to enter and leave etc. are all related to the element of space and associated with limitation. Putting limits in numbers, content, entrance and departure serves the purpose of reciprocity in speech; and conversation being the point of all the meetings, reciprocal and coherent dialogue is the purpose of perfectionism indoors. Marking the boundary between the inside and the outside in this manner emphasizes the concern about perfection of reciprocity, through protection from the outer, uncontrolled, accidental, ordinary etc. This way of ensuring order in communication, avoiding the uncontrolled, corresponds with Maurice Blanchot's views on the concepts of "everyday" and "everyday speech". According to Blanchot, everyday has many negative connotations when order and regularity are valued. "The everyday is platitude... it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence and all regularity" as well as "all forms or structures."[10] The everyday is obviously to the detriment of a household like Mr Offord's, because it carries all that cannot be limited, defined, or have a specific quality of interest. It is not only illimitable, but also inseparably associated with ordinariness, tediousness and banality. On account of all these negative connotations, the everyday speech is unwanted inside. Then Brooksmith's attention serves as a protection from the everyday's disruptiveness, for the cultivation of an unfailing unity of speech, and acts as complementary to Mr Offord's role as a distinguished speaker. The fact that

9. Henry James, "Brooksmith," pp. 45-46
10. Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* [translated by. Susan Hanson] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.239.

Brooksmith's work is consequentially related to spatial and positional aspect of the activity of speech more clearly defines his position in it. His service of limitation defines both his position in the house (as described above) and his distance from speech. Brooksmith's lack of voice in the sense of having no active part in dialogue makes him provide the silence needed for speech to flourish. His silence is a contribution to his protection of the speech inside, hence a part of his task of limitation. Therefore it can be suggested that the quality of the dialogue indoors depends as much on distinguished conversers as on the roles of speech and silence. Moreover it is the role of silence (like his almost unnoticeable presence) that makes Brooksmith a vital part of the social life of the house. Having so far emphasized the positional significance of the two opposing concepts for limitation and order in speech, now the spatial aspect of silence in the story can be looked into as well.

As it is apparent in the two permanent figures of Arcadia, the conserved atmosphere of speech is based on the interdependence of voice and silence. In addition to the fact that the latter opens space to the former, the relation in between is parallel to those of centre-periphery, or content-container. Hence Brooksmith takes part in the maintenance of discourse by being in the presence of it, perhaps "around" it yet not exactly "in" it. His surrounding the speech happens in two levels. Firstly, he surrounds the place where conversation goes on; he is literally and metaphorically at the threshold between the life outside and inside. He is the one who faces those coming to the house, by receiving guests. Standing at this peripheral point situates him between the discourse inside and the one from the outside. This intermediary position is maintained during dialogues as well, where Brooksmith "act[s] as [a] moderator" by "avert[ing] misunderstandings or clear[ing] them up."[11]This position suggests that Brooksmith acts as limit not only in the sense of protection but also that of reception, a faculty he also maintains during his work in the salon. This is the second way how Brooksmith surrounds speech. His being around conversation is not simply by being present and silent where it takes place, but having a keen interest in hearing and getting what is spoken. This is also a peculiarity of Brooksmith that is marked by the narrator. Reflecting upon a conversation with Mr Offord, the narrator relates his own opinion of Brooksmith as follows:

> Mr Offord remarked: "What he likes is the talk – mingling in the conversation." I was conscious that I had never seen Brooksmith permit himself this freedom, but I guessed in a moment that what

11. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.47.

> Mr Offord alluded to was a participation more intense than any speech could have represented – that of being perpetually present on a hundred legitimate pretexts, errands, necessities, and breathing the very atmosphere of criticism, the famous criticism of life. "Quite an education, sir, isn't it, sir?" he said to me one day at the foot of the stairs, when he was letting me out; and I have always remembered the words and the tone as the first sign of the quickening drama of poor Brooksmith's fate. It was indeed an education, but to what was this sensitive young man of thirty-five, of the servile class, being educated?[12]

Apart from the requirements of his profession, an avid embracement of the role of silence near speech is explainable with Brooksmith's keenness on hearing and comprehending it. Although his presence as a silent figure in the house is needed for speech to function, taking in and preserving the content of it is apparently not. It seems to have become one of his ingrained habits in the house. The narrator's worrying about his fate signifies that Brooksmith is too habituated to his home, and that he can hardly hold on to any other way of living or working if one day he has to. His strong adaptation to the peculiar social life in Mr Offord's house later turns against him severely, after Mr Offord is deceased and his company dispersed. Then he no longer can feel himself at home, being unable to regain his previous position as a servant in a place of cultivated dialogue. Brooksmith's peculiar habits gained in Arcadia obviously have made Mr Offord and the house indispensable to him, as much as he has been to them. The sum of his habits (his function of limitation) can be viewed as his strong attachment to Mr Offord. This means he cannot function as the limit without the centre that generates and focuses conversation, inasmuch as the centre cannot form a unified whole without a limit. It has been understood so far that reciprocal speech in Arcadia is most basically dependent on the reciprocity of speech and silence, which is provided by the two men in the house. However the problem is their particular habituation to each other, to the point of not being able to communicate properly in any other household. It should not be expected that Brooksmith's silence will be fitting to any other master's or mistress's company. This is expressed in an example by the narrator: "His notion of conversation, for himself, was giving you the convenience of speaking to him; and when he went to 'see' Lady Kenyon, for instance, it was to carry her the tribute of his receptive silence. Where would the speech of his betters have been if proper service had been a manifestation of sound"[13] This is how Brooksmith fulfils his duties in the house, with his "receptive silence" during conversations, even when he is the addressee. This is the part he plays in the making of reciprocity. Then his failure in getting in connection with a

12. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.47.
13. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.51.

person from out of his social circle may not be regarded simply as a result of his inadequacy, but as well as others' inability to fill the silence he provides. Because his very part in speech is "receptive silence", the way to outline and make clear the speech of others, he needs to stick to the part. The clear distinction between the two roles (along with their connotations relating to space) makes perfection possible in Arcadia. It is this clear distinction that Brooksmith cannot find in other houses, hence there arises a vagueness of roles and loss of the reciprocity he has experienced in its perfection. The degeneracy of clarity and distinction begins with Mr Offord's illness and his death soon afterwards. Hence the extinction of voice at the centre leads to the obscuring of the limit. Neither speech and silence, nor inside and outside can be clearly separated, and this causes the disruption of Brooksmith's sense of place and his vanishing as a figure, to the point of disappearance.

Mr Offord's illness is the first reminding sign for the habitués of Arcadia that their community is not going to last forever. It is also the first time in the narrative when Mr Offord's central position in the community is acknowledged with some concern. The narrator's memory of the first day of his friend's illness explains his importance for the unity of the circle:

> The first day Mr Offord's door was closed was ... a dark date in contemporary history. It was raining hard and my umbrella was wet, but Brooksmith took it from me exactly as if this were a preliminary for going upstairs. I observed however that instead of putting it away he held it poised and trickling over the rug, and then I became aware that he was looking at me with deep, acknowledging eyes – his air of universal responsibility. I immediately understood; there was scarcely need of the question and the answer that passed between us. When I did understand that the old man had given up, for the first time ... I exclaimed dolefully: "What a difference it will make – and to how many people!"
> "I shall be one of them, sir!" said Brooksmith; and that was the beginning of the end.[14]

It is understood from the moment of the narrator's entrance that guests are not received in the usual way that day, and there is not going to be any meeting in its usual sense. It is also notable that this realization occurs to them in their silence. The impending end of their society by the death of their host is not something commented upon, except the implied expectation of dispersion. It is known that without the single person in charge they cannot maintain conversation as before or even manage to keep gathering. Reciprocity, in its association with perfection, is only possible as long as the central voice and its limitation are preserved. However, when one of these is lost, the unity of the conversers and speech is shattered. It is obvious that Mr Offord's death will

14. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.48.

make a great difference to every visitor of Arcadia, yet the change that will happen in Brooksmith's life will be radical and different from that of any visitor's. The difference is stressed by Brooksmith himself, when talking to the narrator:

> "Oh, sir, it's sad for *you*, very sad, indeed, and for a great many gentlemen and ladies; that it is, sir. But for me, sir, it is, if I may say so, still graver even than that: it's just the loss of something that was everything. For me, sir," he went on, with rising tears, "he was just *all*, if you know what I mean, sir . . . But you have the pleasures of society, sir . . . That's not for me, sir, and I have to keep my associations to myself. Mr Offord was *my* society, and now I have no more. You go back to conversation, sir, after all, and I go back to my place[.]"[15]

The emphasized point of Mr Offord's being "all" for Brooksmith and his only society clearly suggests that Brooksmith will not be able to utilize his skills anywhere else, or even properly communicate with anybody again. It seems with Mr Offord's death, he has lost his only connection and place in the world. Having been adapted to the very particular habits and living provided by his late master, he has become to the point of only being able to function in his presence and under his roof. When the time of searching for a new place starts for Brooksmith, his perfect fitting to his ex-household yet being unable to fit into any other society is even more stressed. It is a point worthy of notice, for instance, that Brooksmith's height does not meet the standards of his profession. Therefore he is "too short for people who [are] very particular,"[16] and this is a handicap in the way of his being acceptable for a new position. Becoming unfavourable in stature and less noticed is the reverse of Brooksmith's former state. After having been regarded as a perfect servant and a revered figure in his former house, now he is ironically treated with lack of interest. Turning into a vague and unnoticeable figure after leaving his post echoes the idea of the limit's disappearance after the extinction of the centre. Now that Brooksmith lacks both –a centre to surround and a limit to stand at– he is exposed to what has been kept beyond the limit before, probably everything that "the everyday" echoes. Even when he later finds short-term jobs at houses, he faces everything and everyone he finds "too dull for endurance" and "vulgar as well."[17] Therefore he can find nothing to receive; he is out of communication when he does not have his own space of discourse. It is significant that the communication between the narrator and Brooksmith also gets poorer after the dispersion, which is basically due to their loss of their common place. This is related to the lack of what can be called privacy

15. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.52.
16. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.53.
17. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.54.

after the loss of limit, and it affects their speech in a diminishing way. Therefore, lack of speech after the disappearance of the limit can be viewed as a shrinking of space, rather than expansion or infinity of space.

Having begun with Mr Offord's death as the extinction of the central voice, we have seen the connection between the lack of centre and the consequent disruption of limit and unity, which is detrimental to the coherence and reciprocal quality of speech. The remarkable point, after these have occurred in the story, is that the two remaining prominent characters, the narrator and Brooksmith do not give in to uncontrolled speech, which can be regarded as noisy or dull, without a particular character. Once they are out of the limits of their former common space of conversation, their communication continues in minimum speech or reciprocal silence. When they are in the presence of everybody, in the sense of anybody foreign to their shared past, they can hardly speak to each other. In this way, lack of limit becomes diminishing and eventual lack of space. This is much more observable in Brooksmith, who, unlike the narrator, lacks any chance of having company. With illimitable space and speech, he loses more and more space and privacy, as his state of wandering among an indefinite society drives him to an increasingly hopeless situation. As for what they cannot communicate to each other, it is because they have left it in their shared past, which belongs to the days of their private society and now is incommunicable outside, in the presence of those who have no appreciation or notion of it. The narrator relates the moments of his leaving a party, where Brooksmith serves after several places alike, also referring to their remaining connection:

> We were in intellectual sympathy – we felt, as regards each other, a kind of social responsibility. In short we had been in Arcadia together, and we had both come to *this*! No wonder we were ashamed to be confronted. When he helped on my overcoat, as I was going away, we parted, for the first time since the earliest days in Mansfield Street, in silence. I thought he looked lean and wasted, and I guessed that his new place was not more 'human' than his previous one. There was plenty of beef and beer, but there was no reciprocity.[18]

Their sense of responsibility toward each other seems to be based on making an effort to preserve their previous society in their memories and mutual understanding. The "intellectual sympathy" can be viewed as the result of this endeavour to keep a society within society. However they are also aware of their gradual decline and that they are left placeless, which explains their silence. Despite they are connected in some way, the

18. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.54.

narrator cannot do much for Brooksmith but is almost like watching his fall from far away. The lack of a secluded space for their communication seems to put a distance between them, in addition to diminishing their field of speech. Then what remains is a distanced and silent understanding in between, not being able to touch the subject directly in conversation. This situation is in coincidence with Blanchot's dealing with the element of dialogue in its relation to silence in Henry James's works. The situation is one in which the characters "communicat[e] actually around the incommunicable, thanks to the reserve with which they surround it and the air of understanding that allows them to speak of it without speaking of it."[19] Like their past days, the narrator cannot speak of Brooksmith's decline, which is apparent in his even more shrunken figure. His unhealthy appearance is a result of his being deprived of society among vast and undistinguished social circles. Later, during his days of seclusion near his mother and aunt, the image of shrinking and vagueness of appearance is more observable when he is visited by the narrator: "He was vague himself, and evidently weak, and much embarrassed, and not an allusion was made between us to Mansfield Street. The vision of the salon of which he had been an ornament hovered before me, however, by contrast, sufficiently."[20] Their last meeting echoes Mr Offord's last meeting in his bedroom upstairs, described as "a sadly shrunken little salon" that he "held for then minutes."[21] Now Brooksmith appears, with great contrast, in a small room after his life in a mansion. His image also adds to his disfigurement that has happened so far, "[sitting] with a blanket over his legs at a clean little window."[22] The last meeting marked with the diminishing of figure and space does not allow the two men any privacy again, where "poor Brooksmith seem[s] encompassed with vague, prying, beery females."[23] Although there is no sentence the narrator quotes from Brooksmith, their mutual concern for privacy is expressed in a sentence that is attributed to Brooksmith's last silent look: "When I bade him farewell he looked at me a moment with eyes that said everything: 'How can I talk about those exquisite years in this place, before these people, with the old women poking their heads in?"[24] This scene is the last depiction of the loss of space that happens gradually and splits the bond between the two men, until the narrator is one day told the news that Brooksmith "[has]

19. Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come* [translated by Charlotte Mandell] (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
20. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.55.
21. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.50.
22. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.55.
23. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.55.
24. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.55.

disappeared" [25] after a short period of waiting on tables at dinner parties. The fact that Brooksmith has left no trace behind completes the idea of him as a diminishing body, losing size after his deprivation of conversation, which "[has] become a necessity of [his] nature."[26] His not giving in to any other living than his previous one ends up with his bodily disappearance after speechlessness, leaving only his "dim ghost"[27] in the memory of the narrator.

The theme of reciprocity in "Brooksmith" appears in several ways that are connected through the concepts of centre, limit and regularity. These concepts lead up to the forming of a whole that can function in order, having its own rules working inside it, which is seen in the story as a model of community. The positions maintained in this unity –mainly centre and limit in their association with speech and silence– are essential to the functioning of a whole body of speech, as well as to its distinction from the outside, which lacks its particular arrangement of conversation, that is, speech in its reciprocal activity. Although the model of community implies perfection in its management of social life and through the habituation of its members, its wholeness depends on the existence of the basic roles that must be preserved in a permanent place. The main figure of speech and that of silence also occupy positional roles of centre and limit(ation), thereby focusing meaning around a centre in a limited space, and thus provide wholeness of content. While this limitedness and clarity make the vital point of reciprocity, with the extinction of the central voice there occurs a dispersion of other elements. This, particularly leading to a vagueness and lack of utility in the peripheral figure, brings up the question of limit and of what follows in its absence. With the disruption of the coexistent positions of centre and limit there follows the failing of distinction between inside and outside spaces, which results in unlimited content, hence the loss of controllable speech. This causes the remaining characters' (the narrator and Brooksmith) inability to communicate, for the lack of a private space as they used to enjoy. What has been shared between the old members of the community become unspeakable once they are out of its limits. Especially the inability to speak and gradual loss of space experienced by Brooksmith suggests that unlimited space and society diminish the space of communication, to the point of silence and disappearance, instead of enhancing it. Therefore a reading of the story based on the mentioned concepts leads up to the conclusion that reciprocity in speech is dependent on the existence of distinct roles within

25. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.57.
26. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.49.
27. Henry James, "Brooksmith," p.57.

limits, and that ambiguity or subversion of positions leads to a loss of communication rather than enrichment of it.

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