

THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS AND FULFILMENT

IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES:

WOMEN, MEN, AND THE ARTIST

by

KATHRYN MARGARET LUKES .

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Department of ENGLISH

The University of British Columbia  
2075 Wesbrook Place  
Vancouver, Canada  
V6T 1W5

Date Feb 27/76

ABSTRACT

James's profound pessimism about the lives of the vast majority of the characters whom he chooses to portray in his fiction has been somewhat under emphasized by the critics. James considers a life successful only when the individual in question realizes his inner potential and thus achieves a sense of self-fulfilment. Yet the reader's cumulative impression of James's fiction is that his characters almost invariably fail to achieve this desirable state, and that they are doomed to disappointment and heartache. This unhappiness almost invariably arises from the relation between the sexes.

James considers several major categories of people, but all but one group, the artists, fall short of the objective. For example, James's young female characters (whether European, English, or American), are under constant pressure to "marry well"--to seize the nearest man and the largest fortune. Yet James portrays marriage as the most inhumane of institutions; as one in which women immure themselves and sacrifice all their individuality. Similarly, James's male characters are never happy or fulfilled either in marriage or in business, for in marriage they tend to be brutal or insensitive, while in business they subjugate their moral

and aesthetic senses to acquisitive ones. Such debased values are detrimental to the man himself and to all those with whom he lives. Nor are the rare sensitive men in James's fiction successful in life, for they tend to base their own happiness on the actions of other people--a precarious foundation.

James believes only one sort of happiness is worthwhile and lasting, and that possession of it constitutes success in life. Only the artist can achieve this perfect happiness but he can enjoy it only on the most difficult terms: he must commit himself absolutely to his art. The artist must be a man or woman unlike others, sacrificing all earthly vanities to his one ideal vision. He cannot permit himself to be overwhelmed by the ordinary concerns of daily life. He must remove himself as much as possible from the world of getting and spending, loving and marrying. Only by making this absolute commitment can he achieve the happiness which consists of knowing that he has done the best work that is in him. This sense of consummate achievement constitutes happiness for James's artist characters. They consider it worth the price they pay.

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## Introduction

Henry James has a profoundly pessimistic view of life. His fiction demonstrates that he believed unhappiness and disappointment to be the most characteristic states of the human condition. He sees the relationship between the sexes as the origin of much of this discontent. For James's characters, to fail in love and marriage is to fail, indeed. Marriage and courtship are thus central issues in his fiction. Many of his characters seem destined to fail in this important area of human enterprise; most often because the roles society has decreed for them result in their being ill-prepared, choosing blindly, and lacking foresight as to the probable consequences of their actions. James most often sees love as a maelstrom, marriage as a trap.

Courtship and marriage is thus a common pattern in the lives of James's characters though James demonstrates, time and time again, that it is not a valid goal at all; that it is, in fact, a fool's paradise. By the time his characters realize their mistakes it is too late. The society in which they live continues to gauge personal worth by the "brilliance" of one's marriage, while James's characters stare at the enormity of their errors with growing dread and understanding.

What, then, is worthwhile in a world of illusion and change? Only the production of great art offers a sense of permanence and serenity, and it is to be enjoyed only through the sacrifice of the transient pleasures of love and marriage. In James's fiction, at least, the two realms of art and marriage are mutually exclusive. His artists must devote themselves wholly to their work or see it vitiated by the demands made on their time by their loved ones. His artists must live in the real world, but only to their sorrow are they ever of it. Their task is to transcend the banality of common life, for imperishable beauty and lasting happiness exist only in the realm of art.

There is little sense of achievement to be found in the lives of James's non-artists. His women, though often extraordinary in their intelligence and vivacity, fail to transcend the unhappiness that James sees as their ultimate lot in life. Each starts out full of hope and with a bright vision of the future which never comes to fruition. Marriage is the ultimate goal of all the young girls in James's fiction; or, at the very least, it is the goal of their scheming mammas. Yet the young girl is either too cloistered or too exposed (depending on her society), and taught little that will be of any value to her after she becomes a married woman. Her education is deficient in that her expectations of marriage and life are allowed to remain unpractically romantic and ill-defined; she is not schooled in the arts of survival.

For some of James's women, the disillusionment process does not begin until after marriage. According to James there are a great many sources of disillusionment in marriage. Most commonly the wife is utterly mistaken in her evaluation of the kind of man she has married, as is the case with Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady and Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl. Too, James is preoccupied with the iron-clad aspect of the marriage contract, by the fact that it is regarded as an indissoluble union. It is ironic that people who do divorce in James's fiction are never presented as admirable types; yet people who should (like Isabel Archer) waste their lives and their unique personal qualities in bondage. James thus watches his women vow to do the impossible and then writhe in the agony of keeping that promise.

Nor do James's men find lasting happiness in marriage (or in any other aspect of human endeavor, for that matter). However, because they are rarely the equals of James's lively sensitive women, their failures do not distress the reader to the same degree as those of the women. In other words, because James's men are less engaging characters, their misfortunes evoke less sympathy. For example, Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl and Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady are hollow men. They are opportunists and gigolos whose chief motivation is a desire for the financial security and material luxury which marriage to a rich woman would seem to guarantee. Thus when the rich wives of Amerigo and Osmond



prove troublesome to them, the reader withholds sympathy which would be given to more admirable characters in the same situation. Yet the two men do illustrate James's perception that those who take advantage of others are themselves dealt a kind of poetic justice.

Another group of men whom James studies are represented by Christopher Newman and Adam Verver. Such retired American businessmen try to compensate for the years they have spent in accumulating their fortunes by crowding into European excursions as much culture and immediate gratification as Yankee dollars can buy. Sometimes, with the gravest of consequences, they even try to buy love. James's attitude toward this group may be seen to change over the years. Gallant Christopher Newman of The American (1877), a breezy son of democracy, is doomed to heartbreak when he courts a French aristocrat whose haughty family considers him gauche and inferior. But by the end of his career, James is inclined to regard the faults of the American businessman as infinitely more serious, as flaws not of manners but of morals. Adam Verver is sinister and manipulative in The Golden Bowl (1904) and Abel Gaw is almost a caricature of greed in The Ivory Tower (written about 1910).<sup>1</sup> Such men illustrate the futility of trying to buy happiness.

As James saw it, the only way to make sense of everyday experience was to remove oneself from it, to transcend it, to commit oneself wholly to the timeless, beautiful world of

art. Only then could one do what Henry St. George of "The Lesson of the Master" calls "the great thing"; only then could one fulfil himself. James's artist-figures are always attracted to the world of common experience, tempted to love and to marry, but if they cannot resist those sirens their talents perish. James's artists are never wholly happy unless they are doing their best work, yet they can only produce their best work in isolation from common human experience.

## Chapter One

### Women in the Fiction

James sees unhappiness as the lot of woman in contemporary society largely because of the roles she is required to play. James is not a social reformer; thus he observes and records these roles but has nothing to suggest by way of an alternative. There is, however, one idea basic to his perception of the roles women are expected to play in society. This is a plea that they will not go blindly to their fate, that they will become aware and thus possibly cheat their destiny. However, it is his observation that women are commonly deficient in this awareness. Yet this deficiency (whose consequences are so lamentable) could be remedied while the woman is still a young girl, by the opening of her eyes to the realities of what love and marriage involve, by her making a serious study of the examples she meets in society. (The "proper inexperience"<sup>2</sup> James mentions in the "Preface to The Awkward Age" as necessary to the young girl refers to actual not intellectual adventures.)

James concentrates much of his attention on the début of the young girl, watching her dawning awareness of what society expects of her. He notes the different methods of educating her employed on the Continent, in England, and in

America. Each of these societies glorifies the married state as the only conceivable goal of every young lady; none instills into the young girl an adequate awareness of the narrowness of the lot of the married woman. Pansy Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady and Little Aggie of The Awkward Age represent James's studies of the continental jeune fille; Nanda Brookenham of The Awkward Age and Biddy Dormer of The Tragic Muse illustrate the young English girl; Daisy Miller and Julia Bride demonstrate the cultural state of the species in America.

While it is true that James is critical of what he considers the often tragic limitations which marriage imposes on women, and of the blithe ignorance of them fostered in the young girl, he opposes radical feminism. This is demonstrated in The Bostonians, which is a gallery of grotesques, of the perfervid and wild-eyed types of humanity which may be depended upon to attach themselves to such a cause. The novel clearly shows that James considered the movement repulsive and unnatural.

Marriage looms as one of the most significant subjects in the fiction of Henry James. James never portrays women as happy in marriage, though he does examine a great many varieties of the institution. In The Portrait of a Lady, for example, Amy, the Countess Gemini, is bored with her provincial, anti-social, and stupid husband and, leaving him alone in Florence, amuses herself in Rome whenever she can. Lydia

Touchett carries this system one step further and maintains a home separated from the one her husband occupies by the length of the continent of Europe. Only Isabel Archer strives to maintain a conventional, totally united relationship with her husband. It is her tragedy that he cannot share his life with anyone, for his is an hermetically-sealed egotism. Isabel's marriage induces in her a constant state of despair, for she is forever incurring the displeasure of the perfectionist martinet for whose love she yearns. When she discovers that their life together is based on lies of the gravest significance, her horror is such that she briefly disobeys him. Ultimately, however, she returns to the blasted circle that is her life with Osmond, never again to escape.

In The Golden Bowl Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant each try unsuccessfully to ignore the implications of their married state. Maggie takes her husband for granted, and ignores him for hours on end while she enjoys her extremely close relationship with her father just as if she had never married at all. Charlotte marries for money and social convenience and finds, for a time, that her seemingly vague and much older husband can be placated with small attentions, leaving her free to pursue a romantic relationship with another man. Charlotte is never truly happy, not even when she is with her lover. She must constantly amuse him, must seem frivolous and charming and gay lest he tire of her.

When Charlotte's husband moves to retrieve his straying wife, it is with a kind of repressed but intense cruelty not to be encountered elsewhere in the James canon. Thus the point is made with the sharpest emphasis: marriage is a trap for women; they are in subjugation to their husbands (however rare and fine the woman, however stupid, limited, or cruel the man). By marrying, a woman signs away her individuality.

As observed above, James's fiction manifests a pre-occupation with the type of the young unmarried girl and her career. He finds inadequate or, worse, actually harmful all extant methods of educating her for her role in life as a married woman. On the question of educating the young female, James is ultra-conventional; he is not interested in sending her to college or even to a "female academy." In the "Preface to The Awkward Age"<sup>3</sup> he considers three systems of education for the female young and endorses none of them: the exclusive, formal continental method produces the jeune fille proper like Pansy Osmond, but also (alas!) like Little Aggie of The Awkward Age; the proudly inconsistent English system produces Nanda Brookenham and Biddy Dormer; the American system revolves around the girl herself so that in all things she has an inflated opinion of her own importance like Daisy Miller and Julia Bride. In James's world all education worthy of the name takes place in the salon. His interest is experimental: how can a young girl be exposed to the improving example of the "good talk" available in the

drawing rooms of the social elite without being corrupted by it? How can she learn about life and learn to survive in the social jungle?

The continental jeune fille is the one most consciously produced by her society; that is, she is the one of the three on whom the most formal instruction has been lavished. Pansy Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady and Little Aggie of The Awkward Age are two of James's most important portraits of her. James feels that the education of the jeune fille, like anything else, is a matter of temperament; the young girl in question will either passively accept her instruction and conduct herself accordingly, or she will merely pretend acquiescence, acquire the veneer and, with downcast eyes, employ the manner to get whatever she wants. James sees the continental method as most open to abuse and to perverse manipulation both of the girl and by the girl.

James considers the continental system a double failure. In Pansy Osmond James illustrates how the system can be used for cruel manipulation of its hapless students. Pansy Osmond is a poor-spirited, pathetic little victim because she has been taught always to submit to the will of others. Her father looms so large in her world that the thought of disobeying him is completely foreign to her--even when her own marriage and future happiness are hanging in the balance. Pansy's convent education and the icy formality of her life at home have rendered her excessively malleable.

At the other extreme is Little Aggie of The Awkward Age who has subverted the system to serve her own purposes. She appears to be radiant, virginal, utterly unworldly until she has secured her future by marrying a wealthy man. Then the convent-flower façade is no longer necessary and the real Aggie steps forward to romp, to tease, to flirt, to embark upon an affair with her husband's best friend--to do, in short, all those things which her convent education was to have ensured against. Little Aggie is like the Countess Gemini of The Portrait of a Lady who gaily declares, "Oh, the convents, the convents! . . . Speak to me of the convents! You may learn anything there; I'm a convent-flower myself. I don't pretend to be good, but the nuns do. Don't you see what I mean?"<sup>4</sup> Aggie is a hypocrite.

In The Portrait of a Lady, for example, Pansy is like the flower for which she is named--shy, gentle, fond of the shade, easily broken. She is completely the product of her father's wishes and the convent's instruction. Her fondest hope is to please, her favourite activity the social ceremony of making tea. Crushing Pansy's innocent love of Edward Rosier is easier and thus a lesser victory than breaking Isabel's spirit, but James shows how Gilbert Osmond nonetheless savours his absolute authority over his daughter. Osmond explains to Isabel his sudden, arbitrary decision to banish Pansy to the convent:



"One's daughter should be fresh and fair; she should be innocent and gentle. With the manners of the present time she is liable to become so dusty, a little dishevelled; she has knocked about too much. . . . Convents are very quiet, very convenient, very salutary. I like to think of her there, in the old garden, under the arcade, among those tranquil virtuous women. . . . The Catholics are very wise after all. The convent is a great institution; it corresponds to an essential need in families, in society. It's a school of good manners; it's a school of repose" (Portrait, II, 347).

Pansy's only instinct is to cling where she senses benevolence and, perhaps, pity. Thus she clings to Isabel. On social occasions, as when Isabel is duenna to Pansy at a ball, Isabel often feels that Pansy clings too much, making them both appear ridiculous.

Pansy is never present at "good" talk. Whenever the talk threatens to become "good", she is dispatched to the garden to pick some flowers. It is a measure of Isabel's naiveté in her social milieu that she once protested to the Countess Gemini (who was about to send Pansy to practise her piano lessons), "I would rather hear nothing that Pansy may not!" (Portrait, II, 88).

Isabel's visit to Pansy alone in the villa at Florence (Chapter Thirty) is like a "set piece" in a drama. Pansy fills her role as small chatelaine and entertains her guest in her best imitation of the grown-up manner. From time to time her decorous speeches reveal glimpses of ideas which should have stirred Isabel's American conscience, things which should even have alarmed her. But Isabel was lulled, charmed by this child playing at being a woman. "How well the child has been taught, . . . how prettily she has been directed and fashioned; and yet how simple, how natural, how innocent she has been kept" (Portrait, II, 26). Isabel's final evaluation is that Pansy is "a blank page" with "only two or three small exquisite instincts: for knowing a friend, for avoiding a mistake, for taking care of an old toy or a new frock . . . her force would be all in knowing when and where to cling" (Portrait, II, 26-27).

Pansy's conversation reveals her utter dependence on her father. When Isabel advises Pansy to "be good" and give pleasure to her father the simple reply is, "I think that's what I live for" (Portrait, II, 29). Isabel does not find this strange, does not see anything sinister in the fact that the child has been so drilled as to have no will of her own. Pansy's conversation turns often to money: to how little of it Osmond has; to how expensive the convent school is; to how she thinks she isn't "worth" what her father is paying to keep her at the convent; to how it will probably be

something of a scramble to accumulate a dowry for her ("It costs so much to marry!" [Portrait, II, 29]). Isabel does not think these very old worries for a child of fifteen. Further, Pansy regrets her own lack of academic or musical talents and worries about the propriety of her remarks to Isabel, "I don't like to do anything that's not expected; it looks as if one had not been properly taught. I myself-- I should never like to be taken by surprise" (Portrait, II, 28). None of this suggests to Isabel the extremely oppressive air in which the child has been raised. She does not pity, but admires!

In her diminutive attempt to do the honours of her father's home, Pansy demonstrates she has been well trained for the role she will ultimately play in society. It is the role with which James finds fault in her case, regretting that her upbringing has made her such an easy victim. Osmond means to sell her to the highest bidder, and Pansy has been schooled in resignation, taught never to expect things from others. She will obey a cruel or negligent husband as selflessly as she obeys her father. She will bend, not break; and while that is a kind of survival, it is pitiful nevertheless. Her mutiny was brief and mild; her wish to marry Edward Rosier instead of Lord Warburton, her father's candidate, was borne down by Osmond's displeasure (Portrait, II, 345). The incarceration in the convent was so effective that Pansy wants to return to the world on any terms her father

may choose to dictate. "I've thought a great deal . . . that I must never displease papa." On Isabel's noting that Pansy knew that before, the pathetic response is, "Yes, but I know it better. I'll do anything--I'll do anything" (Portrait, II, 284).

There can be little doubt about where James stands with regard to the dark manipulations loosed on Pansy's harmless little spirit by her malevolent father, but he is more qualified in his views of "Little Aggie" in The Awkward Age. The whole question of the social status of the young unmarried female is discussed by Mrs. Brookenham and the Duchess over tea. The Duchess has the bringing up of her dead Italian husband's "unique niece," and is making of her a jeune fille on the continental model, insofar as that is possible in London.

Little Aggie's London education is of the narrowest. The Duchess, her guardian, is cynical but consistent. She makes it very clear to Mrs. Brook that her only intention is to marry Aggie and to marry her well. She herself will even approach the prospective husband about the match. She reproaches Mrs. Brook for not having sought Mitchy for her Nanda in the same direct fashion: "I'd offer mine to the son of a chimneysweep if the principal guarantees were there. . . . He has forty thousand a year, an excellent idea of how to take care of it and a good disposition" (Awk. Age, p. 63). In the Duchess' view, extreme care must be taken to

ensure that the young girl in question is kept appealing for her prospective husband: "It's not their idea that the girls they marry shall already have been pitchforked--by talk and contacts and visits and newspapers and by the way the poor creatures rush about and all the extraordinary things they do--quite into everything" (Awk. Age, p. 57). Consequently Aggie is in the constant care of a governess, is permitted by way of culture only "Mr. Garlick's class in Modern Light Literature", and, on those infrequent occasions when Miss Merriman has a "day off", Aggie is taken around by the Duchess to pay a very few social calls.

Whereas Pansy Osmond is genuinely innocent and completely unworldly, it is implicit in James's introduction of her that Little Aggie is, perhaps, not what she appears. "Little Aggie presented, up and down, an arrangement of dress exactly in the key of her age, her complexion, her emphasized virginity . . . her admirable training appeared to hold her out to them all with precautionary finger-tips" (Awk. Age, p. 93). Pansy's post-marital situation is never discussed or speculated upon in The Portrait of a Lady, and there is little thought given by anyone to her ever learning those things a maiden ought not to know. The Duchess takes such knowledge for granted on Little Aggie's behalf, balking only at the idea that Aggie should have any inklings before she is safely married ("Don't understand, my own darling--don't understand!" [Awk. Age, p. 97]). When, instead of Miss

Merriman, the Duchess herself has the onerous task of the direct supervision of Little Aggie she is never at ease lest the child hear inappropriate remarks or meet inappropriate people. Thus when the painted Carrie Donner unexpectedly enters Mrs. Brook's drawing room, the Duchess "quickly reached her kinsman with a smothered hiss, an 'Edward dear, for God's sake take Aggie!'" (Awk. Age, p. 99).

The Duchess' scheme is a spectacular failure. Once Aggie is safely married to Mitchy she begins her true career, and with her husband's close friend Petherton (who was also the Duchess' own lover). Mrs. Brook describes their case to Vanderbank:

"I think him quite capable of considering, with a magnificent insolence of selfishness, that what Mitchy has most done will have been to make Aggie accessible in a way that--for decency and delicacy of course, things on which Petherton highly prides himself--she could naturally not be as a girl.

Her marriage has simplified it" (Awk. Age, p. 442).

Harold Brookenham is equally blunt. The subject is Aggie's remarkable efflorescence a scant ten weeks after her marriage:

"But then don't they always--I mean when they're like Aggie and they once get loose--go at a pace? That's what I want to know. I don't suppose mother did, nor Tishy, nor the Duchess . . . but

mother and Tishy and the Duchess, it strikes me, must either have been of that school that knew, don't you know? a deuce of a deal before, or of the type that takes it all more quietly after" (Awk. Age, p. 427).

The Duchess' scheme has failed, and so far from being a "femme charmante" Aggie is, in fact, a scandal. Nanda pities and tries to excuse her: "Aggie's only trying to find out . . . what sort of person she is. How can she ever have known? It was carefully, elaborately hidden from her--kept so obscure that she could make out nothing. . . . You see when there has been nothing before, it all has to come with a rush" (Awk. Age, pp. 528-29).

Nanda is being overly charitable and furthermore Aggie is very much on her conscience, for Nanda was the one who persuaded Mitchy to marry Aggie in the first place. Aggie has run wild and done so in spite of her careful tending by the Duchess. It seems reasonable to assume that the narrowness of her education is at fault, that the very things which were so ostentaciously whisked out of sight as unsuitable were the things that she (like any healthy, curious child) most longed to see. Yet Pansy Osmond, too, was often bundled unceremoniously out of the room when conversation took an indelicate turn, and Pansy never wondered at anything in her entire life. However Pansy did not have a guardian like Petherton who may well have used his confidential status

to implant impure ideas in Aggie's chaste little mind (the Watch and Ward theme). But most of the credit for her wayward career must go to Aggie herself. Ten weeks is too short a time to plausibly change from convent flower to boisterous coquette, so the coquette must have been dormant in her long before. The Little Aggie one meets as the novel begins is thus a creature of presented surfaces and studied appearances, and very little representative of the real girl within.

James sees the continental system as a failure because it does not prepare the girl for marriage. It gives her a veneer of innocence which may (as in Pansy's case) cover woe-ful ignorance and helplessness, or (as in Aggie's case) become itself a charm to barter on the marriage market. In any case, the continental method merely escorts the girl to the threshold of marriage. Its rules which exclude her from the sophisticated discussions of her elders are at fault. One cannot imagine Pansy's ever holding her own in a salon (which is sure to be her milieu after marriage). She will seem an insipid and spineless fool. Her husband will tire of her and she will not even know herself betrayed. Pansy is the perfect victim.

The English system, the second method of educating the young girl considered by James in the "Preface to The Awkward Age", does not require the exclusion of the young girl from the salon, the arena of social encounters. The English system, indeed, does not specifically require anything of



anybody. James's chief criticism of the English system of educating the young girl is that it is incoherent and heterogeneous. These are its characteristics because "the English mind . . . has never conceived of but one [propriety] --the grand propriety, for every case it should in fairness be said of just being English" ("Preface to Awk. Age", p. x-xi). James means by this that the idea of formulated rules seems foreign, unnecessary, distasteful. But because there are so few recognized rules the English girls are left to contrive their own social codes.

The Awkward Age is based on the awkward situation regarding the salon debut of Nanda Brookenham. She is at the awkward age in that, at eighteen, she should properly be receiving guests in her mother's drawing room but Mrs. Brook does not want her there. The Duchess sees no difficulty:

"Why isn't it as plain as a pikestaff that the thing to do with Nanda is simply to marry her--and to marry her soon? That's the great thing--do it while you can. If you don't want her downstairs--at which, let me say, I don't in the least wonder--your remedy is to take the right alternative" (Awk. Age, p. 60).

The ostensible reason for Nanda's exclusion is that the free talk of Mrs. Brook's salon would be compromised by Nanda's maiden presence,<sup>5</sup> and that the most interesting subjects for

discussion would be thus rendered impossible. Mrs. Brook's actual reason is that she fears Nanda as a rival for the attention of her lover, Vanderbank.

The attempt to marry Nanda and thus remove her from competition is Mrs. Brook's chief motive for the rest of the novel. (Since the Duchess' plan was to marry Aggie as a femme charmante she can be said to have achieved only partial success.) Nanda loves Vanderbank, but he cannot see his way clear to marry her--even to claim the very substantial dowry with which Longdon bribes him. Mitchy loves Nanda but she does not return his affection. Thus only Mr. Longdon is left, and he is the one who rescues Nanda from her embarrassment, spirits her away to his secluded country estate and generally saves everyone's face. That Nanda has effectually been sold to the highest bidder seems to appall no-one but Henry James. Longdon's lover-like trepidation as he awaits Nanda's final "answer", and Mitchy's jokes about their elopement are inappropriate, unnatural and disturbing (given the context of the situation). Nanda has been disposed of and Mrs. Brook has won.

Nanda goes with Longdon largely out of despair. If she cannot have the man she loves she is indifferent as to how she spends the rest of her life. Beccles will do quite as well as a nunnery. Her last gesture toward her mother (who isn't worth it) is utterly pathetic. Nanda tries to rebuild Mrs. Brook's salon, her mother's only interest, by urging

Vanderbank to make more frequent visits. It is a wholly magnanimous gesture.<sup>6</sup> Insofar as Nanda is manipulative in marrying Mitchy to Aggie she pays dearly in grief and horror at his fate and her part in it. Thus, throughout the novel Nanda is sincere, magnanimous, altogether superior to her milieu.

James's portrait of Nanda Brookenham shows how the young English girl is left to puzzle out her own moral code in a world of shoddy pretences. Nanda triumphs morally, but is pitifully unsuccessful at achieving her particular personal desires. She is technically excluded from her mother's salon, but learns about life from Tishy Grendon, an unhappily married friend; from Carrie Donner ("the other woman" in a shoddy affair), and from various other intimates of her mother's circle. Nanda even reads a naughty French novel (the subject of an elaborate bit of "business" in the novel [Awk. Age, pp. 430-34]). She walks unscathed through all these things. It is as temperamentally impossible for her to become a world-weary cynic like her mother ("Mrs. Brookenham's supreme rebellion against fate was just to show with the last frankness how much she was bored" [Awk. Age, p. 43]) as to become a coquette like Little Aggie. Since those extremes signify success in her narrow circle she consents to Longdon's removal of her from that circle.

Biddy Dormer of The Tragic Muse is another young English girl whose début, exposure and education are, like Nanda's,

very much a subject of general interest to others. In Biddy's case James's focus is no longer on moral superiority but on the "incoherence" of the English system itself. Biddy Dormer is a very ordinary girl, not at all Nanda Brookenham's match in intelligence, perception, or moral candor. Throughout the novel Biddy's mother, brother, and friends make a great issue of protecting her from scenes and people they consider improper. Thus she is not allowed to attend the Théâtre Français and her mother also finds objectionable the nude statuary and paintings one encounters in Paris galleries. However, on one occasion Biddy is permitted to attend a particular performance at the Théâtre Français when her escort is Peter Sherringham, the man her mother wants her to marry. Such a turnabout certainly manifests English "incoherence" (however intelligible on the practical level). Furthermore, Biddy is subjected to humiliating instant banishment when anyone her mother considers improper enters a room in which she also happens to be. This censorship of Biddy's experience and acquaintance is haphazard and arbitrary. Her social position is one of extreme impotence.

Though restricted on all sides by admonitions like those made to a child, Biddy tries to resist the stultifying conditions of her life, and tries, above all, to appear to have interests other than that paramount one--marriage to Peter Sherringham--she clearly has. Biddy dabbles in serious subjects like art and feminism, and is given to harangues. She

wants to appear a serious intelligent woman, especially to Peter Sherringham, for whom she suffers unrequited love, yet Biddy's interest in art and feminism is clearly founded on vanity. Her work in her brother's studio is a means of passing the time and an escape from the tension of her mother's company. Biddy expresses aesthetic opinions that are admirable per se, but she expresses them with inappropriate vehemence and to an unsympathetic audience. The effect of the harangue is to diminish her as a sensible person at the same time as it elicits from the reader a few grains of pity for her. No-one takes Biddy seriously, but it is evident that nobody could. She is nearly incoherent, not because of righteous indignation or even fervent conviction, but because of repressed rage that Peter is so impervious to her charm. With very little provocation she explodes:

"Don't you think one can do as much good by painting great works of art as by--as by what papa used to do? [Her late papa was a politician] Don't you think art's necessary to the happiness, to the greatness of a people? Don't you think it's manly and honourable? Do you think a passion for it's a thing to be ashamed of? Don't you think the artist --the conscientious, the serious one--is as distinguished a member of society as anyone else?"<sup>7</sup>

The response she elicits is predictable:

Peter and Nick looked at each other and laughed at the way she had got up her subject (Muse, II, 288).

Another of Biddy's harangues purportedly concerns feminism (Muse, II, 293-94). She pretends to have her own opinions, but it is all an excuse to draw Peter out on the subject of Miriam Rooth. In this exchange Biddy is irritable and coy by turns and she proves her insincerity at its conclusion. She is apparently indignant when she says:

"That's the kind of thing you say to keep us quiet."

"Dear Biddy, you see how well we succeed!"

To which she replied by asking irrelevantly, "Why is it so necessary for you to go to the theatre to-night if Miss Rooth doesn't want you to go?" (Muse, II, 294).

Biddy does not mind or cannot help being so transparent in her lament. She has never been told how to disguise her love. In a society where marrying well is everyone's social goal, she is too direct in her wooing of the man she wants. She seems a boring little fool to the reader throughout, but ultimately she achieves her object. She marries Peter Sheringham and becomes the perfect diplomat's wife. Her tenacity is rewarded. She knows herself to be Peter's second choice,

but is as practical a girl as she is dog-like in her devotion. Biddy does not capture Peter's fancy; she wears down his resistance. Hers is a practical victory but certainly not a sentimental one.

Neither Biddy nor Nanda finds happiness as she had originally sought it. Biddy marries the man she loves while he is (more or less) on the rebound. Her career as his wife in the diplomatic corps will be dry, official, unexciting, and she will always know that he loves another woman more than he does her. Nanda does not marry at all, for she cannot lower her standard from Vanderbank (her conception of an ideal man) to a lesser mortal. Since to be an unmarried girl in the thick of London's social elite is unthinkable, she retires to the serenity of Mr. Longdon's Surrey estate. Biddy's practical victory tastes of bitterness; Nanda's moral victory brings her little comfort. English society recognizes no female achievement other than that of a "brilliant" marriage. Biddy obtains hers at the sacrifice of her romantic illusions. Judged by that cold standard of the "brilliant" match, Nanda is a total failure.

Of the education of the American girl James had a great deal to say--all of it disapproving. His disapproval of her is of a piece with his disapproval of America. He could not praise a society so blindly consecrated to the democratic ideal which he saw as reducing everything to the level of the banal:

Social, civil, conversational discipline consists in having to recognize knowledge and competence and authority, accomplishments experience and "importance", greater than one's own; and it is in a bad way, therefore, obviously, in communities in which it is so important to be a chattering little girl--before becoming, by the same token and as for the highest flight, a "social leader"--that every measure of everything gives way to it.<sup>8</sup>

The "chattering little girl" who thinks herself of such cosmic importance is quintessentially represented in "Daisy Miller" and "Julia Bride", which James meant to be considered as companion studies.<sup>9</sup> Despite Buitenhuis' article, despite James's own comments quoted by Buitenhuis and his disclaimers about Daisy's keynote "innocence" in his reply to Mrs. Lynn Linton,<sup>10</sup> the two girls have more similarities than differences. Daisy is quite as much a "queen" in 1878 as the flighty little flirts James deprecates in "The Manners of American Women" (1907). She believes the world revolves around her and that it is her duty to captivate every man she meets. She has not been engaged six times, nor even once--but such would have been her career had she remained in America and lived to be as old as Julia Bride, for Daisy is as headstrong and as utterly bereft of parental guidance as the older Julia. Daisy pouts when Winterbourne does not



dance attendance on her in the fashion of the gallant boys back home. She is idle, capricious, vain. She appears an appealing figure largely by default, because all the other characters in the story are objectionable. One makes excuses for her as if she were a real person, as, "Well, for a girl with such an impossible family! . . ." The conventional old cats of Rome, wintry Winterbourne himself, the upstart courier, Eugenio; the ambiguous little Roman, Giovannelli of the beauteous moustaches--all of these throw Daisy's airy charm into higher relief. In a sense the reader more or less suspends his moral judgment of Daisy in favour of his aesthetic sense, and takes Daisy on trust, the ultimate judgment of the moral case being so strenuously undertaken by Winterbourne and the others.

It is true that, as Buitenhuis and James both intimate, the moral atmosphere of "Julia Bride" is very murky, indeed, but that of "Daisy Miller" is very ugly too. If the thing that matters in Julia Bride's society is marrying money and social climbing, in Daisy Miller's Rome the thing that matters is appearing innocent. One remembers with distaste the cynical, hopeful attitude Winterbourne displays while discussing the proposed excursion to the Castle of Chillon, his indolent manner of waiting for Daisy to indicate she was interested in meeting a fate worse than death; waiting for what Prince Amerigo of The Golden Bowl would call, "the predestined phenomenon, the thing always as certain as . . ."

sunrise . . . the doing by the woman of the thing that gave her away. She did it, ever, inevitably, infallibly--she couldn't possibly not do it. It was her nature, it was her life, and the man could always expect it without lifting a finger."<sup>11</sup>

Daisy does not make the sign, but she cavorts in this atmosphere of sexual tension, much of it of her own making. James tries to make it something of a donnée that she is innocent, but by this he merely means she is a virgin. Daisy may well be innocent of the ultimate intention--a tease always is--but she must be aware of and apparently relishes the turbulence she is unleashing in Winterbourne. She wields her power carelessly and selfishly, believing those to be the prerogatives of the American girl. Daisy does not deliver, but she promises with her eyes. There is a moral culpability in that. There is also great aesthetic charm. She is pretty, graceful, free--flitting here and there according to whim.

Buitenhuis quotes Annette Kar's opinion that Daisy "stood for a principle not easily formulated: inviolable innocence compounded with instinctive moral judgment,"<sup>12</sup> and elaborates: "this protects her with a shield almost as strong as the chastity of the Lady in Milton's Comus."<sup>13</sup> Daisy does not have any judgment at all, nor any shield. Daisy is willful and Daisy is lucky (insofar as it can be considered lucky to lose not her virginity but merely her

life). Her story lies not in the fact that she was protected, but in its converse--that she was so pitifully exposed. "Daisy Miller" carries (along with other, more commendable literary values) a warning, a moral in the tiresome bad-little-boy-who-disobeyed-his-parents-and-got-eaten-by-the-wolf genre.

Daisy's death is of a piece with the avowed "poetry" James put into his portrait of her; nothing that beautiful can last. Daisy ostensibly dies of Roman fever, but her will to live was destroyed by Winterbourne's icy judgment of her. Such are the literal reasons for her death, but the poetic ones are even more significant. Daisy had to die or she would have changed, would have grown older, would have lost her lacy charm, would have become, in fact, what Winterbourne thought she was--damaged merchandise. If Daisy had not died she would have become Julia Bride. There was nothing to arrest her headlong career, nothing could stop her but death. Thus James removed her opportunity, closed his little masterpiece, froze Daisy in an attitude of eternal grace.

"Julia Bride" is a comedy. The reader strongly suspects from the first that valiant Julia will fail to dupe her potential seventh fiancé, the socially prominent Basil French, but applauds her intrepid attempt. Julia Bride's story is as gossipy, as sordid as that of Selina Berrington of "A London Life" (another American girl gone astray); but

the reader breathes easier that there is, in Julia's case, no hysterical Laura Wing to narrate it. Thus the tale remains a comedy.

Peter Buitenhuis' treatment of "Julia Bride" is quite valuable. He is above all correct in seeing in Julia "a degree of self knowledge"<sup>14</sup> to which Daisy never attains or even aspires. Daisy never learns that she is at fault and that she is the hapless product of a careless upbringing. She dies bewildered and heartbroken. Julia Bride, however, must live on to rue her mistakes. Buitenhuis summarizes:

Most of the characters in "Julia Bride" are the natural products of a society that takes a system of "cheap and easy divorce" for granted. . . . Julia, having a mother with one impending and two past divorces to her credit, had naturally gone in for "the young speculative exchange of intimate vows" as James called it. Her plight, like that of Daisy Miller, was the result of ignorance. Julia's half-dozen engagements and disengagements were of no more account to her than Daisy's numerous trysts with Giovanelli in Rome. . . . Daisy, brought up like Julia in an extremely haphazard manner, simply takes for granted "the old American freedom" of association with the opposite sex. . . . Julia, in contrast, comes to the conclusion that

"the disgusting, the humiliating thing" was that her mother had allowed her to assume that "her own incredibly allowed, her own insanely fostered frivolity" had been the natural career for a young girl. She has to struggle to cut herself off from this career by means of deceit and intrigue.<sup>15</sup>

Julia's theory that the right combination of lies can win her the man she loves is the basis of the story's humour (albeit of a dark hue). Her determination gives rise to hilarious exchanges like that with Murray Brush:

"You'll lie for me like a gentleman?"

"As far as that goes till I'm black in the face."<sup>16</sup>

Similarly when Julia is bewailing the intricacies of her predicament to Mr. Pitman she explains how only her six fiancés can save her fair name and that they must approach Basil French on her behalf for she cannot do so herself:

"Qui s'excuse s'accuse, don't they say?--so that do you see me breaking out to him, unprovoked, with four or five what-do-you-call-'ems, the things mother used to have to prove in Court, a set of neat little 'alibis' in a row? How can I get hold

of so many precious gentlemen, to turn them on?

How can they want everything fished up?"<sup>17</sup>

To this the "fine old American freedom" has led her, to the necessity of producing "alibis" as her mother did in her various divorce actions; and, as her mother's alibis were lies, so Julia's will be. James is basically stern in his denunciation of this society of "cheap and easy divorce", but his treatment in "Julia Bride" is farcical. Thus he deplores the social situation but almost admires Julia's resilience and resourcefulness as she meets her crisis. However, Julia does not really matter to James.<sup>18</sup> She is not a girl like Nanda, about whom he can seriously care. Thus when, at the story's end, she admits defeat, it is with "a long lonely moan", but one knows that she will rise to fight again. Julia's vision of the scramble of social climbing in which she was engaged will not radically change her way of life. She will go on much as she always has, but the next time she will realistically set her sights a little lower than the Basil Frenches of this world.

Julia Bride is merely the most outrageous portrait in James's gallery of the possible careers of the young girl. In his considerations of the female young of the continent, of England, and of America, there is a unifying thread of frustration, defeat, unpreparedness, ignorance. Each of the girls considered above--Pansy Osmond, Little Aggie, Nanda

Brookenham, Biddy Dormer, Daisy Miller and Julia Bride--is under excruciating pressure to marry, to seize the nearest man and the largest fortune. The implication of each society is that only then will she be happy, serene, fulfilled.

But James does not share these societies' enthusiastic endorsements of marriage. His studies of marriage show that he viewed it with extreme suspicion, yet he is not a feminist. His fiction demonstrates that he has no patience with nor admiration for the woman who steadfastly repudiates her traditional role.

In The Portrait of a Lady, for example, Henrietta Stackpole's career and her opinions on it are exhibited for their humour alone. She is a "female interviewer . . . a reporter in petticoats", blunt and provincial. Her good qualities are not reportorial but womanly ones: she is a thoroughly kind and loyal friend to Isabel. Late in the novel Henrietta announces her engagement and retirement. Isabel is surprised and disconcerted, reflecting: "It was a disappointment to find [Henrietta] had personal susceptibilities, that she was subject to common passions, and that her intimacy with Mr. Bantling had not been completely original. There was a want of originality in her marrying him--there was even a kind of stupidity" (Portrait, II, 400). Isabel's fault has always been in trying to see ideals personified. Here too, James is saying, she errs. For James,

Henrietta's fate is the only logical, desirable one for any woman.

James's disapproval of militant feminism is expressed in The Bostonians. In it the stereotyped characters eloquently reveal James's views of the movement. There are two women in The Bostonians who have done or who are doing real work to advance the cause of women's liberation--Miss Birdseye and Dr. Mary Prance--but James does not make them attractive figures. The first of these, Miss Birdseye, is nearly eighty and in failing health. She is untidy, colourless, sexless, and unfocussed in her enthusiasms.<sup>19</sup> She can no longer see her way clearly through the mass of trashy cults that are hangers-on to the suffragist movement. James notes: "There was a genius for Miss Birdseye in every bush. Selah Tarrant had effected wonderful cures; she knew so many people--if they would only try him."<sup>20</sup> Miss Birdseye has faith in Verena as a great leader of the future and believes that, in her commerce with Basil Ransom, Verena is converting the South! (Bostonians, p. 397). She is a relic of the heroic abolitionist past, it is true, but when she dies all heroism in the novel dies with her. Basil tells her as she is dying, "I shall remember you as an example of what women are capable of" (Bostonians, p. 399). It is further recorded that "he had no subsequent compunctions for the speech, for he thought poor Miss Birdseye, for all her absence of profile, essentially feminine" (Bostonians,



p. 399). By this Ransom merely means she has given away all she has, sacrificed and scrimped and suffered. In other words, she has done within the abolitionist and women's movements what Ransom expects women to do everywhere; she has selflessly yielded until there is nothing left.

Miss Birdseye's physician, Dr. Mary Prance, has considerably more vitality, but she is so single-minded in her pursuit of scientific knowledge that she has jettisoned any feminine traits:<sup>21</sup> "She looked like a boy, and not even like a good boy. It was evident that if she had been a boy, she would have 'cut' school, to try private experiments in mechanics or to make researches in natural history. It was true that if she had been a boy she would have borne some relation to a girl, whereas Dr. Prance appeared to bear none whatever" (Bostonians, p. 41). Her manner is brusque and ironic, and she is impatient when interrupted in her research. She thinks the women's movement ridiculous, but reveres Miss Birdseye to the extent that she gives up a full month at her office to nurse the old lady in her final illness at Mar-mion, a watering-place. Dr. Prance spends some time there fishing with Basil Ransom. She is entirely self-sufficient and takes "an ironical view of almost any kind of courtship", and especially of Verena's and Basil's peculiar one, obliged as they are to take their rural walks away from Olive's house. Basil saw that Dr. Prance "didn't wonder women were such featherheads, so long as, whatever brittle follies they

cultivated, they could get men to come and sit on fences for them" (Bostonians, p. 358).

The nominal leader of the movement, Mrs. Farrinder, the eminent evangelist of feminism, is, first of all, an exploiter. She is so successful, one soon realizes, because she is readily adaptable. She immediately recognizes the persuasive power latent in Verena and tries to annex her for the benefit of her organization. Similarly she calculates how Olive Chancellor can be induced to draw to the meetings her social peers, the aristocracy of Boston. It is one of James's heavier ironies that the foremost national spokesman for the liberation of women from centuries of oppression by men is herself so absorbed in the politics of power.

Nor are the two most important women in the novel dependable, respectable carriers of the banner. Verena Tarrant's inspirational harangues are almost ludicrous but they move the masses. Verena's appeal, however, is to anything but the intellect. She is beautiful, with masses of red hair, an histrionic manner, and an amazing ability to take herself seriously. She is considered a beautiful little fool by a clique of Harvard boys who beg her to give an address at their college and assure her she would make instant converts. After a pleasant social call at the rooms of one of these wags, Mr. Burrage, Verena dreamily elaborates on her state of mind:

"It would be very nice to do that always-- just to take men as they are, and not have to think about their badness. It would be very nice not to have so many questions, but to think they were all comfortably answered, so that one could sit there on an old Spanish leather chair, with the curtains drawn and keeping out the cold, the darkness, all the big terrible, cruel world--sit there and listen forever to Schubert and Mendelssohn. They didn't care anything about female suffrage! And I didn't feel the want of a vote to-day at all, did you?" (Bostonians, p. 155).

James saw that women in his society inevitably reverted to this state; they were graceful, passive, unthreatening, sheltered, interested in the arts in a desultory fashion. The passage is also an extremely incongruous and amusing one when uttered by a girl who is allegedly a formidable worker for female emancipation. James's message is clear: Verena's inclinations, her regret at having to "think about [men's] badness" are strong and natural and will ultimately overwhelm any temporary deviation from her destined biological course. Her intellect cannot for long subjugate her desires.

Olive Chancellor is the only devout feminist whose depths are sounded in the novel. She has a strong intellect--

much stronger than that of the alleged hero, for example. But Olive's stance with regard to feminism is not intellectual, but emotional: Olive is a latent lesbian and an inveterate man-hater. Thus James ideologically cuts the ground out from under her. Furthermore, Olive expends her energies not in working for the movement but in trying to enthrall the credulous Verena. Olive's introspections, while painful, are deficient in that illumination that generally characterizes those of James's other protagonists. Since she does not know herself, how can she know anything else? Thus James disposes of a movement that he found repugnant, unnatural, but not, apparently, threatening. He seems to be saying that the ladies (God bless them!) are too sensible to take seriously the rhetoric of a movement that is so patently absurd.

Marriage is the only career James seriously considers for his women characters, and he anatomizes many a marriage in the course of his fiction. It is clear that marriage is, to him, the most significant and absorbing relationship that can exist between two people. Many of his characters express their conceptions of what it means to be married in the most exalted and idealistic terms. Miriam Rooth explains to Peter Sherringham, "I must tell you that in the matter of what we can do for each other I have a tremendously high ideal. I go in for the closeness of union, for identity of interest. A true marriage, as they call it, must do one a lot of good"

(Muse, II, 354). Isabel Osmond, in her vigil before the dying fire reflects on her bright, early faith, "She had too many ideas for herself; but that was just what one married for, to share them with someone else" (Portrait, II, 195). These are all admirable sentiments, but the realities of marriage in James's fiction are quite another thing altogether.

James seems incapable of portraying a happy marriage. Perhaps he had never seen one; perhaps he believed them as rare as the unicorn. James subjected the institution of marriage to his closest scrutiny in The Portrait of a Lady and The Golden Bowl, novels rich in examples of the different arrangements that can be subsumed under that title.

In The Portrait of a Lady James examines the institution of marriage at some length. All his characters, at one time or another, take the opportunity to express themselves on the subject. James also portrays three marriages in considerable detail: those of the Countess Gemini, Lydia Touchett, and Isabel Osmond. Amy, the Countess Gemini, freely admits to being a scatterbrain, and professes to take nothing seriously--least of all her marriage vows. Isabel is our judge in the novel, and "Isabel would as soon have thought of despising her as of passing a moral judgment on a grasshopper" (Portrait, II, 225). To the Countess, marriage is a grim thing, an "awful . . . steel trap" (Portrait, II, 87), but in practice she manages to make light enough

of it. Amy longs to live in Rome, to wear pretty clothes, to be greatly admired by a great many men. Her husband insists in living in Florence, and controls Amy to some degree by severely limiting her funds. He is a lecherous fool, unlucky at cards, and illiterate into the bargain. The Countess is a frivolous and selfish woman, reputed to have had "fifteen lovers." Her governing principle in marriage seems to be that of revenge; she takes care to give her husband as much reason to complain of her as he has given her. Amy's attitude toward most subjects is irreverent, and "conventional" only in the most cynical sense of the term, in that she tends to believe the worst of everyone and sees scandal even where it does not exist. Amy's ideas about marriage as it exists in contemporary society are much like those of her brother. They take ugly things for granted in a chic, sophisticated manner that makes Isabel's spirit cry out in despair and disillusionment, "Did all women have lovers? Did they all lie and even the best have their price? Were there only three or four that didn't deceive their husbands?" (Portrait, II, 200-01).

The marriage of the Touchetts, Ralph's parents is more interesting to contemplate. It is based on the maintenance of separate domiciles in separate countries. James is very dry in his treatment of Mrs. Touchett, that driest of women. One finds it difficult to believe that she was once, as her husband says, "fresh and natural and quick to understand

. . . like Isabel" (Portrait, I, 74), but presumably her nature when one meets her in the novel is the result of her marriage (among other influences). Her husband is genial, sweet-tempered, easygoing and kind. She is prickly, generally close-mouthed, extremely fastidious, but also kind. The original cause of their incompatibility is never stated by James. One must accept it as a donnée: "It had become clear, at an early stage of their community, that they should never desire the same thing at the same moment" (Portrait, I, 26). Mrs. Touchett has a house of her own in Florence where she spends her time when not engaged in traveling on the continent and to America. She comes once a year to Gardencourt and spends a month with her husband. She has views about other people's marriages, notably Isabel's: "that a young lady with whom Lord Warburton had not successfully wrestled should content herself with an obscure American dilettante, a middle-aged widower with an uncanny child and an ambiguous income, this answered to nothing in Mrs. Touchett's conception of success. She took, it will be observed, not the sentimental, but the political view of matrimony--a view which has always had much to recommend it" (Portrait, I, 394).

Daniel Touchett has regrets about his marriage. He sees, for instance, no reason why they should live apart simply because they cannot agree. He persists in thinking marriage a worthwhile undertaking, despite the failure of

his own. He takes, generally speaking, the sentimental view of women, advising Lord Warburton, "The ladies will save us, . . . that is the best of them will--for I make a difference between them. Make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting" (Portrait, I, 11). In ordinary daily conversation he takes a whimsical, humourous view of his wife and of her unpredictable nature. Presumably he finds this a more graceful attitude on his part than querulous complaints about habits they are both too old to change. "She never telegraphs when you would expect it--only when you don't. . . . She likes to drop on me suddenly; she thinks she'll find me doing something wrong. She has never done so yet, but she's not discouraged" (Portrait, I, 14). On hearing of her arriving and immediately retiring to her room he merely nods, "Yes--and locked herself in. She always does that. Well, I suppose I shall see her next week" (Portrait, I, 20). Perhaps his most characteristic remark in this vein is one he makes to Isabel that first day at tea on the lawn: "Are you talking about Mrs. Touchett? . . . Come here, my dear, and tell me about her. I'm always thankful for information" (Portrait, I, 24). As he is dying, he makes his final observations about his marriage to his son, Ralph: "Well . . . it can't be said that my death will make much difference in your mother's life. . . . Well, she'll have more money . . . I've left her a good wife's portion, just as if she had been



a good wife" (Portrait, I, 256). He is grateful and a little puzzled about her uncharacteristic vigil at his deathbed, showing, at the last, that same gently troubled, somewhat inarticulate regret he has manifested throughout. He tries to explain his feelings to Ralph, "your mother has been less--less--what shall I call it? less out of the way since I've been ill. I presume she knows I've noticed it. . . . She doesn't do it to please me. She does it to please--to please. . . . She does it because it suits her" (Portrait, I, 256). Those are his last words about his wife.

Mrs. Touchett proves capable of a certain degree of insight into what their life has been after her husband's death. As she says to Madame Merle, "I know what you're going to say--he was a very good man. But I know it better than any one, because I gave him more chance to show it. In that I think I was a good wife" (Portrait, I, 295). She goes on to tell Madame Merle that her portion of the will was most generous, and that she thought she saw in that generosity a tribute to the fact that she was always faithful to him physically and "never exhibited the smallest preference for anyone else" (Portrait, I, 295). Her gravity in making this assertion tends to make the reader smile a little, for there is incongruity in the idea of illicit passion assailing so austere, correct, and fastidious a woman as Mrs. Touchett. Hers is a curious conception of herself as "a good wife" in that she afforded her husband ample opportunity to demonstrate

his own fine nature by tolerating her eccentricities. It seems unlikely that any thoughtful person will share her view that an absentee wife can be a good one.<sup>22</sup>

Isabel's marriage is the most significant one in the novel, and the one in which James dramatizes the gravest of his doubts about that institution. Very early in their acquaintance, and *à propos* of life in general Isabel Archer says to Gilbert Osmond, "I'm rather ashamed of my plans; I make a new one every day. . . . It seems frivolous, I think. . . . One ought to choose something very deliberately and be faithful to that" (Portrait, I, 381). This moral earnestness is the strongest element in her personality, and in combination with pride (with which it accords surprisingly well), constitutes Isabel's character. Isabel's character is her destiny, for her beliefs lead her inexorably toward her doom.

Even as she praises cool judgment Isabel is already beginning to lose hers. James's portrait of a lady falling in love is a masterpiece of ironies. Isabel is first intrigued by Osmond's seeming uniqueness: "Her mind contained no class offering a natural place to Mr. Osmond--he was a specimen apart. . . . She had never met a person of so fine a grain" (Portrait, I, 376). He is mysterious: "It was not so much what he said and did, but rather what he withheld that marked him for her" (Portrait, I, 376). She decides that he perhaps has some faults but even these seem admirable: "He was certainly fastidious and critical; he was

probably irritable. His sensibility had governed him-- possibly governed him too much; it had made him impatient of vulgar troubles and had led him to live by himself, in a sorted, sifted, arranged world, thinking about art and beauty and history" (Portrait, I, 376-77). Thus Isabel muses while she exerts herself more than ever before in her life to make a good impression. She tries to appear a woman of exquisite tastes: "It would have annoyed her to express a liking for something that he, in his superior enlightenment, would think she oughtn't to like; or to pass by something at which the truly initiated mind would arrest itself. She had no wish to fall into that grotesqueness--in which she had seen women (and it was a warning) serenely, yet ignobly, flounder. She was very careful, therefore as to what she said, as to what she noticed or failed to notice; more careful than she had ever been before" (Portrait, I, 379). Ultimately, of course, she repeats with Osmond the error she had made about Madame Merle. When Osmond tells Isabel about his life, she is not content to accept the dull facts but dresses them in splendors. James smiles at poor Isabel's credulity: "This would have been rather a dry account of Mr. Osmond's career if Isabel had fully believed it; but her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting" (Portrait, I, 382-83). Isabel is Osmond's willing accomplice in deceiving herself into

believing him infinitely more intelligent, refined, important, and worthy than he really is.

The seeds of her future unhappiness are all present in these passages. As Ross Labrie has pointed out, "The mixture of acquisitiveness, vanity, and aestheticism towards Osmond is curiously similar to his attitude to her, and this tends to take some of the pathos out of Isabel's case."<sup>23</sup> Like Osmond, Isabel is something of a collector of the rare human specimen. She assumes that those facets of Osmond still undiscovered are richer even than those exposed, and even more deserving of investigation. In seeking to appear rare to him as well--to appear an extraordinarily cultivated, clever, and artistic woman--Isabel is displaying her pride. She believes herself better than other women and wants him to agree.

Of all Isabel's early reflections, however, the one which most directs her later course is her determination to "choose something very deliberately, and be faithful to that" (Portrait, I, 381). Isabel chooses to marry Gilbert Osmond, and her struggle is to be faithful to that deliberate choice. Her temptations are not cast in the form of other men: the Caspar Goodwood episodes show how impervious she is to certain sorts of masculine appeal. He has always made her feel smothered, pinioned, overmastered. At the end of each of their interviews before her marriage she is so overwrought as to collapse in tears. Similarly in their fourth and final

interview her reaction to him is clearly expressed in terms of panic and sexual revulsion. She compares his love to those others she has known: "This was the hot wind of the desert, at the approach of which the others dropped dead, like mere sweet airs of the garden. It wrapped her about; it lifted her off her feet, while the very taste of it, as of something potent, acrid and strange, forced open her set teeth" (Portrait, II, 434).

Isabel's temptations are within herself. As Dorothea Krook explains,<sup>24</sup> there is never in Isabel's mind any serious intention either to legally separate from Osmond or to seek a divorce. Isabel's struggle is to remain true to her own conception of marriage and to reconcile this ideal with ugly reality and her own individuality. Isabel has always been a woman who values her own ideas, but in her vigil by the dying fire she rues them as the cause of Osmond's hatred of her. The reader learns, to his shock and pity, that now "She had no opinions--none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved for it" (Portrait, I, 195). But what Osmond hates in her is even more than this. It is "the whole thing--her character, the way she felt, the way she judged. . . . She had a certain way of looking at life which he took as a personal offence" (Portrait, II, 195). Isabel cannot change "the whole thing" that she is to suit Osmond; she can only minimize it, try to stay out of his way, steer conversations

away from inflammatory topics, assume the demeanor of the dutiful wife. How pitifully contracted and circumscribed is thus the life of the spirited girl whose future everyone had foreseen as so very bright. Her fate is, after all, to be "ground in the very mill of the conventional" (Portrait, II, 415).

Marriage was to Isabel "a complete commitment of one person to another."<sup>25</sup> It was a responsibility of the utmost gravity. The news that Ralph is dying at Gardencourt precipitates a crisis which had long been imminent in their marriage. Isabel reflects, "Marriage meant that in such a case as this, when one had to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one's husband" (Portrait, II, 361). She fears "the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to stay" (Portrait, II, 361), by which she means the violence of a broken ideal. To Isabel "marriage meant that a woman should cleave to the man with whom, uttering tremendous vows, she had stood at the altar" (Portrait, II, 361). To Isabel, "anything seemed preferable to repudiating the most serious act--the single sacred act--of her life" (Portrait, II, 247). After hearing the truth from the Countess Gemini, Isabel goes to Gardencourt--not in defiance but in despair and confusion.

Isabel's return to Osmond is not a positive act, nor did she really have any other choice. Her marriage is to her an immense responsibility, and if she cannot be happy

she can at least be good; she can be true to her own implacable code of honourable conduct. As Ross Labrie observes, "Isabel tends to waver between a sense of personal responsibility for the failure of her marriage and a sense of having been betrayed by Osmond."<sup>26</sup> This sense of personal responsibility is what surfaces during her vigil: "There were times when she almost pitied him; for if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was" (Portrait, II, 191). "Yes she had been hypocritical; she had liked him so much" (Portrait, II, 195). Isabel returns to Osmond because she cannot forgive or excuse this hypocrisy in herself and because she considers marriage an indissoluble union. She has an absolute conception of personal integrity that serves quite adequately (along with her absolute conception of marriage) to imprison her forever in that unholy alliance with Osmond. She will do what penance she can for the rest of her life.

At the novel's conclusion, Isabel returns to her suffocating marriage in Rome. She is gallant and idealistic even in defeat, but she is defeated. Nor are any of the conventional consolations possible for Isabel; she is as constitutionally incapable of embarking on a marital career like that of superficial Mrs. Touchett as of taking comfort and lovers like the frivolous Amy, Countess Gemini. The Countess

Gemini observes when she first scents Madame Merle's plan to marry Isabel to Osmond for the sake of her fortune, "Well it's a pity she's so charming. . . . To be sacrificed, any girl would do. She needn't be superior" (Portrait, I, 392). To prove James's point, however, that is exactly what she must be. Isabel has to be the most exquisite and valuable woman imaginable to emphasize the pathos of what James sees as one of the possible fates a woman may face in marriage. She may well find herself in the situation of Isabel, who "suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" (Portrait, II, 189). One of the many things The Portrait of a Lady is is a warning to women.

The Golden Bowl is the novel in which James most closely examines the institution of marriage, and an intriguing and bloodcurdling study it is. It is a novel of fearful symmetry focusing, for the most part, not on the two marriages which are its ostensible centre, but on the more vibrant, complicated and tangled relationships which interest its protagonists more nearly. Thus Maggie Verver derives more joy from her extremely close, placid relationship with her father than from her relatively newer one with Prince Amerigo, the man she marries. Similarly, Charlotte Stant is more interested in being her son-in-law's mistress than her husband's wife. Yet both Maggie and Charlotte are married women, and both must face the implications of what that means. Each



must learn that marriage has an aspect like "the grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made" (Bowl, I, 5).

Maggie initially regards her marriage as an adventure. When, a few days before their wedding, Amerigo tries to convey to her a kind of veiled warning about how little she really knows about him, her response is a blithe "Luckily, my dear . . . for what then would become, please, of the promised occupation of my future?" (Bowl, I, 9). Maggie is incapable of understanding him, radiant in her confidence, complacent in her ignorance. She loves Amerigo and so she trusts him.

If Maggie had actually put into effect her plan for the "promised occupation" of her future, all might have been well; but Maggie begins to ignore her husband soon after their return, with their infant son, from their extended wedding trip to America. She neglects Amerigo in favour of another man, her father. The new baby is the occasion for their meeting even more often and more intimately than before:

It was of course an old story and a familiar theme that a beautiful baby could take its place as a new link between a wife and a husband, but Maggie and her father had, with every ingenuity, converted the precious creature into a link between a mamma and a grandpapa (Bowl, I, 156).

Maggie sees nothing odd in this arrangement, and in no way considers Adam encroaching on Amerigo's privileges or territory. Such is the pattern of her existence even after her father marries, as well. As Adam's wife drily characterizes their relationship, "They were fairly, at times, the dear things, like children playing at paying visits, playing at 'Mr. Thompson' and 'Mrs. Fane', each hoping that the other would really stay to tea" (Bowl, I, 252).

It is not until halfway through the novel that Maggie begins to realize that "Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she . . . was arranged apart" (Bowl, II, 45). She decides to repair this discrepancy by sheer effort of will, undertaking to detach her husband from his mistress without causing any apparent interruption in the intimacy of the two couples. She gets Amerigo back because she is his wife and he is rather intrigued at her finally noticing him, let alone her turning the full battery of her heretofore unsuspected attention on him. However, the chief motivation for his return is that she has a great deal of money and he will lose it if his defection is permanent.

Maggie never does face the whole truth about herself and her inadequacies. She clings, to the last, to the self-righteous theory that she and her father were absolutely innocent of blame in the question of their spouses' affair. When the time comes for Adam Verver to remove his faithless

wife to America, Maggie still wails to Fanny Assingham, her confidante (everybody's confidante!):

"They're the ones who are saved. . . . We're the ones who are lost. . . . Lost to each other --father and I. . . . Oh yes . . . lost to each other much more, really, than Amerigo and Charlotte are: since for them it's just, it's right, it's deserved, while for us it's only sad and strange and not caused by our fault" (Bowl, II, 333).

After the other couple has departed for America, Maggie's last act in this very scenic novel is to bury her face in her husband's breast. She does so, James says, "for pity and dread" (Bowl, II, 369) of what she sees in her husband's eyes, which is "the truth" of his assertion that he sees nothing but herself. Maggie has worked hard for this moment which should be sweet and triumphant for her. She now stands alone in her husband's sight, eclipsing the rest of the world. She has, to all appearances, "saved" her marriage, but hers is a bitter victory.

Maggie has won and lost at the same time. She has won the practical victory of complete possession of her husband (a rather dubious honour), but lost the sweetness of the old-time association with her father. Moreover she has lost the sweetness of her bright, early faith in her husband.

Now she knows all about him and must come to terms with that knowledge. For Maggie and the Prince marriage is forever, and they will both live a very long time with their regrets, blackened hopes, painful memories, and aching sense of loss.

Charlotte finds no comfort in her marriage either. She enters into it for practical reasons; she does not marry for love. She explains the advantages she sees in such a union to Adam when he proposes: "I should like to be a little less adrift. I should like to have a home. I should like to have an existence. I should like to have a motive for one thing more than another. . . . It's the state, I mean. I don't like my own. 'Miss', among us all, is too dreadful--except for a shopgirl. I don't want to be a horrible English old-maid" (Bowl, I, 219). Charlotte might have added that Adam's money is his chief attraction, but such bluntness would be unnecessary as well as ungraceful, for they both implicitly acknowledge the fact.

Charlotte's expectations in her marriage are quite modest, but she is thwarted by circumstances. She hopes to have children, but there are hints that Adam is impotent. As for the home she longs for, she finds Maggie, on her countless visits to Adam, the virtual mistress there. As Fanny Assingham remarks, "Maggie and the child spread so" (Bowl, I, 374). Charlotte views her responsibilities in marriage much like a business partnership: "What could be simpler than one's going through with everything . . . when

it's so plain a part of one's contract? I've got so much, by my marriage . . . that I should deserve no charity if I stinted my return. Not to do that, to give back on the contrary all one can, is just one's decency and one's honour and one's virtue" (Bowl, I, 318). What Charlotte does, specifically, is go on a wedding trip to America "where, by all accounts, she had wondrously borne the brunt; facing brightly, at her husband's side, everything that came up--and what had come, often, was beyond words" (Bowl, I, 317). Ultimately her duty seems to be reduced to one kind of effort: she "mounted, cheerfully, the London treadmill" (Bowl, I, 317) to represent the Ververs, father and daughter, at social events. "They had brought her in--on the crudest expression of it--to do the 'worldly' for them, and she had done it with . . . genius" (Bowl, I, 318).

Charlotte's original hopes for her marriage are frustrated and, when she becomes bored with her social duties and caught up again in her old passion for Amerigo, she decides that, having fulfilled the Ververs' expectations of her, she is entitled to steal what happiness she can outside her marriage. In this she errs: she is not so entitled. Charlotte is a married woman and, like Maggie, must face the grim and inescapable implications of that contract. She is locked within her marriage to Adam to such a degree that he literally becomes her keeper.

Yet for a time Charlotte is happy and manages to forget about Adam and her relationship to him. There is an air of inevitability about her affair with the Prince. They had been lovers long before but lacked enough money to marry one another. Now, thrown together so constantly and ignored so totally by their spouses, they feel justified. As Charlotte explains to Amerigo: "It makes such a relation for us, as I verily believe, was never before in the world thrust upon two well-meaning creatures. Haven't we therefore to take things as we find them? . . . What else can we do, what in all the world else?" (Bowl, I, 302-03). Charlotte is the aggressor and the arranger of their assignations. It is this "unfeminine" directness<sup>27</sup> which, perhaps, contributes to the eventual decline of Amerigo's interest in her. However, throughout the affair Charlotte is a most pathetic creature, indeed. She must dissemble her love in her every waking moment and cannot be completely honest even to her lover, lest he weary of her. She must be ever graceful, sophisticated, light. Charlotte's true feeling is evident when Amerigo turns from her; then she is like a puzzled, wounded animal. At Matcham in the golden beginning of their affair she had explained her rules of conduct in life to Amerigo. He said of himself, "I go, as you know, by my superstitions", and she replied, "I go but by one thing . . . I go by you . . . I go by you" (Bowl, I, 360). This is the truth--that,

despite her worldly airs, Charlotte is wholly dependent on Amerigo, and when she loses him she loses all.

Charlotte's fate is qualitatively worse than that of either of her unhappy predecessors in the James canon, Kate Croy and Marie de Vionnet. Though each of the other two women had to face the grim end of the affair, each was sustained (to the degree possible) by her recognition of the inexorability and even the logicality of such a conclusion. Charlotte, on the contrary, was told nothing; she was simply abandoned between one day and the next. She was made the scapegoat for all four sinners in the novel.<sup>28</sup> Nor was Charlotte permitted the cold comfort of picking up the pieces and ordering her future as best she could. Charlotte's future is imposed upon her by her husband. To insist that she can be free in the future, as Leon Edel does, is wrong:

Charlotte ends with the wealth and power and freedom of her marriage to an American tycoon, and if Adam takes her back to America this does not necessarily mean she is being taken to prison. We know that she will ultimately be free, like James's other American wives, to travel, to build houses, to acquire art treasures, or other lovers. She can become Mrs. Touchett.<sup>29</sup>

Charlotte can never be free like Mrs. Touchett, for now Adam does not trust her, and the power his fabulous wealth

and his legal position as her husband give him enable him to control her completely. In fact, the passage which ultimately symbolizes their relationship is probably one of the most violent and sinister in all the James canon. The scene takes place at Fawns, during that hot, purgatorial summer:

Charlotte hung behind Adam with emphasized attention; she stopped when her husband stopped, but at the distance of a case or two . . . and the likeness of their connexion wouldn't have been wrongly figured if he had been thought of as holding in one of his pocketed hands the end of a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck. He didn't twitch it, yet it was there; he didn't drag her, but she came (Bowl, II, 287).

Charlotte's role in America will be an intensified version of her painful cicerone performances at Fawns, where Charlotte's lectures to her gaping group on the wonders of Ver-ver's art treasures had for Maggie a sound "like the shriek of a soul in pain" (Bowl, II, 292). But in America the pressure to perform will be unremitting. Charlotte will live forever in the museum at American City. Her apparent control at the close of the novel is mere bravado; she knows her grim fate.

Charlotte is one of the most frenzied and pitiable of James's women, but her unhappiness is typical of that which



he sees as the common lot of woman. Charlotte is trapped in her marriage by her desire to maintain appearances, by her despair at Amerigo's desertion, and by her apparent decision to settle for Adam's wealth since she cannot have Amerigo's love. Maggie's ultimate fate is to accept with what grace she can the knowledge that she can only secure her husband by giving up her beloved father--a renunciation that is like death to both of them. Isabel Archer's choice of Gilbert Osmond as her husband is the mistake to which she sacrifices all her youthful idealism, vivacity, and charm. Isabel, Maggie, and Charlotte each discover marriage to be a grim altar on which she must sacrifice her individuality.

Nor are James's unmarried women happy. The various societies in which they live stipulate that it is every girl's duty to marry and to marry well. Each responds to this pressure in her own way: Nanda Brookenham and Biddy Dormer suffer unrequited love; gentle Pansy Osmond is a mere pawn in the hands of her unscrupulous father; while Daisy Miller and Julia Bride behave so frivolously that they forfeit the good opinions of the men in whom they are most interested.

Thus it continues, and James's fiction can be regarded as a catalogue of female misery. The experience of each female character does include some positive aspects, but these are so characteristically of one sort that the term "tragic awareness" has become a staple of Jamesian criticism.

The wisdom that comes with experience always necessitates pain for James's women and never brings satisfaction or peace. None can hope for more than a state of grey resignation and compromise.

Notes to Introduction and Chapter One

<sup>1</sup>According to Leon Edel, Henry James: The Master (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1972), pp. 500-01.

<sup>2</sup>Henry James, "Preface to The Awkward Age," in The Awkward Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. x.

<sup>3</sup>Henry James, "Preface to The Awkward Age," pp. x-xi.  
All further references to this novel will be to this New York Edition and included in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), I, 369. All further references will be to this edition of the novel and included in the text.

<sup>5</sup>In the "Preface to The Awkward Age" James says, "It is compromise that has suffered her to be in question at all [as a member of the salon], and that has condemned the freedom of the circle to be self-conscious, compunctious, on the whole much more timid than brave" (p. xiii).

<sup>6</sup>F. W. Dupee is mistaken when he says Nanda "queens it" in her salon upstairs, and mistaken when he sees her gesture as "impertinence". Cf. his Henry James, American Men of

Letters Series (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1951), pp. 201-02).

<sup>7</sup>Henry James, The Tragic Muse, 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), II, 288. All further references will be to this edition of the novel and included in the text.

<sup>8</sup>Henry James, "The Manners of American Women," Harper's Bazar, 41 (April-July, 1907), rpt. in Peter Buitenhuis, ed., French Writers and American Women Essays (Branford, Conn.: Compass, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>9</sup>According to Peter Buitenhuis, "From Daisy Miller to Julia Bride: 'A Whole Passage of Intellectual History,'" AQ, II (1959), 140.

<sup>10</sup>Henry James, "Letter to Mrs. Lynn Linton, ca. 1880," in George Somes Layard, Mrs. Lynn Linton (London: Methuen and Co., 1901), pp. 233-34, rpt. in William T. Stafford, ed., James's "Daisy Miller": The Story, The Play, The Critics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 115-16.

<sup>11</sup>Henry James, The Golden Bowl, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), I, 52. All further references are to this edition of the novel and will be included in the text.

<sup>12</sup>Annette Kar, "Archetypes of American Innocence," AQ, 5 (Spring, 1953), 32. Quoted by Peter Buitenhuis "From Daisy Miller to Julia Bride," p. 137.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Buitenhuis, "From Daisy Miller to Julia Bride," p. 137.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>16</sup>Henry James, "Julia Bride" in The Novels and Tales of Henry James, Vol. 17 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 532.

<sup>17</sup>Henry James, "Julia Bride," p. 512.

<sup>18</sup>Henry James, "Preface to 'The Altar of the Dead' etc.," in The Novels and Tales of Henry James, Vol. 17 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>19</sup>Lyall H. Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (Michigan: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1971), p. 80, agrees.

<sup>20</sup>Henry James, The Bostonians: A Novel (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886), p. 32.

<sup>21</sup>Peter Buitenhuis, The Grasping Imagination: The American Writings of Henry James (Toronto: U. of T. Press, 1970), p. 150, agrees.

<sup>22</sup>Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), cannot, for example. Cf. pp. 104 and 117 (n. 73).

<sup>23</sup>Ross Labrie, "The Morality of Consciousness in Henry James," Colby Library Quart., 9 (Dec. 1971), 418.

<sup>24</sup>Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 357-62.

<sup>25</sup>Krook, p. 358.

<sup>26</sup>Labrie, "Morality of Consciousness," p. 417.

<sup>27</sup>Krook, p. 294, discusses how Charlotte makes it all "too easy" for Amerigo.

<sup>28</sup>Elso Nettels is mistaken in insisting Maggie was the scapegoat, just as she is mistaken in maintaining that James's scapegoats volunteer for their ordeals. Cf. "The Scapegoats and Martyrs of Henry James," Colby Library Quart., 10 (Sept. 1974), 413-27.

<sup>29</sup>Leon Edel, The Master, p. 215.

## Chapter Two

### Men in the Fiction

James sees futility, unhappiness, and an absence of self-fulfilment as the lot of woman in all her incarnations, but at least his women are intrinsically valuable people. His men, in almost all cases, lack their vivacity, spontaneity, and degree of self-awareness. In the main they are not as interesting. It is certain that they are not as appealing.

It is interesting that James so steadfastly prefers women to men, not in any sexual sense but for their qualities of heightened intelligence, intuition and ready sympathy. His men are almost always harder, colder, less sensitive, more ruthless. Even women who would ordinarily be considered evil, like Kate Croy and Serena Merle, are portrayed sympathetically. James lingers to study their catastrophes with pity. One does not sense such pity for their male counterparts in evil--for Gilbert Osmond, for example.

James portrays only a small corner of life, only a few kinds of men. He is not interested in the daily rounds of the hard-working physician, or the triumphs and disappointments of the devoted teacher. Certainly he is oblivious to

the charm of the non-professional working classes. Men in James's fiction are typically opportunists looking for rich women to support them, or retired businessmen trying to buy love, happiness and culture. Though James's women, for all their faults, are generally valiant, charming, and admirable, his men are infinitely less so. They are most often egotistical and insensitive to the needs of others. In fact, they often seem to have no souls at all. Like James's women, all find life ultimately painful and even meaningless.

The best examples of James's lack of sympathy with his male characters are to be found in his studies of male opportunists. The male opportunists in James's fiction often have a curiously passive side to their natures: they wait until circumstances and the exertions of other people bring their desires to fruition. Excellent examples of such men are Prince Amerigo of The Golden Bowl and Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady. Amerigo's marriage to the only daughter of a fabulously rich American was originally conceived by a mutual friend, Fanny Assingham (Bowl, I, 21 and 28-29). Maggie and Adam Verver are charmed not by what Amerigo does but by what he is--a handsome, though impoverished, prince of ancient Roman lineage. Maggie airily explains to Amerigo his value to her father:

"You're . . . part of his collection . . . one of the things that can only be got over here. You're



a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you--you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a morceau de musée" (Bowl, I, 12).

This is the static basis on which he enters the Verver ménage and so he continues in it. He promptly presents Verver with a grandson and heir to his billions, but himself takes little interest in the child. In fact Amerigo takes little interest in anything: he is aimless but amiable, pleasant but not himself pleased. He is ignored and taken for granted by Maggie and her father and bewildered by English society and its attitude toward him. In Rome the Prince's title always assured him of deference and respect; in England he does not get it. He muses idly at Matcham on "the so familiar fact of his sacrifices--down to the idea of the very relinquishment, for his wife's convenience, of his real situation in the world; with the consequence, thus, that he was, in the last analysis, among all these so often inferior people, practically held cheap and made light of" (Bowl, I, 353).

The keys to his personality may be found in two passages in the novel. In the first of these, Amerigo's vanity is revealed, a vanity already stung by Maggie's neglect of

him. The subject is Amerigo's resentment of the Ververs' taking it so for granted that he and Charlotte--alone, together--should constantly represent the family at social events. He reflects:

Being thrust, systematically, with another woman, and a woman one happened, by the same token, exceedingly to like, and being so thrust that the theory of it seemed to publish one as idiotic or incapable--this was a predicament of which the dignity depended all on one's own handling. What was supremely grotesque in fact was the essential opposition of theories--as if a galantuomo, as he at least constitutionally conceived galantuomini, could do anything but blush to "go about" at such a rate with such a person as Mrs. Verver in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall (Bowl, I, 335).

Maggie had told Amerigo "you belong to a class about which everything is known" (Bowl, I, 12), in referring to the numerous volumes of his family's history in the public library, but his galantuomo side is also something she should have taken into consideration. He will not with impunity be published as "idiotic or incapable".

Amerigo's passivity is his other chief characteristic. He can be lured easily by money or desire. He can even

elaborate theories excusing his vagrancies, as he does in his extraordinary reverie at Matcham. For all its extreme aesthetic charm, his reverie and the situation it describes are full of rationalization and sophistry:

this place had sounded its name to him half the night through, and its name had become but another name, the pronounceable and convenient one, for that supreme sense of things which now throbbed within him. He had kept saying to himself "Gloucester, Gloucester, Gloucester," quite as if the sharpest meaning of all the years just passed were intensely expressed in it. That meaning was really that his situation remained quite sublimely consistent with itself, and that they absolutely, he and Charlotte, stood there together in the very lustre of this truth. . . . He knew why, from the first of his marriage, he had tried with such patience for such conformity; he knew why he had given up so much and bored himself so much; he knew why he, at any rate, had gone in, on the basis of all forms, on the basis of his having, in a manner, sold himself, for a situation nette. It had all been just in order that his--well, what on earth should he call it but his freedom?--should at present be as perfect and rounded and lustrous as some huge precious

pearl. He hadn't struggled or snatched; he was taking but what had been given him; the pearl dropped itself, with its exquisite quality and rarity, straight into his hand (Bowl, I, 357-58).

The Prince thinks that he is to be repaid for all the boredom he has endured over the last four years, thinks even that it has bought him his freedom. The "perfect and rounded and lustrous" pearl is his freedom and Charlotte at one and the same time. And the best part is that "the pearl dropped itself . . . straight into his hand" without his lifting a finger. It is something like a point of honour with him that "He hadn't struggled or snatched".

When Maggie confronts Amerigo with her knowledge of his infidelity, he abandons Charlotte immediately--without a qualm or even an explanation.<sup>1</sup> He does not care about how she feels or what happens to her: the affair has been all of her own contriving and now it is no longer convenient. He hastily returns to his role as family man in which, though he will not be happy or amused, he will, at least, be rich. Amerigo is thus exposed as a cad, a drifter, a man of no honour or moral substance, dedicated to expediency alone.

Gilbert Osmond is James's most redoubtable portrait of the male opportunist, but, unlike Amerigo, he is sinister in the extreme. He has the same passive quality as Amerigo, but in Osmond it manifests itself like that of the spider,

who, having spun a treacherous web, waits coolly at the centre for his victim to blunder in. Like Amerigo, Osmond owes his marriage to the auspices of a woman friend; unlike Amerigo's case there are not benevolent intentions all round. Serena Merle knows all about Osmond, knows all about the cruelty of which he is capable. (Who could know better? She is herself his discarded mistress.) Yet she schemes to marry him to Isabel Archer, a vulnerable young heiress.<sup>2</sup>

There seem to be two critical camps with regard to Gilbert Osmond. Most numerous are the critics who see him as arch-villian, the incarnation of evil, the machiavellian manipulator of innocent Isabel.<sup>3</sup> However, as Charles Thomas Samuels sensibly points out<sup>4</sup> James has invested his portrait with a great many ambiguities about Isabel's own share of responsibility in the matter of her marriage,<sup>5</sup> so it is difficult to see her as wholly blameless. Similarly, Manfred MacKenzie<sup>6</sup> takes violent exception to what he considers Isabel's melodramatic version of her situation in her famous vigil (Chapter Forty-two); pointing out that the worst thing Ralph can say about Osmond when Isabel tells him of her engagement is that he thinks Osmond "small" (Portrait, II, 70). MacKenzie's arguments that no-one but Isabel categorically condemns Osmond simply prove that Osmond has successfully hidden his malevolence from the rest of the world; or, rather, that Osmond's malevolence does not flare before he has provocation. (He comes to consider Isabel's resistance

to his ideas provocation enough.)

But whether Osmond is considered wholly or partially responsible, all critics agree in finding him, as Ralph does, a "sterile dilettante" (Portrait, II, 71). This is the facet of Osmond most emphasized in the chapter in which Osmond proposes to Isabel, Chapter Twenty-nine. The sterility of his interest in her is a manifestation of his all-consuming egotism. He wants her to reflect only him and his ideas. In this chapter, James reveals Osmond's characteristic traits to be self-pity and indolence, qualities notably sterile. Osmond is reflecting on the growing possibility that Isabel may accept his suit:

At present he was happy--happier than he had perhaps ever been in his life, and the feeling had a large foundation. This was simply the sense of success--the most agreeable emotion of the human heart. Osmond had never had too much of it . . . "Ah no, I've not been spoiled; certainly I've not been spoiled," he used inwardly to repeat. "If I do succeed before I die I shall thoroughly have earned it." He was too apt to reason as if "earning" this boon consisted above all of covertly aching for it and might be confined to that exercise (Portrait, II, 11-12).

He complacently compares himself to an "anonymous drawing"

in a museum suddenly "identified . . . as from the hand of a great master" (Portrait, II, 12). This long-coveted recognition is what Isabel represents to him: "His 'style' was what the girl had discovered with a little help; and now, beside herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble. She would do the thing for him, and he would not have waited in vain" (Portrait, II, 12).

Osmond has always resented the world's neglect of his talents. His accomplishments are small, but he does not think them so: he knows good art when he sees it; he has accumulated certain rare objects, a collection that his shrewdness (not his purse) made possible; he can turn an insincere compliment or pen a sonnet which is "correct and ingenious" (Portrait, II, 11), though passionless. The symbolism implicit in Osmond's patient copying of the antique coin while Isabel announces her momentous decision to go to Ralph at Gardencourt is heavy with significance (Portrait, II, 351 ff.): his attention is focused (as it always is) on money, the subject of his painting; he is merely copying the design of the coin, not creating a fresh one (for a sterile mind cannot create); finally, his absorption is total and excludes his wife.<sup>7</sup>

Osmond is not happy in his marriage to Isabel. She does not defer to him in all things as he had expected. That "sense of success--the most agreeable emotion of the

human heart" (Portrait, II, 11), in which he luxuriated during their courtship does not increase. In fact, he grows to hate her as he realizes her disdain for the narrowness of his ideas. Almost alone in the press of critics the fair-minded Dorothea Krook defends Osmond: "He had certainly not been a mere adventurer who was marrying her for her money."<sup>8</sup> She insists "his main reason for wanting to marry her was, simply, that he liked her; that he found her really charming and graceful . . . that he was in fact, to his capacity, in love with Isabel--genuinely, even ardently, in love."<sup>9</sup> James's great point surely is that Osmond's "capacity" to love is sinfully small; that in marrying so vibrant and free a creature as Isabel, and in imposing his will on her, he did her grievous harm. Nevertheless, Osmond's own disillusionment and recoil are considerable (though very few readers care).

Osmond clings to the empty form that is his marriage, protesting to Isabel that their only solution "is in living decently together, in spite of such drawbacks [as their mutual disillusionment, horror, and suspicion]" (Portrait, II, 357). He says, "I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing" (Portrait, II, 356). Isabel correctly perceives this to be "blasphemous sophistry" (Portrait, II, 356), but realizes that he is sincere, that he is drawing heavily on his code of conduct and trying to explain it to her. Osmond is sincere, but he is wrong. Observing the forms is not



enough. It is what he has done all his life and it has made him what he is: a creature all surface, a man whose strength of will is sufficient to darken the lives of those he holds in thrall, a man without a soul.

It is not surprising that James's dilettante-gigolo figures are not portrayed as admirable men, but neither are his men of action. James's portraits of American businessmen are far from flattering. As he probes their goals and motivations, James shows that the man of action, as represented by the American businessman, is doomed to failure as well. This is largely because of a lack of vision, a narrowness begotten in what James considered the narrow, vulgar world of getting and spending. His earliest novel about a businessman, The American (1877), gives indications of what is to come, for Christopher Newman is somewhat naive and expects money to smooth his path, but Newman is largely an amiable figure nevertheless. On the other hand, Adam Verver of The Golden Bowl is an ambiguous and often sinister character. Finally, Abel Gaw and Horton Vint of The Ivory Tower (James's last words on the American businessman) are unrelieved and unambiguous studies in chicanery. James seems to be saying that such men are dangerous and powerful because of their money, but that their power does not bring happiness. In fact, the most common mistake his American businessmen make is to try to buy happiness, and, most particularly, love.

Christopher Newman is James's first portrait of the American businessman. In him James emphasizes such positive traits as generosity, candour, modesty, perseverance, and a sense of humour. He has as well, it is true, a certain degree of provincialism, and his social naivete is the occasion for much of the humour of the novel. For example, his explanation to the aristocratic Bellegardes of the origins of his wealth is superb: "I've been in everything. . . . At one time I sold leather; at one time I manufactured wash-tubs. . . . I lost money on wash-tubs, but I came out pretty square in leather."<sup>10</sup> As F. O. Matthiessen points out, Newman comes to Europe with a "quiet eagerness for wider experience", in sharp contrast to Adam Verver's grandiose scheme to rifle the Golden Isles.<sup>11</sup>

There is nothing at all sinister about Newman. His money does not give him power over other people. He spends much of the novel under the impression that his money has elevated him socially to something approaching the level of the Bellegardes, but this illusion proves quite false. It is the sight of Newman in all his innocent gaucherie at their grand ball, naked of orders, titles, and aplomb among the cream of French society that determines the Bellegardes to withdraw their agreement to the proposed marriage of Claire and Newman. They cannot see past their inherited prejudices and social distinctions to realize the fine character of the man they scorn.

It is in his attitude to the woman he loves that Newman most distinguishes himself. As a lover Newman is passionate and faithful. Once he has met Claire his only thought is to persuade her and her family to agree to their marriage. The section of the novel during which Newman is courting Claire and luxuriating in his love reveals much of his character. He is not, for example, a sentimental man: "He flattered himself he had not fallen . . . in love. . . . That state, he considered, was too consistent with asininity, and he had never had a finer control of reason or a higher opinion of his judgment" (Amer., p. 239). Nor is there anything of the manipulator in Newman. Claire pleases him exactly as she is, and he seeks only to interpose between her and the troubles of life (Amer., p. 240).

Newman does not try to buy Claire's love, but it is his money which, for a time, buys him acceptance with her haughty family. Their efforts to force this vigorous representative of the democracy to acknowledge just how fortunate he is to be recognized as a suitor for the hand of a Bellegarde are extremely amusing. Newman does not understand, is vaguely aware that he may be being snubbed, but considers it irrelevant. When Urbain de Bellegarde asks if he understands the family's position he replies:

"Oh no, not quite--or perhaps not at all. . . .

But you needn't mind that. I don't care whether

I know--or even, really, care, I think, what you say; for if I did there might be things I shouldn't like, should in fact, quite dislike, and that wouldn't suit me at all, you know. I want . . . to marry your sister and nobody other whomsoever --that's all; to do it as quickly as possible and to do as little else among you besides. I don't care therefore how I do it--as regards the rest of you! And that's all I have to say" (Amer., p. 226).

The scene most characteristic of Newman's dealings with the family is that earlier one in which he triumphs over its flinty-eyed matriarch. He tells her he seeks her daughter in marriage and asks her approval:

"You don't know what you ask. I'm a very proud and meddlesome old person."

"Well, I'm very rich," he returned with a world of desperate intention.

She fixed her eyes on the floor, and he thought it probable she was weighing the reasons in favour of resenting his so calculated directness. But at last looking up, "How rich?" she simply articulated (Amer., p. 197).

Christopher Newman is, ultimately, not rich enough. The Bellegardes cannot countenance the entry into their ancient line of so raw and gauche a man, and so Newman is doomed to despair and disillusionment. The bribe, from the Bellegardes' point of view, is not big enough.<sup>12</sup> What happens, James may have wondered, when the bribe is big enough; when, in fact, it is boundless? Such is the case with Adam Verver, who has not millions but billions.

With his bland assumptions, fabulous wealth, and genial childlike manner, Adam Verver is James's most ambiguous portrait of the American businessman. F. O. Matthiessen detects in him a "lack of congruity between the environment which would have produced a character and the traits which the author has imputed to him."<sup>13</sup> In other words, a man who is a self-made multi-billionaire in the hard world of American business is not normally the kind of person who would claim, with a resigned sigh, in private life, "He had fatally stamped himself--it was his own fault--a man who could be interrupted with impunity" (Bowl, I, 127). Again and again James claims for Adam qualities of trust, childlike good faith, utter sincerity. Yet this is the same man who remembers his years of acquisition thus: "he had believed he liked transcendent calculation and imaginative gambling all for themselves, the creation of 'interests' that were the extinction of other interests, the livid vulgarity, even, of getting in, or getting out, first" (Bowl, I, 144). These

--the ruthless instincts of a sharp dealer--ill accord with the ingenuous traits James attributes to Adam in private life. Verver's business deals were less respectable than those of Christopher Newman and made him infinitely richer.<sup>14</sup> While Newman's only fault was a kind of breezy forthrightness--and it only seemed a fault in the stilted salons of the Paris aristocracy--Adam Verver is a much more complex man; his faults less obvious but more serious.

What Adam Verver does, very simply, is buy a handsome Italian Prince to be his daughter's husband, and a beautiful young American woman to be his wife. Verver's son-in-law muses very early in the novel about what will be expected of him in his new relationship, wondering "Who but a billionaire could say what was fair exchange for a billion?" (Bowl, I, 24). The day has been spent with lawyers and marriage contracts, and here the Prince may be understood to be literally naming his price. So astronomical a figure might well make one uneasy!

The whole question of equating money with loving services rendered is extremely prominent in the novel, as is the pervasive theme of fusing or confusing the aesthetic and moral senses. Adam has this latter fault in abundance, and James comments on it when Adam is considering Charlotte's contributions to the family group before their marriage: "Nothing perhaps might affect us as queerer, had we time to look into it, than this application of the same measure of

value to such different pieces of property as old Persian carpets, say, and new human acquisitions. . . . It was all, at bottom, in him, the aesthetic principle planted where it could burn with a cold still flame" (Bowl, I, 196-97). Adam thus appraises Charlotte, and similarly judges Amerigo:

Representative precious objects . . . had for a number of years so multiplied themselves around him . . . that the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit.

Over and above the signal fact of the impression made on Maggie herself, the aspirant to his daughter's hand showed somehow the great marks and signs, stood before him with the high authenticities, he had learnt to look for in pieces of the first order (Bowl, I, 140).

It is, therefore, as objets d'art that Charlotte and Amerigo are added to the Verver collection.

Adam's acquisitive aesthetic instinct is just one manifestation of his control over the lives of those who live with him. When he wants a fine object or a fine person he simply buys it. Yet he pretends that his vast fortune makes him no different from other men: "His greatest inconvenience,

he would have admitted had he analyzed, was in finding it so taken for granted that as he had money he had force. It pressed upon him hard all around assuredly, this attribution of power. Everyone had need of one's power, whereas one's own need, at the best, would have seemed to be but some trick of not communicating it" (Bowl, I, 130-31). This is self-deprecating nonsense. Adam is extremely powerful because everyone wants his money and must please him in order to get and keep it.

Adam has the power and, moreover, he knows how to wield it. Blair G. Kenney calls him one of James's "Grand Old Men of business, the ironic and complex figures . . . who have made their money and now wish to atone for the making. Their enormous and ruthless effort seems to have drained them of life, so that although . . . they show a generalized kindness, they are also ineffectual in human relationships."<sup>15</sup> Kenney's analysis is inadequate: Adam only seems gentle and ineffectual as long as he is pleased with the course of events and the manner in which others conduct themselves. When Adam is displeased, those same ruthless instincts which won him his fortune reawaken.

Adam's crisis occurs during that last summer the four spend at Fawns, his rented country-house. By some means and at some time not specified to the reader Adam learns of the adulterous relationship between his wife and his daughter's husband. His drama is presented only through Maggie's vision



of her father's trouble (and Maggie is by no means a totally reliable narrator). However, Adam appears to be taking a long time reviewing his alternatives: "the little meditative man in the straw hat kept coming into view with his indescribable air of weaving his spell, weaving it off there by himself. In whatever quarter of the horizon the appearances were scanned he was to be noticed as absorbed in this occupation" (Bowl, II, 284). Once he has decided what to do about his straying wife and the danger she poses to his daughter's happiness, Adam begins to grow more and more sinister. Maggie looks at him and imagines that he says to her (their intuitions being so perfectly attuned to one another):

"Yes, you see--I lead [Charlotte] now by the neck, I lead her to her doom, and she doesn't so much as know what it is, though she has a fear in her heart which, if you had the chances to apply your ear there that I, as a husband, have, you would hear it thump and thump and thump. She thinks it may be, her doom, the awful place over there--awful for her, but she's afraid to ask, don't you see? just as she's afraid of not asking; just as she's afraid of so many other things that she sees multiplied all about her now as perils and portents" (Bowl, II, 287-88).

Such smug infernal glee and cold-blooded appraisal of Charlotte's terror show how little she means to Adam; the sexual reference is appalling (given its context). Adam is a thoroughly disillusioned man, but one cannot pity him because he seems reprehensible in the delight he takes in forcing Charlotte to do his will.<sup>16</sup>

Adam does what is necessary when he takes Charlotte to his museum at American City; he breaks up the eternal quadrangle. He does so only at great cost to himself and Maggie, for they will never meet again, and his relationship with Maggie was the most important thing in his life.<sup>17</sup> American City will be exile for him as well as for Charlotte, but at least he has the luxury of choosing it. The novel's conclusion--the breakup of the quadrangle--is probably the most chilling and comprehensive renunciation scene in all the James canon. Everyone has lost something vital, and what each has salvaged is very qualified, indeed. As for Adam, the power of his money as a bribe or temptation went far to cause the initial trouble, but it was also efficacious in ending it. If, as so many critics claim,<sup>18</sup> it is "love" which restores order at the novel's conclusion, returning to Maggie her husband and to Adam his wife, it is love of Adam's money. Greed for a share in Adam's fabulous fortune is ultimately sufficient to ensure decorous behavior on the part of the straying spouses.

The Golden Bowl reveals Adam Verver to be a man astute in economic matters but hopelessly naive in private life. He prefers to enjoy life in a vague, easy-going, and benevolent manner, but, when driven to the wall, is capable of vicious and skillful retaliation. His total absorption in aesthetic questions and neglect of human ones makes him detached, other-worldly. He is not a convincing or realistic portrait of the American businessman.

In his unfinished novel, The Ivory Tower, James finally and unequivocally admits that money cannot buy happiness or love or even the illusions of having them. Furthermore, the mere fact of possessing an enormous fortune is demonstrably wearing on the human spirit. In The Ivory Tower money is literally a legacy of unhappiness. Two of the American businessmen in the novel, Abel Gaw and Horton Vint, are the logical products of a society in which money is the only god.

While Adam Verver is ambiguous and sinister, there is nothing at all ambiguous about Abel Gaw. He is a mere caricature, and Blair G. Kenney is right in classifying him as "the man who is literally identified with his money to the point that he exists only in relation to it."<sup>19</sup> Gaw is sinister too, but when we meet him he is so shrunken, old, and fragile that he no longer wields the power of his money (like Adam Verver did, for example). But as James's last portrait of a millionaire, Abel Gaw is enlightening. He has become monomaniacal about his money or, rather, about

his financial rivalry with Mr. Betterman, his erstwhile friend and business partner. As the novel opens, Betterman is dying and Gaw is perched like a vulture on Betterman's verandah longing for that death. Gaw passionately wants to know how much money Betterman has bequeathed in his will so that he can more accurately calculate how much Betterman swindled from him before the dissolution of their former association. The novel begins, then, with a hard, dry-eyed look at money; how it can be accumulated and how a love of it can breed corruption in the human spirit.

Gaw's daughter Rosanna believes that his money has destroyed him. She elaborates: "Having to do with it consists, you know, of the things you do for it--which are mostly very awful; and there are all kinds of consequences that they eventually have. You pay by these consequences for what you have done, and my father has been for a long time paying. . . . The effect has been to dry up his life."<sup>20</sup> Gaw certainly is presented as a man whose life has dried up. According to most outward manifestations he seems already dead: he is wizened, grim, yellow, silent. Nor has he any inward life at all. His mental landscape is all monomania about the ancient feud with Betterman relieved by a single patch of colour: Gaw loves, after his inadequate fashion, his huge, ungainly daughter Rosanna:

. . . it had come to him that she represented quantity and mass, that there was a great deal

of her, so that she would have pressed down even a balance appointed to weigh bullion; and as there was nothing he was fonder of than such attestations of value, he had really ended by drawing closer to her . . . and by finding countenance in the breadth of personal and social shadow that she projected (Tower, p. 9).

Gaw is a very old man whose mind turns on money, but The Ivory Tower also provides a glimpse of a younger counterpart in Horton Vint. In his portrait of the latter James planned to show exactly what one did to gain a large fortune, planned to demonstrate the truth of Rosanna's seemingly extravagant and near-hysterical denunciation of money.<sup>21</sup> Horton Vint is, above all, a clear-headed businessman. He knows exactly what he wants and is direct in his pursuit of it. Near the beginning of the novel, for example, Rosanna reflects on how he once unsuccessfully proposed marriage to her, knowing she was her father's only heir (Tower, pp. 55-58). Little daunted, Vint goes on to ingratiate himself with a much more credulous victim, Gray Fielder, the ineffectual heir to Betterman's fortune. Ironies accumulate, for Gray and Horton ("Haughty") Vint had been boyhood friends, had hiked in the Oberland, had on the same day saved one another's lives in two successive climbing accidents.

In the projected novel, Horton Vint gains power of attorney over Gray Fielder's fortune: "Gray falls into the position, under a feeling insurmountably directing him, of signing anything, everything, that Horton brings to him for the purpose--but only what Horton brings" (Tower, p. 312). Horton begins to have money of his own from mysterious sources; it becomes apparent that he is swindling his old friend. Finally, in what James literally calls "The Big Haul" (Tower, p. 343), Vint lies to Gray, claiming to have lost Gray's fortune through investments in which he, Vint, was swindled by unscrupulous (unspecified) financial advisors. Gray tacitly permits this crime, is relieved to be rid of the money, refuses to question Vint, and even lies to others to save Vint's good name.

Thus Betterman's legacy has brought bitter knowledge to Gray Fielder, and has also been the occasion of Vint's showing of what despicable deceits he is capable. Betterman had gained the fortune initially by swindling Gaw, and that crime is duplicated when the tainted money becomes Gray's inheritance. James clearly despises Vint and considers him a man of no honour. Love of money has made him what he is, dried up every virtue he may once have had. He is thus no different morally from the unregenerate Abel Gaw. Ruthless instincts begotten in the hard business world have overwhelmed all more generous impulses he may once have possessed.

James's businessmen thus illustrate James's deepening distrust of big business and new money over the length of his career. Breezy, likeable Christopher Newman is succeeded by men like Adam Verver, whose money represents real and sometimes sinister power. Ultimately in The Ivory Tower (with its added emphasis of all last things), James shows that the American businessman is utterly contemptible, monomaniacal in his pursuit of the Yankee dollar, climbing roughshod over anyone who gets in his way. Because of his unassuageable greed he is not happy, and he brings misery to others as well.

A last group of men portrayed in the fiction are quite as unhappy as the businessmen and opportunists but a significant exception to the generalization that James's men are less interesting, less worthy, less high-principled than his women. Such an exception is Lambert Strether of The Ambassadors. He is the most remarkable of a group comprising such male characters as Ralph Touchett and Rowland Mallett, and who have in common traits of benevolence and an interest in the lives of others so intense that it virtually amounts to living vicariously through them. These characters are diametrically opposed to the opportunist figures like Osmond and Prince Amerigo, for they actually renounce the glittering opportunities which seem to lie almost within their grasp. Strether is the most impressive of these figures and will

serve to illustrate the particular kind of unhappiness inherent in the lives of such men in James's fiction.

Strether begins his adventure in Paris full of the vaguely uneasy awareness that he has never before so relaxed, enjoyed life, taken in such delightful impressions, met such dazzling and interesting people. Such experiences simply did not befall him in culturally disadvantaged Woollett, Massachusetts, where he has heretofore spent his uneventful life as the editor of a modest literary review and where, lately, he has begun a discreet courtship of the mature, austere widow who virtually owns the town. The idea that he has wasted his life, that the vision has come but all too late for him at fifty-five grows in him and reaches its full expression in his impassioned speech to Little Bilham at Gloriani's garden party.<sup>22</sup>

Strether seeks to ease his personal disappointment by immersing himself sympathetically in the concerns of others --most especially in those of Chad. He has a fixed idea from which he draws immense comfort: that is in the "virtuous attachment" of Chad and Madame de Vionnet. Strether sees great improvements in Chad and believes they are all attributable to the influence of this cultured, aristocratic Parisienne. Chad's friends in Paris tacitly join in a charitable conspiracy to reinforce Strether's fond illusion that the relationship is platonic. For a time Strether's fostered ignorance is the basis of his enthusiastic response to Paris.



In actual fact he is falling in love with Paris and with Marie de Vionnet.

The reader pities Strether for the narrowness of his past experience, and rejoices in his modest flights of imagination in France. This is why the scene at the river is so powerful, and why the shock and its aftermath for Strether are so moving. Strether has been having a holiday, roaming quite alone in the French countryside and rejoicing in the sensation that he is living inside the frame of a sun-dappled picture by Lambinet that he had once longed to buy years ago in Boston (Ambass., II, 245 ff.). He had been unable to buy the picture for it was too expensive, but he never forgot it. And now everything on this day of days contributes to his innocent pleasure, from the absurd feeling he has on alighting from the train absolutely at whim ("the train pulled up just at the right spot, and he found himself getting out as securely as if to keep an appointment" [Ambass., II, 246])), to his delight in the compositional qualities of the lights, shadows, and colours around him.

Still in this exalted, aesthetic state of mind he turns his attention to the river:

What he saw was exactly the right thing--a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures,

or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure (Ambass., II, 256).

These are the two people with whom fate has decreed that Strether has an appointment, for they are the very two who can destroy his illusions and his happiness merely by drifting into view.

The couple on the river are Chad and Marie de Vionnet. Their circumstances make it apparent, even to innocent Strether, that they intend to spend several days in the country together. All three chatter to cover their confusion and Strether maintains his composure until much later that night when he is at last alone in his hotel room. Then he finally faces all the implications of what he has seen and faces, most of all, his own isolation, musing "There was the element of the awkward all round, but Chad and Madame de Vionnet had at least the comfort that they could talk it over together. With whom could he talk of such things?" (Ambass., II, 266).

Strether embraces this sense of isolation as if it were no more than he deserves. He feels he has been a fool. ("He was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris" [Ambass., II, 271].) His gnawing American moral sense begins to work in

him and he realizes he must give up Paris, give up all his exciting friends, return to dull Woollett and take up his life there. He embarks on a series of painful leave-takings. Madame de Vionnet seems to him pitiful, fragile, doomed. Chad has a new swagger and seems sure to desert Marie for advertising ventures in Woollett. In his last interview with Maria Gostrey Strether makes the clearest statement of his renunciation. He says he is leaving Paris and leaving her "To be right. . . . That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (Ambass., II, 236).

The cosy life Strether might have lived with Maria Gostrey and her Delft was not really the temptation it might seem. Maria was comfortable and endlessly understanding, but only Marie de Vionnet enchanted Strether. He could not compromise his ideal by marrying a lesser woman. On the other hand, Marie was now for him a flawed ideal, and Strether could not steadily contemplate either that fact nor Marie's impending betrayal by Chad and her disintegration sure to follow upon it. Gallant and humane to the last, Strether does what he can--reassuring Marie of his regard for her ("You're wonderful!" [Ambass., II, 388]), trying to influence Chad to stay with her, and breaking gently with Maria Gostrey. The real temptation for Strether is not to marry Maria Gostrey, but to shut his eyes to the cold moral implications of Chad's situation and to stay on in Paris eating lotoses forever.

Unlike such grasping egocentric characters as Osmond and Prince Amerigo, Strether charms by the utter modesty of his requirements from life. He asks so little and is pleased so easily. His delight in his impressions of Paris is intense, childlike and bittersweet with its constant refrain of "Too late!" Nor, for a time, does it really seem to be too late for Strether; in fact Paris seems to function for him as a fountain of youth. He remarks to Maria Gostrey:

"I don't get drunk; I don't pursue the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets. But nevertheless I'm making up late for what I didn't have early. I cultivate my little benefit in my own way . . . it's my surrender, it's my tribute, to youth. One puts that in where one can--it has to come in somewhere, if only out of the lives, the conditions, the feelings of other persons" (Ambass., II, 50-51).

Since his happiness is based on his illusions about Chad and Madame de Vionnet, his enlightenment about them destroys it utterly. His knowledge makes it impossible to stay on in Paris and his renunciation is its natural consequence.

Strether's disillusionment makes a great difference in his life since it compels him to return to the sterility of life at Woollett. The unhappiness experienced by James's

other male characters is not as overwhelming. Also, because few of the other male characters are as engaging as Strether, the reader does not sympathize with their sorrows to the degree possible with Strether and the female characters. The American businessmen tend to be grasping, narrow-minded and obsessed with their money and power. Christopher Newman is the only example of such a man who is admirable. All the others have untenable standards of values which make them unsympathetic characters: Adam Verver confuses moral and aesthetic values; Abel Gaw is utterly one dimensional in his monomaniacal regard for money; and Horton Vint does not hesitate to perpetrate enormous frauds against an old friend to gain his fortune. Thus the various disappointments of such men--for example, their sorrow at the discovery that money cannot buy love--evoke little compassion from the reader. Similarly such opportunists as Prince Amerigo and Gilbert Osmond cause more pain than they themselves suffer.

James's chief observation about the lives of such men seems to be that they are empty and meaningless. They are doomed to their various disappointments because of inner promptings, lack of vision, and unrealistic goals. Their lives are sterile in ways that the women's lives are not. James's women are typically intense, effusive, vibrant, and sympathetic while his men are indolent and comparatively taciturn. Strether is likeable because he has those qualities more commonly associated with James's women: a ready

sympathy, a lively imagination, and the ability to throw himself whole-heartedly into experience. It might justifiably be said that Strether's is a feminine consciousness.

However, the possession of a feminine consciousness is no guarantee of happiness and, indeed, tends to produce unhappiness. Such a person wrings more sensation and feeling out of daily experience than does an ordinary person. He feels things more keenly and suffers more intensely. Such is the case with Strether and with the female characters. But whichever type of consciousness James's characters possess, whether austere and reserved or open and impressionable, most of them fail to make anything of lasting value from their experiences; they can only suffer and submit. Only James's artist figures succeed in life because only they transmute everyday experience--even painful experience --into triumphant art.

Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup>Dorothea Krook, pp. 296-99, calls this incontrovertible evidence that the relationship with Charlotte was "lust" not love.

<sup>2</sup>Merle's extenuating circumstances--her concern for Pansy is not relevant here. The point is that Merle knew Isabel would be unhappy with Osmond but did not care. Fanny thought only of her protégés' happiness.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, pp. 86-88; J. A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 51-53; and Lyall H. Powers, "The Portrait of a Lady," NCF, 14 (1959), rpt. in Henry James's Major Novels: Essays in Criticism, ed. Lyall H. Powers (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 76-78.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Thomas Samuels, The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 109-12.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. also Ross Labrie, "Morality of Consciousness," p. 417.

<sup>6</sup>Manfred Mackenzie, "Ironical Melodrama in The Portrait of a Lady," MFS, 12 (Spring, 1966), rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Portrait of a Lady": A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 84-90.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Dorothy Van Ghent, "From The English Novel: Form and Function" (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1953), rpt. in Perspectives on "The Portrait of a Lady", ed. William T. Stafford (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1967), p. 128.

<sup>8</sup>Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>10</sup>Henry James, The American (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), pp. 123-24. All further references are to this edition of the novel and will be included in the text.

<sup>11</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 88.

<sup>12</sup>James ultimately came to think it an "affront to verisimilitude" that he did not portray such avaricious creatures as the Bellegardes as enthusiastically seizing any rich, stray American. Cf. "Preface to The American," p. xix-xxi.

<sup>13</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, The Major Phase, p. 90.



<sup>14</sup>Jan W. Dietrichson, "Part II: The Image of Money in the Works of Henry James," in The Image of Money in the American Novel of the Gilded Age (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, and New York: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 87-88.

<sup>15</sup>Blair G. Kenney, "Henry James's Businessmen," Colby Library Quart., 9 (March, 1970), 49.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Caroline Gordon, p. 44. Her "archetypal" reading of the silken halter scene, with Charlotte as "harpy" and Adam as St. George is not tenable. "Mr. Verver, Our National Hero," Sewanee Review, 63 (1955).

<sup>17</sup>Samuels, The Ambiguity of Henry James, pp. 220-22, does not really make a case for Adam's being truly interested in Charlotte.

<sup>18</sup>Caroline Gordon, Dorothea Krook, Munro Beattie, etc.

<sup>19</sup>Blair G. Kenney, "Henry James's Businessmen," p. 49.

<sup>20</sup>Henry James, The Ivory Tower (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), p. 141. All further references are to this edition of the novel and will be included in the text.

<sup>21</sup>The novel was unfinished, but James's notes for it survive and are published, along with the incomplete novel, in the New York Edition, Vol. 25.

<sup>22</sup>Henry James, The Ambassadors, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), I, 217-18. All further references are to this edition of the novel and will be included in the text.

### Chapter Three

#### The Artist in the Fiction

James was convinced that the artist's response to life was the most valid one, in the sense that it transforms ordinary and even painful experience into serene, eternal art. This is true fulfilment and happiness, for it is the only sort that lasts. James's women seek happiness in marriage, but find it a trap; they seek to fulfil themselves as wives but discover that they must actually sacrifice their individuality. James's men are generally more materialistic. They seek the luxury and ease that the possession of a great fortune makes possible. Each learns that money cannot buy everything--neither happiness nor love, for example. As James sees it, true happiness can only be achieved through the creation of art. Only the artist can be truly happy, and in order to attain to that elusive state, he must do the very best work of which he is capable.

But the ideal conditions under which the artist produces his best work are not easily secured. The life of the artist is fraught with perils. Ordinary life is a mindless flux, and, if the artist is to impose order on this chaos, he must isolate himself from ordinary experience. He must commit himself wholly to art as an ideal. Yet the artist must live in the real world, and thus the conflict arises. James's artists are continually torn by the demands made

upon them by their art and those made by life; some perish in the struggle.

The demands made on the artist by what one can loosely term "Life" are of several kinds, and always presented as persuasive appeals to him to steal some time from his easel or his desk. The most common distractions experienced by James's artists, the forces which lure them away from the studio or desk, or which tempt them to produce less than their very best work are those which bedevil non-artists as well. They fall in love and are wracked by doubts as to whether the beloved returns their affection; they marry and have wives and children for whom provision must be made; they must make money; and they must accept or evade the demands of their public, must contend with those who want to meet them, who want to study greatness at first hand for serious or frivolous reasons. All of these are voracious in their demands upon the artist's time and energy; they can overwhelm the consciousness and sap the creativity of all but the most wary artist. The artist must make choices and sacrifices, for some of these things have great intrinsic worth; some little or none. Outright rejection of the values of love and marriage, for example, may well diminish the artist as a person, but to embrace them without thought of his work may be disastrous. These are the problems which interest James.

Roderick Hudson was James's first novel length treatment of the problems of the artist as he is torn by the demands of life and art. Roderick's problems are twofold. First of all, he has the private demon of a recurrent fear that his talent will run dry. This fear is like a grim premonition and time proves it justified.<sup>1</sup> However, the theme of the private struggle of the artist with his muse is outside the scope of this study, and is taken up again by James in such diverse works as "The Madonna of the Future" and "The Real Thing."

Roderick's other and more serious problem is a lack of self-discipline. Thus even while his period of artistic fertility lasts, he cannot drive himself to work as he should. He is consumed by a passion for the complex and beautiful Christina Light. She is a multifaceted woman whose nature is so complicated that it constitutes something of an artistic flaw in a novel that is otherwise a stock romance with stereotyped characters (The Byronic Hero, The Sensible Friend, The Plain But Virtuous Truelove, etc.). The novel would have been more coherent had James been content to portray Christina as either a cynical, professional heartbreaker or a coarse and worthless creature Roderick idealized and worshipped to his damnation. As it is, Christina seems legendary, and well worth what she costs Roderick.<sup>2</sup>

Roderick loves Christina Light and follows her everywhere. She is like an obsession, and the thought of her drives all others from his head. Leon Edel observes:

Roderick allows his terrible passion to destroy his art. One of James's other heroes had wondered "whether it is better to cultivate an art than to cultivate a passion." The possibility of both is excluded from the Jamesian world.

Roderick Hudson is the story of an artist who cultivated a passion.<sup>3</sup>

Implicit in such statements is the idea that Roderick originally had a choice, that he could have chosen not to fall in love with Christina. However, Roderick's temperament is such that rational inner debate on such a question would be utterly foreign to him. In other words, it is not fair to blame him, since Roderick is a person of the sort who always acts according to instinct, not reason.

Roderick Hudson is James's portrait of what is conventionally considered to be the artistic temperament. Roderick is handsome, with abundant curly hair and a naturally flamboyant style of dress.<sup>4</sup> He is given to picturesque attitudes and gestures. Roderick is extravagant in all things: his happiness is always elation; his disappointment is always the blackest despair. For example, the news that Christina has broken her engagement to the prince induces Roderick to

lounge histrionically on a couch in his darkened bedroom, smelling a large white rose while other roses and violets carpet the floor. Rowland's observation about his friend in this state is that he looks like "a Buddhist in an intellectual swoon" (Rod., p. 394).

Roderick tries to be kind to dull people, but the effort clearly goes against the grain. His reaction to the arrival of his mother and his fiancée in Europe is characteristic of this strain in him. He is frank about it to Rowland:

"They bore me to death . . . I'm not complaining of them; I'm simply stating a fact. I'm very sorry for them . . . Another week of it and I shall begin to hate them. I shall want to poison them . . . they mean no more to me than a piano means to a pig" (Rod., pp. 355-56).

The people around Roderick seem to tolerate his arrogant and fanciful behavior for several reasons. He adds theatre to their lives and is, in certain moods, most diverting. Also, everyone believes in his genius and suffers a certain amount of eccentric behavior because of it. As for Mrs. Hudson and Mary Garland, they love him and thus forgive all his trespasses.

In his attitude toward his art Roderick most often resembles Pegasus hitched to the plow. As long as his inspirations

last he works exuberantly, but when they flag he gives up. The cynical but successful Gloriani tries to warn him against such passionate excesses, but to no avail (Rod., p. 124). Since Roderick's creative ability is so inextricably bound up with his emotional state, it is not surprising that his passion for Christina Light should affect it so radically. It is entirely reasonable that his talent (which has been waning and flaring so erratically throughout the novel) should be extinguished forever at the news that Christina has married another.

Roderick Hudson never achieves what James considered to be that transcendent happiness available only to the artist --the sense of having done the best creative work of which he is capable. The demands of life, presented to him as love for Christina Light, are too strong. He cannot withstand them and thus loses his precious gift. But Roderick's genius was always so unstable that it seems probable that he would have surrendered to some other siren had he not met Christina. Throughout the novel Roderick's spectacular but fitful ability is contrasted to that of Gloriani and Sam Singleton. The former is cynically content to work without inspiration; the latter is almost irritatingly industrious, modest, and single-minded in his worshipful attitude toward his craft. Thus though Roderick's talent was great his ability to nourish and safeguard it was slight, and so he was destined to fail.



James was always interested in examining the problems of the artist who is drawn to life (and the myriad demands of love, marriage, publicity, money-making) but who yet wishes to do justice to his art. Roderick Hudson was destroyed by his inability to withstand the forces of life. He was swept into the fatal whirlpool of hopeless love. Certain other of James's artist figures meet the challenge of life in the ordinary world more successfully. In particular James considers this classic dilemma in two tales about artists who are writers--"The Lesson of the Master" and "The Death of the Lion."

In these two tales "the artist's problem curiously mingles itself with a personal and private dilemma having to do . . . with marriage. A principle of plot-making so persistent almost invites us to seek out a significance."<sup>5</sup> The significance is that James's artists are always faced with an "either - or" situation; either they can choose to lead a full, rich life with marriage, children and financial obligations, or they can give all their attention and devotion to their art.

The choice is always one of absolutes, and is formulated by Henry St. George in "The Lesson of the Master" for the benefit of Paul Overt, the young writer in whom St. George sees so much promise. The talk has been of the effect that marriage and domestication can have on the artist. St. George says:

"I've made a great deal of money: my wife has known how to take care of it, to use it without wasting it, to put a good bit of it by, to make it fructify. I've got a loaf on the shelf, I've got everything in fact but the great thing."

"The great thing?" Paul kept echoing.

"The sense of having done the best--the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature has hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played. He either does that or he doesn't--and if he doesn't he isn't worth speaking of."<sup>6</sup>

"The great thing" is of paramount importance to James, and this account of it given by St. George can be considered James's own opinion as well. There are ironic implications in the plot of "The Lesson of the Master", especially in St. George's marrying the girl Overt loves while Overt is off devoting himself to his art in accordance with St. George's earnest advice. Yet the irony does not qualify this idealistic account of the artist's purpose in life.

Paul Overt protests against St. George's bitter self-criticism, declaring:

"You've had the full rich masculine human general life, with all the responsibilities and duties and burdens and sorrows and joys--all the domestic and social initiations and complications" ("The Lesson of the Master", p. 72).

But St. George is determined to make his point:

"They've given me subjects without number, if that's what you mean; but they've taken away at the same time the power to use them. I've touched a thousand things, but which one of them have I turned to gold? The artist has only to do with that--he knows nothing of any baser metal. I've led the life of the world, with my wife and my progeny; the clumsy, conventional expensive materialised vulgarised brutalised life of London. We've got everything handsome, even a carriage --we're perfect Philistines and prosperous hospitable eminent people. But, my dear fellow, don't try to stultify yourself and pretend you don't know what we haven't got. It's bigger than all the rest. Between artists--come!" the Master wound up. "You know as well as you sit there that you'd put a pistol ball into your brain if you had written my books!" ("The Lesson of the Master", p. 72).

St. George has made his choice between art and the world, and he knows how far he has fallen since his first three good novels. He has deliberately written for the popular market, wholly prostituted his art to make money and provide for his family. He has enjoyed his worldly life, but in no way considers that it compensates him for not having achieved "the great thing". He is very emphatic in telling Overt that marriage and art do not mix. He stubbornly maintains that the artist's only business is with the perfection of his art. "He has nothing to do with the relative--he has only to do with the absolute; and a dear little family may represent a dozen relatives"<sup>7</sup> ("The Lesson of the Master", p. 76).

James feels that the true artist must choose to be alone. This choice is largely a matter of temperament. The predisposition to make renunciations is ultimately something the artist either possesses or lacks. In the interests of variety and verisimilitude some of James's artists incline more toward the one choice or the other from the beginning, some have already made their choices when the story begins, and for some the difficulty of making the choice constitutes the interest of their story. Henry St. George chose life and its many demands (perhaps unwittingly<sup>8</sup>) when he contracted his first marriage, and then deliberately chooses life again when he marries Marian Fancourt. Paul Overt has his choice made for him by the more warm-blooded St.

George, but surely he should know that such a ripe prize as Marian will not keep indefinitely without any assurances from him. Overt is too passive to deserve such a woman, and there is some justice in Munro Beattie's abuse of him: "The lesson of the master is that for an artist there can be no lesson where the heart and the sensibilities are concerned. If you haven't the gumption to love a woman, don't try to make an artistic principle out of your deficiency."<sup>9</sup>

Neil Paraday is an interesting case of the artist whose choice was made ten years previous to the telling of his tale. When the young, worshipful narrator meets him, Paraday is fifty years old and convalescing after a long illness. The narrator reports that Paraday, "once told me that he had had no personal life to speak of since his fortieth year, but had had more than was good for him before."<sup>10</sup> He elaborates further, "He allowed half his income to his wife, from whom he had succeeded in separating without redundancy of legend. I had a general faith in his having behaved well, and I had once, in London, taken Mrs. Paraday down to dinner" ("The Death of the Lion", p. 109). In other words, Paraday has divested himself of his wife and his obligations to her as honourably as possible in order to devote all his energies to his work. Presumably the lady was more trouble than she was worth to him.

As the tale begins Paraday is considering the scheme of a new book which he obligingly reads to the narrator. The

latter exclaims in rapture, "My dear master, how, after all, are you going to do it? It's infinitely noble, but what time it will take, what patience and independence, what assured, what perfect conditions! Oh for a lone isle in a tepid sea!" ("The Death of the Lion", p. 107). This is what the narrator fights to keep for his idol--a serene space in the midst of a tumultuous world. He struggles against hopeless odds for Paraday's most recent book proves a popular success. It is a success only in the sense that it catapults its author into instant celebrity. "His book sold but moderately, . . . but he circulated in person to a measure that the libraries might well have envied" ("The Death of the Lion", p. 122). Mr. Paraday has very little stamina, and the narrator watches with horror his tragic, headlong disintegration in the glare of publicity and at the hands of stupid, demanding people.

His sudden lionization is Paraday's second confrontation with the absolute choice. To steadfastly ignore the clamour of public interest in his person would require more energy than Paraday possesses. Even the narrator, Paraday's protector, is ineffectual against it, though himself a robust man. Despite occasional premonitions of disaster, Paraday succeeds in rationalizing his new situation. He begins his dance of death fortified with "portable sophistries about the nature of the artist's task. Observation too was a kind of work and experience a kind of success;

London dinners were all material and London ladies were fruitful toil . . . the fatigue had the merit of being of a new sort, while the phantasmagoric town was probably after all less of a battle field than the haunted study" ("The Death of the Lion", p. 122).

Paraday sounds very like James himself here, for whom it was certainly true that "London dinners were all material and London ladies were fruitful toil." Ever on the alert for "germs" for his stories, James did what Paraday only deluded himself into believing he could do; James actually turned his social experiences into novels and tales. James was able to succeed where Paraday failed because he had a great deal of self-discipline. Like Paraday, James was very popular. "During the winter of 1878-1879 James, by his own account, dined out 107 times."<sup>11</sup> Unlike Paraday, James was perfectly capable of declining an invitation, as when he wrote to S. Colvin on December twenty-sixth, 1895:

The great dining-out business has lately reached a point with me at which I have felt that something must be done--that I must in other words pull up. I have been doing it nightly since Nov. 1st., and it has left me with such arrears of occupation on my hands that it is imperative for me to try and use a few evenings to catch up.<sup>12</sup>

Paraday was too weak to remove himself from the maelstrom of

the London season, and thus his work perished. That Paraday himself literally perished is something in the nature of a grim reminder that James wrote to himself.

James believes that the true artist will overcome the temptations that bedevil him; but to the artist who does waver, who does sell his birthright, James is unfailingly understanding. He knows the path of pure art is as painful to travel as the knife-infested pathway to truth discovered by Stephen Crane's wayfarer, and he commiserates with those who say, "Doubtless there are other roads". Extremely attractive compensations are showered on those who choose to embrace life. In responding to life they often seem to be making the only natural choice. Who would choose to isolate himself and "hammer out head-achy fancies with a bent back on an ink-stained table" ("The Lesson of the Master", p. 19), when he could have instead the vibrance of Marian Fancourt, the girl who expressed herself in that extraordinary and most unJamesian parlour, the room where Paul Overt fell in love?:

She was in a large bright friendly occupied room, which was painted red all over, draped with . . . quaint cheap florid stuffs . . . and bedecked with pottery of vivid hues, ranged on casual shelves, and with many water-colour drawings from the hand . . . of the young lady herself,



commemorating . . . the sunsets, the mountains, the temples and palaces of India ("The Lesson of the Master", p. 50).

The artists who choose life renounce one happiness: they do not have clear consciences. They do not bask in the knowledge of having done the very best work possible; they have not done, in St. George's phrase, "the great thing." Paul Overt has this peace but at the cost of any happiness in his private life. Neil Paraday's possession of it is threatened by his inability to safeguard his privacy, and thus the conditions under which he can continue to produce his best work are eventually destroyed. To James himself the knowledge of having done "the great thing" must have been very sweet indeed. To him his New York Edition was the crown of his life's achievements.

James's most extended and ambitious fictional consideration of the problems of the artist and the conflicting demands made on him by life and by his art is set forth in The Tragic Muse. Miriam Rooth and Nick Dormer are the two artists around whom James sought to create a novel. In the preface he explains:

I . . . must in fact practically have always had the happy thought of some dramatic picture of the "artist-life" and of the difficult terms on which it is at the best secured and enjoyed, the

general question of its having to be not altogether easily paid for. To "do something about art"-- art, that is, as a human complication and a social stumbling-block--must have been for me early a good deal of a nursed intention, the conflict between art and "the world" striking me thus betimes as one of the half-dozen great primary motives (Muse, I, v.).

In the character of Nick Dormer James portrays the conflict between art and "the world" in all its intensity. In Nick's case the world is the great world of politics and public acclaim. As the novel begins he is very divided as to his long term goals in life. On the one hand he is about to become a candidate for a seat in the British parliament, and he shows all the signs of being a brilliant successor to his late father, a gentleman knighted for his public service. Similarly he is in love with the wilful Julia Dallow, a beautiful young widow of great means, who is fiercely ambitious in her political aspirations for him. Yet Nick is also very drawn to the idea of being a career artist, and if he had only himself to consider that is what he would do with his life. However he is the sole support not only of his two unmarried sisters but of his widowed mother whose expectations of Nick are exactly like those of Julia Dallow.

A career as a member of parliament means not only respect and acclaim to Nick, but also involves a great deal of money. Burdened with his family's expectations of him, and with their livelihood to gain, Nick doubts that he can afford to forego the lavish salary of a member of parliament on the chance that the fickle public will buy the canvases of an unknown painter like himself. There are also two more fortunes beckoning Nick to assume the yoke of public office. Mr. Carteret, a lifelong friend and admirer of Nick's late father, reveals his intention of settling a handsome fortune on Nick when he demonstrates his intention of following in his father's footsteps. Finally, there is Julia--lovely Julia--to whom Nick has but to say the word and he can have her, her estates, her great fortune, and extravagant security for the rest of his life. Was ever the path of duty more clearly and attractively laid out before a man? And for a time Nick strives to content himself with it, campaigning for and winning the seat, making a thoroughly respectable maiden speech, pleasing his starched Victorian mother.

But eventually Nick decides he can no longer continue the charade. He gives up the seat, takes a studio, makes a clean break with the world of politics. Such a startling change causes Julia to break their engagement, Lady Agnes (Nick's mother) to virtually stop loving him, and Mr. Carteret to cut him off without a cent. From such a wild

bonfire of hopes one expects at least a phoenix. But Nick disappoints.

When Nick talks to Biddy about her artistic aspirations as they stroll through the statuary in the garden of the Palais de l'Industrie, he is really thinking out loud, engaging in self-mockery at his inner struggle:

"Don't you think I've any capacity for ideas?"  
the girl continued ruefully.

"Lots of them, no doubt. But the capacity  
for applying them, for putting them into practice,  
how much of that have you?" (Muse, I, 17).

He tells her that his canvases have been "futile . . . ill-starred endeavours", and when she asks if he then intends to "give up" his "work" his reply sounds weary, "It has never been my work all that business, Biddy. If it had it would be different. I should stick to it" (Muse, I, 20). He has already lamented his mother's attitude: "She has inherited the fine old superstition that art's pardonable only so long as it's bad--so long as it's done at odd hours, for a little distraction, like a game of tennis or of whist. The only thing that can justify it, the effort to carry it as far as one can (which you can't do without time and singleness of purpose) she regards as just the dangerous, the criminal element" (Muse, I, 18). Thus art, to Nick is a formidable undertaking, extremely demanding, requiring all of the

artist's energies "to carry it as far as one can." His conception of the discipline required is strenuous indeed. Thus when Nick finally does make his decision and sacrifices all to art, one expects to find him engaged in marathon bouts at his easel. Since art could then properly be styled his "work" one expects to see him "stick to it" as he had vowed he would. "He had not thrown up the House of Commons to amuse himself; he had thrown it up to work, to sit quietly down and bend over his task" (Muse, II, 186).

Nick is very articulate about his art, but his subject is art in general (not his own in particular). It is in failing to rein in his enthusiasms that, in part, he dissipates his energies. He intellectualizes about art and disseminates his aesthetic opinions to Gabriel Nash, to Biddy, and to Sherringham. His chief premise seems to be that all forms of art (painting, theatre, sculpture, literature) are one. "It's the same great many-headed effort, and any ground that's gained by an individual, any spark that's struck in any province, is of use and of suggestion to all the others. We're all in the same boat" (Muse, I, 14).

Thus Nick's attention paid to others in the same boat should be fruitful and productive. His friendship with Miriam should give him ideas he can use, just as her observations in the world at large give her ideas (Muse, II, 132-33). But such is not the case. The time Nick spends with her and with others, even though they often talk of art, does not

fire him to greater efforts at his easel. His social but not his aesthetic sensibilities are refreshed. In fact, the time Nick spends away from his studio (and it is a great deal of time) is wasted. It is time stolen from his "pegging away" in the studio, and it does not improve the quality of his work when he returns.

The novel ends less than two years after Nick has "thrown up" the House of Commons. In all that time he has accomplished very little. The second portrait of Miriam is never completed to our knowledge. Miriam abandons the sittings, citing "caprice" as her reason but actually realizing that Nick will never love her no matter how often they meet. Nick says he'll finish the portrait and send it to Peter (but if he ever did complete it it is unlikely that Peter's wife would welcome that addition to their private collection). The portrait of Gabriel Nash is not only unfinished (Nash, too, abandoned sitting), but seems to be gradually fading from the canvas. It seems appropriate that Nash, the novel's verbose (but often amusing) token aesthete should thus fade away.

James is fairly cryptic in his comments about Nick's portrait of Julia: "everyone will remember in how recent an exhibition general attention was attracted, as the newspapers said in describing the private view, to the noble portrait of a lady" (Muse, II, 440). James's opinion of newspapers was never very high, but here one feels there is a

real restraint in the newspaper's use of the phrase "general attention was attracted." "Noble" as an adjective of praise is also very moderate and almost dry. The "private view" sounds very chic (and Julia would never have agreed to have her portrait exposed to the vulgar eye in any case), but this ultra correct *début* may well be an indication that Nick's career will continue in that decorous and rather arid atmosphere, that he will become a mere society painter--a Reynolds on a diminished scale, never a Michelangelo.

James leaves the novel's conclusion ambiguous with regard to Nick: "I may finally say that his friend Nash's predictions about his reunion with Mrs. Dallow have not up to this time been justified" (*Muse*, II, 441).<sup>13</sup> However, the lack of direction in Nick's professional history does not suggest he will go on to do great things. It is altogether possible that Gabriel Nash's cynical prophecy about Nick has begun to come true, at least in its essentials:

"Mrs. Dallow will send for you . . . To paint her portrait; she'll recapture you on that basis.

She'll get you down to one of the country-houses, and it will all go off charmingly--with sketching in the morning, on days you can't hunt, and anything you like in the afternoon, and fifteen courses in the evening. . . . Your differences with the beautiful lady will be patched up and you'll each

come round a little and meet the other halfway.  
The beautiful lady will swallow your profession if  
you'll swallow hers. She'll put up with the palette  
if you'll put up with the country-house. It will  
be a very unusual one in which you won't find a  
good north room where you can paint. You'll go  
about with her and do all her friends . . . and  
you'll eat your cake and have it" (Muse, II, 406).

As Ross Labrie points out,<sup>14</sup> though Nash presents this vision  
as one of compromise, he really thinks it base surrender on  
Nick's part. It is significant, too, that when Julia's por-  
trait is exhibited, "Nash had been at many a private view,  
but he was not at this one" (Muse, II, 440). Gabriel Nash  
thinks he has lost Nick, that Nick has gone over to the  
enemy and abandoned all art worthy of the name.

Nick is thus reduced to something resembling a gigolo  
by his surrender to Julia Dallow's charms. The abundance of  
her fortune and her perfect willingness to provide handsomely  
for his mother and sisters appear as something of a bribe.  
Julia, Nick's mother and two sisters function as a petticoat  
conspiracy throughout the novel, all ardently desiring Nick's  
marriage to Julia. Furthermore, even after Nick and Julia  
break their engagement, she continues to insist that his  
family live in one of her houses, thus making certain that he  
is obligated to her. Julia is astute, stubborn, ambitious,



and managerial. It is her beauty, however, that ultimately draws Nick back to her. It is of that high, proud, cold sort which Nick finds irresistible.

There is a fated quality to their romance--though they are opposites, though she hates his art. From the beginning he had doubts that were acute anxieties: "What he suspected in Julia was that her mind was less pleasing than her person; an ugly, a really blighting idea, which as yet he had but half accepted. It was a case in which she was entitled to the benefit of every doubt and oughtn't to be judged without a complete trial. Nick meanwhile was afraid of the trial . . . because he was afraid of the sentence, afraid of anything that might work to lessen the charm it was actually in the power of her beauty to shed" (Muse, I, 90).

Nick's love for this strong-willed woman who regards his art with such antipathy is destructive to his gift, as are his mother's attitude, the grim necessity of making a living for his family, and some of his own feelings of guilt about disappointing so many people and failing to live up to his father's example. But chiefly Nick's failure is one of will. Having "thrown up the House of Commons" he did not then "sit quietly down and bend over his task" as he had vowed he would do. His irresolution costs him his talent. Having chosen art over the demands of life and the world he was unable to cleave to it.

The lesson of The Tragic Muse is that art demands the artist's complete devotion. Nick Dormer is unable to make this vital commitment and his talent deteriorates. However the novel relates the story of another artist, one whose commitment is perfect and formidable. Miriam Rooth, the flamboyant actress, is James's portrait of the artist triumphant. That perfect happiness and sense of peace which comes only to the artist who has done full justice to his talent is hers to enjoy because she earns it.

Miriam has a very high estimation of her own powers from which she never wavers; an attitude which as the novel begins seems fantastic, disproportionate, and grotesquely egotistical but which is more and more justified by her dramatic successes as the novel progresses until, when we last see Miriam on her opening night as Juliet, her performance moves the critics to use words like "'revelation,' 'incarnation,' 'acclamation,' 'demonstration,' 'ovation'-- to name only a few, and all accompanied by the word 'extraordinary'" (Muse, II, 430). She is buoyed up by self-confidence throughout the novel; unlike Nick she never doubts her ability. This vision of what she can do, of what art can accomplish Miriam holds steadily before her. It is the most important thing in her life. On the other hand, James never thoroughly tests her devotion. There is never any question of sacrificing her art for the man she loves, for example, because the man she loves, Nick Dormer, is completely

oblivious to her. One suspects, nevertheless, that art would have won out even over Nick, had he cared to frame her such a painful choice.<sup>15</sup>

Miriam's single-mindedness, her determination to excel is her most arresting quality. It is the origin of an unfailing habit which proves disconcerting to others in the novel, especially to Peter Sherringham, and which gives the reader pause as well. Peter feels that she is a creature of

infinite variety. To say she was always acting would too much convey that she was often fatiguing; since her changing face affected this particular admirer at least not as a series of masks, but as a response to perceived differences . . . or . . . like the shifting of the scene in a play or like a room with many windows. The image she was to project was always incalculable. . . . This time . . . a bright gentle graceful smiling young woman in a new dress, eager to go out, drawing on fresh gloves, who looked as if she were about to step into a carriage and--it was Gabriel Nash who thus formulated her physiognomy--do a lot of London things (Muse, II, 209).

This is Peter's view of her, and while there is a certain propriety in his being bedazzled, he is not alone. Miriam is forever sweeping into a room in some grand attitude or

another. Much of this flamboyance can be accounted for by her natural high spirit and by the fact that she is perpetually surrounded by her doting mother and a retinue of admiring friends ("Lord, she's good today! Isn't she good today?" [Muse, II, 60-61]). Why should she not play to the gallery? But though everything she does seems natural, free, and often negligent, one seems to see a part of Miriam constantly performing for an audience of one--herself. There is a certain cold egotism about Miriam that is, in a sense, praiseworthy. She is always working, always trying on attitudes; her mind is almost always in the theatre. When Peter denies to himself the possibility that she might always be acting, it is because, unbidden, the thought has worked its way into his consciousness and sticks like a burr. Miriam is very effusive in her greeting to Peter on his return from Paris:

She called him "Dear master" again and again, and still oftener "Cher maître", and appeared to express gratitude and reverence by every intonation.

"You're doing the humble dependent now," he said: "You do it beautifully, as you do everything" (Muse, II, 131).

Miriam's mimicry is a very different thing from the commonplace social dissembling that goes on throughout the novel--Biddy trying to pretend she is unaffected by Peter's nearness, Peter trying to assume nonchalance when told Miriam

loves another, and so on. Her remarkable talent can be a weapon too. In the heat of her angry midnight interview with Peter, she dismisses the life he offers her as "tossing up my head as the fine lady of a little coterie. . . . A big coterie then! It's only that at the best. A nasty prim 'official' woman who's perched on her little local pedestal and thinks she's a queen for ever because she's ridiculous for an hour! Oh you needn't tell me. I've seen them abroad --the dreariest females--and could imitate them here. I could do one for you on the spot if I weren't so tired" (Muse, II, 347).

Miriam's "plastic" quality (Muse, I, 212) was one of the first things Sherringham noticed about her. In fact, he is the one who urged her to develop a personal style saying, "All reflexion is affectation and all acting's reflexion" (Muse, I, 206). She was a puzzle to him even then in what Dorothea Krook calls Miriam's "early ugly-duckling period."<sup>16</sup> Peter freely expressed these doubts to Miriam then. Later when he had grown to love her he could not afford to believe she had no personal depth,<sup>17</sup> but initially he was very frank:

"What's rare in you is that you have--as I suspect at least--no nature of your own. . . . You're always at concert pitch or on your horse; there are no intervals" (Muse, II, 210).

"Your feigning may be honest in the sense that your only feeling is your feigned one," Peter pursued. . . . "Were you really so frightened the first day you went to Madame Carre's?"

She stared, then with a flush threw back her head. "Do you think I was pretending?"

"I think you always are" (Muse, I, 211).

Peter's judgment of Miriam is a little harsh, but he is wrong only in the degree of affectation which he attributes to her. Of course she has emotions of her own, but she is very skilled at hiding them. Also, when they do not conform to the grand design she has made for her life she manages to smother them with comparative ease. For example, her "sensible" attitude on sensing the futility in her unrequited love for Nick Dormer illustrates this practical strain in Miriam. However, the primary reason that Miriam seems affected is her total absorption in her art. Nothing else matters to her to the degree that becoming the greatest actress alive matters, so all her energies are channeled toward that one goal. Thus if her ordinary manner seems preoccupied, excessively expressive, or even histrionic, it is because she is an artist to the core.

At some point in her life Miriam was confronted by the same choice all James's artist face--whether to choose the common pattern of family life and its responsibilities or to

devote her life to art. In Miriam's case, the substance of her art is the way she presents herself to the world, and it is completely the product of calculation. Peter Sherringham warned her early in their acquaintance that hers was an absolute choice, saying, "You can't be everything, both a consummate actress and a flower of the field. You've got to choose" (Muse, I, 211).

It is ironic that Peter gave this advice yet ultimately comes to wish Miriam were "a flower of the field"--natural, artless, passive. He is wrong in one respect, however: Miriam had made her choice long before he met her. Nor does one feel she found the choice difficult, nor perhaps even recognized it as a choice. Miriam was compelled from the beginning to become a consummate actress. She is always acutely aware of the dramatic potential of any situation (thus her air of calculation, and even affectation). Miriam's art is a matter of instinct; she is a natural actress. In this sense she is indeed "The Tragic Muse." She is theatre personified, a creature "who's absolutely all an artist." Peter had professed himself "curious to see that" (Muse, I, 212), but finds the reality something he cannot accept.

Because Miriam's talent is so great, and because she is willing to devote all her thought, all her energies to perfecting and expressing it, she shines as James's portrait of the artist triumphant. She is her own best critic and constantly sits in judgment on her work. Her diligence is

astonishing. Her philosophy of life and art as she expresses it to Peter Sherringham is fundamental to her success. She believes, like Nick Dormer does, that all observation benefits the artist. But, unlike Nick's, Miriam's observations are actually transformed into the stuff of her art. Unlike his, her forays into the world are productive and fertile.

Miriam's philosophy of life and art sounds ingenuous on first reading but is actually acutely perceptive. Since she possesses the self-discipline to approach all life's experiences as a study in theatre, she can but gain:

She was delighted to find that seeing more of the world suggested things to her; . . . she was thus convinced more than ever that the artist ought to live so as to get on with his business, gathering ideas and lights from experience. . . . But work of course was experience, and everything in one's life that was good was work[;]. . . if you only kept your eyes open nothing could happen to you that wouldn't be food for observation and grist to your mill, showing you how people looked and moved and spoke, cried and grimaced, writhed and dissimulated, in given situations. . . . She was fierce to know why people didn't take them up, put them into plays and parts, give one a chance with them; she expressed her sharp impatience of the general literary bêtise (Muse, II, 132-33).



Miriam has chosen to devote her life to her art. With her thoroughly professional attitude of rigorous self-discipline, she wrings the essence from every experience and studies it for elements she can use in her performances. Her hard work combines with her talent to produce coups de théâtre like her incandescent Juliet, "an exquisite image of young passion and young despair, expressed in the truest divinest music that had ever poured from tragic lips" (Muse, II, 430).

This was James's conception of the most blessed happiness an artist could know. It is what Henry St. George called "the great thing. . . . The sense of having done the best--the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature has hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played" ("The Lesson of the Master," p. 69). Miriam knew this peace, for she gave all to her art. Nick Dormer, on the other hand, compromised his ideal, had traffic with the world, spread his loyalties too thin, and lost his precious ability.

James considered the artist's talent to be an infinitely precious gift, an extraordinary trust to be treasured and exploited for good. But the artist must choose either to be true to the best that is in him and make all the sacrifices that entails, or to allow himself to become involved in the concerns of ordinary daily life, probably to the

detriment of his art. He must defer to the world no more than is absolutely necessary for him to live. It is a perilous balance to maintain--living for art but in the world. Throughout much of the fiction, James examines with interest the manner in which his artists meet this challenge. For most, the lure of the world is too strong; especially when it offers not only flattery and acclaim (as it does to Henry St. George and Neil Paraday), but love, the most dangerous siren of them all. Roderick Hudson perished for love and, in another sense, so did Nick Dormer.

The rewards to the artist who remains true to his art and who does "The great thing" are heady indeed. That sense of exaltation which is creative ecstasy is worth any price to those who know it. James knew it and ordered his life around it, safeguarding the sanctity of his isolated study. However his tales and novels about artists demonstrate that, though he had resolved his own conflicts, he did realize they still existed for other artists. His imaginative and sympathetic treatments of the possible temptations and conflicting interests they experience all resolve themselves into a single principle: James believed the artist had to make an absolute choice between the demands of his art and those of the world. He was also confident that for really great artists, like Miriam Rooth, there was no conflict at all, for really great artists invariably choose to do "the great thing."

Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Graham, Henry James "The Drama of Fulfilment: An Approach to the Novels" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 29-57 treats this aspect of the novel at length.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Louis Auchincloss, Reading Henry James (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1975), p. 43, whose remarks on her role in the novel are similar.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Edel, "Introduction," in Henry James's Roderick Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. vii-viii.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Henry James, Roderick Hudson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), pp. 23-24. All further references are to this edition of the novel and will be included in the text.

<sup>5</sup>Munro Beattie, "The Many Marriages of Henry James," in Patterns of Commitment in American Literature, ed. Marston La France (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup>Henry James, "The Lesson of the Master," in The Novels and Tales of Henry James, Vol 15 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 69. All further references will be to this edition of the tale and included in the text.

<sup>7</sup>Gwen Matheson, "Portraits of the Artist and the Lady in the Shorter Fiction of Henry James," Dalhousie Review, 48 (Summer, 1968), 224, considers how James believed "the artist is opposed by his wife's maternal function."

<sup>8</sup>Ross Labrie, "Sirens of Life and Art in Henry James," Lakehead Univ. Review, 2 (Fall, 1969), 156.

<sup>9</sup>Munro Beattie, "The Many Marriages of Henry James," p. 99.

<sup>10</sup>Henry James, "The Death of the Lion," in The Novels and Tales of Henry James, Vol. 15 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 123. All further references are to this edition of the tale and included in the text.

<sup>11</sup>Simon Nowell-Smith, The Legend of the Master (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted by Nowell-Smith, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. also Ross Labrie, "Sirens of Life and Art," p. 153.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>Gabriel Nash seems to concur (Muse, II, 204).

<sup>16</sup>Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Muse, II, 209.

### Conclusion

In his fiction James concentrates on unhappiness and disillusionment, considering these to be the most common responses to the experiences of life. His characters set out confident, ambitious, and, for the most part, woefully ignorant. Most of their unhappiness derives from the relations between the sexes. James shows the unremitting pressure to marry well which is exerted upon the young girls of continental, English, and American societies and studies their pain, frustration, and ignorance as they approach marriage. The convent-bred docility of the continental jeune fille may make her a passive victim, like Pansy Osmond, or an accomplished hypocrite like Little Aggie of The Awkward Age. What James called the "incoherence" of the English system of rearing its young girls forces them to devise their own codes of conduct, producing complex young women like the thwarted Nanda Brookenham, who is knowing and innocent all at once. Similarly the English Biddy Dormer yearns too openly after the man she loves and her pitiful attempts at the dissimulative arts make her appear ridiculous. At the opposite extreme to continental is American society, which allows its young girls too much liberty and gives them an unrealistically high opinion of their relative importance.

The lazy flirtatious grace and arrogance of Daisy Miller and Julia Bride are the logical consequence of such liberty; their failures inevitable. None of the three societies questions the validity of marriage being the only conceivable fate for its young girls, yet none prepares her for it. Thus all attention is directed toward the chase itself, and none toward the rational selection of the quarry or even toward the basic question of the comparative wisdom of the hunt itself.

James's married women never live happily ever after. Some of the more superficial ones devise solutions of a sort; thus the frivolous Countess Gemini of The Portrait of a Lady works around her husband as if he were an inanimate obstacle, scheming to get as many pretty dresses and as much vacation time in Rome as she can. Lydia Touchett (in the same novel) is so willful that she has virtually separated from her husband, visiting him only one month of the year, and that entirely on her own terms. But for the earnest idealists like Isabel Archer marriage is an enormous responsibility, and even when it proves to be a hideous mistake she cannot bring herself to dissolve it. James is preoccupied with the ironclad aspects of the marriage contract and shows in The Golden Bowl what sacrifices and compromises must be made if certain marriages of questionable quality are to be preserved intact. The sacrifices usually involve the woman's relinquishing her individuality, as Charlotte does, or

accepting, as Maggie does, a flawed human mate instead of the golden god she thought she had secured. Marriage is never synonymous with security, and for James the altar is the beginning, not the end, of the story.

Like his women, James's men are not happy either. Men of little character, like Prince Amerigo of The Golden Bowl and Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady begin full of cynical confidence that a rich wife is all they need to make life easy, to open up glittering realms of possibilities. They learn, however, that nothing is as simple as it appears, and that every commitment, however lightly undertaken, involves obligations. Amerigo must forego a diverting affair with another woman and become a domesticated family man; Osmond learns that his intense young bride can be broken in spirit and still not submit, still not subscribe to his bleak, corrupt view of the universe.

James's businessmen experience failure and disappointment as well, most often when they attempt to use their fortunes to buy happiness and love. Gallant Christopher Newman of The American is doomed in his naive wish to marry the daughter of haughty French aristocrats. Powerful Adam Verver of The Golden Bowl uses his money to control the behavior of his wife and son-in-law, though he cannot control their affections. Abel Gaw and Horton Vint of The Ivory Tower live only for money and their human affections wither in consequence.

The most sensitive group of male characters in James's fiction is admirably represented by Lambert Strether of The Ambassadors. Strether is altogether admirable--modest, altruistic, enthusiastic and child-like in his response to Paris. But since his happiness is based on his ignorance of the real relationship existing between two of his friends, it is easily destroyed when his illusion is shattered. Thus his kind and sensitive nature is no more a guarantee of happiness and success in life than are the more ruthless and egotistical natures of his fellow males in James's fiction.

James believed that real and lasting happiness is possible only to the artist, and possible only under certain conditions. The artist can only experience lasting happiness when he realizes that he has done "the great thing," produced the very best work he can. This realization of the ideal can only take place if the artist turns all his attention to his art. He must live in the real world no more than is absolutely necessary in order to earn a living and deal with the practical problems of life in a cursory fashion. The artist who hopes to achieve his ideal must eschew any involvement in the delusory, transitory happiness that presents itself as love and marriage.

James's artists all have a vision of the ideal, but few of them are willing or able to make the necessary sacrifices to attain it. Roderick Hudson is a flamboyant Bryonic sculptor driven to despair and ruin by his hopeless love for



Christina Light. Urbane Henry St. George of "The Lesson of the Master" prostitutes his art by devoting himself to material comforts for himself and his family, but he is always aware of just how far he has fallen from his original greatness, and that awareness is a hollow ache in his soul. Paul Overt, in the same tale, rails bitterly at St. George's dictum that the artist can either be great or be married--the one or the other--but supplies a practical demonstration of its truth. Pitiful Neil Paraday of "The Death of the Lion" is literally lionized to death by stupid, thoughtless people (notably London Hostesses), despite the futile efforts to shield him made by his more perceptive friend. X

In The Tragic Muse, his most extended and ambitious study of the possible conflicts the artist experiences when he is drawn to life and yet wishes to do full justice to his art, James portrays Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth. For Dormer the blandishments of the great world are money, personal recognition and fame as a member of parliament, and the satisfaction of pleasing his demanding mother and fiancée. He renounces all this to paint portraits but is unable to hold fast to his resolution. Nick is gradually drawn back to his old interests and responsibilities (all save his parliamentary one) and his art languishes for want of attention. On the other hand Miriam Rooth is an intriguing study of artistic ambition that defers to no-one and nothing. Miriam is so certain she can do great work that she originally seems

utterly immodest, grotesquely egotistical. But Miriam is right. As opportunities arise and her great talent is nourished by her indefatigable efforts, the effects she produces on the stage justify her original extravagant claims. Miriam does not swerve for love; she marries only to secure an astute business manager whose interest in her career is equally as intense as hers (albeit rather more avaricious). Miriam's success is personal and dazzling because she is wholly committed to her art.

In James's fiction there is no lasting happiness, no sense of achievement or fulfilment to be found in the scramble to marry well which constitutes the life of the young girls of Europe, England and America. Marriage itself is the most inhumane of institutions in which women immure themselves, sacrificing all their individuality. Men cannot be happy either in marriage or in business, for in marriage they tend to be brutal or insensitive, while in business they subjugate their moral and aesthetic senses to acquisitive ones, to the detriment of the man himself and all those with whom he lives. Nor are the rare, gentle, sensitive men successful in life, for they tend to base their own happiness on the actions of other people, a precarious foundation. Creative happiness of the sort known by the artist is the only kind one can depend upon, but it requires absolute commitment. The artist who would achieve greatness cannot permit himself to be overwhelmed by the ordinary concerns of

daily life. He cannot afford to love, he cannot afford to marry, for he cannot give hostages to fortune. Similarly he cannot pay too much attention to flatterers and to questions of his material wealth. The artist must be a man or woman unlike others, sacrificing all earthly vanities to his one ideal vision. Only by making this absolute commitment can he achieve the happiness which consists of knowing that he has done the best work that is in him.

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