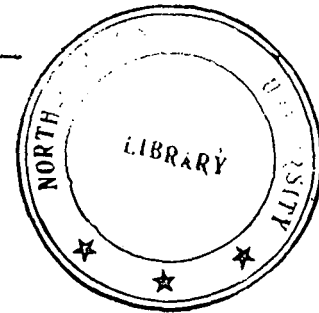


THE HEROINES OF HENRY JAMES

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Department of English



**Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

To



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(D.P. SINGH)

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Mrs. T. AO

INTRODUCTION

To James the writer's biography reveals choices imposed by circumstances, or voluntarily made, which decide the point of view from which he invents his world. James sees certain aspects of a writer's life (where he lives and the kind of social and intellectual society to which he belongs) as positions from which he conducts a strategy of observing life and transforming it within his art.¹

This statement very aptly sums up Henry James's literary career and accounts for the richness of his insights into the human experience. We have his own statements about the art of fiction which offer us the vantage points from which to explore his artistic genius.

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative — much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius — it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.²

¹Stephen Spender, Love — Hate Relations, English and American Sensibilities (Bombay, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1977), p.71.

²Henry James, The Art of Fiction and Other Essays with an Introduction by Morris Roberts (New York, Oxford University Press, 1948), pp.10-11. Hereafter cited as AF.

The experiences of belonging to a particular social and intellectual milieu provided Henry James with the material out of which he created an immense body of literature; 14 novels, 112 tales, numerous pieces for the theatre, essays of criticism and also a prodigious number of letters to both friends and family alike.

The main sphere of his literary creativity, however, was curiously restricted to a set of rich and idle people of both the continents who had great pretensions to art and culture. These are people who, besides being rich and highly civilized, are endowed with gifts of intelligence, imagination and fine sensibilities. They are presented through their personal relationships and the obvious situations of social intercourse. But this is only the social exterior of James's artistic probe into the human existence. He probes deeper into the consciousness of his protagonists and tries to establish their validity in the light of this consciousness. What he achieves in the presentation of these characters is best explained in his own words. In their characterization he employs "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern,

the condition of feeling life in general ..."³. What ultimately emerges, therefore, is a complete interiorization of experience and informing the consciousness of the protagonists with a moral sensibility.

James's concern with the moral sensibility of his protagonists is however devoid of any conventional or religious emphasis. His attempt is to evolve a purely aesthetic-moral code of living which has to fit in the framework of the world he created, where life is conceived of in terms of a fine art. James also speaks of the indivisibility of the aesthetic-moral code as exemplified in his fiction. "There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very close together; ..."⁴ In the consistent exploration of the inner life of his protagonists, James tackles the most fundamental question of human existence — that of right and wrong. The validity and maturity of a Jamesian protagonist is therefore always in proportion to his or her achieving the state of moral consciousness.

The most interesting aspect of Henry James's fiction is that he explores the relevant themes of his

³Henry James, AF, p.11.

⁴Henry James, AF, p.21.

art through his heroines or female characters. In almost all of his novels and tales the most memorable protagonists are women. Commenting on this, Lisa Appignanesi says,

Looking at the spectrum of Henry James's characters, one is immediately struck by the number and importance of his female figures. From Daisy Miller and Catherine Sloper to Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant, the central position in James's fictional canvas is given over to woman.⁵

In his own preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James quotes George Eliot's statement about women, "In these frail vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affection."⁶ He further goes on to explain, with examples from Shakespeare and George Eliot why "the woman matters" in his own fiction.

Echoing the same view, Naomi Lebowitz remarks,

There was hardly a challenge in the whole of the novelistic process which appealed more to James than this of the vulnerability of his "frail vessels of consciousness", of the actual loosening of structural or societal supports around it (supports like set manners, shared

⁵Lisa Appignanesi, Femininity and the Creative Imagination : A Study of Henry James, Robert Musil and Marcel Proust, (New York, Barnes and Noble, 1973), p.2. Hereafter cited as Appignanesi.

⁶Henry James, Preface to The Portrait of a Lady (Harmondsworth, Middle-sex, England, Penguin Book, 1963) p. XI. All references hereafter are to this edition cited as Preface.

consciousness in the subplotting or comic relief, which bolstered so many heroes and heroines from Shakespeare to George Eliot), so that the vessel might be for itself "sole mistress of its appeal."⁷

The male characters, on the other hand, are dealt with in a subdued and perfunctory way which evoked this remark from J.I.M. Stewart.

His men, perhaps more than his women, are liable to be felt as only moieties of humanity. As individuals they are displeasingly and in the mass they are implausibly deficient in simple masculinity.⁸

Going beyond the confines of this statement, one can say that James's women characters are interesting not merely because of their sex but because they are endowed with qualities which make them superior as individuals. James seems to view the female psyche as the ideal object of study for an aesthetic-moral resolution to life's innumerable problems. This attitude of James's can best be articulated in the words of Lisa Appignanesi.

⁷Naomi Lebowitz, The Imagination of Loving. Henry James's Legacy to the Novel, (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1965), p.85.

⁸J.I.M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers (Oxford University Press, London, Oxford, New York, 1963), p.76.

Femininity is a call to being for James in that it is a call to inwardness and introspection, the prerequisite of all true relationship and action. When one is fully conscious of self, then and only then, one is. And being for James means being open to the whole assault of life — delimiting experience in no way — while intelligently grasping the significance of this assault. Thus the feminine, with its quality of an open and flexible sensibility and its insistence on both interiorization of events and personalism in relationships, introduces into the Jamesian world the possibility of full consciousness.⁹

In his Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James stipulates,

Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's consciousness ... stick to that for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself ... press least hard, in short on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributory only to the greater one.¹⁰

It is true that James makes this remark with specific reference to the heroine in The Portrait, but this maxim seems applicable to all of his other heroines too. Because they are created in such a mould, there are just no male counterparts in his fiction for a Daisy

⁹Appignanesi, p.80.

¹⁰preface, p. XIII.

Miller, Bessie Alden, Francie Dosson, Euphemia Cleve, Christina Light, Catherine Sloper, Isabel Archer, Verena Tarrant, Olive Chancellor, Fleda Vetch, Maisie, Nanda Brookenham, Madame de Vionet, Milly Theale and Maggie Verver, or even for a Mme Merle, the governess in The Turn of the Screw, Rose Armiger, Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant. These women of James's all possess qualities which make them far more interesting protagonists than his male characters.

Out of the impressive bevy of James's heroines, six young girls have been selected for study because their careers seem to embody James's life-long pre-occupation with a proper understanding of the inner self, of the realm of human consciousness. The careers of these heroines span almost the entire creative period of James. Daisy Miller of the nouvelle of the same name and Euphemia Cleve of Mme de Mauves are two of James's early creations and their stories are two of his best known tales. Catherine Sloper of Washington Square belongs in a category by herself, in the sense that her story is set in an all-American milieu. But in the overall scope of this study, Catherine Sloper's plight

proves to be a milestone in the Jamesian heroine's encounter with the complexity of human motives and in the assertion of her individuality. The creation of Isabel Archer of The Portrait of a Lady is still regarded by many readers to be James's greatest achievement. In this novel, the Jamesian heroine is presented in the fulness of her moral awareness and integrity. The other two heroines, Milly Theale of The Wings of the Dove and Maggie Verver of The Golden Bowl belong to that period of James's artistic maturity which Mathiessen calls The Major Phase. Though all of these heroines of James are innocent American girls beguiled and bewildered by Europe, Milly Theale's odyssey in this bewitching country is the most beautiful and tragic at the same time. In contrast Maggie Verver remains the most prosaic version of the young Jamesian heroine whom the author so consistently portrayed in novel after novel throughout his career.

It is no mere coincidence that all these girls happen to be American girls. The significance of this fact lies deep rooted in James's concern in his "complex fate of being an American." This concern resulted in

the evolution of the most important theme of his art: the Europe - America tension of his international theme. The Jamesian heroine is an innocent and inexperienced ingenue representing the youthful exuberance of America. In spite of her material possessions this young girl hankers after an elusive, ideal existence beyond the horizons of her provincial background and looks to Europe as the desired Utopia of such an existence. But at closer contact she discovers that the glimmer of the civilized and sophisticated facade is provided by the glint of avarice in the European eyes for American opulence; she also discovers that the impressive framework of genteel society is devoid of any human warmth. She would have been totally devoured by so much "sterile dilettantism" but for the redeeming fact that her moral integrity is unassailable. Though she is vulnerable because of her lack of experience, she proves to be invincible because of her moral vigour.

The fact that James makes all his heroines rich can be viewed in itself as a metaphor for the rise of America as an affluent nation in the late

nineteenth century. The principle implied in the metaphor is that James's heiress has a greater scope for cultivating higher interests and finer moral sensibilities because of her affluence which frees her from the restrictions of having to strive after the basic amenities of life. Her odyssey to Europe is, therefore, undertaken with great expectations of achieving the full flowering of her personality.

The irony inherent in the Jamesian heroine's destiny lies in the fact that the very condition which is supposed to give her the opportunities for developing her personality proves to be the cause of her undoing. She is entrapped, body and soul, by the European man because he wants to possess her wealth which he can do only by manipulating her vulnerability.

The vulnerability in the heroine comprises of her lack of true comprehension of people, of their motives and hence of human relationships in general. She may be a millionaire's daughter or may inherit millions but she remains extremely naive with regard to her wealth. She tends to take it much too much for granted and therefore fails to place it in its proper

perspective in the affairs of life. Material well-being is no doubt a prerequisite for the cultivation and nurturing of gracious living, but on the the other hand, lack of it can trigger off negative responses in the human psyche, especially so in the case of people who have a whole civilized and expensive life-style to maintain. These impoverished individuals who feel that they have a tradition, a culture to perpetuate by whatever means they can think of, are the Europeans who victimise the naive, innocent American heiress for their pseudo-cultural motives. In the context, of the much-vaunted international theme of James's fiction, this aspect in the psychology of the aggressor's mind is an important point to remember. It is because of this pseudo-cultural aura which envelopes the European personality that the young, impressionable American girl finds him irresistible. She views him as the exalted being from the enchanted land of culture and civilization who must be a 'fine gentleman' or better still, 'a specimen apart' from all other ordinary mortals.

The European's apparent concern and dedication to all things cultural is no doubt a result of his tradition but somewhere along the evolution of this

'specimen', the vital, moral core of aestheticism has been subsumed by the merely material manifestation of this way of life. The tragedy for the Jamesian heroine rests on the inevitability of her commitment to the European before she can discover this painful truth. That she is such a ready victim to this beguilement is truly an index to her psychology.

Just as much as the European is trying to acquire a means to ensure his continued state of culture and civilization, the American heiress too seems to attempt at a refinement of her condition by accepting what he has to offer her. By whatever name we may try to gloss over this pathetic attempt at acquiring culture, it remains a fact that this too is a form of self-aggrandisement. But the crucial point to remember is that hers is an attempt at a refinement of the inner personality rather than one's outward circumstances. One can even venture to state that the American girl's aim is to attain a culture of the inner self whereas the European concern remains static at the level of society only. This is exactly what Isabel Archer intuitively grasps as the inherent flaw in the personality of Mme Merle, whom she calls a "social animal."

Because of this quality in the heroine's psyche, James's vision transcends the international conflict within the American encounter with Europe and he directs his probe inward into the sensibilities of the protagonist. As the evolution of the Jamesian heroine progresses, one realizes that the international conflict has been a means to an end. It is as though this conflict becomes the spring-board for James's subsequent probe into the human consciousness and his examination of the aesthetic - moral code of living. As Euphemia Cleve asserts, reality is not outside but "in the nameless country of one's mind" where national or cultural concerns must be eschewed for the sake of a moral vision of life.

However, it is true that James gives his analysis a slightly American tilt, in the sense that the question is presented from the American point of view. Edmund Wilson goes so far as to say that it is America which really gets the better of it in Henry James. But in the final analysis it would seem that neither America nor Europe gets the better of it in James because what he presents in the end is something which transcends questions of nationalities and culture and directs one's

attention inward to the self, to the essence of one's being. Starting from the heroine's uncertainties about her outward circumstances, the process of discovery is brought full circle when the final analysis rests upon the self's validity in respect of herself as well as the outside reality.

The first step towards this new vision of the heroine is given when James presents a totally new interpretation of the concept of innocence and evil. Innocence for James does not merely mean the absence of evil. It means a complete lack of awareness of the self as well as the outside world. Because of this, the innocent heroine's overall understanding of people and events tends to be superficial. Her vision therefore becomes myopic and with her generic inferiority complex, she believes that everything on the other side of the ocean is better, superior and therefore worth cultivating.

Evil for James, on the other hand, is purely ontological. He conceives of it as one person's conscious attempt to deny the other its freedom of individuality. Evil, James seems to say, is that state of the mind from where all human considerations have been



left out. In such a state, the human spirit has been deadened to such an extent that it would not stop at manipulating and dominating another self if such an action would procure the desired objective.

Discussing James's concept of evil, J.A. Ward gives an a-religious and humanistic definition of 'sin' which seems to correlate to James's own view of evil as he exemplifies it in his fiction.

Improper intervention in the life of another is virtually the only sin that interested James. Specific human actions, considered in isolation from other matters, are never in themselves evil (in this respect James is a moral relativist), the only criterion is the injury of another person. But in James's world of complex social relationships human action does not take place in a vacuum, and the choice of one person inevitably results in either good or evil for others.¹¹

In the European sensibility cultural and material concerns overwhelm the human element to such an extent that it displays a callous disregard for human values. Mere social and cultural distinctions cannot substitute this essential value and James shows that it is through

¹¹J.A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster : Evil in the fiction of Henry James (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1961) p.13. Hereafter cited as Ward.

a moral re-awakening in the consciousness of an individual that this value can be restored. If there is a re-affirmation of the American point of view, it is in this context because in the end it is the moral vitality of the American heroine which triumphs over the evil inherent in the European sensibility. Yvor Winters is more definitive about this particular aspect of James's fiction.

There is further evidence that James conceived this moral sense to be essentially American, moreover, in the fact that the moral phenomenon and its attendant dramatic formula alike were first defined in the early American period of his art, and that they were most fully and richly developed in his last great masterpieces, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl.¹²

This then is the intellectual and psychological framework which is super-imposed on the social material of James's fiction. The principle of development of the Jamesian heroine is to be viewed with this framework in mind. The attempt in this study will be to trace the gradual evolution of the Jamesian heroine from her humble origins in Schenectady, her sojourn in an alien

¹²Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse Seven studies in the History of America Obscurantism. (Norfolk, Conn, New Directions, 1938), p.170.

culture in Europe, her marriage and subsequent betrayal, to her ultimate triumph in The Golden Bowl when she emerges as the mistress of her world. This evolution is therefore the process of the heroine's psychological re-ordering and her triumph is the final coherence given to this process. From the beginning, the heroine senses that there has to be a special quality in one's life, over and above one's material circumstances. She hankers after this elusive quality, the absence of which constitutes a void in her life. The pathos inherent in such a sensibility is that all the time, that which she seeks elsewhere is within herself only.

The heroine naively believes that this missing quality can be obtained from other people, other societies and other countries. In the earliest example, Daisy Miller seeks for "society" in Europe thinking it is something readily visible and easily definable. She does not yet comprehend that it is altogether a complete way of life, a life which is so alien to her. Mme de Mauves vaguely senses this but erroneously believes that merely being born into the right society is enough to guarantee a person's moral worth. Isabel Archer and Milly Theale too seem bent on the same course of

discovery. Isabel especially, has a highly idealized concept of the kind of life she thinks desirable and which she mistakenly seeks for in the civilization of Europe.

Her notion of the aristocrat's life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment.¹³

In an extreme version, Milly Theale wishes to remain in an ethereal world from where she would not have "to go down -- never, never to go down!" Even Maggie Verver, the most pragmatic of the heroines, longs for "the golden bowl without the crack in it" which would be a symbol of her happiness with her prince.

Because of her idealistic expectations of life, the heroine is always disillusioned and her career ends on a tragic note. Daisy Miller dies, wrongly condemned; Euphemia Cleve has the suicide of her husband to haunt the remainder of her days and Catherine Sloper is psychologically maimed for life because she believed in "human affection." Isabel Archer who wanted to "affront

¹³Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, p. 431.

her destiny" goes back to her husband and to a life in which, she knows for a certainty, "the vital principle of one" would be "a thing of contempt to the other." Milly Theale too dies forlorn and betrayed by the people dearest to her. And even Maggie Verver has to settle for the golden bowl with the crack in it.

In the successive stages of the development of the Jamesian heroine the gradual awakening of her consciousness is portrayed. Her intuitive grasp of the desired quality of life to fill the void in her is correct as far as her vision defines it. She has a certain vision of what life should be and proceeds to discover it in the civilization which she has idealized in her mind as the epitome of that life. But as she comes into direct contact with this way of life, she realizes how her ideals have misled her. There are serious cracks in the apparently glittering facade of this idealized society. But having accepted this other way of life she has to evolve a new world-view which will sustain the moral core of her essential being and at the same time fulfil her commitments. The evolution of this world-view is possible through the heroine's acquisition of a new consciousness which she has gained

at the expense of her innocence.

This new world-view stands for a synthesis best elucidated in the final analysis of the career of Maggie Verver of The Golden Bowl. Until this point in the study of the Jamesian heroine, her consciousness has consistently tended to veer more towards the visionary and the poetic. But as Maggie comes to terms with "the golden bowl with a crack in it" the heroine's consciousness displays a certain pragmatism. This aspect of her new consciousness accepts the fact that the notion of a synthesis implies a certain element of compromise which will always fall short of the ideal. Perhaps this accounts for a certain poetic disillusionment in the overall characterization of Maggie but then one has always to bear in mind that an element of deterioration is an obvious corollary of growth and development. The initial concept of the Jamesian heroine as a symbolic princess among her peers is given validity in the portrayal of Maggie Verver who is a real-life princess. The heiress-princess retains her millions as well as her prince but brings about a new dimension to the relationship. The emptiness of a hyper-cultural sensibility is now suffused with a new human warmth

and the void in the heroine's psyche is replaced by a new consciousness which enables her to perceive herself in perfect objectivity thus freeing her of the vulnerability of an unaware self. This state is to be understood as being not merely conscious but being morally conscious about life itself. Lisa Appignanesi sees this quality as exclusive to the Jamesian heroine.

It is only by being fully conscious, by fully seeing, that James's characters can fully be. But to fully see means that life must be led according to the principle of successive aspects. Only the individual who is capable of flexibility, of an open-ended existence devoid of absolute values, can experience the fulness of felt-life and exemplify the Jamesian ethic. To reach the heights of being and consciousness, one must see into the depths. Only the feminine with her "inwardness" is capable of this.¹⁴

In a study of this sort where the entire analytical energy has been focused on these heroines, a discussion of the biographical influences upon their creation is inevitable. It is a generally accepted view that James's Albany cousin Mary (Minnie) Temple was a model for certain heroines like Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer and Milly Theale. James's own account of his

¹⁴Appignanesi, p.31.

attitude towards this lady would bear ample testimony to this fact. Writing about her in his autobiography, James infuses his reminiscences with a quality which transcends the merely personal element and creates an aura of poetic grandeur around her personality which enables the reader to understand how James caught the essence of Minnie's being and immortalised it in so many of his heroines. He speaks of "the immediacy of the impression she produced,"¹⁵ and goes on to testify,

She was really to remain for our appreciation, the supreme case of a taste for life as life, as personal living; ...¹⁶

Mary Temple's memory remained for James "an essence that preserved her still."¹⁷

If I have spoken of the elements and presences round about us that "counted," Mary Temple was to count, and in more lives than can now be named, to an extra-ordinary degree; count as a young and shining apparition, a creature who owed to the charm of her every aspect (her aspects were so many!) and the originality, vivacity, audacity, generosity, of her spirit, an indescribable grace and weight - if one might impute weight to a being so imponderable in common scales.¹⁸

¹⁵Edited with an Introduction by Frederick. W. Dupee, Henry James, autobiography, (New York, criterion Books, 1956). From the section Notes of a Son and Brother, p.283. Hereafter cited to this section as Notes.

¹⁶Notes - p.283.

¹⁷Notes, p.282.

¹⁸Ibid.

James speaks of the memory of Minnie as the experience which provided him with the felicity of the personal, the social, the 'literary and artistic' almost really the romantic identity ..."¹⁹ Her untimely death was a great blow to both his brother William and himself.

... she would have given anything to live — and the image of this, which was long to remain with me, appeared so of the essence of tragedy that I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it, a particular occasion aiding, in the beauty and dignity of art.²⁰

If the memory of Minnie Temple provided James with the raw material to create his heroines, his artistic genius transformed this personal experience into a "sacred fount" of inspiration with which he was able to subsume the personal experience with a poetic insight and transcend the boundaries of a limited sensibility into a universal experience of a certain quality of life which all his heroines embody. Because of this, he was able to overcome the obviousness of the questions of mere nationalities and cultures and transport the scene of his internationalism into the very heart of human existence.

¹⁹Notes. p.281.

²⁰Notes, p.544.

In such an existence, the Jamesian heroines, the "frail vessels of consciousness" seek to evolve a meaningful life-style where "human affection" has to have equal ratings with grand manners and fabulous possessions in a society which puts little premium on the former. This society invariably victimizes the innocent heroine but in terms of the reality of the inner life, she merges victorious, a fact which signals the ultimate vindication of James's aesthetic - moral code of living.

The main endeavour of this study will be to trace the author's analysis of such an achievement in the context of the highly sophisticated and civilized society where all his heroines are placed.

CHAPTER - I

THE MAKING OF A HEROINE:

A Study of The Madonna of the Future(1875),
Daisy Miller(1879) and Mme. De Mauves(1875)

Throughout his career, Henry James had an overriding sense that the fact of his being an American was a distinctive quality, sometimes a negative one but always a challenge to be unique. Most of his memorable protagonists are Americans or at least of American origins. The sense of this distinctiveness or separateness was always vis-a-vis the old civilization of Europe. Commenting on the new vigour of the emerging nation he wrote,

It is a complex fate being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitions valuation of Europe.... We are American born, I look upon it as a great blessing; and I think that to be an American is an excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to be that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them, we can deal with forms of civilization not our own. We must of course have something distinctive and homogenous and I take it that we shall find it in our unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigour.¹

¹Percy Lubbock, editor, The Letters of Henry James (New York, Scribner's, 1920), 1, 73. (Written to Charles Eliot Norton, February 4, 1872).

This then will be the intellectual background against which the tales The Madonna of the Future, Daisy Miller and Madame de Mauves will be discussed in this chapter. These can be taken as the blueprint for James's concept of a heroine and in the formulation of his "intentions" in them one can see the author's initial statements about the aesthetic-moral code of life which he explores through the careers of his heroines. The transcendent idealization of The Madonna of the Future, the naivete of the American princess-type heiress in Daisy Miller and the narrow conventionality of her own kind abroad in the same story and the victimization of the innocent American heiress by her corrupt French husband in Madame de Mauves are the seeds which blossomed into James's mature works later about similar heroines. The study of James's heroines can best be conducted in the light of the following statement by Philip Rahv.

Henry James is not fully represented in his novels by any one single character, but of his principal heroine it can be said that she makes the most of his vision and dominates his drama of transatlantic relations. This young woman is his favorite American type, appearing in his work time and again under various names and in various situations that can be taken as so many stages in her career. Hence it is in the line of her development that we must

study her. Her case involves a principle of growth which is not to be completely grasped until she has assumed her final shape.²

In analysing the "principle of growth" in the heroines of Henry James, one has to bear in mind two important points. First, the implications of this principle are that there are higher values than mere social accomplishments and acquirements, and that in life these are the most important moral values. Second, that James's internationalism has always been 'secondary' to dramatizing moral distinctions because he felt that only in a cosmopolitan setting the moral values of two distinct outlooks on life could be portrayed. Therefore the internationalism of his novels can be said to be a means to an end.

Almost all of James's memorable heroines have been American girls exuding both elements of naiveté and innocence as well as a keen sense of moral consciousness. A remark by Frederick J. Hoffman³ seems to point to an essential truth about the Jamesian heroine. "The best of James's Americans are metaphorical figures, seeking

²Philip Rahv, "The Heiress of All the Ages", Partisan Review, (May-June 1943), pp.227-47.

³Frederick J. Hoffman, "Freedom and Conscious Form: Henry James and the American Self", Virginia Quarterly Review, 37 (Spring 1961), 269-285.

the finest opportunities for actualizing their insights". (p.275) The study and exploration of these 'insights' constitutes an important aspect of the development of the Jamesian heroine. Hoffman continues in the same article, "This is why the American consciousness, which is in itself really more naive than "free", needs to experience the fixed and established European world, but above all needs desperately an occasion that will challenge its spirit without merely indulging it".(p.278). However, the 'freedom' that these heroines possess is initially presented as their being heiresses in the literal sense. The material well-being thus affords them the 'opportunities for actualizing their insights' or 'dreams' or whatever one chooses to call them.

The inclusion of The Madonna of the Future in a study of the heroine's 'development' may at first glance seem incongruous but this tale may be taken as a metaphor for James's life-long pre-occupation with the creation of an ideal heroine. And this ideal heroine would be an American heiress - princess type who would finally prove the "superiority" of the American "moral consciousness" and would be able to deal with a civilization which is not hers but nevertheless over which she has established her own mastery.

The 'heroine' of The Madonna of the Future⁴ is as yet only a concept and an ideal in the mind and imagination of "poor Theobald" an expatriate American painter living in Florence, nursing a fantastic dream of creating on canvas a perfect madonna "breathing truth and beauty and mastery" which his friend playfully designates as The Madonna of the Future. The narrator in the story describes Theobald thus,

It amused me vastly at times to think that he was of our shrewd yankee race; but after all, there would be no better token of his American origin than this same fantastic fever. The very heat of his devotion was a sign of conversion; those born to European opportunity manages better to reconcile enthusiasm with comfort. He had moreover, all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion and our native relish for sonorous superlatives. (MF p.212)

Long before he wrote this tale, he wrote to his mother in 1869 comparing Americans with Englishmen.

On the other hand, we seem a people of character, we seem to have energy, capacity and intellectual stuff in ample measure. What I have pointed out as our vices are the elements of the modern man with 'culture' quite left out. It's the absolute and incredible lack of culture that strikes you in common travelling Americans.⁵

⁴Henry James, The Madonna of the Future (1875) from the Tales of Henry James, Vol. II, 1870-1874, edited by Maqbool Aziz, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978. Hereafter cited as MF.

⁵Percy Lubbock, editor, The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I. to his mother dt. October 1869.

Theobald here then is the archetypal 'travelling American' whose naive enthusiasm about his project borders on the ridiculous. However, the main point of the study is the "dream" of Theobald the artist and the irony inherent in the apparent incongruity between his ideal woman and the real one on whom he has based his dreams. The woman of this artist's dream is no ordinary woman - she is to be the madonna, the eternal virgin, symbol of innocence and purity. The realization of this dream would not only create the ultimate symbol of womanhood, embodying perfection of form, attractiveness and even seductiveness, it would also mean the ultimate in artistic achievement for Theobald. He would, in fact, in drawing the madonna, create his masterpiece.

Theobald's "sonorous superlatives" regarding his madonna only highlight the fact that he has idealized the model for his masterpiece beyond recognition. He claims that this woman is "a beauty with a soul" - "the most beautiful woman in Italy." In reality, "the most beautiful woman in Italy" is "broad and ample, low-browed and large-eyed, dark and pale" yet certainly one, whose beauty the passage of time has not been able to

stamp out completely. This woman so blindly and naively idealized by Theobald is a shrewd and practical woman of the world. When confronted by the narrator one time in her true surroundings, she states her philophy of life in a very matter of fact way.

In this hard world, one mustn't ask too many questions; one must take what comes and keep what one gets. I've kept my good friend /meaning Theobald/ for twenty years and I do hope that at this time of day signore, you've not come to turn him against me. (MF p.225).

In her own way she has helped keep Theobald's dream alive in order to extract what material gains she can out of the whole situation.

This model for the Blessed Virgin is more than a friend of the man with whom she is seen by Theobald and the pair of them are engaged in the mass production of cheap statuettes for sale to the hordes of tourists visiting Florence, the home of Michael Angelo. The sheer incongruity and futility of Theobald's artistic zeal and idealism is made obvious by the popularity of the statuettes of cats and monkeys peddled by Serafina and her gentleman friend.

Everyone who knows Theobald, thinks him a slightly mad artist who lives a fantastic dream. And

it is inevitable that he too should one day face the naked truth of his dismal failure as an artist. When that day comes, he is unable to take in the hard facts of reality and his death is only a logical exit for so much naivete' and idealism.

The Madonna of the Future exists purely on the plane of the ideal, with few incidents of actual life. Theobald's idealism and artistic dream is a hypothesis and his death a mere academic conclusion to it. Yet, there is enough force in the argument to activate the reader's imagination to the awareness that it is not Theobald's lack of artistic talent which defeats and destroys him in the end but that it is his complete lack of comprehension of the realities of life which eventually kills him. Perfection of any sort is an impossibility in the "felt" and "lived" life of flesh and blood and any unrealistic pursuit of it is bound to end in disaster - like the disaster for Theobald's "transcendent illusions."

In his exuberance, enthusiasm and artistic pronouncements, there is a hint of the superficiality which is the hall-mark of any imitator. Theobald, the expatriate American in search of art, culture and civilization in Europe is an imitator of the old masters

of Europe, by which he acknowledges the superiority of the old civilization. He is so consumed by his idealization that he fails to understand the ways of the practical life of the people among whom he has lived so long.

In Theobald's idealization of the model for his madonna and the glaring disparity between this and the actual facts about her, one can sense the author's ironical comment on the European civilization that Americans so fervently, so devotedly and often blindly pursue. The decadence of this older civilization so subtly hinted at through the life of Serafina, would victimize American naivete' and innocence time and again in James's later fiction.

As a study of such a sensibility combining naivete and innocence, Daisy Miller (1878) stands out as a timeless index of James's concept of the American heroine as the heiress-princess type. In this brief but brilliant study we see the blueprint as it were, for all the heroines that were to follow and who were of course to be more fully rounded characters. Perhaps sensing a certain lack of full expansion in Daisy Miller, James makes a justificatory remark, after a lapse of 31 years since the story was first published, that "my supposedly

typical little figure was of course pure poetry and had never been anything else."⁶

No matter what the author intended her to be, it is an undeniable fact that Daisy Miller is an unsophisticated, uncultured girl who on the strength of her father's riches is holidaying in the continent in order to imbibe what culture and education she can, through actual contact with the older civilization. The world into which Daisy has been transported can best be described in Cargill's words as "one in which a character usually guided in his actions by the mores of one environment, is set down in another, where he must employ all his individual resources to meet successive situations where he must intelligently accommodate himself to the new mores, or in one way or another, be destroyed."⁷ The "individual resources" which may mean a cultural background or even family tradition seem to be conspicuously absent from Daisy's life. The deportment of her brother, and her mother's passive helplessness are indication enough of their lack of tradition and breeding. She herself is a very ignorant, very innocent girl. Her

⁶Henry James, Preface to Daisy Miller, from The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), XVIII, v-viii.

⁷Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: Macmillan Company, 1961), pp.46-47.

concept of society therefore is very superficial - going to parties, wearing smart dresses, being given dinners and having "gentlemen" friends is her idea of high society, the absence of which in the small Swiss town she deploras. In the "nouveau rich" society of Schenectady and occassionally of New York, Daisy has very little chance of learning about 'society', that class-ridden conglomerate of the old titled and often monied families of Europe whose cardinal rule of living is the proper manner of doing things.

Through an ironic twist, a representative of such a sensibility is Mrs Costello, an expatriate American herself, who thoroughly disapproves of Daisy's free and easy way of mixing with people, her complete lack of inhibition in her association with men and her failure to insist upon the class distinction of the paid servant Eugenio. In her eyes, whatever is coarse, vulgar, loud and unmannerly can be equated to being "bad". But on this point, her nephew, Frederick Winterbourne, takes up for the Millers and says, "They are very ignorant, very innocent only. Depend upon it they are not bad."⁸

⁸Henry James, Daisy Miller, from Great Short Works of Henry James, Introduction by Dean Flower, (A Perennial Classic, New York, Harper & Row, Publishers), p.28. All subsequent references are to this edition, cited as D.M.

This remark perhaps sums up Daisy Miller's situation. Her fate, as Henry James takes care to underline, is the result, not only of her innocence, but also of her ignorance, lack of awareness and self-knowledge. Her ignorance of correct social behavior is understandable because her mother, who otherwise would have groomed her daughter in this, is herself a very ignorant, unsophisticated person, insensitive to the subtle undercurrents and innuendoes of social intercourse. This becomes apparent when she is seen talking at cross-purposes with Mrs. Walker during the latter's party. Mrs. Miller tells the hostess that Daisy will be coming in only later as she was busy at the piano with Mr. Giovanelli. Mrs. Walker replies, "I'm sorry that she should come in that way". Mrs. Miller completely fails to take in the innuendo in the remark and instead replies, "Well, I told her that there was no use in her getting dressed before dinner if she was going to wait three hours. I didn't see the use of her putting on such a dress as that to sit around with Mr. Giovanelli" (D.M., p.40). She displays the same insensibility at the end of the party too. Daisy's seemingly unpardonable behavior at the party makes Mrs. Walker vow that she will never invite her again to her house and she snubs Daisy publicly.

Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker are typical of the expatriate Americans who bring on their harshest indictment against Daisy. These pseudo-sophisticates disown her, disparage her and publicly disgrace her as Mrs. Walker did. "They ceased to invite her; and they intimated that they desired to express to observant Europeans the great truth that though Miss Daisy Miller was a young American lady, her behavior was not representative - was regarded by her compatriots as abnormal" (D.M. p.47). Even Winterbourne, who is a sort of a champion for the Millers, begins to grow quite critical about her behavior and resents the fact that he tries to 'chop logic' about this young, irresponsible and reckless girl. Yet he wonders whether she is not "too light and childish, too uncultivated and unreasoning, too provincial to have reflected upon her ostracism or even to have perceived it" (D.M., p.47). He goes on to think "that holding one-self to a belief in Daisy's "innocence" was "more and more a matter of fine-spun gallantry". (ibid).

Winterbourne's mixed reaction to Daisy is partly due to her own "reckless" behavior as well as to the fact that he is not an impartial observer. He entertains a secret admiration for her which he cannot

articulate because of his self-righteous and superior estimate of himself. He takes on the supercilious attitude of the initiate towards a novice - he thinks that because of his long exposure to the older civilization of Europe, he can deign to look down on Daisy and her kind as some country bumpkins come to a metropolis to gawk at the alien culture. His view of Daisy's personality is myopic because he tries to reduce a phenomenon as complex as a human being to a string of certitudes and decide that her "eccentricities" as he calls them may be taken for something "generic" or "national". In taking such an attitude towards Daisy, however personal his observations are, Winterbourne identifies himself with all the others like Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker who tend to think that "good manners" may be an index to a person's moral integrity.

Daisy Miller is both a symbol as well as a product of the emerging awareness of a new culture, a new way of life that was the America of the nineteenth century. The shaping of an ingenue personality like Daisy's among the uncertainties and paradoxes of the alien culture of Europe is only hinted at. Daisy Miller is finally killed as much by the cold unrelenting self-righteous puritanism of Winterbourne and his kind as by the Roman fever.

Daisy Miller is condemned on account of her behavior in an alien society. She is at once an ingenue and a coquette embodying all the innocence, naivete' and inexperience of youth - yet one who is so headily drunk with the new licence that money can buy. All these contradictory qualities in her are sharply projected because she is in an unfamiliar setting where "appearances" seem to matter much more than the real facts. The fallacy on which her condemnation rests is exposed by Giovanelli's remark, "She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable. And she was the most innocent." (D.M, p.54). It is extremely ironical that an actual European has to vouch for the "innocence" of Daisy's character which has been so heartlessly maligned by her Europeanized compatriots.

Daisy's effect and impact on her circumstances may be tentative, but the author's ultimate comment seems to be the exposure of the emptiness behind an assumed cultural superiority and what such an attitude can do to any potential human relationship. Winterbourne is perforce bound to recognize his own share in Daisy's tragedy and makes this remark to his aunt, "You were right in the remark that you made last summer. I was

booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts" (D.M., p.54). The keynote is struck by the word "foreign" - the implication being that having been under the influence of a "foreign" culture, his natural impulses have been deadened to such an extent as to make him impervious to the needs of a very innocent and inexperienced compatriot. The 'mistake' he commits regarding Daisy is due to this insensibility. A year ago when he saw Daisy with Giovanelli at the Colloseum at night he had immediately jumped to the conclusion that "She was a young lady whom a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect". (D.M. p.51). When he recollects Giovanelli's remark about Daisy and her message to him before she dies, Winterbourne is forced to revise his opinion about her. He tells his aunt, "She would have appreciated one's esteem". (D.M. p.54).

Though Winterbourne is the central intelligence through whom we perceive Daisy, a certain dubiousness relating to his own personal life makes him an unfit judge of her. After the Daisy episode of his life he goes back to Geneva, the metropolis of Calvinism, the stronghold of Puritanism, in order to pursue his interest "in a very clever foreign lady" who is also reported to be "older than himself". This probably could mean that

she was one of those ladies who, 'for respectability's' sake were provided with husbands". (D M, p.11). He changes his mind several times regarding Daisy. He seems to be truly puzzled by her odd behaviour which he views solely from the Europeanized angle. The subtle debunking of Winterbourne as the commentator on Daisy seems to point to a sort of vindication for her. But if there is any vindication, it is in the sense that though there is no assertion about the "rightness" of Daisy's actions, there is certainly a strong emphasis on the "wrongness" of the premise on which she has been so cruelly condemned.

Daisy Miller is rich with suggestions of the way in which the writer viewed innocence and personal integrity vis-a-vis the correct social behaviour, bringing out the truth that these two are not always synonymous. In terms of James's concept of the heroine, Daisy Miller anticipates the predicament of young girls who want to "affront destiny", or who just want "to live - oh so to live" in a society whose paradoxes stifle and stunt them and more often than not victimize them.

Daisy Miller is etched in bold, striking poses as if in keeping with the ingenu quality of the heroine. Though she is the archetype of the young American girls

who in the later and maturer fiction of James emerge as heroines of more significant stature, Daisy Miller does not attain such a fulness because James does not equip her with any background at all. In his own words, "The Francie Dossons, and the Daisy Millers and the Bessie Aldens and the Pandora Days", the American branch of his inter-nation department, are "unprecedented characters" "with the same "characteristic blankness". Commenting on the "blankness" or "flatness" of character in Daisy, James, in his reply to Mrs. Lynn Linton about his "intentions" in Daisy Miller, says that notwithstanding the fact of her "blankness" - "a sufficiently brooding tenderness might eventually extract a shy incongruous charm". He calls the story (in the same letter), "the tragedy of a thin, natural, unsuspecting creature being sacrificed as it were to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head and to which she stood in no measurable relation". In the same letter he points out that "the keynote of her character is her innocence".⁹

In his preface to Daisy Miller (1909), James staunchly defends his portraiture of Daisy and says "that my supposedly typical little figure was of course

⁹Henry James to Lynn Linton (in 1880), in George Somes Layland, Mrs. Lynn Linton (London : Methuen & Co., 1901), pp.233-234.

pure poetry, and had never been anything else; since this is what helpful imagination, in however slight a dose, ever directly makes for."¹⁰

If in 1878, Daisy was only a "poetic" formulation of his concept of a heroine, he however establishes her as the predecessor of all his memorable heroines by giving them similar characteristics and developing them into fully rounded characters - in particular like Milly Theale of The Wings of the Dove. She too, like Daisy, dies before she can fulfil her dream "to live - oh so to live". But in her, whatever James left unfinished in Daisy, is made vivid in superb masterful strokes.

Daisy's abrupt death in the story is seen by Richard A. Hocks as her "liberation, even by death, from the darker interpretations of life."¹¹ Drawing the inevitable parallel between the death of James's beloved cousin Minny Temple in 1870 and that of Daisy's in the story, he points out that "James seems always to have believed that Minny's death, terrible as it was, at least precluded her discovery of the full extent of the world's evil." (p.173). This is an interesting observation

¹⁰ Preface to Daisy Miller.

¹¹ Richard A. Hocks, Daisy Miller, Backward into the Past : A Centennial Essay, The Henry James Review, 1,2 (Winter 1980 164-178), p.173.

because in the later novel The Wings of the Dove, the heroine Milly Theale too dies young - but her death is not a "liberation" in the sense that Daisy's is. Daisy dies before her consciousness is awakened and assaulted by the experience of life, therefore she escapes any knowledge of "the full extent of the world's evil".

Daisy is seen entirely from without, there are only two instances in the story where we glimpse something deeper in her nature than the personality of a precocious flirt. The first is when she perceives in spite of Winterbourne's denial, the fact that Mrs. Costello does not care to know her. The second instance is when she "turns pale" at Mrs. Walker's snub at the end of the party. In the life of such a young girl then, who has not yet known any deeper emotion than the sensations of new places and new people only, death is seen somewhat as a senseless, meaningless thing.

But in the later novel, death for Milly Theale is full of the poignance of a life which held so much promise but one which is doomed to an early demise. It is not only this that attaches more meaning to her death - she dies because she cannot bear the reality of the "full extent of the world's evil". For her then death is a "liberation" in the literal sense of the word.

It is inevitable that an early work like Daisy Miller should seem somewhat amateurish when compared to James's maturer fiction. But this tale occupies an important place in the James canon because here we see James's model for all subsequent heroines who were to dominate his artistic canvas. Though the reading public as well as some critics were outraged at what they termed as an "affront to American girlhood", Daisy Miller nevertheless was a tremendous success. Among the more favourable reviews of that time, one by John Hay¹² seems to grasp the essential truths about the story very precisely.

The fact that he has done so with a touch of marvellous delicacy and truth, that he has produced not so much a picture as a photograph, is held by many to be an aggravating circumstance. Only the most shiveringly sensitive of our shoddy population are bold enough to deny the truth of this wonderful little sketch. To those best acquainted with Mr. James's manner (and I believe I have read every word he has printed) Daisy Miller was positively startling in its straightforward simplicity and what I can only call authenticity. It could not have been written - I am almost ready to say it cannot be appreciated - except by one who has lived so long abroad as to be able to look at his own people with the eyes of a foreigner. (2.13).

"The eyes of a foreigner" of the foregoing paragraph may be interpreted as a sort of objectivity that

¹²Girlhood on the American Plain, Review of Daisy Miller by John Hay. Atlantic Monthly, vol. XLIII (March 1879), 399-401.

James has in depicting the career of Daisy. Such objectivity is necessary because her situation is the transatlantic relations and the heroine's career is to assimilate the European experience without really surrendering the moral vigour of her provincial background. However, themes which were to be explored in greater detail in the later works are merely hinted at in Daisy Miller. For example, Daisy's affluence is never emphasized except through some precocious remarks of her brother Randolph. Also the question of her marriage too is discussed by the others only as some hypothetical argument. An interesting point in this context is the discussion between Winterbourne and his aunt.

He [Giovannelli] is evidently immensely charmed with Miss Miller. If she thinks him the finest gentleman in the world, he, on his side, has never found himself in personal contact with such splendour, such opulence, such expensiveness, as this young lady's. And then she must seem to him wonderfully pretty and interesting. I rather doubt that he dreams of marrying her. That must appear to him too impossible a piece of luck. He has nothing but his handsome face to offer, and there is a substantial Mr. Miller in that mysterious land of dollars. Giovannelli knows that he hasn't a title to offer. If her were only a count or marchese! He must wonder at his luck, at the way they have taken him up. (DM, p.45).

And again, "It is very true", Winterbourne pursued, "that Daisy and her mamma have not yet risen

to that stage of - what shall I call it? - of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a marchesse begins. I believe that they are intellectually incapable of that conception." (DM, p.46).

In James's fiction, the 'drama of transatlantic relations' begins at the point where American affluence, in an attempt to assimilate the old-world culture and civilization of Europe, tries to buy a 'title' and in which transaction it is the American heiress who is the bait for the barter. In Daisy Miller, this is merely hinted at and left as a remote possibility because Daisy is too much the provincial belle rather than an idealist like Isabel Archer to take such a step. Hence, the 'incompleteness' of Daisy Miller. If there is any explicit moral element in the story it is still in the realm of social and cultural context rather than of individual psychology. This element dramatizes the special conflict and mutual misunderstanding between the free American spontaneity as represented by Daisy and the complex reaction to it by the Europeanized Americans.

In terms of chronology, Mme de Mauves (1874) is an earlier tale than Daisy Miller, but in terms of

thematic treatment, it analyses more fully the tragedy of a young, uninitiated and rich American girl exposed to the history and glamour of an older civilization. The decadence of the European sensibility which was only obliquely hinted at in Daisy Miller is now fully exposed through the decadence and cynicism of the de Mauves. The social and cultural conflict between two different outlooks on life as we see in Daisy Miller is now transformed into the personal, psychological conflict between the rich American heroine Euphemia Cleve and her profligate and impoverished French husband Baron de Mauves.

Unlike the sketchy portraiture in Daisy Miller, characters in Mme de Mauves are more fully developed and the tension among them made more dramatic. As in Daisy Miller, in this tale also there is a central character through whose consciousness the heroine is presented. But unlike Frederick Winterbourne in Daisy Miller Bernard Longmore is not a mere observer. He is assigned a role of much more intimacy with the heroine thereby drawing out her characteristics more fully. In fact, the relationship between Longmore and Mme de Mauves provides the framework for the story's central idea.

In presenting Euphemia Cleve, Henry James

emphasizes most her romantic nature. In a letter to Longmore from a friend, Mrs. Draper, this point is stressed. Commenting on Euphemia's unhappiness in marriage, Mrs. Draper goes on to say, "She was romantic and wilful, and thought Americans were vulgar."¹³(p.288).

This sentence reveals at a stroke both her romanticism and naivete - the following description of her girlhood again emphasizes this romantic streak in her character.

Here, [in the Parisian Convent] besides various elegant accomplishments - the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea - she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which she might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a title - not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Mme. la Vicomtesse (for which it seemed to her that she should never greatly care), but because she had a romantic belief that the best birth is the guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. Romances are rarely shaped in such perfect good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was in the radical purity of her imagination. She was utterly incorruptible, and she cherished this pernicious conceit as if it has been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints, she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than in well arrested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and that the consciousness of a picturesque family tradition imparts an exquisite tone to the character.(MM 11, p.289)

¹³ Henry James, Mme de Mauves, from The Tales of Henry James, Vol. 2. 1870-1874, edited by Maqbool Aziz (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1978), pp.284-347. All subsequent references are to this edition cited as MM.

Such a person, however, existed purely in the imagination of this romantic girl and when she enters into a personal relationship with such a preconceived notion, there is bound to be a moment of disillusionment at close contact with reality. Though the Baron de Mauves, whom she eventually marries, is a "gentleman with a long pedigree", he is far from being the "fine fellow" of her "transcendent theory."

When Longmore makes the acquaintance of Mme de Mauves in the little French town of Saint-Germain, she has been married long enough to the Baron to have discovered what kind of a man he is. She is no longer the bright-eyed innocent girl who had such romantic notions about being married into the aristocracy. Though she is unhappy, she is however determined to hide her unhappiness behind a calm exterior. Her disillusionment, in other words has been complete and into such a volatile situation in the de Mauves household, Longmore is introduced.

When a frustrated and disillusioned but young girl makes the acquaintance of a fellow American, young, personable and unattached, and who does not conceal his growing admiration of her, two courses are open to her - either to plunge headlong into an affair with the

admirer or to bear her sorrow in secret and maintain only a formal relationship with him. Given her temperament and upbringing she chooses the latter option.

On the other hand, her husband, far from being wary of Longmore's presence in his household and his attentions to his wife, encourages him to continue doing so. The Baron's sister Mme. Clairin goes so far as to say that both she and her brother count upon him to 'make love' to Mme de Mauves. In the eyes of these representatives of French aristocracy, it is more than justifiable for a young, beautiful and wronged wife to take a lover as a form of revenge upon the husband. Not only that, by doing so, she would be accepting that particular way of life, which for the de Mauves is merely the history of their family. They therefore want that Euphemia should 'conform' and not create any unnecessary unpleasantness by being jealous.

Euphemia, however, refuses to "conform" and this refusal sorely irritates the de Mauves who consider her attitude tantamount to an affront from the little puritanical foreigner come into their fold to disrupt their centuries-old way of life.

If Euphemia refuses to indulge the de Mauves, she also refuses to make a public spectacle of her marital problems by assuming the role of a tragic figure. In other words she simply refuses to show any outward signs of reaction to her husband's infidelity. She tells Longmore,

'I hate tragedy', she once said to him; 'I have a really pusillanimous dread of moral suffering. I believe that - without base concessions - there is always some way of escaping from it. I had almost rather never smile all my life than have a single violent explosion of grief'. (MM, III, pp.306-307).

What she is actually expressing there is that having been so brutally proven wrong in her romantic idealization of marriage and partnership, she has moved from one extreme of poetic imagination to one of cold prosaic conclusion about the futility of all human interaction. She reveals the process of her disillusionment to Longmore after he forces her to discuss her unhappy marriage.

I like my "world" no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what particular group of people is worth pinning one's faith upon? I confess it sometimes seems to me that men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I'm romantic. I have a most unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life is hard prose, which one must learn to read contentedly. I believe I once thought that all

the prose was in America, which was very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl, fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin to tell you now. Sometimes when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days, they take away my breath, and I wonder my bedazzled visions didn't lead me into troubles greater than any I have now to lament. I had a conviction which you would probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form of passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardour of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now in the distance like a shadow melting slowly in the light of experience. It has faded, but it has not vanished. Some feelings, I am sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the conditions of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion - that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece, then, and there is no shame in being miserably human. As for my "isolation", it doesn't greatly matter; it's the fault, in part, of my obstinacy. (MM II, pp.317-318).

In this long discourse, she displays a mind far more mature and composed than one would have given her credit for. Already, the tone of resignation about her fate is quite pronounced. The only note of regret in this passage is sounded when she says, "There have been moments when I have wished I was the daughter of a poor New England minister, living in a little white house under a couple of elms, and doing all the housework.(MM p.318).

When Euphemia refuses to "conform" according to

the de Mauves' code of conduct she not only defeats their purpose, she also thwarts Longmore's amorous advances. His visits have been the only moments of relaxation in a life otherwise fraught with the tensions of an unhappy marriage, but so far she had been able to maintain a discreet distance with him in spite of the regularity of his visits and his attempts at soliciting any direct allusion to her personal life. So long as the state of her marriage was secret, Mme de Mauves could maintain this distance, but after her long confessional statements, such a stance becomes impossible because the hitherto passive Longmore becomes more bold in his avowals of affection for her. Having been compelled to shed her reservations with him, she decides to put an end to their relationship. Her decision is more or less precipitated by an encounter that takes place between her and the Baron where he literally tells her to go ahead and have an affair with Longmore.

Take your revenge, console yourself; you're too pretty a woman to have anything to complain of. Here's a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to the poor fellow, and you'll find that virtue is none the less becoming for being good natured. You'll see that

it's not after all such a doleful world,
and that there is even an advantage in
having the most impudent of husbands.
(MM. VI, p.326)

Euphemia, however decides that the time has
come for her to remove any possibility whereby her
integrity may be compromised. Therefore in a coolly
calculating way, she puts forward her decision in the
form of an appeal to Longmore's refined sensibility and
also reminding him of her "high opinion" of him.

Don't disappoint me. If you don't
understand me now, you will tomorrow, or
very soon. When I said just now that I
had a very high opinion of you, I meant
it very seriously. It was not a vain
compliment. I believe that there is no
appeal one may make to your generosity
which can remain long unanswered. If
this were to happen - if I were to find
you selfish where I thought you generous,
narrow where I thought you large - and
she spoke slowly, with her voice lingering
with emphasis on each of these words -
vulgar where I thought you rare - I should
think worse of human nature. I should
suffer - I should suffer keenly. I should
say to myself in the dull days of the
future, "There was one man who might have
done so and so; and he too failed." But
this shall not be. You have made too good
an impression on me not to make the very
best. If you wish to please me for ever,
there's a way. (MM, VIII, pp. 336-337)

And the way to please her is for him to make
this visit his last and she makes it sound like the
best possible way - "not that I had dismissed you,

but that you had gone away out of the fullness of your own wisdom". (p.337). A very cleverly manipulated stratagem - and an appeal to which she knew Longmore would respond in the way she expected him to - that he would accept the challenge of the appeal and leave her to her fate. Thus the only source from which any hint of compromise upon her integrity was possible, has been effectively removed.

Had the story ended at this stage Euphemia's vindication might have been a plausible fact. But the author gives it an O'Henryesque twist by making the Baron shoot himself. It is reported that the Baron eventually repents of his follies and falls in love with his wife - but Euphemia refuses to admit him to her favours again. In the words of this third person narrator, "She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. (MM. IX, p.347)

In such a person's concept of morality, intransigence rather than the accommodating Christian principle of forgiveness seems to be the motivating force. Emotions in such a person, once arrested at the vulnerable point, have no hope of being revived. Quite early in their association, Longmore had intuitively grasped this quality of Euphemia's personality,

when he thinks that she had effectively concealed her sorrows and had assumed "the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek Statues," (MM III, p.300)

However, as his attachment to her grows apace with his association, he tends to idealize her more and more. He regards her passive submissiveness as the sign of a generous nature.

She seemed to him to have been long resisting the force of cruel evidence, and though she had succumbed to it at last, to have denied herself the right to complain, because if faith was gone her heroic generosity remained. (MM, III, p.306). And again after his dismissal he thinks, "She has loved once", he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his windows; that's for ever; Yes, yes - if she loved again she would be common. (MM, IX, pp.339-340).

It is only at the end when he hears of her husband's suicide that he finally understands the true nature of her personality. It is perhaps because of this perception that he shows no inclination towards her even though he learns that she is free. "The truth is, that in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Mme. de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling, for which awe would be hardly too strong a name". (MM, IX, p.347).

There isⁱⁿ Mme de Mauves' insistence to uphold the responsibility of a commitment even after the sentiments and feelings which prompted it are no longer there, an unfeeling, unreflecting obstinacy of clinging to a meaningless formality. If there is evil in the decadent and cynical way of life among the debauched Europeans, there is an equally chilling dehumanizing effect in the rigid and unrelenting puritanical attitude to human foibles as displayed by Mme de Mauves. The spiritual and cultural alienation between the Baron and his puritanical wife is the essential character of the international conflict in Mme de Mauves. But it is in the context of Euphemia's relationship with Longmore that this conflict becomes clear and the rigidity of her worldview is exposed. Her relationship with Longmore rather than that with her husband, provides both the main interest and the critical point of view in this tale.

James Kraft makes this remark about Euphemia Cleve¹⁴

¹⁴James Kraft, Madame de Mauves and Roderick Hudson: The development of James's Inter-national Style, The Texas Quarterly, II (Autumn 1968), pp.143-160.

Perhaps in Euphemia the element of romance is so strong that, properly approached, she could have an affair with Longmore. He must, however, attempt this affair in a way that fulfills her romantic ideal. Once her husband and his sister have entered, it is too late for this proud woman. The idea is only suggested in the tale but if this suggestion seems substantial, it shows James dealing with the subtle innuendoes of a mind that wants merely to appear pure in order to imagine itself so; and the criticism of Euphemia and her American morality must then become, in the light of her later actions, even more devastating. She is not just injured and self-righteous; she is then deliberately and hypocritically playing the role of the martyr. (p.152)

Granting that Euphemia is a romantic person, it is however illogical even to suggest that she could have had an affair with Longmore. Idealist that she is, there is a great deal of selfishness in her idealism. If she is disappointed and disillusioned with her husband it is simply because she thinks that she deserved better consideration from him. The same analogy applies to her attitude to Longmore too. This is apparent in the way she begins her appeal to him - "Don't disappoint me". And then she proceeds to order his emotions according to her expectations. The initial effect of her appeal on Longmore is to arouse in him a "perverse imagination".

Longmore was confused, dazzled, almost bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal; but her presence there, so close, so urgent, so personal, seemed a distracting mockery of it. She had never been so lovely. (MM VIII, p.337)

Her words leave him wondering, "Were her words, in their soft severity, a mere delusive spell, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and was this the only truth, the only reality, the only law?" (p.337).

But Longmore does not remain perplexed long and understanding of her words and actions dawns on him with the revelation of her estimate of him.

She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly. She liked him, she must have liked him greatly, to wish to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her friendship - her strong friendship she had just called it - Longmore's soul rose with a new flight, and suddenly felt itself breathing a cleaner air. The words ceased to seem a mere bribe to his ardour; they were changed with warmth themselves; they were a present happiness. (MM VIII, p.338).

Longmore's reflections and subsequent actions too are then logical because he too, like Euphemia Cleve, is a member of the "transatlantic democracy" whose sensibilities are in direct opposition to those of the

de Mauves and all they stand for. The irony of the situation is that though Longmore does not perceive it, he has been 'used' by Euphemia as a foil to her prim puritanical moralism just as much as she has been taken advantage of by the de Mauves because of her romantic idealism.

In Mme de Mauves, one sees the transformation of a romantic idealist into a cold unfeeling moralist who would not admit of any human consideration in a relationship. Her reaction to the intense personal deception that she has suffered seems to be purely cerebral - there is no overt grief, no outward change in her relationship with her husband. Though her progression from an innocent, idealistic girl into an austere, puritanical matron is too abruptly etched, the conflict between two opposing codes of moral conduct is clearly brought out. This theme was to recur in all of James's later works too. But in his mature fiction, he restores the human equation to the heroine's moral stance by investing in her the mellow humanity which is often acquired through a heart rending personal tragedy. Heroines like Isabel Archer, and Maggie Verver, though they too suffer similar deceptions do achieve a compromise without totally surrendering their principles.

Apart from the mature style and compactness of the nine short, dramatic units, Mme de Mauves marks an important step in the development of James's narrative technique. Unlike Winterbourne in Daisy Miller, Longmore is made the story's central consciousness and through his mind we see the unfolding of the dramatic conflict in the story. Because of this he becomes a more important fictional character than merely an observant narrator like Winterbourne.

Mme de Mauves is important from another consideration - it seems to be the kernel of James's most important work of his early phase, The Portrait of a Lady.

In Euphemia Cleve one can virtually see an Isabel Archer in the making. Both are romantic idealists and rich. Euphemia is a girl, who, according to her own confessions, is in love with her theories. (p.318). Isabel too is described as one who had many theories. Both marry much older men, suavely decadent in their own ways. And these men marry the girls solely for their money. The egotism and politeness of the Baron de Mauves vividly anticipate Gilbert Osmond's. In Longmore one sees a combination of Ralph Touchett and Caspar Godwood - In playing the role of the

outsider, observing the drama of the de Mauves marriage, he resembles Ralph Touchett, the "interested observer" of the fortunes of Isabel in The Portrait. But as a contender for the affections of Euphemia, he is like Caspar Goodwood, who, like him is rejected when the heroine decides to stick to her despicable husband. Madame Clairin with all her sense of history and family pride resembles Countess Gemini of The Portrait. However though both Euphemia and Isabel are betrayed by their husbands and both take similar moral stands regarding their obligations to their marriage contracts, Isabel's portraiture is more detailed and analytical and because her sense of disillusionment is so sympathetically presented, she emerges as a more plausibly human individual than Euphemia.

What James is able to achieve in Mme de Mauves is perhaps best stated by J.A. Ward.¹⁵

In its total effect, Madame de Mauves is a remarkably complex and carefully organized work of fiction. The relationships among the characters, the narrative development, and the setting work together to explore the delicate relationship between class and character, between cultural persuasion and private perception.(p.94).

¹⁵J.A. Ward, The Search for Form : Studies in the structure of James's Fiction. (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1967), Section on Madame de Mauves, pp.77-94.

In the exploration of such a 'relationship' the boundaries of countries and nationalities are immaterial,. The tension is purely in the "nameless country" of the mind, and imagination. Euphemia tells Longmore exactly this during a conversation in the early days of their association.

As matters stand, one may be very American and yet arrange it with one's conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps - I had a little when I was younger - helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This is not America, perhaps, about me, but it's quite as little France. France is out there, beyond the garden, in the town, in the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and - she paused a moment - 'in my mind, it's a nameless country of my own. It's not her country' she added, that makes a woman happy or unhappy. (MM, III, p.301).

Here then we see how James was to use the conflict between America and Europe rather as the backdrop to study 'private perception' and how in his later fiction he placed the drama in the "nameless country" of his characters' mind rather than in any international conflict between nations and cultures.

Madame de Mauves was not one of those pieces which produced rave reviews for James and was less known than Daisy Miller. But in the James canon, the heroines

of these two tales occupy an important position as the predecessors of all his other memorable and more famous heroines like Isabel Archer, Milly Theale and Maggie Verver. These tales, therefore, far from being mere items in a prolific writer's repertoire provide the initial insights into the "many stages" in the development of the Jamesian heroine.

CHAPTER - I

THE LIMITED HEROINE :

A Study of Washington Square (1880)

Catherine Sloper of Washington Square¹ is perhaps the unlikeliest of all the heroines of Henry James, because, though the novel is her story, he has not assigned her a dominant role. Her mediocre intellect and plain looks evoke no romance or excitement. She has none of the usual charms of his other heroines. Here is her description in Chapter II,

She was a healthy, well-grown child, without a trace of her mother's beauty. She was not ugly; she had simply a plain, dull, gentle countenance. The most that had ever been said for her was that she had a 'nice' face; and, though she was an heiress, no one had ever thought of regarding her as a belle. Her father's opinion of her moral purity was abundantly justified; she was excellently, imperturbably good; affectionate, docile, obedient, and much addicted to speaking the truth.

The description further continues to emphasize Catherine's mediocrity. "Catherine was decidedly not clever; she was not quick with her book, nor indeed with anything else." (WS, p.11).

¹Henry James, Washington Square, First published 1880 (London, Penguin Books, 1963), p.11. All other references hereafter are to this edition cited as WS.

When a person of such attributes happens to have been born after the death of a much adored son and whose birth was the event of her mother's death, and the father happens to be a successful society doctor who "knew his own value" (WS, p.12), the sense of the father's irritation at having produced such a "commonplace" (p.12) child becomes somewhat understandable. But the irritation assumes quite a different proportion when it remains unmitigated by any paternal affection whatsoever. Moreover, Dr. Austin Sloper has an unflattering estimate of feminine characteristics in general, whom he thinks of as the "complicated" and "imperfect sex" (WS, p.9). The only woman who ever "dazzled" him was his wife whose greatest virtue according to him was her reasonableness. Translate this as one who always agreed with him, and one can understand his chagrin at Catherine who is the exact opposite of her mother.

Such disappointment with his unpromising child being the dominating force, his relationship with her assumes an unnatural character in which he keeps her at a disdainful distance by adopting a mockingly ironical tone with her. It is as though he is trying to maintain an emotional and mental distance because

he feels that she has somehow cheated him of his potential glories of being the progenitor of a charming and intelligent girl. Instead, by being what she is, Catherine seems to be a bad reflector of his genius.

Catherine on the other hand however, thinks him "the cleverest, the handsomest and most celebrated of men," and "her deepest desire was to please him and her conception of happiness was to know that she had succeeded in pleasing him". (WS, p.12). If there was any sense of alienation in her mind regarding her father, it was because she sensed that "she had never succeeded beyond a certain point" in pleasing him. Her affection for him was therefore tinged with awe - "that gentle dread which gave its stamp to her admiration of her father". (WS. p.11-12).

Though Dr. Sloper is convinced of the "moral purity" of his daughter, who is "imperturbably good", he puts a low premium on it when he says, "You are good for nothing unless you are clever". (WS, p.10). Therefore he wants his sister Lavinia Penniman to make a "clever woman" of Catherine. This statement itself is a ridiculously ironical proposition when one sees

that Mrs. Penniman's dubious qualification for this task is pointed out from the very outset. She had "a taste for light literature, and a certain foolish indirectness and obliquity of character : -- She was not absolutely veracious;" (WS, p.10).

When the father casts his clever, clinical eyes on his daughter, he sees only a poor specimen of humanity more to be pitied and ridiculed than appreciated for her moral worth. When he envisions a future for her in his mind, he conjures up a pitiable, pathetic little scene for her.

'When Catherine is about seventeen, he said to himself, Lavinia will try and persuade her that some young man with a moustache is in love with her. It will be quite untrue; no young man, with a moustache or without, will ever be in love with Catherine. But Lavinia will take it up, and talk to her about it; perhaps, even, if her taste for clandestine operations doesn't prevail with her she will talk to me about it. Catherine won't see it and won't believe it, fortunately for her peace of mind; poor Catherine isn't romantic'. (WS, p.11).

The doctor is thus denying Catherine not only any imaginative power but also seems to be trying to stunt her natural growth where love for, and response to the opposite sex is a part of living - whether one is "pretty" or "plain" - "lively" or "dull". As far as

the doctor is concerned, Catherine's life is an open and shut case.

Therefore when the surprise element in the person of Morris Townsend enters to cause a stir at Washington Square, the doctor is sufficiently aroused to take notice of the fact. But his agitation is not on behalf of poor Catherine - his interest is almost purely clinical; he wants to find out if Catherine can ever be loved for her moral worth alone. The doctor is "amused" - and expects some entertainment, from the little drama (WS, p.35) of Catherine's courtship. The attitude displayed here is one of objective distance - he is not at all bothered that his daughter is poised on the verge of a new sensation, a new relationship. He sees only the improbable, only the ludicrous element in the situation.

'It must be deucedly pleasant for a plain, inanimate girl like that to have a beautiful young fellow come and sit down beside her, and whisper to her that he is her slave - if that is what this one whispers. No wonder she likes it, and that she thinks me a cruel tyrant; which of course, she does, though she is afraid - she hasn't the animation necessary - to admit it to herself. Poor old Catherine!' mused the Doctor; 'I verily believe she is capable of defending me when Townsend abuses me!' (WS, p.45).

In many respects the doctor is right about his assessment of his daughter's characteristics and absolutely so about his intuition about the worthlessness of Morris Townsend. But his critical analysis is devoid of any positive concern - he is only a dispassionate observer of the drama of his daughter's love - and irony is his tool to maintain the emotional distance that he has created between him and his daughter. For instance, when he sees his otherwise insipid daughter in a red satin gown trimmed with gold at the Almond's party (WS, p.18), he exclaims, with his eyes not on her but on her gown - "Is it possible that this magnificent person is my child?" and brushing aside her protestation, continues, "you are sumptuous, opulent, expensive. You look as if you had eighty thousand" (WS, p.22). The irony and contempt for his daughter is betrayed by the epithets he uses, "magnificent, sumptuous, opulent and expensive" for a person whom he had long ago categorized as "common place". The cutting irony also signifies a de-humanizing metamorphosis that Catherine undergoes in her father's estimate. He seems to have converted his lack-lustre daughter of negligible "moral worth" into a marketable commodity "worth" several thousands a year.

The epithets therefore belong rightfully to the dress which is the index of her 'worth', rather than the human personality called Catherine Sloper. He maintains this mocking tone with Catherine all throughout. He taunts her, "Well my dear, did he propose to you to-day?" (WS, p.31) after one of Townsend's visits with Catherine. And again, when she tells him later that she is engaged to be married he asks sneeringly, "And who is this happy mortal whom you have honoured with your choice?" (WS, p.54).

The tension that the father creates between himself and his daughter dominates everything in the novel and determines the course of events for everyone concerned. Even Morris Townsend plays only a contributory role in the overall drama and his introduction into the scene seems merely to heighten the doctor's self-righteous domination of his daughter. Catherine is therefore best seen, observed and understood in the context of her relationship with her father. Seen from this vantage point then, the novel becomes the story of the self-centred and strongwilled father's attempt to manipulate his daughter's life and of the contention between two men of similar dispositions trying to manipulate and dominate a young

innocent girl. The father uses his paternal authority to subdue her will and the threat of disinheritance to stop her from marrying her sweetheart. The young man on the other hand, tries to manipulate her vulnerable young heart with the idea of love and romance while all the time his main interest is her inheritance only.

Catherine's vulnerability in the hands of these two men is rooted in her own psyche too. She has grown up in the shadow of her brilliant father whom she worships with a sincere devotion and naively believes in his infinite goodness and the sincerity of his parental concern for her. Her awareness that she did not succeed 'totally' in pleasing him leaves a deep impression in her mind about her inadequacies and in her ardent devotion she thinks that "to go beyond the point in question seemed to her really something to live for". (WS, p.12). She is also aware that she is in no way anything like her beautiful and brilliant mother whom her father adored. [Mrs. Penniman constantly reminds her of this. WS, p.127]. All the more reason perhaps why she is so conscious of her duties towards him which is to obey him and not do anything which might cause him pain. It is precisely because of her submissive but sincere nature that Morris Townsend is able to

impress upon her that his love is genuine. He plays the ardent lover to the hilt while the father assumes the distant, disdainful attitude of a deity who is extremely critical of the devotee but who at the same time takes a perverse delight in the devotion and uses that devotion against the worshipper. Catherine's devotion to her father is described thus, "She had an immense respect for her father and she felt that to displease him would be a misdemeanour analogous to an act of profanity in a great temple"; (WS, p.87). But the father, playing the role of the brilliant but pompous father to a dull, plain girl sees, not her goodness, nor her devotion but only her plainness of looks and dullness of personality. When he thinks of her she is always 'poor Catherine' (WS, p.11, p.44) said in a derogatory way. He even talks to Mrs. Montgomery of her as 'my poor girl' (WS, p.67). The lover also has no better opinion of Catherine. "Gracious Heaven, what a dull woman!" Morris thinks of her during a conversation just before she leaves for Europe. (WS, p.111).

However, the author takes care to hint that it would be a gross mistake to dismiss Catherine out of hand and decide that she is incapable of growing out of the mould that the father and the lover have assigned

for her. Early on in the novel we are told,

Both she [Mrs. Penniman] and her brother however exaggerated the young girl's limitations; for Catherine, though she was very fond of her aunt, and conscious of the gratitude she owed her, regarded her without a particle of that gentle dread which gave its stamp to her admiration of her father. To her mind there was nothing of the infinite about Mrs. Penniman; Catherine saw her all at once, as it were, and was not dazzled by the apparition; whereas her father's great faculties seemed, as they stretched away, to lose themselves in a sort of luminous vagueness, which indicated, not that they stopped, but that Catherine's own mind ceased to follow them. (WS, pp.12-13).

It is therefore very interesting to note that the possibility of psychological growth hinted at in this passage should be manifest with the advent of the young and dashing Morris Townsend into her hitherto uneventful life. The girl who has been described as "much addicted to telling the truth" is seen speaking untruths on three instances in the course of an evening. (The Almond's party - WS. Ch. 4). But this may be interpreted as the confused reactions of an inexperienced person to a new situation rather than deliberate acts aimed at deception. Being constantly aware of the father's critical eyes and her aunt's curiosity Catherine is unable to give a direct response to the first stirrings of a new

sensation. But some deeply felt chord has been struck and she responds to the possibility of a new personal relationship. Certitudes are few as yet - assertions much less but her meetings with Morris become "the most important, the most absorbing thing in her life". (WS, p.39). There is no great flurry and flutter about the business because she is not made that way but the signs are unmistakable - she is in love.

The girl was happy, she knew not as yet what would come of it; but the present had suddenly grown rich and solemn. If she had been told she was in love, she would have been a good deal surprised; for she had an idea that love was an eager and exacting passion, and her own heart was filled in these days with the impulse of self effacement and sacrifice. (WS, pp.39-40).

For Catherine, love as an emotional involvement of sharing between two equal persons is an alien concept and the new sensation leaves her with an impression which so touchingly reveals her loveless existence so far.

Love demands certain things as a right; but Catherine had no sense of her rights; she had only a consciousness of immense and unexpected favours. Her very gratitude for these things had hushed itself; for it seemed to her that there would be something of impudence in making a festival of her secret. (WS, p.40).

But however inadequate her responses and whatever be the uncertainties, her love for Morris Townsend

promises the start of her psychological expansion.

The opposition which the father sets up against Morris Townsend on the question of his real motive for wanting to marry Catherine, actually provides her with the opportunities for self-assertion and attaining a new personality. The first instance of this process is seen in her reply to her father's mocking question whether Morris had proposed to her that day. "Perhaps he will do it the next time". (WS, p.32). Quite a flippant retort from the timid and submissive daughter. But that is not all - she wishes that he should ask the question again so that she can give him a more fitting answer like 'Oh yes, Mr. Morris Townsend proposed to me and I refused him'. (WS, p.32).

As Catherine tries to tackle a human, practical problem for the first time in her life, we see certain subtle changes taking place in her. First she is seen deriving "a great excitement at trying to be a good daughter" (WS, p.74) - a good daughter who is even trying to justify her father's stand by saying that he is merely playing the role of a "conscientious father" (WS, p.75) in opposing Morris and suspecting his motives. She also displays a good deal of naive piety in viewing

the problem. While "the idea of a struggle with her father, of setting up her will against his own was heavy on her soul and it kept her formally submissive" (WS, p.75). She piously hoped that "if she were only good enough, Heaven would invent some way of reconciling all things - the dignity of her father's errors and the sweetness of her own confidence, the strict performance of her filial duties, and the enjoyment of Morris Townsend's affection". (WS, p.76). What Catherine is really hoping for is a fairy-tale ending to her problem, with a little intervention from Heaven. But practical problems of the world have no such ready solutions and Catherine has to make a painful choice between her loyalty to her father and her love for Morris Townsend. (WS, pp.106-107).

Though her naivete is apparent from such wishful thinking, Catherine displays another aspect of her character which constitutes her greatest strength. For lack of any ready phrase, this may be defined as the sincerity of her intentions and actions. At every stage of her confrontation with her father on the question of her marriage with Morris Townsend, we see her meekly seeking her father's permission like a dutiful and

conscientious daughter. She tries to convince her father thus that her desire to be married to Morris Townsend is in no way an act of disloyalty or defiance towards him. And by proving this about her intentions she hopes to soften his heart and obtain his consent. Even to Morris Townsend she makes it very plain how much her father's permission matters and how difficult it is for her to go against his wishes. When Morris tells her - 'I should have liked you to say, "If my father doesn't think well of you, what does it matter?"' she replies, "Ah, but it would matter; I couldn't say that!" (WS, p.38) Catherine's integrity is such that she tells her father that she ought not to say with him and enjoy his kindness and protection if she cannot obey him and fulfil her duties as a daughter. (WS, p.109). She also chides her aunt Penniman for visiting Morris without her father's knowledge or consent and tells her, "I don't see why you should have seen him. I don't think it was right", and goes on to say that she herself has not seen him because her "father has forbidden it". (WS, p.84).

The meekly pious stand that Catherine has taken on this issue cannot be maintained long. This is partly

because of Morris Townsend's impatience at her docility and mostly because of her father's unreasonableness towards her entreaties. Though he is right in thinking that Morris Townsend's motive is avarice, his opposition to the marriage did not merely rest on the fact of Townsend's poverty.

The fact that Morris Townsend was poor, was not of necessity against him; the Doctor had never made up his mind that his daughter should marry a rich man. The fortune she would inherit struck him as a very sufficient provision for two reasonable persons, and if a penniless swain who could give a good account of himself should enter the lists, he should be judged quite upon his personal merits. There were other things besides. The doctor thought it very vulgar to be precipitate in accusing people of mercenary motives, in as much as his door had as yet not been in the least besieged by fortune hunters; and lastly he was very curious to see whether Catherine might really be loved for her moral worth. (WS, p.36).

The "other things" which the doctor talks about have mainly to do with his own natural antipathies to the young man.

The doctor was struck with his appreciative quest; he saw that he was not a commonplace young man. 'He has ability', said Catherine's father, 'decided ability; he has a very good head if he chooses to use it. And he is uncommonly well turned out; quite the sort of figure that pleases the ladies; but I don't think I like him'. (WS, p.37).

And again his dislike erupts, "He has the assurance of the devil himself!" (p.37) said Morris's host. It is interesting to note here how the doctor's mind is working on the subject. The young man who is not a "commonplace man" cannot be in love with his daughter who is a "commonplace child". This is the reason, along with his own dislike of him, why he cannot accept the fact that Morris Townsend loves his daughter for her "moral worth". Undoubtedly a very lucid academic analysis of a problem but if in the beginning his opposition to the young lovers stems from such thinking, it gradually grows into a perverse curiosity as Catherine shows signs of "sticking" to her young man. And finally his curiosity turns to a hostile determination to prove himself right. So he uses the most lethal weapons at his disposal - attack Catherine's filial piety and threaten to disinherit her in an obvious attempt to expose Morris Townsend for what he is.

It is thus that the doctor's bemused interest in the affair turns to open cruelty. In terms of mental cruelty unleashed on Catherine, there are two scenes in the novel which 'unmask' the doctor as it were; the

Alps scene in Europe and the other one in Chapter 18, (p.92). Though there is a definite physical terror evoked by the desolation of the scenery, the gathering darkness of dusk and the stark emptiness of the doctor's soul revealed by his action in the Alps scene, there is also a considerable amount of melodrama; it is as though the scene and tableau has been very carefully selected and constructed in order to evoke the desired response from Catherine. But in the little scene in Chapter 18, there is something more chilling and dehumanizing than the Alps scene. In the cosy comfort of a rich man's library the daughter stands meekly seeking the father's permission to see her sweetheart just once, of whom the father disapproves thoroughly. She could have met the sweetheart secretly as her aunt does, but the sincerity and adherence to 'veracity' in this young girl makes her want to do her duty by her father. But her humble request is met with an icy, unrelenting authoritarian rebuff.

'Exactly as you choose', he repeated, standing there with his hand on the door, 'I have told you what I think. If you see him, you will be an ungrateful, cruel child; you will have given your old father the greatest pain of his life'.

This was more than the poor girl could bear; her tears overflowed, and she moved towards her grimly consistent parent with a pitiful cry. Her hands were raised in supplication, but he sternly evaded this appeal. Instead of letting her sob out her misery on his shoulder, he simply took her by the arm and directed her course across the threshold, closing the door gently but firmly behind her (WS, p.92).

The cruelty and finality of the gesture is such that years later, she sees it as even more hurtful than the inconsistency of Morris Townsend. "From her own point of view the great facts of her career were that Morris Townsend had trifled with her affection and that her father had broken its spring". (WS, p.160, italics mine).

The European tour is only a temporary truce between two persons now trying to humour each other, as it were. As Catherine begins to perceive that the father will never relent and agree to her marriage with Morris, a certain resolve takes shape in her mind and the hitherto unresisting Catherine comes back from Europe quite a changed person. On the other hand as the doctor also sees how steadfast Catherine is in her devotion to Morris Townsend, his attitude towards her hardens into greater cruelty. If in his former ironical addresses, there was a certain flippancy,

now there is deliberate malice and despise in his tone.

The night before they leave for England, he tells her,

He ought to be very thankful to me, do you know, I have done a mighty good thing for him in taking you abroad; your value is twice as great, with all the knowledge and taste you have acquired. A year ago, you were perhaps a little limited - a little rustic; but now you have seen everything, and appreciated everything, and you will be a most entertaining companion. We have fattened the sheep for him before he kills it. (WS, p. 119).

For the first time here, the doctor makes a direct allusion to Catherine's deficiencies and mocks at her supposed education abroad. A little later he tells his sister Mrs Almond what he thinks about this 'education', "Exactly the same; not a grain more intelligent. She didn't notice a stick or a stone all the while we were away - not a picture nor a view, not a statute nor a Cathedral". (WS, p.130).

If Europe failed to arouse Catherine's interest or rather if Catherine failed to appreciate Europe - her European trip has however given her a new perspective, a moral comfort - in knowing that her father has ceased to occupy the same position in her mind as before. She tells her aunt Penniman,

Nothing has changed - nothing but my feeling about father. I don't mind nearly so much now. I have been as good as I could, but he doesn't care. Now I don't care either. I don't know whether I have grown bad; perhaps I have. But I don't care for that. I have come home to be married - that's all I know. (WS, p.124).

For a person who always seemed to languish in the shadow of her father's domineering personality and who has hitherto suffered her frivolous aunt's interferences without demurring, this is a very incisive little speech indeed.

With Morris Townsend also her demeanour is more assertive and demanding. She tells him

'You mustn't pity me' said Catherine,
'I don't mind it now I am used to it'.
(WS, p.126).

And she explains her father's opposition to their marriage thus,

He talked to me one night - the last night - and then it came over me. You can tell when a person feels that way. I wouldn't accuse him if he hadn't made me feel that way. I don't accuse him; I just tell you that that's how it is. He can't help it; we can't govern our affections. Do I govern mine? Mightn't he say that to me? It's because he is so fond of my mother, whom we lost so long ago. She was beautiful, and very, very brilliant; he is always thinking of her. I am not at all like her; Aunt Penniman has told me that. Of course it isn't my fault; but neither is it his fault. All I mean is, it's true; and it's a stronger reason for his never being reconciled than simply his dislike for you. (WS, p.127).

There is no pathos in the statement, no bitterness, no sarcasm, and no undue sentiment whatsoever. It is as detached and dispassioned a statement as if it were made by a person like her father and not Catherine. But it is the moment of truth for her and she accepts it without a murmur. This new awareness is what has freed her from any sense of obligation and what makes her tell Morris Townsend. "I have great moral comfort now". (WS, p.126).

But unfortunately for Catherine, though she is now poised for the final break from her father and all that her submission to him has meant to her, the person for whom she is ready to renounce everything betrays her and leaves her once again in his cruel clutches. When she realises that Morris means to leave her, she cries out to him - "Think of what I have done!" she broke out. 'Morris I have given up everything'. (WS, p.143).

Catherine has never been depicted as a person sparkling with good looks and brilliant conversation. Nor is she a high minded romantic idealist like Euphemia Cleve or Isabel Archer. But all the same the process of her disillusionment is fraught with the same treachery, betrayal and cruelty that James's more celebrated heroines

suffer. Where she thought she saw true love - only the crass glitter of avarice mocked her in her hour of disillusionment. And where she expected genuine human sympathy and understanding she was met with only a wall of adamant self-justification. In the end then her father and Morris Townsend manage to blight her youth and leave her maimed, for life as it were. She is thwarted in her attempt at forging a distinct personality of her own by the two persons whom she thought were dearest to her. As such it is only natural that she recoils into herself and tries to eke out what savour she can out of a life which has only left her a big "void". Catherine Sloper's consciousness remains only partially awakened and her story ends almost at the point where it started. The distance between these two points is strictly chronological and the psychological expansion possible for a person who has undergone the kind of experience that Catherine has, remains mostly unexplored. Her life is the chronicle of a person who remains unobtrusive, unassertive and unimpressive all throughout. The concluding sentence of the novel is the confirmation of this. "Catherine, meanwhile, in the parlour, picking up her morsel of fancy work, had seated herself with it again - for life, as it were". (WS, p.174).

Her negative passivity stems largely from her notion of 'goodness' which demanded an unquestioning abnegation of the self - From the very outset, her goodness is pointed out as her one positive quality. The father's conviction of it is complete - "Her father's opinion of her moral purity was abundantly justified; she was excellently, imperturbably good, affectionate, docile, obedient and much addicted to speaking the truth". (p.11). When Dr. Sloper tells his sister to make a clever woman of Catherine she replies, "Do you think it is better to be clever than to be good?" - the implication here being that Catherine is already good, Catherine herself, after returning from Europe tells her aunt Penniman, "Nothing is changed - nothing but my feeling about father. I don't mind nearly so much now. I have been as good as I could, but he doesn't care. Now I don't care either. I don't know whether I have grown bad; perhaps I have. But I don't care for that". (Ch. 25, p.124).

The domination of this goodness and the attempt to take advantage of it becomes the nature of the moral conflict in Washington Square. The concept of evil, which was treated as the polarities of worldviews in

Daisy Miller and more especially in Mme de Mauves becomes now actualised as the attempt of the three other principal characters in the novel - Dr. Austin Sloper, Morris Townsend and Lavinia Penniman, to dominate and manipulate the inner life of the heroine, Catherine Sloper.

Dr. Austin Sloper's is the most damaging effect on Catherine because he possesses the greatest power to harm her, the unalterable fact of his fatherhood, a relationship which began at the instant of Catherine's birth and which naturally involves mutual responsibilities. But sadly for Catherine, this is entirely a one-sided affair. Her affection and awe for her father assume even certain divine proportions - not because of Dr. Sloper's god-like propensities but because of the sincerity of her devotion. Such devotion, however is used against her, as a means to intimidate and humiliate her. His interference in her affair with Morris Townsend, however well-meaning he may try to make it appear, is nothing but the exercise of his power to control and dominate her. Beside such a power, Catherine's goodness is ineffective and her quest for a meaningful personal relationship ends in disaster.

The tension in the story is between the father's latent capacity for evil and Catherine's passive goodness. Therefore their relationship dominates everything in the novel. Catherine is best seen, observed and understood in this context. The introduction of Morris Townsend into the household at Washington Square is not to be seen as the cause of this tension but rather a result of the peculiar relationship between Catherine and her father. Therefore, though he does become an important factor in her life and is partly responsible for her misery, he provides mostly the melodramatic element of the novel.

Morris Townsend's monetary designs on Catherine remain starkly so. His role is therefore that of an unethical operator who had his assured good looks and the girls' naive innocence to his advantage. Though cast in a typical role, he is no Baron de Mauves, or Gilbert Osmond or Merton Densher or Prince Amerigo. From the beginning of the story we see a young man with a predilection for extravagance who sees in Catherine and her money the promise of an easy contented life. His selfishness is unmitigated by any other quality; he has no breeding, no culture, no sophistication. The only

consistency that he displays is in his pursuit of Catherine, the heiress. When he thinks the prospect of her disinheritance is real he leaves her heartbroken. The obvious exit for such a character is comic rather than anything else. "Goodbye, then", said Morris, "Excuse my indiscretion", and exits from Catherine's presence, (Ch. 35, p.174) and greets Mrs. Penniman in the hall with the exasperation of an actor who has bungled his lines due to bad prompting "That was a precious plan of yours!" Said Morris clapping on his hat. (p.174). In a gallery of portraits that James created of the male seducers, Morris Townsend is an 'American' in the most literal sense of the word and what James lamented of as want of 'paraphernalia' in this novel is perhaps the lack of suavity and sophistication that his Europeans and Europeanised American men possessed.

The sense of betrayal suffered by Catherine becomes doubly more so because of the ironical fact that her father's opposition contributes to Morris Townsend's betrayal and this betrayal only justifies the father's opposition to their match. She is caught between the sadism of her father and the treachery of

her sweetheart. Materialism is the name of the evil that these two men practice in two different ways.

If avarice is the mask of Morris Townsend's evil, there is yet another kind of evil - however unintentioned, in the comic interference of Lavinia Penniman in the affair between Catherine and Morris Townsend. In the name of well-meaning intervention Lavinia is merely seeking some perverse self-gratification which is the result of an addle brained imagination. From the very beginning the comically light weight characteristic of this woman is emphasized - "a certain foolish indirectness and obliquity of character", "not absolutely varacious" (p.10) these descriptions are an indication of the role she was to play later in Catherine's tragedy.

She takes an unduly active interest in the relationship between Catherine and Morris Townsend, sensing that Lavinia would take up Townsend's cause Dr. Sloper tells his other sister Mrs. Almond that "she [Lavinia] had better be careful, I will have no treason in my house". (Ch. 13, p.64). It is interesting to note that being a shrewd observer of human nature, he anticipates that if anything underhand is to be expected, it is sure to be from Lavinia rather than Catherine who is

the principal character of the drama.

Lavinia Penniman is at once a comical and a potentially dangerous character. Her girlish imagination conjures up all sorts of romantic escapades for the "guilty couple" - to use her own phrase for Catherine and Morris - the most absurd being their getting married in a subterranean Chapel in New York - with the authorial comment - "Subterranean chapels in New York were not frequent" (WS, p.76) - intruding to emphasize the ludicrous vision. In such an escapade she envisioned herself playing the role of the confidante, intercessor and ultimately the agent to effect a reconciliation with the irate father and thus give to their romance the conventional fairy-tale ending. If such foolish imaginings were simply the day-dreams of a "fantastic widow" as her brother calls her, all that would have happened would be to provide some vicarious pleasure to a lonely widow left to her own devices. But Lavinia puts her fantastic notions into practice and inadvertently adds to the misery of the poor girl. She is the one to tell Morris that he can do anything he likes with Catherine because she was so much in love with him.

'Mr. Townsend', she proceeded, 'shall I tell you

something. Catherine loves you so much that you may do anything'. (WS, p.105).

Thus she seems to encourage Morris even to 'trifle' with Catherine's affection as it were.

In her pursuit of her fantastic notions about this romance, she proves false to her brother as well. She meets Morris in absurd little corners and cafes ostentatiously to bear tidings of momentous import - which prove - to the exasperation of Morris Townsend, certain silly enjoinders like 'hold fast' - when she knows perfectly well that her brother strongly objects to any meetings with him. The most blatant example of her disloyalty is when she allows him free access to Dr. Sloper's study where the other so unabashedly made himself at home for one year when the doctor was away in Europe with his daughter. This not only exposes the inherently insincere nature of Lavinia but also the want of breeding and gentility in Morris Townsend.

Though her predilections and her little 'escapades' - like meeting Morris in an oyster saloon are apparently comical, these actually reveal where her loyalty lies. For example - we read her letter in which she exposes her prejudice against her brother - not because she thinks

that he is cruel to Catherine but because he hates Morris. (WS, p.133). She also exposes her alienation from Catherine - "She is so terribly secretive, like her father". (p. 133) And when she continues in the same letter, "My dear friend, you cannot set up in married life simply with a few pairs of shoes, can you?" - she not only makes light of Catherine's expectation to be married soon but also hints that he should not marry without the assurance of Catherine's inheritance. This is how Lavinia views the subject.

In the first place, Morris must get the money and she would help him to it. In the second, it was plain it would never come to him, and it would be a grievous pity he should marry without it - a young man who might so easily find something better. (WS, pp. 134-135)

Therefore she is not surprised or shocked when Morris says, "I must give her up", instead she says, "I think I understand you". (p.135)

There is something complex and perverse in this seemingly comical character. In the same breath that she says how his desertion would affect Catherine and delight the father, she can become as detached to ask

him if he intends to marry another woman, to which question Morris gives a theatrical response, "I give her up not for another woman, but for a wider career."
(WS, p.137)

In the light of such revelations it would seem that the comicality which describes her personality is rather a superficial assessment - the apparent comedy of her role hides something more damaging than meets the eye. Granting the fact that there is no deliberate malice involved in Lavinia's actions, they all the same contribute substantially to Catherine's betrayal by her sweetheart.

Even the otherwise passive Catherine instinctively grasps this and lays a direct accusation upon her aunt,

Is it you then that have changed him and made him so unnatural? Is it you that have worked on him and taken him from me? He doesn't belong to you and I don't see how you have anything to do with what is between us! Is it you that have made this plot and told him to leave me? How could you be so wicked, so cruel? What have I ever done to you, why can't you leave me alone? I was afraid you would spoil everything, for you do spoil everything you touch. I was afraid of you all the time we were abroad; I had no rest when I thought that you were always talking to him, - and

Catherine continues, 'You made him tired of my very name! I wish you had never spoken of me to him; I never asked your help!' (Ch. 30, pp.150-151)

In all her career, Catherine has not made another such passionate speech as this. Here at last we see that she is able to grasp the harm that her aunt's interference has done her. She can now see that her aunt is a "dangerous woman". (WS, p.169). Catherine is right when she says that Lavinia has nothing to do with what is between her and Morris Townsend because she never asked her aunt's help. Mrs. Penniman simply plays out her self-assigned role to the young girl's infinite grief.

There is an element of evil in such an interference because Lavinia has no moral right to come between Catherine and Morris Townsend especially with her partisan attitude to him. Till the end she is seen championing his cause though in the last chapter she seems to be damned in the eyes of her protégé too. "Damnation" is the last word she hears from him. Though she herself remains quite unconscious of the damage she has wrought on her niece's life, Lavinia Penniman does represent an aspect of the evil which is just as damaging as the doctor's deliberate and conscious domination of his daughter, and the "trifling of her affection" by the

heartless gold-digger Morris Townsend.

Like all great personal tragedies, Catherine's sorrow is immense when she realises that she is a despised and forsaken woman. Her hour of distress resembles in a certain way Isabel's vigil in a similar circumstances. However, in her hour of reckoning we read, "Nevertheless, she felt a wound, even if he had not dealt it; it seemed to her that a mask had suddenly fallen from his face". (WS, p.143) For a person who has just been jilted by her sweetheart, this seems a peculiar attitude, whereas he would have seemed to be the prime cause of her misery, she perceives in some mysterious way that he has merely been a contributory factor in the overall fact of her misery. That is why years later she summarizes her life thus,

"From her own point of view the great facts of her career were that Morris Townsend had trifled with her affection, and that her father had broken its spring." (WS, p.160) The only accusation that she can lay on Morris Townsend years later when he returns to woo her again is "You treated me badly". (WS, p.172).

With her father however she is altogether a different person now. Her concern, after Morris jilts

her, is that her father should never find out how much her lover's deception hurts her. Therefore she starts telling him lie upon lie about their affair. She tells him that she has broken off the engagement and has asked Morris to leave New York (WS, p.135). The process of mental and emotional distancing that the cruel father has so assiduously pursued is now completed by Catherine through her deliberate misrepresentation of facts. And when the doctor, on his death bed requests her to promise him that she will not marry Morris, she refuses to give him that satisfaction even though she knows perfectly well that she can never take Morris back. In her father's request, Catherine sees certain facts about their relationship which she can view now with more objectivity.

All her feelings were merged in the sense that he was trying to treat her as he had treated her years before. She had suffered from it then; and now all her experience, all her acquired tranquility and rigidity protested. She had been so humble in her youth that she could now afford to have a little pride and there was something in this request, and in her father's thinking himself so free to make it, that seemed an injury to her dignity. Poor Catherine's dignity was not aggressive; it never sat in state; but if you pushed far enough you could find it. Her father had pushed very far. (WS, pp.162-163).

Not only that she refuses to give the promise, she finds a "certain joy" in her own obstinacy. The

docile and obedient daughter has been pushed so far that she has been transformed into a stubbornly dignified personality able to hold her own.

The "rejection" scene in the last chapter does show us this mature and more composed Catherine who has borne her grief in secret for more than twenty years.

She continued to look at him, [Morris] however, and as she did so she made the strangest observation. It seemed to be he, and yet not he; it was the man who had been everything, and yet this person was nothing. (WS, p.171).

Here we see a girl who has shed her illusions in the worst possible way - by being cheated by the man who had been at one time everything to her.

In terms of achieving psychological maturity through a process of gradual awakening of consciousness, Catherine falls short of the stature achieved by James's more famous heroines like Isabel Archer, Milly Theale and Maggie Verver. Catherine merely seems to act out a pre-ordained role and recedes into a life of passive resignation by "picking up her morsel of fancy-work - for life as it were". (WS, p.174).

Critical response to Washington Square has always tended to favour the author's own dissatisfaction with



this work. He decided to omit it from the New York edition of 1907-9. He called it a "poorish story" in a letter to William Dean Howells because of the meagreness of American life and society - despite the setting. He wrote, "What is your Cornhill novel about? I am to procede it with a poorist story in three members - a tale purely American, the writing of which made me feel acutely the want of the paraphernalia."²

In another letter written to Robert Herrick, while he was preparing the New York edition of his works, he said, "I have tried to read over Washington Square and I can't, and I fear it must go!"³

However in a letter to his brother William who had praised the novel he seems to have presented the essential truth about the novel, "The young man in Washington Square is not a portrait - he is sketched from the outside merely, not fouille'. The only good thing in the story is the girl."⁴

Even in an important study like Oscar Cargill's The Novels of Henry James, Washington Square is conspicuously absent.

²Henry James to W.D. Howells dt. Jan. 31, 1880, from The Letters of H. James, edited by P. Lubbock (New York - Scribner's 1920) 1,73.

³Henry James to Robert Herrick, dt. August 7, 1907 from The Selected Letters of Henry James, edited by Leon Edel (New York, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy 1955) p.150.

⁴From F.O. Mathiessen, The James Family (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p.325.

However, there is another group of critics who consider this novel one of the early achievements of Henry James. The most notable among these is F.R. Leavis, who considers Washington Square as one of the six greatest novels of James - a work rich in "the abundant, full-blooded life of well-nourished organisms".⁵

Clifton Fadiman on the other hand makes this kind of a grudging comment,

It is remarkable that so interesting a book could have been written about a heroine who is quite candidly described as dull, one to whom only one important thing happened in the course of a long life, and that one thing a defeat.⁶

On the surface of it, this seems to be a correct summing up of Catherine's life. But viewed from another angle her very defeat and the way she handles it is her moral victory. James has not assigned her a dominant role like his other heroines who in varying degrees, find themselves in similar circumstances. Isable Archer, for instance, like Catherine, falls a prey to Osmond's machinations but by placing the "centre of the subject in the consciousness" of his heroine, James gives us a

⁵F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (New York : New York University Press, 1964), pp.161-62.

⁶Clifton Fadiman, Introduction to Washington Square. The Modern Library Edition (New York, The Modern Library, 1950), p.xi.

heroine of considerable psychological stature who seems to have travelled an immense expanse of experience to emerge with a great awareness of herself as well as of her circumstances. But Catherine is always presented in contrast to the other three important characters who play the key roles in her drama. The actions and tensions seem to revolve round her rather than being generated by her active participation in life. D. S. Maini makes this remark in this context.

Had she been invested with a large imagination, she would have been a very different kind of heroine. Indeed her dullness is a thematic necessity.⁷(p.97)

But the ultimate triumph of this nondescript and uninspiring girl is that her integrity and sincerity remain indomitable. Her 'goodness' seemingly so ineffective against the onslaught of the combined forces of her father's unrelenting will and Morris Townsend's cold-blooded betrayal abetted by the interfering aunt, at last emerges victorious when she, with a remarkable resilience and moral strength refuses to let the tragedy break her spirit. And most important of all, she has proven that

⁷D.S. Maini, Washington Square : A Centennial Essay, The Henry James Review, 1,1 (November 1979) pp.81-101, hereafter cited as Maini.

there is an inner life of every individual where certain regions of the mind and intellect should remain inviolate and sacrosanct. This is what constitutes a person's dignity, and James, in his fiction always gives more emphasis to his aspect of an individual's life than his outer circumstances.

Millicent Bell is of the opinion that James's choice of setting for his story suited his style.

There is appropriateness in James's choice of a stage - the little square where the tide of upward mounting wealth appeared to have paused for a moment in the red brick mansions with their white stone steps and delicate fan lights. Here, more than anywhere in America "You had come into a world which appeared to offer a variety of sources of interest". Here was a context in which he could locate Catherine's naivete', such a context as he had found only in Europe for his previous studies of American simplicity.⁸(p.21)

But to look at Washington Square and its story as a reflection of the attitude of a certain society at a given point in history merely would be to miss the whole point of James's delectics in the novel. Though the setting is American, and certain aspects of the story's interactions do represent a world-view typical of America of

⁸Millicent Bell, "Style as Subject : Washington Square", The Sewance Review, 83, Winter 1975, pp.19-38, hereafter cited as Bell.

the early nineteenth century, the novel's moral concerns however transcend all these and adumbrates a universal concept of psychological reality. Both Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend are materialists - though in different ways and their attitude to life stems from this basic fact. But here James is not so much concerned whether materialism per se is moral or immoral - as with the view that domination and violation of another individual by whatever means is as immoral and evil as adultery, murder or theft is immoral in the external, conventional world.

Catherine's moral growth has been possible because she has been exposed to the evil in her father and Morris Townsend and has lost certain illusions about people and life which, in the Jamesian concept is the inevitable price for moral expansion.

Catherine Sloper is one more version of the Jamesian heroine whose 'goodness', innocence and idealism is pitted time and again against the crass materialism of a society where acquiring suave manners and material possessions seem to be the sole purpose of living. True, she too is a part of this life, this society but she is different because she recognises the 'other' plane of life, the life of the mind, the life of the intellect

where personal dignity and the sanctity of personal relationship must take priority over everything else. Therefore the reality of this inner life takes precedence over the reality of the observable world outside. Her triumph is therefore to be reckoned in terms of the values of this inner life of consciousness.

The real life incident in the life of an English heiress which gave James the idea for Washington Square, however established the pattern earlier explored in Mme de Mauves, which was to feature in James's fiction all throughout. Commenting on this Millicent Bell says -

It is not surprising that Isabel Archer should continue to figure in the pattern established in Washington Square : she too, struggles against the imposition of other's styles and, wishing to be free, is caught in the scheme of their false art. Her final discovery of a mode of her own is almost as silent as Catherine's, yet she will go further toward leaving her imprint upon the life around her; she has learnt how to absorb the style of Madam Merle. In so doing she continues to express the secret history of the artist, his quest for a true voice, an authentic and original being.⁹

Bell's remark illustrates the point that Washington Square is an important guide post in the author's quest for the "authentic and original being" of artistic creation

⁹Bell, p.38.

as well as the style to adequately express this being.

D.S. Maini thinks that "Washington Square" has most of the felicities that characterize James's earlier novels. There is a controlled air about the sentences and the writing shows ease and elegance, urbanity and aplomb.¹⁰

In Washington Square James seem to have relegated to the background the influence of Europe on the American psyche. Nor does he concern himself much with Americanism as such except the nostalgic description of New York of his boyhood in Chapter 3 - as the setting for Dr. Sloper's gradual rise to prosperity.

The much vaunted European tour which the father forces Catherine to undertake turns out to be an anti-climax. Both father and daughter embark on it with wrong assumptions; the father thinks that the trip might make Catherine give up Morris and Catherine thinks that by consenting to his proposal, her father might relent and agree to her marriage with Morris. What the trip actually accomplishes is the final breach between father and daughter. As such there is nothing of the romance and history of the old world civilization of Europe in this

¹⁰Maini, p.101.

trip, which remains merely the father's psycho-tactical gambit which backfired.

However, Washington Square establishes the pattern where the psychology and moral responsibility inherent in personal relationships takes precedence over concepts about culture, civilization and material success in life.

CHAPTER - I I I

FREEDOM OR ISOLATION?

A Study of The Portrait of a Lady

In terms of its social material The Portrait of a Lady (1881), has all the usual appurtenances of an engaging story of the moneyed international set. Its central action revolves round the fortunes of the young American girl Isabel Archer who falls a victim to certain scheming fellow Americans living abroad because of the great wealth that she inherits from a benevolent uncle. On this level, there is no doubt at all that Isabel Archer's story is in the pattern established earlier in Mme de Mauves (1874), and Washington Square (1880).

But the real theme, as James asserts in the Preface to the novel rests on "the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny," and by laying the "corner stone" of his story on this, James transcends the limits of the so-called international theme and directs his probe into regions where it is immaterial whether one is from America or Europe or for that matter, from the deep woods of nowhere. The setting merely provides him with the metaphors for his probe. Ultimately

therefore, the story of Isabel Archer is much more than the international opposition, it is one of moral actions and decisions that confront sensitive beings "from whatsoever proceeding." The focal point in The Portrait therefore is not merely the personal history of the heroine but of the other dimension of her existence - the inner life or consciousness which is of paramount interest. The external event or incident is no longer valid per se but only in the measure in which it evokes responses from the protagonists. Comparing The Portrait of a Lady with Daisy Miller, Christof Wegelin says, "In the earlier story the picture he gives is all manners, all in terms of Daisy's relations with society; in The Portrait it is largely of the heroine's relations with herself so that the story is a story of moral clarification."¹

The focus on Isabel's inner life thus affords James a new phase in his fiction where Europe seems to be of less import in the American imagination and the greater weight is given to the imagination of the heroine herself.

In the earlier studies, we see the heroines as

¹Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, (Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p.68.

victims of forces outside of themselves more or less but in Isabel's case the process is subtly reversed. She is victimized ostensibly because of her inheritance but this is made possible by her own vivid imagination and a naive and smug sense of self-sufficiency.

Here is James's description of the essence of Isabel's nature.

"Isabel Archer was a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably active."²

Because her theories are unsullied by the experiences of the practical world Isabel surrounds herself with an aura of make-believe superiority and exclusiveness.

...She had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself, she had a theory that it was only under this provision life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization (she couldn't help knowing her organization was fine), should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of one's self as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend: one should try to be one's own best friend and to give one's self, in this manner, distinguished company."(PL pp.50-51).

Although the above observations point to a super-ego, there is no doubt that this personality also does

²Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, first published 1881 (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p.49. All other references hereafter are to this edition, cited as PL.

possess a spontaneous vivacity and natural vitality. Her egotistic tendencies in the passage below are quite explicit.

Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better, her determination to see, to try, to know, her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit and the eager and personal creature of conditions; she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant. (PL p.52).

The sole aim of young Isabel's existence seemed to be striving after a perfection of her self, to cultivate a refined personality. "She was always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress." (PL p.53).

Commenting on this particular aspect of her personality, Paul J. Eakin remarks,

Isabel's pre-occupation with the ideas of genius and self-reliance, following the characteristic movement of transcendentalist thought, leads her to the formulation of a program of self-culture.³

³ Paul J. Eakin, The New England Girl : Cultural Ideals in Hawthorne, Stowe, Howells and James (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1976), p.173.

When such a young, naive and inexperienced girl sets out to "affront her destiny" with an inflated ego and a set of unproven theories, the obvious result would be a personal tragedy which Eakin terms the "tragedy of self-culture." But Isabel's tragedy is not in the tradition of the classics, hers is a tragedy of the inner life where her natural vitality and innocence is first cleverly manipulated and then slowly strangled by the cold and calculating Gilbert Osmond and his Kind. The offense is intangible and unprovable but the effect is all the same as debilitating and hurtful as a physical violence. Her tragedy lies in the fact that the fine theories that she formulates about herself and with which she hoped to "affront her destiny" fall pitifully short of her expectations. Not only that, these very theories expose her to the machinations of others and prove in the end, to her infinite dismay, her undoing.

One such theory was about her independence or self-sufficiency, "It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of that state." (PL p.52).

Isabel's belief in her personal freedom is an assertion of her distinct individuality. It is this

sense that is to influence her thinking and decision-making all her life. In her ardent pursuit of her personal "development, perfection and progress" she believes that this freedom is a pre-requisite. To a certain degree, this belief is shared by Ralph Touchett too and he eventually persuades his father to leave her half of his inheritance because he wants her to be independent in the material sense also. She defends and treasures her freedom and individuality so jealously that when Ralph, on their first meeting hastily assumes that she has been adopted by his mother she retorts, "Oh no; she has not adopted me. I'm not a candidate for adoption." (PL p.21) The desire to preserve this freedom in order to attain the full measure of her personal expansion therefore establishes the tenor and pattern of Isabel's future.

In the limited span and circumstance of Isabel's American existence and even during her sojourn in Europe, the major decisions of her life concern the men who woo her and want to marry her. First there is the young American Gaspar Goodwood who has a considerable amount of wealth and is a "mover of men". He exudes a strong masculine virility which at once attracts and repels her.

In the entire novel the only physical scene occurs between them when he kisses her. She finds that his kiss was like "white lightning" and the intensity of this encounter is such that she feels overwhelmed just as if she has been ship-wrecked. There is no doubt at all that she never really 'rejects' him as she does her other suitor Lord Warburton. Though the pull of Goodwood's masculine presence and persistent wooing does sway Isabel's mind momentarily, she turns him away because to accept him would mean the loss of her "personal liberty."

The idea of a diminished liberty was particularly disagreeable to her at present, since she had just given a sort of personal accent to her independence by looking so straight at Lord Warburton's big bribe and yet turning away from it. Sometimes Caspar Goodwood had seemed to range himself on the side of her destiny, to be the stubbornest fact she knew; she said to herself at such moments that she might evade him for a time, but that she must make terms with him at last - terms which would be certain to be favourable to himself. (PL p.115)

In another instance, Isabel tells Goodwood, "I like my liberty too much. If there's a thing in the world I'm fond of ... it's my personal independence. (PL p.161)

Isabel considers that Goodwood, of all her suitors,

constitutes the real threat to her personal freedom. Therefore, after she has dismissed him almost summarily in the scene at Pratt's Hotel in London, Isabel is seen in an intensely agitated state of mind.

It was not for some ten minutes that she rose from her knees, and even when she came back to the sitting-room her tremor had not quite subsided. It had had, verily, two causes: part of it was to be accounted for by her long discussion with Mr. Goodwood, but it might be feared that the rest was simply the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power. She sat down in the same chair again and took up her book, but without going through the form of opening the volume. She leaned back, with that low, soft, aspiring murmur with which she often uttered her response to accidents of which the brighter side was not superficially obvious and yielded to the satisfaction of having refused two ardent suitors in a fortnight. That love of liberty of which she had given Caspar Goodwood so bold a sketch was as yet almost exclusively theoretic; she had not been able to indulge it on a large scale. But it appeared to her she had done something; she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of victory; she had done what was truest to her plan. (PL p.164)

But the irony of it all is that, being an American and also being so ardently and sincerely in love with Isabel, he might have proved to be the most generous who would cherish her and assist her in the free expansion of her personality so that she would attain that level of perfection and achieve the zenith of her "self-culture".

He tells her exactly this in so many plain words.

Who would wish less to curtail your liberty than I? What can give me greater pleasure than to see you perfectly independent - doing whatever you like? It's to make you independent that I want to marry you. (PL p.161)

And he goes on to explain that an unmarried, young girl was not really independent and was "hampered at every step." Caspar Goodwood speaks from a very practical, realistic point of view whereas Isabel views the matter solely from the point of her theory of 'independence' as the precondition for a program of "self-culture." Though at this point in her career, Isabel delights in her power to reject Goodwood, he remains till the end a factor in her destiny so much so that in the end their final separation is not the result so much of her rejection of him but rather of her deliberate withdrawal from him.

In contrast, Isabel's rejection of Lord Warburton's offer of marriage has the stilted formality of a stage-play. He does not seem too intensely in love with her. What he finds appealing in her is her naive vivacity and freshness. When she first appears at Gardencourt, his remark to Ralph Touchett sums up his real estimate of her.

'You wished a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman. There it is.' [meaning Isabel]. (PL p.21)

Of her encounters with men, Isabel's relationship with Lord Warburton seems to be the most casual and formal. Unlike Goodwood, he cannot arouse any deep response in Isabel, either of attraction or repulsion. On the other hand, each time Goodwood visits her, she feels the impact of his presence deeply and these are the few instances when Isabel's emotional agitation is emphatically visible. When she rejects Lord Warburton she does it in unequivocal terms unlike the case with Goodwood. However, she fails to give a convincing reason for doing so, at least nothing tangible that the prosaic Englishman can grasp. But her reasoning is once again based on her considerations of personal freedom. Though she has enough common sense to realise that refusing him means denying herself a magnificent chance, she realizes that inspite of the "splendid security" offered by Lord Warburton, the situation might prove to be a "stupefying anodyne." She tries to explain this to Lord Warburton by saying that if she marries him she will be giving up real participation in life and thus will be trying "to escape her fate." (PL p. 131)

This vague and hypothetical argument is beyond Warburton's comprehension and as he tries to reason with her his statements turn comical, thus turning such a serious moment into a farce, almost.

The rejection of Lord Warburton establishes certain distinctions for Isabel. She has not been unduly impressed by the grandeur of his title and property though she does admit that his offer does her great honour. Later on she recalls this offer of marriage as a "big bribe" a bribe which would have seriously handicapped her program of "free exploration of life." On such considerations therefore it costs Isabel very little to reject Warburton's magnificent offer of marriage.

But with Gilbert Osmond, the man whom Isabel eventually marries the circumstances are drastically different and are tinged with the shade of certain important changes in her life. While both Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton are practical men of the world, commanding considerable influence in their respective circles of society, here is a man who belongs to no country in particular and by anybody's standards is a complete non-entity. That she should choose this man in preference to the other two is as much due to her

inherent romanticism as to her changed circumstances. The penniless orphan girl, who so boldly and even heroically rejects offers of marriage from such important and wealthy men, has now become herself the proud possessor of a formidable fortune - an inheritance of £.70,000 left to her by her benevolent uncle Daniel Touchett. If before she feared her pecuniary destitution as a possible weak link in a relationship, she need no longer have any apprehension on that score. She can now be absolved of any mercenary motive should she choose to marry a man of affluence.

To a person who values her personal liberty so much, the fortune left to her by her uncle adds to her sense of being 'independent' in every sense of the term. This is the spirit out of which Ralph had persuaded his father to leave her half of his inheritance. When he discusses the subject with his father he tells him —

It's just to do away with anything of that sort that I make my suggestion. If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support. That's what I want cannily to prevent. She wishes to be free, and your bequest will make her free. (PL p.183)

Apart from being materially independent, Isabel views her fortune in yet another perspective, as her

ever-active imagination lends a new dimension to her new found status as a moneyed person.

...She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the mass. Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty. (PL p.224)

Isabel also decides that "to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to do, and that it could only be sweet", and also looks at her wealth as an "acquisition of power." (PL p.210)

Though this latter view about her new-found wealth promises to be more practical and viable, Isabel's general outlook on life which is idealistic and is often conditioned not by what the facts are but by what she imagines them to be, eventually clouds her judgement about her money. Once again this too has a direct relevance to her concept of her personal liberty and freedom.

The vehemence and consistency with which Isabel tries to defend her personal liberty speak for her inherent fear of being dominated or possessed completely

by another personality. And hence this fear is seen as the essential co-relate of her concept of personal freedom. In her relationship with Caspar Goodwood, his virile masculinity and personal dynamism are formidable forces to reckon with. Then there is the fact of her poverty compared to his affluence. On all counts therefore Isabel reasons that she is at a great disadvantage and to enter into a permanent relationship with him would mean the surrender of all personal liberty. The same logic is operative vis-a-vis her relationship with Lord Warburton also, though on the physical level he seems to leave her simply cold.

Thus the picture that emerges of the young Isabel so far is that of an idealist who tries to live purely on the theoretic and imaginative sphere with no real correspondence to hard facts about the business of living. She rejects both Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton because they fail to appeal to her imagination - they are too solidly grounded in the tangible world. What exactly she hopes to find in her ideal man is hard to define but judging by her admiration of Osmond one can surmise that her ideal man should not be

"course-minded", nor should be too vulgarly engaged in the pursuit of material wealth or fame and should display a keen appreciation of everything artistic and beautiful.

Though her uncle's bequest makes her financially independent, intellectually Isabel is still impressionable and idealistic. She has a tendency for hero-worship which is evident in her attitude towards her two women friends. Henrietta Stackpole an American journalist is in Isabel's estimate "a proof that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy." (PL p.53) Isabel's admiration rests on the fact that Henrietta is an independent woman who was "in the van of progress and had clearcut views on most subjects." Being a fellow American Isabel can appreciate the slightly naïve, pushing exuberance of Americans in general which stands out conspicuously in societies other than America. If in her admiration for Henrietta, one senses Isabel's spontaneous response to a kindred natural vitality, another aspect of her sensibility is revealed by her admiration for Mme Merle, an expatriate American widow who seems to have the most exquisite taste in almost everything and accessibility to the best circles and homes in society. Isabel

thinks of Mme Merle in superlative terms.

To be so cultivated and civilized, so wise and so easy, and still make so light of it - that was really to be a great lady, especially when one so carried and presented one's self. It was as if somehow she had all society under contribution, and all the arts and graces it practised - or was the effect rather than of charming uses found for her, even from a distance, subtle service rendered by her to a clamorous world whenever she might be?
(PL p.190)

In Mme Merle Isabel sees what she perceives to be, an ideal life lived exclusively for the sake of the sophistication and the beautiful aspect of it. When by the circumstance of Mr. Touchett's last illness these two ladies are thrown together quite often, Isabel discovers the older woman to be a perfect conversationalist, discoursing knowledgably on many subjects. It was during one of these discussions that a very important theme of the novel comes under scrutiny of these two women who represent two radically divergent views about "self" or "personal identity." Isabel has so far made a cult of her 'self' by way of planning out her expansion and development but which has so far remained purely theoretical and intellectual pursuits. Her concern moreover, is with what constitutes the

'inner life' of a person and has very little to do with the person's outward circumstances. Therefore Isabel's vision of the perfected self excludes all questions of wealth, rank or position in society. She rather thinks of the self as a 'free spirit', leading an 'aristocratic' life - free from all the gross and gross inevitabilities of actual living.

In complete disagreement with this view Mme Merle gives her definition of the 'self' as she understands it.

That's very crude of you, when you've lived as long as I you'll see that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our "self"? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us - and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things'. One's self - for other people, is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps - these things are all expressive.' (PL p.201)

Taken with a proportionate sense about the importance of what Mme Merle calls the 'shell' of a

person, one can see that this definition is solidly grounded on a worldly pragmatism. However, the one crucial drawback in this definition seems to be the fact that the emphasis is on the 'expression' rather than on what it is an expression of.

Isabel's reaction to such a view is predictable.

'I don't agree with you. I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should; (PL p.202)

The opposition between these two views of 'self' is in essence the real conflict in the novel. The unconcealed materialism of Mme Merle and her kind is in direct contrast to the naive, idealistic and unrealistic attitude of Isabel Archer. She has failed to appreciate the fact that tradition and sophistication is attainable only with a measure of material well-being and that the greater part of a tradition is its tangible forms and norms. While her keen sensibility has rightly ascertained that a mindless pursuit of outward forms can stunt a person's moral and intellectual growth,

this perception is not bolstered by an objective overview of tradition and its impact on a person. The concept of tradition in its extreme is a dehumanising factor and it is precisely this that Isabel seems to be fighting against. It is however not as though she rejects tradition altogether. But she seems to declare that if she accepts it, it will be on her own terms.

The tension between these views can be seen again in the way Isabel and Mme Merle judge what each seems to consider a fault in the other. Though the older woman admits that Isabel is "extremely good-looking and extremely clever and quite exceptional" these are quite not enough. She tells Isabel, "I wish you had a little money," (PL p.203) thus implying that this important item is missing from her personality. Once again her concern is of the material world.

On the other hand when Isabel casts her critical eye on Mme Merle's otherwise polished personality, the one fault that she detects probes into the essence of her nature.

If for Isabel she had a fault it was that she was not natural; by which the girl meant, not that she was either affected or pretentious since from these vulgar vices

no woman could have been more exempt, but that her nature had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much rubbed away, she had become too flexible, too useful, was too ripe and too final. She was in a word too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be; and she had rid herself of every remnant of that tonic wildness which we may assume to have belonged even to the most amiable persons in the ages before country-house life was the fashion. (PL pp.191-192)

While Mme Merle is concerned about the incompleteness in Isabel's 'shell', the latter's probe makes no reference to Mme Merle's outward circumstances, whether she has money or not, whether she dresses well or not, whether she has married well or not etc.. By saying that Mme Merle is not 'natural' Isabel means that 'custom' or tradition or whatever the sophistry of genteel living can be called, has overwhelmed her nature and has deprived her of a certain spontaneous energy of being. It is as though the essence of her being has been exhausted in the creation of the shell and now there is very little of that natural self which can be termed original. This created self, the artificial self may be pretty, may even look "aristocratic" and grand, but having lost that naturalness, the

original vigour, this polished self is only a poor copy of the original and hence of comparatively less value. The "tonic wildness" which Isabel sees "overlaid by custom" in her companion is the spontaneous vitality and vivacity without which a person cannot be said to be an individual in his or her own right. The distinct 'self' or individual in Mme Merle has become merely a "social animal." The loss of this "tonic wildness" therefore, in Isabel's estimate amounts to the loss of a certain measure of humanity.

It is Isabel's "destiny" to combat such a world view as represented by Mme Merle and her kind and the only weapon at her disposal is her idealism but the tragic irony of her situation is that it is this very idealism which make her so susceptible to the cleverly disguised materialism of Gilbert Osmond and his kind.

It is in the context of such a mental make-up in Isabel that one can discern the reason why she chooses a man like Osmond to be her life companion.

The process of Isabel's victimisation starts from the moment Mme Merle insiduously brings his name into their conversations at Gardencourt. She seems to make light of this "most delightful person, exceedingly

clever, a man made to be distinguished" because he has "no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything." (PL p.197) The reduction of the personality is total; it is brought down to the final zero - "no anything". But this estimate of Osmond is according to Mme Merle's materialistic yard-stick and is therefore not bound to bear any correspondence to Isabel's view of the same personality. Moreover, by the time she comes to make the acquaintance of this delightful personage, certain events have taken place in her life which greatly add to her sense of independence and personal liberty. Coupled with her theories of her own independence her new found wealth lulls her into a false sense of security. She is now momentarily off-guard and when she comes into contact with the suave, worldly wise Gilbert Osmond, she is completely bowled over.

Her eagerly receptive mind is now ready for any new relationship and her emotional state having been properly primed by Mme Merle, Isabel finds herself in the company of a man whom she thinks of as a "specimen apart." And she thought that "this new relation would perhaps prove her very very distinguished." (PL p.261)

The impact of Osmond's personality on Isabel is altogether remarkable. She seems completely smitten with him.

She had never met a person of so fine a grain. The peculiarity was physical, to begin with, and it extended to impalpabilities. His dense, delicate hair, his overdrawn, retouched features, his clear complexion, ripe without being coarse, the very evenness of the growth of his beard, and that light, smooth slenderness of structure which made the movement of a single one of his fingers produce the effect of an expressive gesture - these personal points struck our sensitive young woman as signs of quality, of intensity, somehow as promises of interest. (PL pp.261-262)

Isabel's observations of Osmond's physicality dwell on the artefacts of his personality rather than on the actual physical features. For instance, she notes his hair, complexion, beard, fingers and also makes the intriguing remark "retouched features," as though Osmond has just had a face lift or altered some aspect of his physiognomy! One can observe a certain amount of superficiality in these remarks and yet Isabel thinks that they are an index to his "quality, intensity and promises of interest." She seems to be viewing him in the same way as one would view a completed picture and note the delicate finishing touches.

Though Isabel does not realize it, she seems to be admiring the artful polish of Osmond rather than looking deeper into other aspects of his inherent 'nature'.

This attitude is in direct contrast with the one she has taken regarding Goodwood's looks earlier.

She wished him no ounce less of his manhood, but she sometimes thought he would be rather nicer if he looked, for instance, a little differently.

His jaw was too square and set and his figure too straight and stiff: these things suggested a want of easy consonance with the deeper rhythms of life. (PL p.116)

If one seeks for a logical opposition between a square jaw and the "rhythm of life" as Isabel puts it, there would be little to sustain her pronouncement on his features. However it is clear that she is aware of his inherent nature rather than of his outward accomplishments of personality. There is also the fact that her observations point to her awareness of him as a virile, very masculine personality. When she thinks of him as a "mover of men" she admits of his forceful personality and also grudgingly evinces a certain amount of admiration for his active and hectic participation in living. On the other hand she thinks that the keynote

of Osmond's existence is one of "connoisseurship" - a life-style which is passive, calculated and devoted to activities somewhat effeminate. What Isabel so tragically overlooks is the fact that connoisseurship is a matter of cultivation which, sooner or later overwhelms the natural. She had earlier found fault with Mme Merle because she had become a mere "social animal" but she seems to find the very same qualities in Osmond a mark of distinction.

In her previous relationships with Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton Isabel has been seen as on constant guard against any encroachment upon her personal liberty and freedom. Therefore she was always prepared to meet them with the awareness that she should not allow anything or anybody to overwhelm her. The affluence and virile personality of Caspar Goodwood therefore instead of being a point in his favour become a point of contest in which Isabel is determined to retain her personal freedom. With Lord Warburton also, she is not unduly impressed by the grandeur of his aristocratic background and wealth and she can dismiss his proposal of marriage to be able to call it a 'big bribe' to buy off her freedom.

In the context of her own improverished circumstances their wealth and importance become minus points for these two gentlemen. In the author's own words "... her poverty had been a venial fault for two gallant gentlemen." (PL p.203)

But by the time she makes the acquaintance of Gilbert Osmond, Isabel is getting used to the "new consciousness" of being rich and is just beginning to savour of the power that money can buy. Therefore the fact that Gilbert Osmond has "no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" and yet that he is apparently so superior to any man she has met so far, disarms her completely. Osmond's very lack of material possessions lends an air of mystery and romance and fires her imagination which has always been active.

During a visit to his hill top villa he tells her about his life - making his poverty and social insignificance sound like a heroic renunciation of the vulgar. The account that he gives her of his life is apparently self-disparaging but yet tinged with an air of self-righteousness of the true connoisseur.

I had no prospects, I was poor, and I was not a man of genius. I had no talents even; I took my measure early in life. I was simply the most fastidious young gentleman living. There were two or three people in the world I envied - the Emperor of Russia, for instance, and the Sultan of Turkey! There were even moments when I envied the Pope of Rome - for the consideration he enjoys. I should have been delighted to be considered to that extent; but since that couldn't be I didn't care for anything less, and I made up my mind not to go in for honours. (PL p.265)

A dull, somewhat malcontented and non-descript kind of existence but Isabel does not see it for what it really is, but rather "her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting." (PL p.266) In contrast to the other two men whom she rejects, Osmond seems to epitomise the genteel tradition where occupations of the mind, intellect and imagination govern the life-style rather than the mundane things like owning cottonmills in Massachusettes or "half of England." The lack of material concerns like these in Osmond's life is grist to the mill of Isabel's imagination and the list of his lackings, "no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" is instead transformed into a sort of negative grandeur to surround his personality. Even Ralph Tonchett who is a cynic by circumstance and long practice voices a

similar attitude when he says that Osmond is "like a prince who had abdicated in a fit of fastidiousness and has been in a state of disgust ever since." (PL p.249) If such is the impression created upon a cynic like Ralph, it is little wonder that a naive girl like Isabel sees only the princely qualities - real or otherwise imagined - his suave manners, the air of disdain he implies for material things and his professed interest in the pursuit of art and beauty alone.

In her relationship with Osmond, Isabel seems to have abdicated her rights to her individuality and she is already defenceless in his presence. She tries hard to impress him and live up to the reputation which she believed Mme Merle had imputed to her.

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. (PL p.263)

Her one apprehension was that she might be accused, not of ignorance but of "her possible grossness of perception." In other words she is acutely concerned about creating a favourable impression regardless of whether it corresponded to actual fact or not.

Already, Isabel is applying Osmond's touchstone to measure her own personality and action. It is from

this point onwards where she abandons her personal judgement and tries to emulate the standards of Gilbert Osmond and his like that her tragedy begins. The girl who was forever asserting her personal freedom and liberty succumbs to the impressions created by these "connoisseurs" of life for her benefit and with a view to entrap her free spirit. She seems to be in awe before Osmond's presence and is therefore at a seriously disadvantageous position in her relationship with him. With such a frame of mind in her dealings with Osmond, it is not surprising therefore that Osmond's reassurance and flattering remarks should create a lasting impression upon her and when he professes his love for her she succumbs to his proposal.

In the process of Isabel's capitulation to Osmond one sees once more her imagination playing the most vital role. Here it is in the context of her "new consciousness" of being rich. In the fact of her feeling inferior to Osmond's studied sophistication Isabel thinks of her wealth as the only armour - because she decides that being rich and "to be able to do" was equivalent to acquisition of power, and when one had this power, one could meet, anyone on equal grounds. But it is extremely ironical that the source of her "new consciousness",

of her apparent acquisition of power is the very factor which makes her a victim of the machinations of Mme Merle and Gilbert Osmond.

Though Isabel's fortune is enough by itself as a motivating factor, there is some element in her nature that arouses Osmond's genuine interest. He is at first intrigued and then fascinated with the possibility of being able to woo and win a girl who has recently distinguished herself by refusing a very eligible handsome English peer. By succeeding where Lord Warburton has failed, Osmond thinks that he will be proven superior to him.

He had never forgiven his star for not appointing him to an English dukedom, and he could measure the unexpectedness of such conduct as Isabel. It would be proper that the woman he might marry should have done something of that sort. (PL p.304)

Besides this, Osmond is also enchanted with Isabel's personal qualities. He tells Mme Merle that "she's really very charming and graceful and capable of great devotion." Considering such an attitude it would be erroneous to dismiss Osmond merely as a fortune-hunter. Rather he is seen as a complex character who embodies conflicting qualities of mind and manners.

The decision to marry Osmond is the first conscious, independent step taken by the now slightly more experienced and mature Isabel. The inevitable reaction to this decision among her immediate circle of friends and relatives and her response to them once again bring out the essential qualities in her personality.

It is a curious fact that Isabel should feel obliged to write to Caspar Goodwood about her engagement and that he is one of the first two persons to be told about this. Her relationship with him remains an enigma till the end. This is one more index to the deep and complicated nature of this seemingly sweet and docile girl. She is in truth attracted to Goodwood in more ways than she cares to admit. He is the one man who is capable of arousing Isabel's emotions and of disturbing her composure. Though she has not given him any tacit commitment, enough of it is implied when she feels obliged to write to him of her engagement.

When Goodwood with his characteristic bluntness proceeds to probe into Osmond's antecedents and discovers his obvious lack of anything to warrant her consideration, Isabel concedes the point but not in any apologetic way and only to defend her choice.

'Who and what? Nobody and nothing but a very good and very honourable man. He's not in business,' said Isabel. He's not rich; he's not known for anything.

...That I should marry him? Nothing at all,' Isabel replied while her patience helped itself by turning a little to hardness. 'If he had done great things would you forgive me any better? Give me up, Mr. Goodwood; I'm marrying a perfect non-entity. Don't try to take an interest in him. You can't.' (PL p.329)

Goodwood of course understands what she means by her words.

"I can't appreciate him; that's what you mean. And you don't mean in the least that he's a perfect non-entity. You think his grand, you think he's great, though no one else thinks so." (PL p.329).

Without being able to articulate it so fully, Goodwood is able to pin-point the essential nature of her admiration for Osmond - that in a vague undefinable way Isabel is smitten by Osmond's personality - an admiration which is quite beyond any outward or material considerations. In the context of Goodwood's very ostensible material success in life and virile presence she refuses to let Osmond's image diminish in importance.

Though so volubly defensive of her choice there is something in Goodwood's presence which disconcerts her and puts her on the defensive. She has been fully

prepared for an emotional outburst but instead she is met with a "remarkable self control." His self-composure irritates her and makes her feel angry and somewhat in the wrong. But she realises that such a situation is ridiculous and she "suddenly exclaimed, as if she were accusing him of having accused her: I've not deceived you! I was perfectly free!" (PL p.331) The only instance when Isabel ever voices any misgiving about her choice is when she tells, Goodwood, "No one can be more surprised than myself at my present intention." (PL p.331)

But it's a totally different Isabel when she announces her decision to marry Osmond to her aunt, Mrs. Touchett's displeasure is based on the obvious grounds that he has "no money, no name, no importance," but Isabel holds her own and virtually dismisses her objection by saying, "It was my duty to tell you Aunt Lydia, but I don't think it's my duty to explain to you." (PL p.334) Ralph's considerations against the marriage are however on quite another plane. He does not seem bothered about Osmond's lack of material possessions but is sincerely apprehensive about Isabel's future. He seems to sense that this idealistic, eagerly imaginative girl faces the repression of her free spirit. 'I think I've hardly got over my surprise,' he went on

at last. 'You were the last person I expected to see caught.' (PL p.341)

By this remark Ralph is able to envision the tragedy of the free spirit of Isabel at the hands of Osmond. He knows only too well of her lively imagination, her love of personal freedom, her eagerness to savour of life. "A year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life." (PL p.341) Because he had admired these qualities in her, he had made it possible for her to be rich - rich, by his interpretation, in being able "to meet the requirements of her imagination." He wanted to make her 'free' but with her engagement to Osmond he sees all his fond wishes for her future rendered null and void. He is dismayed to think of her life inseparably linked with a man of "no importance" whom he considers "small" and finally gives the crowning definition of Osmond's career by calling him a "sterile dillentante". (PL p.345)

In Isabel's discussion with Ralph on the subject of her impending marriage there is nothing of the stiff formality of her exchange with Goodwood nor the almost defiant posture with Mrs. Touchett. Instead there is more intimacy, more intensity of emotion in her defence of her choice. It is in the long passage quoted below

where Isabel is most articulate about her feelings for Osmond.

What sort of a person should you have liked me to marry? She asked suddenly. 'You talk about one's soaring and sailing, but if one marries at all one touches the earth. One has human feelings and needs, one has a heart in one's bosom, and one must marry a particular individual. Your mother has never forgiven me for not having come to an understanding with Lord Warburton, and she's horrified at my contenting myself with a person who has none of his great advantages - no property, no title, no honours, no houses, no lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant, belongings of any sort. Mr. Osmond's simply a very lonely a very cultivated and a very honest man - he's not a prodigious proprietor.' (PL p.347)

It is very clear that in Isabel's mind, hers was "a choice of which she felt, only the nobleness and purity" needed to be justified. Being more sensitively attuned to Isabel's true nature, Ralph can also see that there is a deeply felt, genuine conviction about the rightness of her decision which no arguments to the contrary can shake. Through the pain of his disillusionment Ralph is aware of "the impression of her ardent good faith. She was wrong; but she believed; she was deluded but she was dismally consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that having invented a fine theory about Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours." (PL p.348)

In order to understand the nature of the rift that occurs between Isabel and Osmond later, it is essential to understand the premises with which these two highly imaginative persons are entering into a life-long relationship. As for Isabel, her main sensation seems to be one of detachment. This is enhanced because of the discreet opposition offered her marriage by friends and relatives alike.

...she had now little free or unemployed emotion for minor deeds, and accepted as an incident, in fact quite as an ornament, of her lot the idea that to prefer Gilbert Osmond as she preferred him was perforce to break all other ties. She tasted of the sweets of this preference, and they made her conscious, almost with awe, of the invidious and remorseless tide of the charmed and possessed condition, great as was the traditional honour and imputed virtue of being in love. It was the tragic part of happiness; one's right was always made of the wrong of someone else. (PL pp.349-350)

The truism of the last statement despite Isabel's generalization is not universal; it applied peculiarly to her situation only. And in this perhaps Isabel is inadvertently alluding to her sense of certain loss as she stands poised on the threshold of a great experience, as she imagines her marriage is going to be.

Though Isabel does not see it as such, her marriage to Osmond is an act of surrender and renunciation of all

that she held essential for the full expansion of herself. She views her future with a metaphysical detachment and seems oblivious of all the practical considerations of marriage. Long ago she had thought that "if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely." (PL p.53) That light has dawned upon her sensibility in the person of Gilbert Osmond.

The desire for unlimited expansion had been succeeded in her soul by her sense that life was vacant without some private duty that might gather one's energies to a point. She had told Ralph she has 'seen life' in a year or two and that she was already tired, not of the act of living, but of that of observing. What had become of all her ardours, her aspiration, her theories, her high estimate of her independence and her incipient conviction that she should never marry? These things had been absorbed in a more primitive need - a need the answer to which brushed away numberless questions yet gratified infinite desires. It simplified the situation at a stroke, it came down from above like the light of the stars, and it needed no explanation. There was explanation enough in the fact that he was her lover, her own, and that she should be able to be of use to him. She could surrender to him with a kind of pride; she was not only taking, she was giving. (PL p.352)

What constitutes an act of surrender for Isabel is definitely a gain for Osmond though he cleverly tempers his sense of success with an "ecstasy of self-control." He thinks of Isabel in terms of "a present of incalculable

value" and a "gift" made by Mme Merle. In his "evaluation" of her he is calculating the various uses that he can derive from such a companion as Isabel.

...this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one a plate, that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel, he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring.
(PL p.350)

For Osmond, Isabel is an acquisition, a thing for him to use and manipulate as he pleases. The sensation is pleasing because of his conviction that Isabel will be "malleable" to his whims. However, Isabel has merely a "decorative value" to his already accomplished life-style and whatever her intelligence can provide for him would be only a 'dessert' - and not the main course. But for Isabel marrying Osmond means breaking all past ties and renouncing her plans for self-expansion and one can see the immense difference in their respective attitudes with which they embark upon this new relationship.

Though Osmond envisages a bright future for them, the angle of vision is lopsidedly only his. He tells her, "You're remarkably fresh and I'm remarkably

well-seasoned. We've my poor child to amuse me; we'll try and make up some little life for her. It's all soft and mellow - it has the Italian colouring." (PL p.352) What Osmond seems to be doing here is look at the picture of their married life just as an artist would, at a canvas which he has just started by drawing two postures. Like the artist, he is hoping for the perfect symmetry of forms and for the correct blending of colours. And very curiously he is making his daughter the focal point of this picture as making a "little life for her" seems to matter more than making a life for themselves. Unconsciously however Osmond seems to be betraying the fact that they are coming together solely for this purpose. The oddest sentence in this passage is "We've my poor child to amuse me." (italics mine) While the "we've" denotes a collective responsibility the object 'me' shuts out Isabel from any further participation in the "little life" of Pansy Osmond.

In her role as Mrs. Osmond, Isabel is reduced to the position of someone dominated and used by beings seemingly superior to her. Gone is the highly imaginative girl who can withstand the powerful presence of a young American industrialist like Caspar Goodwood; can be

slightly disdainful of an English lord who own's "half of England", hold her own with an opinionated lady like - Mrs. Touchett and a wymphathetic cynic Ralph Touchett. Instead we see her play the part of a meek and docile wife - being ornamental in her husband's equipage and in being instrumental in enhancing Pansy's chances of a brilliant marriage by providing her with a handsome 'dot'. Her milieu is now the society of a handful of expatriate Americans and their Latinated acquaintances whose sole pleasure seems to be derived from the acquisition of objects d'art, showing them off to each other and engaging in endless debates over the quality of porcelain or old lace. Surely a girl of Isabel's imagination had never thought of life in such sterile terms, never dreamt that one day she too would be forced to determine a person's 'worth' in terms of his material possessions, Life for her has become so stilted that she longs for some kind of "occupation" so that she may be saved. Ralph Touchett whose observation about Isabel have always been catalytic, sees the ennui of her life and tries to define the desultoriness.

The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent? Ralph

asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond, 'Good heavens, what a function!' he then woefully exclaimed. He was lost in wonder at the mystery of things. (PL p.393)

The 'occupation' that Isabel can think of at the moment is to bring about the union of Pansy with Lord Warburton. Such an event, Isabel knows for a certainty, would please Osmond greatly. As the idea gets hold of her, she realizes that a new sensation takes possession of her - in a long while she feels enthusiastic about something and this brings her some happiness. "It was astonishing what happiness she could still find in the idea of procuring a pleasure for her husband." (PL p.415) This idea is then that of "assisting her husband to be pleased" - the obvious corollary being that she herself has failed to please him herself. Hence the project to 'procure' a pleasure for her husband in order to prove to herself that "she had done everything possible to content her husband".

Isabel is however aware that another expatriate, American Edward Rosier, enjoys Pansy's favour and might pose a problem for her scheme. The youngman has no manifest occupation but keeps busy looking after his

collection of objects d'art adding to it whenever possible and generally moving in the society of like-minded people in Rome and elsewhere in the continent. Isabel, whose own life now revolves more or less in the same way thinks of Rosier as 'inferior' to Lord Warburton. Rosier, she thinks, is a 'light-weight' and a "useless fine gentleman when compared to the "English nobleman."

The note of worldliness in such observations speaks of the changes that have taken place in Isabel's attitude to life. A certain cynicism now marks her observations. Though she tries to tell herself that it is not Warburton's wealth and position which make him superior to Rosier she seems to assess people more or less according to the yardstick of Osmond and his kind. The man whom she rejected only a few years ago in favour of Osmond now becomes more attractive and even superior to a person like Rosier who is definitely not worse than Osmond in any way. Isabel does not seem unduly concerned about the human drama involved in the intricate relationships but is taken up with the idea of Pansy as "a perfect little pearl of a peeress." She dismisses Pansy's attachment to Rosier as "secondary obstacles."

In all these observations Isabel is trying "to take her husband's view" of things. But it is quite another matter when the moment of actual execution of her plans presents itself one evening while she and Pansy were at home. The moment of truth is the point when she is about to leave Pansy alone with Lord Warburton. But "something held her and made this impossible" (PL p.417) Although she tries to behave just as Osmond would have wanted her to, an unnamed element, "a vague doubt" prevails and she remains in the room all throughout the Englishman's visit.

The incident, on the surface is an innocuous one but in terms of Isabel's personal integrity and honesty, it is a decisive victory for her. It illustrates how close she comes to be overwhelmed by Osmond's influence in her life. But she pauses long enough to clear the "vague doubt", to establish the moral rightness of her action and is thus able to preserve her integrity. But Osmond in his avidity for procuring Lord Warburton as a son-in-law regards Isabel's hesitation as an open defiance of his wishes and precipitates the greavest moral crisis in Isabel's life. This is the moment which marks the distinct point of alienation from her husband.

"Think that over and remember how much I count on you" (PL p.422). Osmond tells Isabel when he urges her to use her influence with Lord Warburton so that he would propose to Pansy. Mme Merle too thinks the same and tries to convince her that her action would be an act of kindness to Lord Warburton.

"But if you wouldn't marry Lord Warburton yourself, make him the reparation of helping him to marry someone else." (PL p.414) A typically cunning and invidious way of winning over Isabel to her way of thinking and neutralizing any objection that Isabel might have against the proposition.

What these two are trying to do is ruthlessly exploit whatever fascination Warburton might still have for the penniless orphan who had rejected him, in order to bring about the marriage between Pansy and the English Lord. So long as their brilliant marriage comes off, they do not care if Pansy has to sacrifice true love and if Isabel, the wife of Osmond now, indulges in a bit of flirting with a rejected lover with this ulterior motive.

What seems so simply easy to these two worldly-wise sophisticates regarding the marriage is not so

simple or easy for Isabel. In her view there are very important moral questions involved, the most vital being her need to believe in the rightness of what she is going to do. This belief can be established by being convinced of the total sincerity of Warburton's feelings for Pansy. She senses a subtle hint in the word 'influence' implied by both Mme Merle and Osmond when they urge her to encourage Lord Warburton to marry Pansy. If by this it is meant some vestige of Warburton's old fascination for her then it would seem that he is partly motivated by the prospect of being near Isabel if he marries Pansy. On the other hand, if she manipulates in any way to accomplish this marriage it would mean violating Pansy's sensibilities and destroying her relationship with Rosier.

These are some of the considerations which disturb Isabel's conscience and arouse a moral rebellion in her soul against the people who wish to impose their views on her and dictate her action. The moral incompatibility between Osmond and Isabel is made crystal clear by their divergent attitudes to a possible marriage between Lord Warburton and Pansy. To Osmond it is extremely desirable on account of what it may do to enhance his social standing.

What means he employs to gain this end seems immaterial. He not only dismisses Pansy's affection for Rosier as of no account but is also totally insensitive about the indelicacy of urging his own wife to pander to any bit of lingering affection for her so that Warburton is induced to propose to Pansy.

On the contrary, for Isabel all these outward material gains should be eschewed if certain basic moral norms are violated. So when she discovers that she does have some 'influence' still with Lord Warburton, she refuses to cash in on it. When the 'vague doubts' are cleared in her mind, she tells Lord Warburton, "My dear Lord Warburton you may do, so far as I am concerned, whatever comes into your head." (PL p.446)

This decision taken in deference to a moral conviction releases a host of reactions in the psychological tug of war between Osmond's materialistic aspiration and Isabel's moral sincerity and forces open the hitherto intangible rift between them. It is remarkable that the most revealing psychological stocktaking occurs in her mind after Osmond speaks to her about using her 'influence' with Lord Warburton. This wish of his "puts the situation before her" - the situation about the real

state of her marriage. Her soul-searching vigil reveals to her the stark truth that in her marriage to Osmond she is living in "an opposition in which the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other". The chain of reactions which she had initiated, however inadvertently, by her refusal to marry Warburton causes the most violent upheavals in her marriage. It is in the context of Warburton's failure to propose to Pansy that the Osmonds have their first open rupture that reveals their deep-seated antagonism against each other. Osmond accuses Isabel of deliberately interfering in the affair so as to stop Warburton from proposing to Pansy and in this he sees only her attempt at inflicting an injury on him by dealing him a disappointment.

Osmond's disappointment is indeed great when he realises that Pansy will not become a "peeress". However, true to his imperturbable exterior, he displays a great feat of self-control and calculated civility during the night when Warburton comes to bid them goodbye. Isabel's consciousness monitors minutely her observations and mental reactions to Osmond's studied response to the situation.

On the other hand she had a perfect consciousness of Osmond's emotion. She felt almost sorry for him; he was condemned to the sharp pain of loss without the relief of cursing. He had had a great hope, and now as he saw it vanish into smoke, he was obliged to sit and smile and twirl his thumbs. Not that he troubled himself to smile very brightly; he treated their friend on the whole to as vacant a countenance as so clever a man could very well wear. It was indeed a part of Osmond's cleverness that he could look consummately uncompromised. (PL p.477)

Isabel is only too aware of the fact that Osmond "had been intent on the prize" of Warburton as a son-in-law but he also had the cleverness not to "allow his eagerness to irradiate his refined face." With a grudging admiration, Isabel can see that because of his seeming indifference regarding Warburton's attention to Pansy, he can now behave perfectly non-chalant, as if there was nothing at stake and therefore nothing has been lost. Inwardly Isabel is relishing her husband's cleverly concealed disappointment and is yet pitting Warburton against the imperturbability of Osmond. "Strangely very strangely, it was a satisfaction; she wished Lord Warburton to triumph before her husband, and at the same time she wished her husband to be very superior before Lord Warburton." (PL p.478)

A very complex response to the situation but a very clear indication of Isabel's identification with

Osmond. Her eagerly worshipful attitude of earlier days towards him has taken a lot of beating in the intervening years but still she is under the spell of his sophistication, as she will remain till the end. In this little scene she is fully aware of Osmond's terrible inward rage at the loss of Warburton - but she cannot help but admire his outward calm and sees only "the beauty of consistency" in his behaviour. She is charmed by "the advantage of acquired habit" that Osmond displays. The fact that at this moment Osmond is dissimulating does not strike her at all as an aberration - she is only conscious of the great act that he is putting up. Much more than anything else, she is now immensely taken in by the artistry of his behaviour.

Time and again we see Isabel come under this particular spell of Osmond's personality and how inadvertently she seems to abandon her individual conviction and incline to view matters from Osmond's angle of observation. This constitutes Isabel's weakest point - the fatal flaw in her psychological armour. The ascendancy of the proper, of the conventional over natural responses which she now considers to be praiseworthy, dictates her decisions later. What she has failed to grasp at this moment is that if a distinction cannot be

drawn between the natural and that which is influenced by custom, admiration for the acquired habit can often cloud a person's judgment. It is then easy to mistake the fake for the genuine. There may be a certain amount of crudity in the natural, even vulgarity and unpleasantness but it has the advantage of being the essential truth about things, about feelings. Whereas in the pleasant exterior of the cultivated posture, and calculated behaviour there is definitely an air of insincerity and even of dishonesty because the spontaneous feelings are suppressed to create an impression. The artificiality super-imposed upon the natural passes off for the genuine and to that extent the moral value of the gesture is diminished.

The problem that Isabel has to tackle in order to give a psychological coherence to her disorganised and inconsistent psyche is in essence the problem of the much vaunted "international theme" of James's fiction. He uses Europe and America merely as the back drop against which he deals with extremely personal concerns with moral action in the lives of his heroes and heroines.

The tradition and culture of Europe certainly helped create the glittering, shimmering facade of its

society and nurtured its "beautiful people" with their suave manners and refined airs. What an alien to this society would see would be its glitter and charm - not realising that its basis rested on a form of materialism and artificiality. The artificiality lies in the attempt to gloss over the essential truths about things in the name of giving it refinement and polish. Hence the hint of duplicity and the air of insincerity that envelop such a society. Only when the outsider comes into closer contact the cracks in the apparently smooth exterior begin to show under scrutiny. This discovery becomes acutely agonising for the outsider because he had first come closer to this civilization because of a sense of admiration and adoration for its undeniable refinement, grace and culture. But the question remains as to how much of it is gained at the cost of the genuine. The thin edge between refinement and insincerity, between gracious behaviour and dishonest motives then poses the moral question.

A typical example of this society is Lord Warburton and therefore it is no wonder that the Warburton episode is to have longlasting effects in Isabel's life. When Warburton reappears in her life and eventually exits

without proposing to her step-daughter, it triggers off the first open rupture between her and Osmond thus dramatizing the complex moral questions relating to two opposing world views as symbolised by Isabel and Osmond. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that Isabel had rejected his offer of marriage and now he has turned up as an ostensible suitor for Pansy's hand. Though the focus of the tension generated by Warburton is on Isabel and Osmond, one cannot but be amazed with his behaviour too. He, like Osmond, does not see any indelicacy in appearing to be interested in the step-daughter of a woman who had rejected him and for whom he still harbours some affection. In the heightened drama of the Osmonds' disenchanted marriage, Warburton's motives and actions are almost relegated to the background and the point of emphasis on the Osmonds is complete. However one cannot but note that Warburton too belongs in the same world as Osmond's where form is more important than sincerity and honesty. As is made clear, he does not have too strong or deep feelings for Pansy but seems to be contemplating proposing to her if that will ensure his nearness to Isabel. He may then perhaps indulge in some subtle intrigue with her without violating any social norms. It is this seeming denseness as to the real import

of his actions that depicts Warburton as a sort of moral buffoon. He seems impervious to anything other than the superficial civilities of his breeding. He is an aristocrat by the accident of birth and too much custom and tradition seems to have stultified his nature into an ossified specimen of his tribe. His final departure from Isabel's life is affected without any fanfare; she hears from her aunt Touchett that he is to marry a "Lady Flora, Lady Felicia - something of that sort." (PL p.572) The implied obscurity and insignificance in this report truly sums up Warburton's effect on the overall drama. He seems to have been created for a specific purpose and retains interest as long as that purpose is viable, but after that, oblivion.

...Isabel felt as if she had heard of Lord Warburton's death. /ref. to his marriage/. She had known him only as a suitor, and now that was all over. He was dead for poor Pansy; by Pansy he might have lived. (PL p.572)

Though Warburton fails to leave any indelible impressions on Isabel herself his reappearance precipitates the rupture between her and Osmond and it is during her wake (Ch.42) after an exchange with Osmond, that the high point in the drama of Isabel's consciousness is reached. In this chapter a complete analysis of her

marriage, her motives and actions is portrayed. In the flashback of events so far, she realizes that she had embarked upon her marriage with certain naive fallacies regarding her new-found wealth and her estimate of Gilbert Osmond. Though Isabel cannot be very articulate, she senses that Mme Merle has played a deep game and that the relationship between this lady and her husband was so suspiciously intriguing that the recurring vision of this long night was "that of her husband and Mme Merle unconsciously and familiarly associated."

Just as Isabel recognises the unmistakable bond that exists between Osmond and Mme Merle, the importance of her analysis lies in the fact that here Isabel is seen as recognising the underlying facts about the state of her marriage and the tenor of her life since she married Osmond. Though there is a hint of self-justification in the analysis, on the whole she displays, for the first time, a certain objectivity in her observations thus signifying her psychological maturity. If this chapter is a reflector of the past it is also a harbinger of the future trend of events. Isabel worries "what was coming - what was before them?" But the possibility of a separation does not provide the solution. "If to herself the idea was startling, if it presented itself at first as

a kind of infidelity, a capacity for pollution, what infinite effect might it not be expected to have had upon him?" (PL p.433)

But the saddest recognition during the vigil has been that they are living in an opposition in which "the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other." (PL p.424)

Nothing could be more basic, more fundamental than this gulf which existed between them. More important is the fact that both of them are aware of this incompatibility. Though there is no obvious attempt at deception each views the other with suspicion and with a great sense of being let down. Isabel's mortification is all the greater when she realizes that it was her own vivid imagination which supplied the "human element" to the drab existence of Osmond. And secondly she recognises that she had married him with the notion of doing something noble with her money. In a very naive, subtle way she too had been guilty of trying to 'use' Osmond. When one undertakes any task on a theoretical premise, the implication is that the object or person involved is being 'used' for obtaining the proof of that theory. To this extent then Isabel is guilty of 'using' Osmond.

In her enthusiasm with her theory she failed to take into account the entire accumulation of events and experiences which went into the making of the personality of Osmond. She did not probe deep enough - she accepted and believed what was projected for her to see and absorb. Isabel merely took the envelope of his personality for the real person.

If on this account one is led into thinking that Osmond had 'put up' a front only for Isabel's benefit, a word of caution has to be struck. The suavity and sophistication of Osmond does look incongruous and deceptive in comparison to the narrowness of his mind but as a matter of consistent social behaviour no one can fault Osmond and say that he simulates these traits at any stage. His considerations for the proper manner of doing things and keeping up a decorous mode of behaviour is so great that it has become second nature with him. Osmond makes this point very clear to Isabel from the beginning of their acquaintance. During her sojourn in Rome before their marriage he tells her,

'Ah well, it's proper you should go with her, very proper. Do everything that's proper; I go in for that. Excuse my being so patronising. You say you don't know me, but when you do you'll discover what a worship I have for property.'

And again continues in the same vein -

No; I am not conventional. I'm convention it-
self. (PL p.312)

Even in her darkest hour of soul - searching,
Isabel recognises and acknowledges this consistency in
him.

His ideal was a conception of high
prosperity and propriety, of the aristo-
cratic life, which she now saw that he
deemed himself always, in essence at
least, to have led. He had never lapsed
from it for an hour; he would never have
recovered from the same of doing so.
(PL p.431)

On the eve of her journey to England to see her
dying cousin, Osmond berates Isabel for proposing to defy
tradition by undertaking the journey alone and against
his express wishes.

I've an ideal of what my wife should
do and should not do. She should not travel
across Europe alone, in defiance of my
deepest desire, to sit at the bedside of
other men. Your cousin's nothing to you;
he's nothing to us. You smile most expres-
sively when I talk about us, but I assure
you that we, we, Mrs. Osmond, is all I know.
I take our marriage seriously; you appear
to have found a way of not doing so. I'm
not aware that we're divorced or separated;
for me we're indissolubly united. You are
nearer to me than any human creature, and

I'm nearer to you. It may be a disagreeable proximity; it's one, at any rate, of our deliberate making, you don't like to be reminded of that, I know; but I'm perfectly willing, because - because-' And he paused a moment, looking as if he had something to say which would be very much to the point. 'Because I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!' (PL pp.536-537)

This is the only occasion when one sees Osmond being visibly agitated about something and volubly expressive of his distaste for the prospect of Isabel's visit to Ralph which he calls "dishonourable, indelicate and indecent." For Isabel too this incident is clearly a landmark in her relationship with Osmond because during this interview she expresses her "worst thought to her husband" for the first time. She accuses him of being "unjust" and of putting up an opposition to her which is "calculated" and "malignant". For both of them then this incident is what the author designates as the "crisis-point" of their relationship.

Though Osmond's insistence on their oneness sounds ridiculous in the context of their acrimonious and suspicious attitude towards each other, one can all the same see that he is pleading for a certain decorum to be preserved in a married couple's public behaviour towards each other. He is claiming a social obligation

which she owes him as long as she stays married to him.

Isabel undoubtedly feels the force of his argument because he is taking a stand on behalf of convention, on behalf of tradition itself - concepts which have been the mainstay of a civilization that he has striven all his life to represent. "He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious - the observance of a magnificent form." (PL p.537) She is vulnerable to such an argument because she too ostensibly belongs to the tradition for which he seems to be pleading. It is not as an outsider but as a subscriber of that 'form' that she seems to be trying to deviate from it and to this extent her guilt and her apparent treachery to her own kind is emphasized by Osmond. It is precisely her recognition of this which makes Isabel concede that after all Osmond might have a point in his remonstrance.

It came over her that in his wish to preserve appearances he was after all sincere, and that this, as far as it went, was a merit. (PL p.537)

Isabel seems to be literally overwhelmed by the force of Osmond's argument. By his reference to propriety and her apparent lack of comprehension about the notion he puts her on the defensive with the insinuation that she "lacked tradition."

"He spoke gravely and almost gently" as if trying to make a recalcitrant child understand the folly of its insistence on doing a particular thing.

What ensues is a very interesting psychological parrying between Isabel and Osmond presented mostly through her consciousness. She has a fairly detached view of her husband's game, but she seems unable to withstand the force of his sophistry when it comes to the moment of action. The passage which describes the subtle turning of the tables, contains certain terms with deep Biblical overtones. He spoke in the name of something "sacred and precious...." using words which "represented something transcendent and absolute, like the sign of the cross or the flag of one's country." Isabel has a sense of her husband's blasphemous "sophistry" which can turn her resolve for action into "slow renunciation, transformed by the blight of Osmond's touch." In an earlier instance also Osmond had told Isabel that he has a great worship for propriety. (PL p.312) Isabel too at one time thought that to love and possess "the finest - the subtlest manly organism" named Osmond was an act of devotion. (PL p.428) (Italics mine).

In the use of the religious terminology, there are two distinct processes involved. As long as Isabel is merely observing the nature of Osmond's adherence to

form, the references to it are straight forward, untinted with any evaluative remarks. But when the analogy is brought to the context of their relationship, a negative tone predominates her observation. Terms like "blasphemous sophistry -" is a strange collocation where the sense of accomplishment embodied in the word 'sophistry' is made a mockery and a profanity because of the 'intent' in the ardour expended for it. The whole 'intent of his sophistry has been to bedevil Isabel to the point of coercing her into a "renunciation" which is "slow" because it is done unwillingly. In the "transformation" of her spontaneity of action and purity of intent, there is a retardation, a regression which is further re-inforced by the phrase "the blight of Osmond's touch."

In such observations an objectivity is maintained and because of the clarity afforded by objectivity, Isabel is able to make a distinction in her situation. "If she must renounce, however, she would let him know she was a victim rather than a dupe." (PL p.537) It is as though she sees herself in a new light and is thus able to take stock of the overall situation. And in the context of this distinction that Isabel can now maintain about her individuality, one can begin to comprehend her

last irrevocable decision to return to Rome.

In "organising an ado" about Isabel Archer, her return to Rome is the cornerstone of the framework. If there is a denouement in the story in the traditional sense of the term, it is not in the revelation of countess Gemini to Isabel about Osmond's relationship with Mme Merle. Neither is it Mme Merle telling Isabel that it was actually Ralph who had made her a rich girl; nor the admission that she (Mme Merle) had "everything" to do with Osmond; nor is it Goodwood's reappearance at Gardencourt and his physical encounter with Isabel. It is not even the brief scene that Isabel observes unseen where Osmond is seated while Mme Merle is standing but in an attitude and proximity in glance and stance as only friends of long standing can acquire. The real denouement takes place without any fanfare or fuss and is merely a reported event. Isabel returns quietly to Rome, to her husband and all the obligations of her relationship with him. This is a surprising event because all the events prior to this pointed to the possibility of a final breach between her and Osmond. The denouement is in the debunking of all logical expectations about Isabel's action in the context.

Though this action does seem contradictory, it is to be remembered that at no point in her life does she contemplate leaving Osmond. She does go to England despite the strongest opposition put up by him but then the events immediately prior to this had greatly re-inforced her desire to see Ralph for the last time. After countess Gemini reveals everything about Osmond's past to her, her instinctive cry is for Ralph, rather than for herself.

'Ah, I must see Ralph!' Isabel wailed, not in resentment, not in the quick passion her companion had looked for; but in a tone of far-reaching sadness. (PL p.549).

Her concern is for Ralph but the 'infinite sadness' is for herself because deep in her heart she knows that inspite of everything there can be no drastic change in her life. There is an instance during the night of her vigil described in Ch. 42 when the idea of a separation from Osmond does enter her mind - but this too in an oblique manner as though she had gathered it from Osmond's attitude, as though it originated from his mind.

...he had had the revelation that she could after all dispense with him. If to her-self the idea was startling, if it presented itself at first as a kind of infidelity, a capacity for pollution, what infinite effect might it not be expected to have had upon him? (PL p.433).

Another instance when such an eventuality occurs to her is when she is taking a solitary walk soon after a visit from Mme Merle. She now realises why Osmond married her and how this lady was instrumental in bringing them together in the first place. And now that Osmond had her money, she ruminates, "would he take her money and let her go?" (PL p.520).

The only direct allusion to their separation is when she tells Osmond on the eve of her departure for England.

'I suppose that if I go you'll not expect me to come back.' (PL p.538).

Osmond's response to it is characteristic of his attitude as it is genuine and unstudied at this instance. 'Are you out of your mind?' he enquired. Here too she seems to try to put the onus on Osmond if a separation did take place eventually.

On her arrival at London, referring to Osmond's great displeasure at her action, she replies to Henrietta's question. "He will though" Isabel answered gravely. 'It won't be the scene of a moment; it will be a scene of the rest of my life.' (PL p.565) (italics mine).

After having had those revelations during her vigil, after having come to realise the true nature of Osmond and even after learning of the relationship between him and Mme Merle, Isabel can have a vision of her future such as this. However, such an attitude is not new, she had earlier told Henrietta, "I cannot publish my mistake. I don't think that that's decent. I'd much rather die" (PL p.488).

If this sounds a bit hypocritical and vain, one is reminded of her mental stock taking in Ch. 42 of the reasons and inducements which culminated in her marriage to Osmond. She has enough moral integrity and honesty to acknowledge her responsibility for her marriage.

It might feed her sense of bitterness, but it would not loosen her bonds. It was impossible to pretend that she had not acted with her eyes open; if ever a girl was a free agent she had been. A girl in love was doubtless not a free agent; but the sole source of her mistake had been within herself. There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked and considered and chosen. When a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it - just immensely (oh, with the highest grandeur!) to accept it. One folly was enough, especially when it was to last for ever; a second one would not much set it off. (PL p. 495) (*italics mine*).

It is noteworthy that this mental resolve takes

shape in her mind long before she learns of the facts of Osmond's past. But even so, the sense of betrayal she feels here is much greater and deeper than when eventually she learns of Osmond's relationship with Mme Merle. She feels let down and betrayed by Osmond on the emotional and spiritual level and these considerations count more with her than any ostensible, physically verifiable acts committed against her.

"She lost herself in infinite dismay when she thought of the magnitude of his deception." (PL p.428).

And because such deception cannot be countermanded by any retaliatory measure, nor is it in her grain to take such a step, Isabel's acceptance of her lot is made long before her trip to England. This trip merely brings forth all the suppressed antagonism and suspicion each has of the other but it can not lead to any open or final breach between them.

In a different way, Isabel too admires 'propriety' and the aristocratic way of life but what a difference there is between her ideal of it and Osmond's!

...but they attached such different ideas, such different associations and desires, to the same formulas, her notion of the

aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude. He was fond of the old, the consecrated, the transmitted; so was she, but she pretended to do what she chose with it. He had an immense esteem for tradition; he had told her once that the best thing in the world was to have it, but that if one was so unfortunate as not to have it one must immediately proceed to make it. She knew that he meant by this that she hadn't it, but that he was better off; though from what source he had derived his traditions she never learned. (PL p.431)

The basic difference between them then lies in this that while he puts a greater premium on the outer circumstances and forms of life, she values the freedom of spirit and beauty of mind. His attitude to life is prosaic whereas she strives after pure poetry. That in reality such an ideal life cannot be had is made very clear. This recognition is one of the most vital discoveries that Isabel makes during her intense soul-searching. And her subsequent actions only prove her acceptance of this inalienable fact of life.

But this base ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a standard. (PL p.430)

Her return to Rome after Ralph's death is therefore the compromise she strikes with the 'ignoble' world of Osmond not by way of conforming with it but "to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority."

After her experiences Isabel has to redefine her concept of tradition but would no longer suffer by thinking that she lacked it. She too is concerned about having and upholding tradition and is, in her own way conventional to a degree. When she reaches Gardencourt and visits with Ralph he tells her that if there is a measure of disappointment in her life, if she has not been able "to look at life for herself," it's because she has been "ground in the very mill of the conventional." (p.577) She herself proves his point when she tells him that she'd stay at Gardencourt "as long as seems right" and asserts that one must think a great deal about that.

Given such a temperament and attitude to life, Isabel can never totally wean herself away from the influence of Osmond and though she recognises his faults and shortcomings, there are certain aspects of his personality which she cannot help admiring even at the

most intense moments of alienation from him. As an illustration of this there is the case of little Pansy's banishment to the convent after Lord Warburton leaves Rome without proposing to her. A typical Osmondian stroke, calculated to arrest Isabel's enthusiasm, to defy her if possible but at any rate to show her to what extent his devilish sophistication can lead him.

Pansy's departure for the convent has been arranged without the slightest hint to Isabel. It is only when the little girl comes to bid her step-mother good-bye, that Isabel realises what a masterful stroke this project has been and thinks to herself "that he had more traditions than she supposed." (PL p.531).

Osmond's speech to Isabel regarding the subject beginning with the blunt dismissal that she wouldn't at any rate, understand why he had decided to send Pansy to the convent again, aims to confine Isabel within a certain psychological isolation slot thus establishing the difference between their respective backgrounds. Her exclusion from the scheme of things is only too apparent and he takes a disgustingly patronising tone which not only slights her capacity for understanding but also dismisses her altogether from the completed

picture as it were. Isabel realizes however why Osmond has acted in this way.

...but she understood it better than he supposed or desired, in as much as she was convinced that the whole proceeding was an elaborate mystification addressed to herself and destined to act upon her imagination. He had wanted to do something unexpected and refined; to mark the difference between his sympathies and her own, and show that if he regarded his daughter as a precious work of art it was natural he should be more and more careful about the finishing touches. If he wished to be effective he had succeeded; the incident struck a chill into Isabel's heart. (PL p.532)

Isabel's reaction arises from the recognition that it's not a father's possessive love or protective concern for Fanny out of which he has masterminded her return to the convent. He talks of her as though she is a rag doll become a bit 'dusty and dishevelled' for the rough handling it has been subjected to. She has therefore been sent to the convent so that she can be restructured according to his specifications. Osmond has thus reduced his daughter's human value and has turned her into a mere pawn in the subtly sinister psychological warfare that he is waging against Isabel. And hence the 'chill' in Isabel's heart.

In his long speech to Isabel, Osmond makes an intriguing remark about society. Unlike all previous

remarks and references, this one displays a potent contempt for what he calls 'this bustling, pushing rabble that calls itself society.' His attack here can be interpreted as an attempt to establish his superiority over the 'rabble' within society of which Isabel is obviously a member, according to him. Thus he is once again isolating Isabel from the exclusive circle within society where he thinks he belongs.

What an ironical fate for Isabel who had thought earlier -

She would have been willing, however to renounce all her curiosities and sympathies for the sake of a personal life, if the person concerned had only been able to make her believe it was a gain! This at best was her present conviction; and the thing certainly would have been easier than to care for society as Osmond cared for it. (PL p.430)

The 'personal life' that Isabel envisioned would be one within an enchanted circle where art, beauty and sophistication would merely enhance the sense of achievement and contentment. The bonds of personal relationships and commitments would be sacrosanct, shielded away from prying eyes and maneuvering minds. Each would surrender to the other with no expectations save those of reciprocity of feelings and the responsibility of

commitments. Indeed a truly poetic vision of life out of which the concerns of the 'base, ignoble world' have been banished totally. It is in pursuit of such an ideal life that Isabel is seen "affronting her destiny" trying at various stages in her career to break away from a predestined mould. But the supreme irony in her destiny has been that the one person whom she thought 'a person of so fine a grain,' turns out to be the exact opposite.

Isabel's tragedy lies in being what she is. Osmond, she believes, hates her for having a mind of her own - but it is this "remarkable mind" of hers which had induced her to admire and adore him in the first place. Her failure to grasp at the essence of his character can be compared to the costly mistake of a self-educated connoisseur of art who invests all his wealth on what he considers to be a genuine and valuable work of art - only to discover later that it is only a clever forgery. This seems to be an apt analogy because Isabel does seem bent on achieving a relationship best realised in the realms of poetry rather than in felt life. Juliet McMaster makes this remark, "What James has shown in Isabel and increasingly as the novel progresses, is life straining towards the condition of art."⁸ (p.63)

⁸Juliet Mc Master, "The Portrait of Isabel Archer", American Literature, 45 (March, 1973), pp.50-66.

Isabel's return to Rome does show her as caring for society as Osmond does - for its outward norms and niceties, for the preservation of appearances. But the Isabel who goes back to Rome goes back armed with a certain knowledge, knowledge gained from her experience of being manipulated and maneuvered, of having been made use of in the most base and materialistic way. But, to quote her own words she is not a mere 'dupe' though a 'victim'. She is now aware of what has happened, is now conscious of the reality around her. This consciousness now is not one of merely 'knowing' what has happened but, more important, it is one of recognising and acknowledging her own part in her tragedy. This awareness is both of the outward circumstances as well as of her own self and motives. And if this new consciousness can be termed the 'new knowledge' then it is certainly the mark of a psychological maturity. Viewed from this angle, her return to Osmond is not merely for form's sake but can be seen as her acceptance of her own responsibility for her marriage.

In spite of her naive, imaginative and egotistical nature, the one consistent aspect of her personality is her moral conviction about the rightness of her decisions.

She marries Osmond out of such a belief, out of her "ardent good faith" in him and in the end she goes back to him because she believes that "certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage and were quite independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it." (PL p.581) Taken in isolation the statement does smack of a certain puritanism - but in Isabel's context, it only affirms her moral consistency.

Any attempt to rationalise Isabel's life and actions, however, must account for her being an American but as Dorothea Krook warns, to take Isabel as merely representing the "weaker side of the American national character" with all her "sentimental nonsense about life and art and Europe and gracious living" would be to "drain the whole central relationship of the book of its tragic meaning, and a fortiori to diminish almost out of existence Isabel Archer's stature as a tragic heroine."⁵

In as much as Osmond is seen as the symbol of the magnetic charm of the old-world civilization, Isabel's career becomes the love-hate relationship of the newly

⁵ Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.41.

awakened American consciousness with the old civilization. In her return to Osmond there is just a hint of the possible synthesis of the old civilization with the new energy and vitality of America as symbolized by Isabel. This is perhaps the possibility that Philip Rahv sees in The Portrait of a Lady.

In the Portrait James is still hesitating between the attitude of Mme Merle and that of Isabel, and his irony is provoked by the excessive claims advanced by both sides.⁶

However, Isabel's return to Rome must be seen not only as preserving the psychological coherence in her character but also as meeting the requirement of an artistic need, because this final act of hers heightens the sense of ambiguity of actions and intentions much more than anything else in the novel.

James's later heroines like Maggie Verver of The Golden Bowl might be able to articulate that synthesis of two equally energetic and scintillating world-views but as of the writing of The Portrait of a Lady, his heroine stands out in "splendid isolation" in her "humane consciousness," stranded between the realms of poetry and of ordinariness.

⁶Philip Rahv, *The Heiress of all the Ages*, (p.116).

CHAPTER - IV

BEATITUDE OR TRAGEDY?

The Wings of The Dove ('1902)

The idea, reduced to its essence, is that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamoured of the world; aware moreover of the condemnation and passionately desiring to "put in" before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived.¹

This is how the author of The Wings of the Dove² summed up the 'formidable' theme when he reviewed his novel some years later. "The image so figured would be at best, but half the matter; the rest would be all the picture of the struggle involved, the adventure brought about, the gain recorded or the loss incurred, the precious experience somehow compassed."³

The 'image' or nebulous identity of Milly Theale, the heroine moves before the reader's eyes as through the various refractions of a spectrum. Whatever form and colour are given to her are tinted according to the person's

¹Henry James, Preface to the Wings of the Dove, p.v

²Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (first published 1902, Charles Scribner's Sons) New York, The Modern Library edition. All references hereafter are to this edition cited as WD.

³preface, p.v

attitude towards her, through whose eyes she is presented. All throughout the novel she is assigned a passivity which logically removes her from the actual purview of the actions and reactions of the story. She is best seen as a symbolic figure rather than the real life representative of any society or country in particular. Whether it is as the "potential heiress of all the ages" (WD, p.82) which refers literally to her millions as well as to her symbolic significance, or as the princess, dove, priestess or even simply as the American Girl, Milly fails to have any meaningful human interaction with any of the other characters. In her isolation, whether it is forced on her or it is out of her own volition, there hovers an air of desperate seeking for protection from some unknown, unnamed apprehension. It is in the context of this that the quotation from Psalms 55 can be related to her situation.

My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove."

I would fly away and be at rest; Yea, I would wonder afar, I would lodge in the wilderness.

(Psalms 55:4-7(RSV))

In a method which Mathiessen calls "deliberately

indirect presentation of its heroine,"⁴ Milly is first introduced through the romantic perspective of her Bostonian companion, Susan Shepherd Stringham.

Mrs. Stringham was never to forget - for the moment had not faded, nor the infinitely fine vibration it set up in any degree ceased - her own first sight of the striking apparition, then unheralded and unexplained: the slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeably angular young person, of not more than two-and-twenty in spite of her marks, whose hair was somehow exceptionally red even for the real thing, which it innocently confessed to being and whose clothes were remarkably black even for robes of mourning which was the meaning they expressed. It was New York mourning, it was New York hair, it was a New York history, confused as yet but multitudinous, of the loss of parents, brothers, sisters, almost every human appendage, all on a scale and with a sweep that had required the greater stage; it was a New York legend of affecting, of romantic isolation, and beyond everything, it was by most accounts, in respect to the mass of money so piled on the girl's back, a set of New York possibilities. She was alone, she was stricken, she was rich, and in particular, she was strange - a combination in itself of a nature to engage Mrs. Stringham's attention.

(WD. pp.79-80)

The elder lady instinctively grasps the enigmatic quality of Milly from the moment she comes into contact with her.

Mrs. Stringham found herself from that hour, in other words, in presence of an explanation that remained a muffled and intangible form, but that assuredly, should it take on sharpness, would explain everything.

⁴F.O. Mathiessen, Henry James, The Major Phase, (New York University Press, 1963), p.55. Hereafter cited as Mathiessen.

would become instantly the light in which Milly was to be read.

(WD. p.88)

Though Milly is shown as "intangible", "muffled", her effect on others, from the very beginning is sharp. Because of her isolation and her detachment on account of her extraordinary circumstances like her youth, her wealth, she possesses the power to "reduce" whoever comes into close contact with her to a "consenting bewilderment". The "light" therefore in which she "is to be read" always presents her as a little better, much richer and far greater to "escape measure" than "they" - the people who are closely associated with her.

Susan Stringham thinks of herself as "a woman of the world" but Milly Theale is to be a "princess". The air of mystery and enchantment which Mrs. Stringham introduces in her 'reading' of Milly is sustained all throughout. The terms of reference used for her are therefore all symbolic and what eventually emerges is an image which is more of a poetic vision rather than a human being of real flesh and blood. Though she is the heroine of the story she remains only on the periphery of events and emotions in the novel.

The scene on the Alpine ledge where Milly is found to be so "precariously perched" for a "mere maiden"

can be seen as a metaphor for the role assigned to her. Her entire situation in life is precarious, for she is a 'mere maiden' sitting on the thin edge of an abyss - the abyss of aloneness and precarious health - yet it is this very situation that infuses the scene with so much heady romance for the "woman of the world". Milly is supposed to be contemplating the "kingdoms of the earth", not with an air of renunciation but with an eye for new connections - choose some or take them all?

Milly does not have to say anything, she need not do anything - yet her very stance, whether it be on this lonely but picturesque Alpine ledge or in a crowded room in a palazzo, - her impression upon others is vivid - strong and indelible. Without ever becoming aware of her presence, Milly gives Susan Stringham the impression of a future which the latter's imagination can so distinctly perceive.

For she now saw that the great thing she had brought away was precisely a conviction that the future was not to exist for her princess in the form of any sharp or simple release from the human predicament. It wouldn't be for her a question of a flying leap and thereby of a quick escape. It would be a question of taking full in the face the whole assault of life, to the general muster of which indeed her face might have been directly presented as she sat there on her rock.

(WD pp.94-95)

Her 'precarious perch' thus becomes her 'rock', her stance, her attitude to life. This 'mere maiden', thus willing to face "the whole assault of life" is the 'potential heiress' of the young girl who had earlier set out "to affront her destiny".

However, like her predecessor, the tragedy of this 'princess' is that she is transposed into a world where the "assault of life" involves direct human relationships, not mere romanticization of them and requires a sharp insight into the power of money in human equations, not the mere possession of it. Despite her increasing passivity on account of her ignorance of these factors, interest in her is sustained by the promise of what she is potentially capable of doing. She is young, she is comely and hence the promise of love and romance. She is rich and there is just the possibility that she may yet grow to understand money and use it to enhance her life. Above all, there is in Milly Theale the spontaneous response to life which Densher calls her "talent for life" an aspect which balances the effects of her mysterious and unnamed malady, to constitute her "interesting state". When it transpires that Milly cannot translate the promise of her life into reality - when "the mine of her treasures" cannot be worked to

the full, this mysterious malady affords her the transition from an otherwise uneventful life into an impressive death; impressive on account of the continued effect it has upon the associates she leaves behind.

The light in which Susan Stringham sees Milly is the theme in which she is pictured and the statement of this in Chapter V reads like a musical rendering of the key note which is counterpointed throughout, by the variations on the note by the other characters, specially Merton Densher.

The next frame or light in which she is presented is a comparative one, the focus alternating between her and Kate Croy, her English friend. By presenting Kate through Milly's adoring eyes the author not only draws a parallel between the two but emphasizes Milly's inherent lack of self-confidence.

In contrast to Milly's obscure past, which is left vague and amorphous, Kate Croy's milieu is presented in concrete terms. In fact, the very first few chapters of the novel dwell on Kate's family and social back-ground. Her adoption by her aunt Maud Lowder is shown as something which is more appropriate as a back-ground for Kate's personality than the comparatively poor surroundings

of her childhood. The implication seems to be that Kate deserves more than she has.

In terms of physical appearance too, Milly is instantly struck by Kate's beauty - 'the handsome girl' is the key phrase used to describe Kate. Milly herself does not have any great claims to beauty herself. Susan Stringham, remarks on this aspect of her ward, "... spoke of her friend as plain, as ugly even, in a case of especially dense insistence", (WD p.89).

In the milieu of Lancaster Gate, Maud Lowder's home, Milly is seen for the first time actively participating in human interactions. Within a short time she becomes quite intimate with Kate Croy. Her admiration for her and the slight awe with which she views this 'handsome girl' contributes to her ingratiating air towards the English girl. Moreover, the "cultural deficiency" which Susan Stringham sees in Milly as the representative of a presumptuous society, quite determines Milly's attitude to Lancaster Gate and all that it stands for. The superficial grandeur and ostentatious display of Mrs. Lowder's wealth dazzles the young girl, so much so, that even when Lord Mark tells her that "nobody here does anything for nothing", (WD p.120) Milly fails

to grasp the real implication of the remark. Thrust, as it were into the very materialistic society of London, Milly herself becomes an object, a "trophy" for Susan Stringham to flaunt before her wealthy former school-friend Maud Lowder as though in compensation for her own lack-lustre life and circumstance. Thus the person who was shown as an interesting, even romantic personage gets gradually dehumanized in this society into a prize - a thing to be used and "made fun of."

Milly's failure to be aware of the subtleties of human relationships is displayed even in her association with Merton Densher whom she knew since her New York days.

But Kate's omission of Densher's name from their list of confidences does awaken a troubled, unnamed and unnameable feeling in Milly's mind.

She had lived with Kate Croy for several days in a state of intimacy as deep as it had been sudden, and they had clearly, in talk, in many directions, proceeded to various extremities. Yet it now came over her as in a clear cold way that there was a possible account of their relations in which the quantity her new friend had told her might have figured as small, as smallest, beside the quantity she hadn't.

(WD pp.139-140)

And Milly continues to ruminate that "this abrupt extrusion of Mr. Densher altered all proportions, had an effect on all values." (ibid.)

The word "extrusion" is the pointer to the way Milly feels about the omission. In 'extruding' one applies force, violence, and it is a deliberate act. Webster's definition includes one sense which says that it is done at 'threat' and one is extruded for being unworthy of an honourable calling. All the implications of the word have a negative tinge and Milly clearly sees Kate's deliberate intention in this fact. Had Milly not been interested in Densher, this would not have affected her so much as this and she also realizes that her attitude to Kate undergoes a visible change. She now looks at her friend as the 'other' - the side of her which is illuminated with reference to Merton Densher. But she is troubled to note that Kate pretends as if there is nothing amiss in their relationship and this awareness comes as a premonition of her "possible betrayals."

The sense of being "on the edge of a great darkness" on account of this is natural, because when she comes on the scene certain relationships and alignments have already been made in the circle into which she has been introduced. This "edge of darkness," this abyss now becomes the challenge of life. What she does in the face of this challenge, how she reacts to it

will determine the course of her future. Here is an opportunity for Milly to start the "assault on life" but the young girl fails to give an adequate response to the situation. She can either dismiss the whole issue regarding Densher as of no importance whatsoever as far as her relationship with Kate is concerned, or confront the latter with the facts. She cannot ignore the issue because she does have enough feelings for Merton Densher and yet she cannot face Kate with her knowledge because she lacks the self-confidence required for such an act. This also shows her apparent ignorance of the mutual obligations of a relationship. She is neither mature or experienced enough to fully grasp the opportunity provided by the situation to gain new experience and assert her own individuality.

On the contrary she agonises over a possible meeting among the three of them lest there be some unpleasantness. She even thinks of going away if necessary. The intention to turn away from a reality because it may be unpleasant, signals her withdrawal and disengagement from the rougher aspects of life. The allusion to her health and possible death in the context of this episode, only confirms this withdrawal from life.

In contrast to Milly's refusal to get involved, which Susan Stringham describes as that she "never really cares." (WD p.138) Kate Croy is a person who is willing to go to any length to get what she wants and cares for.

Milly views Kate as "the product of a packed society" thus bringing out her own essential Americanness, that aspect of her personality which is emphasized all throughout the novel. In the face of so many romantic roles assigned to Milly Theale, the one role which makes her more real and human is that of the American girl, especially emphasized by Merton Densher. She herself lays a great stock on this. She tells Sir Luke Strett, her physician in London "... I'm American. Not that I mean that makes me worse. However, you'll probably know what it makes me." (WD p.180) When Merton Densher talks of Milly's "direct talent for life" (WD p.356) he seems to mean a certain spontaneity and 'directness' of action which has been so characteristic of Milly. In contrast when he applies the same phrase to Kate it is quite in another sense.

... which was precisely a high proof of how Kate had steered her boat. The situation exposed in Mrs. Lowder's present expression lighted up by contrast that superficial

smoothness, which afterwards with his time to think of it, was to put before him again the art, the particular gift, in the girl, now so placed and classed so intimately familiar for him, as her talent for life. (italics mine) (WD p.488)

This difference may also be taken as an index to Milly's American character which, according to Susan Stringham, suffers from a "cultural deficiency" (WD p.83) In contrast, Kate possesses that culture or 'art' which can brazen out an awkward moment like the one in the British Museum, an event over which Milly had agonised so much.

Just as Milly is apprehensive in her relationships with others, Kate is assertive and demonstrative of her feelings. Milly thinks of her as someone who could be "the heroine of a strong story." (WD p.128) When she and Merton Densher get engaged, it is Kate's initiative which brings this about.

Suddenly she said to him with extraordinary beauty. "I engage myself to you forever."

The beauty was in everything and he could have separated nothing - couldn't have thought of her face as distinct from the whole joy. Yet her face had a new light. "And I pledge you - I call God to witness! - every spark of my faith. I give you every drop of my life." (WD p.72)

The beauty, the sincerity and the intensity of her emotions is something which speak for her initial innocence and her whole hearted acceptance of their love regardless of all other considerations. This is an important fact to remember when one comes to examine later the complexities of her actions and intentions. Taking this instance, and the earlier one when she was ready to give up the comparatively more luxurious life offered by her aunt on certain conditions if only her family would consent to have her back, one can see a personality who is capable of much spontaneous animation in a human relationship.

Milly's sojourn in the "packed society" is inextricably linked with the happenings of Lancaster Gate and its immediate circle, and the alliance between Kate and Densher is to be regarded as the backdrop against which the tragedy of the American heiress is played out. viewed in this perspective, The Wings of the Dove becomes in more ways than is normally acknowledged the history of the relationship between Kate Croy and Merton Densher. Milly Theale is the spirit which provides the moral tone to the novel but the real warp and woof is woven round the plight of these ill-fated, and ill-advised lovers. The social milieu of

Lancaster Gate is the concrete 'world' which most 'impinge' upon Milly's life and which eventually 'devour' her in the sense that caught in the vortex of the diabolical machinations of its representatives, she eventually loses her tenuous grip on life.

For this society, Milly is alternately the 'princess' of Susan Stringham's romantic idealization, the 'attendant fairy' of Maud Lowder, the 'dove' of Kate Croy's imagination and the American girl of Merton Densher's sensibilities. When the group at Lord Mark's country house unanimously vouch for her strong resemblance to the Brozino portrait, she too is caught up in the spirit and her subjective identification with the portrait is instinctively related to her stricken conditions when she talks of the lady of the portrait as "dead, dead, dead." Like the personage in the picture the others too seem to think of Milly as already belonging to time and history, thus heightening the sense of disorientation and alienation surrounding her character.

In a society where she is regarded in such a light, the process of her betrayal is set in motion by herself when she confides to Kate about her malady. Kate therefore becomes the prime mover of actions in the drama of her betrayal and even though he is an

accomplice, Merton Densher becomes the vessel of consciousness upon whom the spiritual effect of Milly is felt most.

Though assigned a secondary role to Kate's assertive one, as the novel progresses, Merton Densher becomes more and more the moral centre. Compared to the other illustrious members of the Lancaster Gate circle like Lord Mark, he is a non-entity, a poor penniless journalist. But from the outset a special quality in him is made clear. It is Kate Croy who first recognises this,

He represented what her life had never given her and certainly, without some such aid as his, never would give her; all the high, dim things she lumped together as of the mind. It was on the side of the mind that Densher was rich for her, and mysterious and strong; and he had rendered her in especial the sovereign service of making that element real. (WD pp. 38-39)

When he and Kate get engaged and promise to keep their engagement a secret, it is he who cautions Kate against allowing her aunt to build false hopes on her for anyone else. The implied morality is subtle but all the same it is the index to the moral fibre of his sensibility and it is on this consciousness that the total effect of Milly is to be reflected in the end.

Armed with the knowledge of Milly's fatal malady, Kate decides to launch a diabolical scheme when she is convinced that Milly really 'likes' Densher. The theme of the victimization of the heroine on account of her wealth is a recurrent one in James's fiction. But it is in this novel that the familiar theme assumes such sinister proportions. In Mme de Merves, Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady and in The Golden Bowl the heroine's fortune is the great motivating factor for 'acquiring' her but in The Wings of the Dove, the heroine's imminent death becomes the expedient to acquiring her wealth.

The plot to 'use' Milly originated on account of the opposition set up by Maud Lowder to Kate's involvement with Densher because, though he is a likeable, person he is 'socially' not 'good' enough for her niece. And so in a way this scheme is to deceive her also. But the role played by Maud Lowder provides the irony to the intrigue. Having convinced Milly that Kate does not care for Densher at all, she proceeds to encourage Densher to pay court to Milly by pointing out that her fortune is a 'real fortune'. Though both Mrs. Lowder and Kate are proposing the same thing, their motives are entirely different. However the important fact remains that Milly has been "successfully deceived."

In this overall scheme of deceiving Milly, Densher is the appointed agent. Though he starts out, however reluctantly, as the typical male seducer of James's fiction, he however undergoes a substantial psychological change as he realizes the extent of the havoc he causes on the young girl's life. From the moment he is assigned this role, he is shown as trying to rationalize his intentions and actions. He is perceptive enough to realise what his assignment entails. Milly's "beautiful delusion" and her "wasted charity" constitutes for him "as pretty a case of conscience as he could have desired, and one at the prospect of which he was already wincing." But in his situation whatever consideration he might have on Milly's behalf, must be subservient to his loyalty to Kate. To clear Milly's delusion would amount not only to Kate's "exposure" but would be "a kind of betrayal".

Kate's design was something so extraordinarily special to Kate that he felt himself shrink from the complications involved in judging it. Not to give away the woman one loved, but to back her up in her mistakes - once they had gone a certain length - that was perhaps chief among the inevitabilities of the abjection of love.

(WD p. 281)

Thus one sees a man who is totally aware of what he is in for but who seems incapable of the right decision at the right moment.

On the other hand Densher is also aware of the fact that Milly's typically American *naïveté* would simplify matters for him.

"... the impression that American girls when, rare case, they were as charming as Milly, were clearly the easiest people in the world." (WD p.277).

And this conviction removes any 'primary awkwardness' he might have had in carrying out his scheme of "paying court" to Milly which he sees as that of Milly being "sacrificed."

This word "sacrificed" once again evokes certain connotations of the word 'dove' associated with Milly and alludes to certain Hebraic laws in the Old Testament. The dove was a 'sacrificial' bird as sanctioned in Leviticus 12:8 and the practice was continued even unto the time of Jesus. The dove was a fit item of sacrifice because of its innocence - "innocent as doves" (Mathew 20:16.) and Milly, the dove is also being sacrificed because of her innocence, *naïveté* as well as her great wealth.

The process of betrayal of this unsuspecting girl which has been set in motion at Lancaster Gate is transported to the ethereal, make-believe grandeur of

the rented Venetian palace for the last phase of the drama. And "the pink dawn of an apotheosis" that Milly thinks of as happening while viewing the Brozino portrait at Matcham, finds its culmination in Venice. The scenario here is at once a tableau out of a fairy-tale or at least a legend captured in a picture. Surrounded by her "servants, frescoes, tapestries, antiquities, the thorough make-believe of a settlement" the note is once again on the amorphous quality of Milly's existence, she is a "priestess of the worship"(WD p.325) Adding one more sparkle to her many splendoured roles, Susan Stringham compares Milly's passage through Venice as that of the Empress Catherine's progress across the steppes of Russia. The make-believe settlements, the dancing peasants who greeted the empress were all provided by her protege called Potemkin to give a false impression to the empress. The implications of the analogy are apt references to Milly's situation because the improvised gaiety and grandeur of her Venetian palace is yet another attempt to circumvent the misery of her stricken condition.

Progressively, the terms of reference used for Milly and her entourage emphasize the slightly unreal

air about her existence - like the comparison to the Maeterlinck play and the Veronese picture. The essence of Milly's Venetian sojourn is very aptly summed up by Lord Mark.

What a temple to taste and an expression of the pride of life, yet, with all that, what a jolly home! (WD p.333)

Here in this setting which is her deliberate choice, Milly is seen stretching out to the breath-taking beauty of a poetic existence - the vision of what could have been. The scenario that she conjures up for herself is an immensely romantic ramification of her enchanted existence.

That was nothing, verily, but the perfection of the charm - or nothing, rather, but their excluded, disinherited state in the presence of it. The charm turned on them a face that was cold in its beauty, that was full of a poetry never to be theirs, that spoke, with an ironic smile, of a possible but forbidden life. It all rolled afresh over Milly: "Oh, the impossible romance —!" The romance for her, yet once more, would be to sit there forever, through all her time, as in a fortress; and the idea became an image of never going down, of remaining aloft in the divine, dustless air, where she would hear but the flash of the water against stone. The great floor on which they moved was at an altitude, and this prompted the rueful fancy. "Ah, not to go down - never never to go down!" She strangely sighed to her friend. (WD p.334)

But it is not all romance and poetry that Milly sees in her situation. In an amazingly lucid, practical analysis of her circumstance with reference to her great wealth, she reveals an aspect of her personality which was almost 'muffled' over by the impressions of her varied roles.

With that there came to her a light: wouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely in the ravage of her disease? She mightn't last, but her money would. For a man in whom the vision of her money should be intense, in whom it should be most of the ground for "making up" to her, any prospective failure on her part to be long for this world might easily count as a positive attraction. Such a man, proposing to please, persuade, secure her, appropriate her for such a time, shorter or longer, as nature and the doctors should allow, would make the best of her, ill, damaged, disagreeable though she might, be for the sake of eventual benefits: she being clearly a person of the sort esteemed likely to do the handsome thing by a stricken and sorrowing husband. (WD pp.335-336)

If this is to be taken as the most realistic aspect of Milly's personality, one can see that in all the other aspects she is merely taking the cue given by the others to enact the various roles assigned to her. Ironically it is only Merton Densher, the man who is moving now in very calculated steps against her, who is willing to concede a concrete, definable identity to Milly, a person capable of making such a perceptive

analysis about herself as is shown by the passage quoted above.

He continued to see her as he had first seen her - that remained ineffaceably behind. Mrs. Lowder, Susan Shepherd, his own Kate, might, each in proportion, see her as a princess, as an angel, as a star, but for himself, luckily, she hadn't as yet complications to any point of discomfort: the princess, the angel, the star were muffled over, ever so lightly and brightly, with the little American girl who had been kind to him in New York and to whom, certainly - though without making too much of it for either of them - he was perfectly willing to be kind in return. (WD p.354)

Densher considers and accepts Milly as a real person, with real feelings and longings and therefore the impact of her life and death on him is painfully real because of what he has done to her.

But despite her lucid side, Milly has set up a make-believe milieu of her choice in the Venetian palace and it is here that the highpoint of her drama is enacted. In the party given at her palazzo, the overall effect of her ethereal appearance, all swathed in white is built up like the final crescendo of a symphony. This party is Milly's last public appearance as the 'princess', the 'angel' and 'the star'. In fact, this is the last scene in the drama of her apotheosis and she is accorded the ultimate accolade by being presented in white. The

symbolism as embodied in her white garment is best interpreted in terms of the Biblical passage quoted below.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "who are these, clothed in white and whence have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "these are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of Lamb.

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

(Revelations 7:13-17, RSV)

Even when Milly is actually seen in company with other people it is the amorphous, or spiritual quality of her nature which becomes more pronounced than her actual presence. This is exactly what happens in this party too. Certainly the switch over from her habitual garb of mourning of black to white would be significant in itself but here the symbolism of the white garment seems to be stretched to its ultimate meaning; her mourning has now been changed into joy, she is no longer the "joyless" lady of the Bronzino portrait but is a

joyous 'princess' of another 'court'. She is a 'priestess of the worship' who has a new shepherd now. Thus in one symbolic stroke Milly's transition from the earthly existence into another is quite aptly heralded.

For all the others surrounding her, Milly's apotheosis has been some kind of escape from their various mundane modes of life. But for Merton Densher who does not see Milly quite in the same light as the others do, her transformation, when he sees it, is a movement towards a moral meaning of life. Even during the party at the palace, Densher consistently holds on to his own views regarding Milly's identity.

She was acquitting herself tonight as hostess, he could see, under some supreme idea, an inspiration which was half her nerves and half an inevitable harmony; but what he especially recognised was the character that had already several times broken out in her and that she so oddly appeared able by choice or by instinctive affinity to keep down or to display. She was the American girl as he had originally found her - found her at certain moments, it was true, in New York, more than at certain others; she was the American girl as, still more than then, he had seen her on the day of her meeting him, in London in Kate's company. It affected him as a large though queer social resource in her - such as a man, for instance, to his diminution, would never in the world be able to command; and he wouldn't have known whether to see it in an extension or contraction of "personality", taking it as he did most directly for a confounding extension of surface. (Italics mine) (WD p.384)

Densher is not denying Milly her enchantment and mystery, he is merely trying to make her more human than the others are willing to do, and give to her, her dues as a distinct human being.

But it is Densher now who voices the transformation of the dove image associated with Milly so far. The stricken girl whom he himself had thought of as the "sacrificial dove," is given the ultimate spiritual status. In Biblical terms too, the image of the dove of the old Hebraic reference is given a new meaning.

Milly was indeed a dove; this was the figure, though it most applied to her spirit. But he knew in a moment that Kate was just now, for reasons hidden from him, exceptionally under the impression of that element of wealth in her which was a power, which was a great power, and which was dove-like only so far as one remembered that doves have wings and wondrous flights, have them as well as tender lints and soft sounds. It even came to Densher dimly that such wings could in a given case - had, in fact, in the case in which he was concerned - spread themselves for protection. Hadn't they, for that matter, lately taken an inordinate reach, and weren't Kate and Mrs. Lowder, weren't Susan Shepherd and he, wasn't he in particular, nestling under them to a great increase of immediate ease?

(WD pp.386-387)

In comparing Milly's spirit to a dove, Densher unconsciously gives the greatest religious meaning to the concept of her apotheosis. In the New Testament interpretation of the 'dove' in the context of Jesus'

life and ministry, the spirit of God is likened to a dove. The Gospels of Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22 and John 1:32 all record the descent of "the spirit of God in bodily form, as a dove" upon Jesus soon after his baptism by John the Baptist. And after Jesus' ascent into heaven, his disciples experience the descent of his holy spirit on the day of the Pentecost and this 'spirit' according to the believers is the 'Presence' of Jesus among his congregation on earth.

Stretching the suggestions of association even to the brink of the blasphemous, one is constrained to add here that it is the 'spirit' of Milly after her death which Kate and Densher mean when they agree that, they are covered by her 'wings,' the wings of the dove. (WD p.521)

With Milly's exit from public view after his last recorded interview with him, the focus is more or less concentrated on Densher's psyche and the moral questions of the novel are handled through his consciousness and actions.

Beginning from the instance when he warns Kate not to allow her aunt to build false hopes on her for someone else, Densher displays a finer moral sensibility

than Kate, lovers and accomplices though they undoubtedly are. When Kate spells out that he should propose marriage to Milly, he tells her, "And what I don't make out is how, caring for me, you can like it." And again "what I don't make out then is how you can ever bear it."

(WD p.393). He also sees the indelicacy and difficulty in dissimulating before Milly. "Only you see, one has to try a little hard to propose to a dying girl." (WD p.395) But inspite of such moral stirrings in his mind he is too much in love with Kate not to go along with her plan. His love for Kate is shown as being as much physical as anything else. But when he strikes a bargain with Kate in order for him to stay back in Venice and carry out their scheme to the end, it is as much a lover's natural impulse to want to possess his loved one as well as a surety that having gone the whole way, Kate would not betray or desert him.

There's nothing for me possible but
to feel that I'm not a fool. It's all I have
to say, but you must know what it means.
With you I can do it - I'll go as far as you
demand or as you will yourself. Without you
- I'll be hanged! And I must be sure."

(WD p.374)

In this remark there is also a subtle hint as though meaning that on his own and out of his own volition, he would never have considered what they are proposing to do.

Despite their mutual attraction, there seems to be a great difference in their moral sensibilities. The circumstances of Kate's early life may provide extenuation for her tenacity and cruelty to a certain extent but despite a shared experience, she remains unregenerate till the end. She sums up this difference when she tells Densher, "I'm just where I was; and you must give me some better reason than you do my dear, for your not being." (WD p.480)

Densher had long been pliant in the hands of the cold and calculating Kate and had been merely gliding along with the superior force of her scheming mind. The first mote of moral decisiveness is struck when he tells Kate, "If I had denied you moreover, I would have stuck to it." (WD p.463) In the context of his moral regeneration, the most valid interpretation for this would be that having deceived Milly already by dissimulating a false affection for her, he was not going to further deceive her by denying the truth about himself and Kate. He has been prepared to take a stand in order not to go further into the moral abyss which is of their deliberate making.

Densher comes back from Venice bearing the full brunt of his last interview with Milly and fully

acknowledges the fact they have acted abominably. He has lost faith in their common goal and in order to make right the wrong that has been committed against Milly, he proposes the announcement of their engagement immediately, thereby making public the confession which he so miserably failed to give Milly during their last meeting. But Kate will not have him on these conditions.

Densher's experience has been such that the change wrought by it on him is quite perceptible. Though indissolubly bound by their common crime Kate however fails to grasp at the significance of this change. "My dear man, what has happened to you?" She asks him as though to hint that he has lost his reason.

"Well, that I can bear it no longer. That's simply what has happened. Something has snapped, has broken in me, and here I am. It's as I am that you must have me."

Out of Kate's failure to understand the change in Densher, a psychological and moral barrier is created between them. There is even a subtle vein of antagonism and suspicion between them now evident, an element so detrimental to any relationship.

"You see in everything, and you always did," Densher returned, "something that, while I'm with you at least, I always take from you as the truth itself." (WD p.503)

In spite of the growing alienation between them Densher still attempts to build a future for themselves out of the chaos of their common crime by trying to make Kate understand the intensity of his experience with Milly. As a last gesture of expiation for a shared guilt, he brings to Kate Milly's letter unopened. In his own way he is trying to invest the simple ritual of breaking open the seal of the letter with a symbolism which he says is "a symbol of my attitude." But Kate simply throws the letter into the fire in the grate with the callous remark, "You'll have it all, from New York." (WD p.509)

This process of alienation is completed when Densher tells Kate that she has to reject the legacy if she still wants to marry him. But she leaves him with the sad rejoinder - "We shall never be again as we were." (WD p.522) articulating the sense of universal loss on which note the novel ends.

As Densher's consciousness comes to recognise his guilt, his motives and actions reflect more and more the moral beauty and power that Milly Theale represents. It is as though in the indirect light of his consciousness she is finally actualised as the poetic vision of moral

truth and beauty. The symbolic imagery and language that always described her short life is also used to announce her final withdrawal from life.

"She has turned her face to the wall" announces Susan Stringham in a somewhat melodramatic scene to Densher in his lodgings about Milly's last illness. The Biblical allusion here is to II Kings 20:2-3. King Hezekiah, when told of his imminent death by the prophet AMOZZ, turns his face to the wall to pray, to weep and to supplicate God to grant him life. In a similarly symbolic way Mrs. Stringham is telling how much Milly wants to live, how she is "clinging to it". But when Densher recounts this to Kate later, his interpretation is that Milly had given up her will to live on learning from Lord Mark about their engagement, thus bringing in a slight manipulation to the allusion.

The complex conglomeration of ideas and images that is Milly Theale remains a poetic vision of the ultimate in moral truth and beauty. The strange mixture of 'Byzantine' mysticism and Biblical allegory which went into creating this vision perhaps was the only material which James could employ in order to give coherence to a life-time's obsession with the perfection of his craft

as well as articulating his ethics about human relationships. Christof Wegelin argues that though Milly Theale is the heroine,⁵

She is for more than the last fifth of the whole novel present only as a reflected image so that even certain highly climatic scenes like Densher's leave-taking of her, are not enacted. The reason for this indirection is simply that in the moral scheme of the novel Milly finally has to undergo a kind of transfiguration, both the pain and the sublimity of which are beyond dramatic representation. (pp.111-112)

Wegelin however emphasizes that The Wings of the Dove should not be read as an "allegory" or a "Biblical subject." According to him it is a drama not of unambiguous conflict between heaven and hell, but between two kinds of human ethics." (p.112)

The Wings of the Dove can however be seen as the crystalization of James's idea of the "certain sort of young American" as the "heir of all the ages." The artistic pursuit of an ideal which had its genesis in the portraiture of Daisy Miller in the nouvelle of the same

⁵Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, Ch. V.

name finds its acme in this novel. In the two parallel media employed in The Wings, the real blends into the beauty of the allegorical thus giving a strangely beatific quality to the final vision of this "potential heiress of all the ages."

On the thematic level too, The Wings of the Dove introduces important changes in the pattern of seduction and betrayal of the heroine in the fiction of James discussed so far. Here the heroine dies physically inviolate but it is her sensibility which has been ravished. In an intricate reversal of roles, the 'actor' (Merton Densher) and not the passive 'sufferer' (Milly Theale) who undergoes the most significant changes in his consciousness and makes the moral decisions in the end. If he is to be considered a representative of the old world civilization rather than just one of 'the tough English gang', his regeneration into recognising the moral beauty of Milly, the ultimate 'American Girl' would point to a gradual synthesis of the two world views. Cast in the role of the typical male seducer of James's fiction, this important change in his psyche makes him altogether a unique character. Comparing Densher to Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady, Philip Rahv says, "Merton Densher (The Wings of the Dove) and Prince Amerigo

(The Golden Bowl) are men of grace and intelligence whose wicked behaviour is primarily determined by the situation in which they find themselves."⁶

Kate Croy too has been conceived in the type as represented by Mme Merle in The Portrait of a Lady but whereas Mme Merle was truly only a satellite of the heroine, Kate Croy's character is sketched much more prominently and not without sympathy either. True to the symbolic promise of the title, the heroine is amorphously conceived and presented by reversing the method he earlier used in The Portrait of a Lady. He presses hardest not on the consciousness of the heroine but on those of her "satellites." Yet the overall impression of her character is real and relates to the moral drama which according to Mathiessen is James's "most thorough-going." He moreover sums up James's achievement in The Wings of the Dove in the following passage, a view one would like to endorse.

In a more restricted but very relevant sense one may also look for the essential design, not through the successive stages of an artist's whole development, but in his masterpiece, in that single work where his characteristic emotional vibration seems deepest and where we may have the sense, therefore, that we have come to the very soul.⁷

⁶Philip Rahv, The Heiress of All The Ages, from Literature and the Sixth Sense (Boston, Houghton, 1969, pp. 104-125), p.119.

⁷Mathiessen, The Major Phase, p.74.

The most intriguing part of James's technique in this novel is that the last scene between Milly and Densher remains shrouded in mystery - only its impact on Densher is the index to the nature of the confrontation. Whether she accused or he confessed is left entirely to the imagination of the reader. But ultimately, the 'presence' of the 'absent' Milly is to surround his sensibilities for the rest of his life. That is why Kate wants him to reassure her that he is not in love with her memory. She intuitively responds to this state of Densher's mind when she tells him "We shall never be again as we were!"

The tragedy of it all in this novel is in the pathetic end to Milly's desire to "live - Oh so to live" as well as in the destruction of Densher's conscience. In the context of the Jamesian moral code, the latter would seem to be of greater consideration and therefore, while the lingering sadness is for the people whom Milly leaves behind, Milly's tragedy is informed with a definite spiritual beauty and poetic grandeur.

Undoubtedly, the character of Milly Theale was fashioned on the model of his cousin Minny Temple who also died of tuberculosis at the age of 24. James's affection for this sensitive, vivacious girl was much

more than that of a mere cousin and there is a reason to believe that Minny too reciprocated that feeling. Her death therefore was felt as a great personal loss and he was to record that this event marked "the end of their youth" both for himself and his brother William.

But whatever be the genesis of the idea for his heroine, the beauty of James's achievement in The Wings of the Dove lies in the fact that he translated an intensely personal experience into an artistic reality. With consummate skill he controls the narrative, not allowing the allegorical element to suffuse the real and yet making the allegories give coherence to the real. The overall effect of the novel is that it has both the amorphous beauty and realism of an impressionistic painting.

CHAPTER - V

THE FINAL VISION : A Study of
THE GOLDEN BOWL (1904)

The Golden Bowl is by far James's most direct presentation of characters, their emotions, their actions and feelings. In this novel there is nothing of the tentativeness with which he had delineated his earlier heroines. At long last, he seems to have grasped the essence of his ideal heroine and the qualities with which he had endowed his other heroines are eventually coalesced in The Golden Bowl and given new interpretations. The heroine is no longer the naive, innocent ingenue like Daisy Miller, Euphemia Cleve or Catherine Sloper. Nor is she a highly imaginative and romantic girl like Isabel Archer or the almost ethereal one like Milly Theale. In this last great novel of James's we have a heroine who is very real, very life-like and also prone to all the aches and pains and predicaments of all vulnerable human beings.

To be sure, Maggie Verver does embody certain stock Jamesian characteristics. She is extremely rich, she is young and she is also susceptible to the old world

charm of Europe and European men. She is also insensitive and self-centred as only the very rich can be. When she first meets Prince Amerigo and marries him, she considers him more as an 'aquisition' rather than a human being with whom she has contracted a relationship for life. Until the time when she begins to recognise the inherent danger in taking him for granted, she sees her husband rather through her father's eyes than her own consciousness.

The Prince too is aware that Maggie sees in him only the romance of his origins and ignores the quintessence of his being.

'... There are two parts of me' - Yes, he had been moved to go on. 'One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless betises of other people - especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me. Those things are written - literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've, both of you, wonderfully, looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant - unimportant save to you - personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing.'¹

¹Henry James, The Golden Bowl, (first published by Charles Scribner & Co. 1904) Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, Penguin Books Ltd. (p.33) All subsequent references are to this edition cited as GB.

What the Prince is suggesting here is that it is important for Maggie to try and find out more about this "unknown personal quantity" about himself. But Maggie sees only the romance of his lineage and dismisses this unknown quantity. She asks him, 'where, therefore without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?' (BG p.33) In the light of such an estimation, the Prince becomes only a valuable 'acquisition' for the Ververs. She even refers to him as a 'morceau de musée.' Maggie is thus seen as merely taking the Prince at his face value only.

On the other hand, the Prince has very clear and realistic ideas about his own worth and what he stands to gain from his alliance with the Verver millions. He sees himself representing an obsolete set of values good in its proper time and place, but not so good compared to the contemporary setting.

It was as if he had been some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms; medieval, wonderful, of which the 'worth' in mere modern changes, sovereigns and half-crowns, would be great enough, but as to which, since there were finer ways of using it, such taking to pieces was superfluous. That was the image for the security in which it was open to him to rest; he was to constitute a possession, yet was to escape being reduced to his component parts. (italics mine)(GB p.43)

The Prince displays a consistent concern for material things and the acquisition of money. Though he can boast of an impressive lineage, his grievance against his ancestors is that through their profligate living they squandered the family fortune which otherwise would have been his now. His answer to Maggie's question quoted earlier reveals this concern. 'I might have been in a somewhat better, pecuniary situation.'

(GB pp.33-34)

Money is what he does not have and therefore the acquisition of it and all its attendant glories seems to be his motive for doing everything in life.

What was this so important step he had just taken but the desire for some new history that should, so far as possible, contradict, and even if need be flatly dishonour, the old? If what had come to him wouldn't do, he must make something different. He perfectly recognised - always in his humility - that the material for the making had to be Mr. Verver's millions.

(GB p.38)

As a rationale for self-aggrandisement, the Prince seems to have evolved a very personal philosophy of life. During a brief discussion with Charlotte before his marriage when she turns up unexpectedly in London, he states this to her.

'My dear friend,' he returned,
'it's always a question of doing the best
for one's self one can - without injury
to others.' (GB p.67)

His sense of achievement in marrying Maggie Verver is therefore quite in terms of his mercenary visions rather than the personal relationship. He considers poverty the most extreme state of futility of being, "having seen it, having tried it, having taken its measure." And therefore it is a condition to be avoided at all costs, even if it meant sacrificing a person he happens to love because she too is a pauper like himself. In the light of all this, perhaps one can begin to understand Amerigo's exultation over his imminent marriage to Maggie and her millions.

Well, he was of them now, of the rich peoples; he was on their side - if it wasn't rather the pleasanter way of putting it that they were on his. (GB p.39)

The image of the Prince on the eve of his marriage is that of a smug businessman who has completed a deal to his immense gratification.

He felt therefore, just at present as if his papers were in order, as if his accounts so balanced as they had never done in his life before and he might close the portfolio with a snap. (GB p.40)

Prince Amerigo personifies the new morality, the new raisons d'etre of a people who realise that their quaint histories and obsolete traditions cannot survive in the new set-up represented by the Ververs where money is the great manipulator and trendsetter for human existence. And yet these people know that in their own way they have some definite value to offer to the nouveaux rich. Amerigo knows that "he was to constitute a possession for the Ververs."

Fanny Assingham, the character who almost till the end, plays the role of the omniscient authorial delegate, manipulating the lives around her and glossing over whatever she thinks is evil or immoral, also does so in order to benefit from the magnanimity of the Ververs. Both she and the Prince seem to stand for a completely new world-view and personal interpretation of morality. Fanny Assingham says, "But stupidity pushed to a certain point is, you know, immorality. Just so what is, morality but high intelligence?"

And when one employs this 'high intelligence' to safe-guard one's interest as she is doing she is only echoing the Prince's own philosophy of self-preservation too.

In the context of such a world view, the golden bowl, on which the title of the novel is based, is the most appropriate symbol. And the manner in which it is introduced ingeniously encompasses the whole moral dilemma of the novel.

Charlotte Stant, an old friend of Maggie's, and the Prince have been lovers but both being poor could not marry. But on the eve of Amerigo's marriage to Maggie, she turns up in London and seeks an opportunity to spend some time alone with him. And this occasion is when the golden bowl is discovered in a Bloombury antique shop by them.

At one level, the golden bowl can be considered as the metaphor for the Prince's personality. Just as the bowl has a hidden flaw which has been cleverly gilded over by an expert craftsman, the Prince too has a hidden flaw in his personality - his avarice, which he cleverly disguises as his 'touch stone of taste' in doing things. Once Adam Verver tells Amerigo that he is "a pure and perfect crystal." The Prince's rejoinder to this remark is revelatory and has covert allusions to the golden bowl which he had rejected as a wedding present from Charlotte because it had a flaw.

'Oh, if I'm a crystal I'm delighted that I am a perfect one, for I believe that they sometimes have cracks and flaws - in which case they're to be had very cheap!' He had stopped short of the emphasis it would have given his joke to add that there had been certainly no having him cheap; and it was doubtless a mark of the good taste practically reigning between them that Mr. Verver had not on his side either, taken up the opportunity. (GB p.121)

The 'opportunity' that Adam Verver does not take up is the occasion to explain that it was 'Amerigo's character as a representative precious object' along with the other items of collection and acquisition "so engaged all the faculties of his mind, that the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit." (GB p.121)

This then is the value scale on which the Ververs operate and the human equation has to be manipulated and fitted into the scheme of things worked out by them on this scale. Amerigo has been brought into the family on this basis and when a wife for Adam Verver has to be found, a variant of this same value-scale is in action. Maggie feels that by marrying Amerigo, somehow the symmetry of her life with her father has been upset. It is as though the acquisition of the precious Prince

has disarranged the display of their lives and therefore one more item has to be acquired to restore the balance. The facility with which they have been able to acquire precious objects is due to their wealth, and because of this, their sensibility has been so deadened as to make them insensitive to people and their human needs.

This is the curious attitude of the Ververs which is now wedded to the Prince's policy of self-preservation.

It is interesting to note that both Maggie and Adam Verver look upon her marriage as some kind of violence done to their ambiguous relationship. And both agree that Adam's marriage would redress this. Their surmise on this subject constitute the irony in the whole situation because in the end, instead of providing the much needed element to restore the balance in their lives, it is because of this marriage that Maggie's relationship with her husband is jeopardized.

The Ververs' is a very calculated move, devoid of all human considerations. Adam Verver views his contemplated proposal to Charlotte with the same detachment and eye to symmetry and the right placement as he

would in the ordering of objects in a show case. As if to emphasize this point, the author juxtaposes Adam's acquisition of the exquisite Damascene tiles and the 'acquisition' as it were of Charlotte as his wife.

Thus, Charlotte's stant is brought into the rich, emotionally empty, lazy, art-filled lives of the Ververs. This 'unknown' quantity in the person of Charlotte introduced into the circle already comprised of the Ververs' affluence and Prince Amerigo's impressive, though impoverished heritage proves to be the catalyst.

Charlotte, however, accepts Adam Verver's proposals with a candour and humility which stands out in stark contrast to his own. Hers is an attempt to fill a real, human need in her life - his is merely to fill a social void as created by Maggie's marriage.

Charlotte tells Adam,

'I won't pretend I don't think it would be good for me to marry. Good for me, I mean,' she pursued, 'because I'm so awfully unattached. 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 - a motive outside of myself. In fact,' she said, so

sincerely that it almost showed pain, yet so lucidly that it almost showed humour, 'in fact, you know, I want to be married. It's - well, it's the condition.' (GB p.175)

Charlotte has the additional burden of her past relationship with the Prince because of which her marriage to Adam Verver certainly puts her in a peculiar position in the whole set-up. Fanny Assingham, is party to this knowledge but who has very diplomatically kept quiet on this score. It is to her that Charlotte articulates her view of her own position.

'Indeed, love, you simply couldn't even if you thought it necessary - that's all I mean. Nobody could, for it belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed - fixed as fast as a pin stuck, up to its head, in a cushion. I'm placed - I can't imagine anyone more placed. There I am!' (GB p.199)

Charlotte is therefore the alien object, the outsider who is brought in for a specific reason. In thus placing her, James here makes the most decisive change in the pattern followed so far. It was the heroine who was earlier seen as the outsider, the alien, seeking for acceptance and recognition but now it is the

anti-heroine who is placed in this situation. The heroine belongs in the world of the novel, in fact it is her world, the established world of her father's affluence and her husband's limited aestheticism. Into this 'world' Charlotte is brought because of her 'usefulness' to the Ververs.

'Placed' as they were in the intimate little circle of Eaton Square, Portland Place and Cadogan Place, and given the daughter's and father's predilection for each other's company exclusively to themselves, it is only inevitable that Charlotte and the Prince should have more and more occasions to be together. Fanny Assingham, who is at once a manipulator, a moderator and also a self-appointed moral guardian, construes this situation as Charlotte's wilful negligence of her husband, and chides her, "you ought to be absolutely happy, you live with such good people." (GB p. 200) Fanny Assingham's agitation over the situation and her apprehension about where it may lead Charlotte and the Prince is not purely a self-less concern for the morals of close friends. She is terrified lest the old lovers renew their liaison and thereby jeopardize her relationship with the Ververs. She and her husband are leading an existence as some amiable appendages to the Ververs'

benevolence and it was through her influence that the Prince could marry Maggie. Whereas the Prince's marriage to Maggie only seemed to secure further her standing with the Ververs, Charlotte's subsequent marriage with Adam Verver threatens to upset the delicate balance. And Fanny Assingham is frantic with apprehension for herself, "By every dictate of moral delicacy she must leave him alone," (GB p.217) thus implying that the situation is solely of Charlotte's deliberate making.

However, in all fairness to the old lovers, it must be conceded that the extra-ordinary situation in which the Prince and Charlotte find themselves would even by itself generate a new relationship were it so that these two were strangers prior to their marriage into the same family. Charlotte, during one of such moments together tells the Prince,

'Isn't the immense, the really quite matchless beauty of our position that we have to "do" nothing in life at all? - nothing except the usual, necessary, everyday thing which consists in one's not being more of a fool than one can help. That's all - but that's as true for one time as for another. There has been plenty of "doing", and there will doubtless be plenty still; but it's all theirs, every inch of it; it's all a matter of what they've done to us.' And she showed how the question had therefore been only of their taking

everything as everything came, and all as quietly as might be. Nothing stranger surely had ever happened to a conscientious, a well-meaning a perfectly passive pair: no more extraordinary decree had ever been launched against such victims than this of forcing them against their will into a relation of mutual close contact that they had done everything to avoid.

(GB p.221)

It is indeed true that this pair of lovers had, by mutual consent agreed to go their separate ways because both were poor and Charlotte realized that it was important for the Prince to have money in order to maintain his old way of life. Unlike James's other lovers such as Osmond and Mme Merle and Kate Croy and Merton Densher, these two had not plotted in any way to acquire wealth through any covert manipulation. But ironically they both happen to be married into the same family and not only that, are given every opportunity to renew their former relationship with each other. The situation is best explained in the author's own words.

What had happened, in short, was that Charlotte and he had, by a single turn of the wrist of fate - 'let up' to indeed, no doubt, by steps and stages that conscious computation had missed - been placed face to face in a freedom that par-took, extraordinarily, of ideal perfection, since the magic web had spun itself without their toil, almost without their touch. (GB p.227)

But they are nevertheless caught in the web of this placement and this is precisely the background against which the moral questions of the novel are to be asked and the answers given.

In the beginning of this essay, it was remarked that both Maggie and her father display an insensitivity as only the very rich can develop. They have been cushioned and protected by their wealth against the hard facts of life, of what material destitution can do to man's spirit and inherent nobility. Insulated, as it were, in the comfort of their wealth as well as in each other's company as they have been since the death of Maggie's mother, these two fail to notice what is happening to their respective partners. In all their dealings, the impression gained is that they take them much too much for granted. This is so, because they literally 'acquired' their partners to fulfil certain needs in their lives. And once having fulfilled these needs, they fall back to their old rhythm of life, grossly neglecting the human needs of these two persons who are such integral parts of their lives.

The condition in which these two lovers re-establish their relationship inspite of themselves is

presented through Charlotte's intelligence and consciousness. On a wet afternoon, after she has literally roamed all over town in an effort to do something to relieve her boredom - Maggie and the little Principino were spending the day with her father - she stops at Portland Place to find the Prince alone.

There it all is - extra-ordinary beyond words. 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? (GB p.230)

Narrating to the Prince, how at three different instances that day she came back home to find still, father and daughter engrossed in their little world - oblivious to everybody and everything else, Charlotte asks the rhetorical question, in her bewilderment.

'...what do they really suppose', She asked, 'becomes of one? - not so much sentimentally or morally, so to call it, and since that doesn't matter; but even just physically, materially, as a mere wandering woman; as a decent harmless wife, after all; as the best stepmother, after all, that really ever was; or at the least simply as a maitresse de maison not quite without a conscience; They must even in their odd way,' she declared, 'have some idea.' (GB p.232)

The Prince's attitude towards the same situation is one of caution and care for not antagonising the Ververs which is in fact in keeping with his policy of survival. But Charlotte's animation seems aimed at building up a justification, should it so happen that they pick up the threads of their old relationship.

When two people such as these, given the history of their past relationship, their highly motivated marriages to people who now afford them so much togetherness turn to each other for comfort and companionship to obviate their common condition, it is only to be expected that the inevitable should happen. From a casually reassuring and harmless gesture like a hand-clasp, the emotional and physical coming together of these two lovers is described in an astonishingly graphic but beautiful piece of narration rarely found in the fiction of James.

'It's sacred,' she breathed back to him. They vowed it, gave it out and took it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they passionately sealed their pledge. (GB p.237)

The Prince's philosophy has all along been that 'one should do the best for one's self one can without injury to anyone' and this seems to be operative here too. He tells Charlotte that "everything's right and everything will stay so.' He goes on to explain what he means by this. He says, 'We're happy, and they're happy. What more does the position admit of?' (GB p.257)

Charlotte too, though a victim of the situation, is quite lucid about the entire situation. There is even a certain sense of smugness when she assures the Prince that they are 'safe.' No matter what the extenuating circumstances and notwithstanding the implied sympathy for the lovers in the description of their physical reunion, there is enough evidence to suggest that they are guilty of not only what they actually commit but also of the motive with which they take advantage of their situation. It is against such a background of complex and intriguing personal relationships that the consciousness of the heroine is aroused.

Maggie's awakening is as though from a psychological stupor. It is Fanny Assingham who sums up the situation so neatly.

'...And the only thing that even can be the matter with Maggie is that, By "that" I mean her beginning to doubt. To doubt, for the first time, 'Mrs Assingham wound up, 'of her wonderful little judgement of her wonderful little world.'
(GB p.283)

What happens at Matcham during the fateful Eastern weekend, creates enough shock waves on her complacency and self-sufficiency, for her to take a fresh look at her own life. The essential truth about Maggie's marriage is once again presented through Fanny Assingham's intelligence.

'It isn't a question of recovery. It won't be a question of any vulgar struggle. To "get him back" she must have lost him, and to have lost him she must have had him.' With which Fanny shook her head. 'What I take her to be waking up to is the truth that all the while, she really hasn't had him. Never.'
(GB p.285)

The bluntness and crudity with which this pronouncement is made however does not alter the essential truth of the statement. As a material possession, as a social ornament, the Prince has been had by the Ververs but Maggie has not been able to establish the human, personal contact with him so far. It is to this truth that she wakes up. But the sad fact remains that her

awakening is not to something good and noble that she had missed but to a new and frightening concept - the concept of evil. "Evil with a capital E" as Mrs. Assingham puts it. And the image of this concept is like "a great flower grown in a night." (GB p. 327). Indeed a frightening spectacle - a giant specimen to confront one in a place where there was nothing but empty space only a short while ago. On awakening as it were, Maggie sights the spectacle of the relationship between Charlotte and her husband as the horrible abnormality of a giant flower grown over-night.

As Fanny Assingham asserts, this danger, this disagreeableness in the situation is what will eventually goad Maggie "to decide to live." (GB p. 287) This would mean the transition of her merely existing beautifully as she herself admits, with "the complications of life kept down, the bores sifted out, the large ease of the home preserved....." (GB p.314) to a more active and vigorous participation in life. She now sees her life in the light of this new awareness and it makes her uneasy to realize that she is "moving for the first time in her life as in the darkening shadow of a false position." (GB p.303)

The "false position" is however, not because there is any ambiguity involved in the aspects of her relationship with the others but because of the doubts in her mind now about the moral rightness of the attitude, the stance she has taken about her marriage so far. She remembers what her friend Fanny Assingham had said about them, about herself and her father - that they were not "living at all, as not knowing what to do or what might be done for them." (GB p. 314)

In her re-awakened consciousness, Maggie sees the whole aspect of their two marriages with the lucidity of a keen and objective analyst. And the image thus created is not only an apt analogy but also a beautiful poetic presentation of the whole human predicament involved.

She had a long pause before the fire, during which she might have been fixing with intensity her projected vision, have been conscious even of its taking an absurd, fantastic shape. She might have been watching the family coach pass and nothing that, somehow, Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling it while she and her father were not so much as pushing. They were seated inside together, dandling the Principino and holding him up to the windows, to see and be seen, like an infant positively royal; so that the exertion was all with the others. Maggie found in this image a repeated challenge; again and yet again she pauses before the fire; after which each time, in the manner of one for whom a

strong light had suddenly broken, she gave herself to livelier movement. She had seen herself at last, in the picture she was studying, suddenly jump from the coach; whereupon, frankly, with the wonder of the sight, her eyes opened wider and her heart stood still for a moment. She looked at the person so acting as if this person were somebody else, waiting with intensity to see what would follow. The person had taken a decision - which was evidently because an impulse long gathering had at last felt a sharpened pressure.
(GB p.315)

Before attaining such an awareness of her situation, Maggie has been living in an innocence which is not conscious of anything else except the immediate well being of the self. The situation as she sees it now intrudes into "the very centre of the garden of her life" thus shattering her innocence. When this almost virginal Maggie awakens to reality, it is to the very concrete, physical reality of her husband and the prospect of losing him. The unspoken, confessional dialogue reveals Maggie's deep seated passion for her husband and she talks of Amerigo as "the reason" of her life. And her decision for action is aimed towards total possession.

The interesting point about Maggie's awakening into life is that she is not striving after some impossible ideals or fantastic dreams but is attempting towards

building a more meaningful relationship between herself and her husband. The vital connection that she has failed to make with her husband as between man and woman is going to be forged with this new awareness.

However, repossessing her husband to herself is made more complicated because the person from whom he has to be repossessed is her own step-mother! Thus the chain of reactions triggered off by Maggie's alerted sensibilities unravel the mysteries, the moves and counter moves of personal politics such as only James, "the recorder of fine consciousnesses" can reveal. If Maggie's mind has become more agitated after the Matcham episode between Charlotte and her husband, the other two principals of the drama too are convinced that a certain change has taken place in Maggie's entire outlook on life, inspite of Maggie's conscious control over her emotions and her behaviour with them. Taking the cue, as it were, from her own change, these two "treat" her in such a way as to follow "a plan that was the exact counterpart of her own."

They had a view of her situation, and of the possible forms her own consciousness of it might take - a view determined by the change of attitude they had had, even so subtly, to recognize in her on their return from Matcham. (GB p.328)

In such an intriguing situation of psychological sword-play, Amerigo and Charlotte seem to have the advantageous position. Apart from her wish to reassert her relation with her husband, Maggie is determined to ensure that her father is protected from any hurt. But in order to do so she has to be very careful of the steps that she takes. She realizes that the more she tries to take the lead in the ordering of their lives, the greater is her father's vulnerability which is a great restraining factor. It is indeed a delicate task that she has undertaken because she is attempting to bring about a drastic change in the tenor of their lives without letting her father see the reason why.

From this juncture onwards, the tension in the novel is built up on the theme of who will emerge the victor in this subtle game of personal politics. This is no mean game of vulgar accusations and crude denials but one executed with a taut fineness and civility as only these highly placed sophisticates of James' fiction are capable of. Maggie is a comparative novice here, the other two are accomplished cosmopolites who are against her with their shared past. Each party is intensely aware of the other's motives and moves and in this Maggie can match them with her keen analytical

perception. She recognises that "her husband and his colleague are directly interested in preventing her freedom of movement." She also recognizes that it is she who holds the vital power to sustain the equilibrium of their life that they all seem to be striving to preserve in their separate, antithetical ways.

Policy or no policy, it was they themselves who were arranged. She must be kept in position so as not to disarrange them. (GB p.330)

And Maggie in the same passage recognises how that "Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together but she - to confine the matter only to herself - was arranged apart."

This recognition of her aloneness delineates Maggie's position in the human equation in The Golden Bowl. What she does in the face of this sense of alienation, of abjection, will determine the extent of her direct participation in life.

The policy of the other two is based on a complex philosophy of self-interest as well as their desire of not "wounding" Maggie. She becomes for them "a subject of intimate study" simply because they are alarmed lest she adopt a course of direct and public

confrontation and expose them. They smother her with their care and attention so much that Maggie is described as ensconced in "the solid chamber of her helplessness, as in a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her." Emphasizing Maggie's entrapped self in the guile of these two artful cosmopolites, the author uses the beautiful metaphor of the trapped bird whose expressions of "desired flight" are being suppressed with bribes of "extra allowance of lumps of sugar and a more gilded cage."

But Maggie's keen perception of other wavelengths operating around her affords her a very stimulating insight into the heart of the matter. She therefore immediately assumes a role for which she suddenly develops a terrific animation. As though in a flash of recognition, Maggie perceives the possibilities of her own position. The occasion was a dinner hosted by the couple at Eaton Square for the same party which gathered at Matcham during that memorable Easter week-end. Maggie thinks that this group was bound in "an inscrutable comradeship" against herself.

What occurred was simply that she became aware, at a stroke, of the quantity of further nourishment required by her own, and of the amount of it she might somehow extract from these people; whereby she rose,

of a sudden, to the desire to possess and use them, even to the extent of braving, of fairly defying, of directly exploiting, of possibly quite enjoying, under cover of an evil duplicity, the felt element of curiosity with which they regarded her. (GB p.333)

Maggie sets up Lady Castledean, as the epitome of the opposition that she has now to deal with. She has an instinctive antipathy towards this personage in spite of the latter's beauty, wealth, lineage and social accomplishment. In such a company as this, Maggie, for the first time is aware of being the odd one out, the curious little 'American girl' of such recent origins who has been accepted in this exclusive circle by virtue of her marriage to a member of their group, and her millions of course. This is certainly a defensive attitude because she suffers from a sense of diminution of her personality in the context of this broader stage of human interaction. The real source of her complex is of course her anguish over her relationship with her husband but this is a completely new perspective in which she has to deal with it. Here the personal element of the problem is more or less subsumed by the wider implication of the social context.

Comparing herself to a 'dressed doll' Maggie brings out her sense of inadequacy in the sophisticated

circle in which she has been accepted as Amerigo's wife. She imagines herself explaining her psychological stand to the assemblage and Maggie is only too well aware that she is merely trying "to fill out as a matter of course her appointed, her expected, her imposed character." The role of a princess is Maggie's social mask and that she herself views her role quite lightly is evident by her analogy of the circus girl. This is a curious reversal of the role played by Milly Theale, the make-believe princess of The Wings of the Dove. At a similarly glittering party at the latter's Venetian palazzo, through the use of metaphor and apt analogies, the pitiably stricken condition of the heroine is sublimated and elevated to a certain poetic grandeur whereas in The Golden Bowl, the social role of Maggie, the real princess is reduced to a comical spectacle as conjured up by the sight of the circus girl performing on a prancing animal rather scantily dressed. In the previous novel the attempt was to deify a very vulnerable and pitiable heroine, but here the attempt is to bring home the comicality behind human endeavour at playing prince and princesses, gods and goddesses. However, this is not to be viewed as a perverse desire to reduce

human personality, but rather as a genuine attempt at redeeming man's essential humanity out of the mire of his many persona that he adopts for different motives.

On account of the nature of her dilemma, Maggie's anxiety and grief is terribly inward and her concern for her father seems to be more than her grief for herself. She regards her husband as the 'adversary' and engages in a highly tensed psychological duel with him where she has to assume various poses and different masks in order not to betray her hand. Therefore she learns to be a "mistress of shades" so that she can out-manoeuve her husband - the "adversary who was a master of shades" too. (p.397) Maggie's motives for this struggle are complex as her relationship with her father has rather been ambiguous all through out. As it has always been with her, even here she regards his happiness, his well being as paramount. It would therefore seem that while her most intimate "fermentations" are on behalf of herself, the social aspect of her struggle is for her father's sake so that there is not the slightest imputation on his personal life from any quarter whatsoever.

Though not an unbiased party, the choric importance of Fanny Assingham is quite specific and therefore it is not surprising that Maggie should drop all pretences with her regarding the real state of her mind. "What awfulness, in heaven's name, is there between them? What do you believe, what do you know?" Maggie asks her in anguish. And a little later, when she herself comes across irrefutable evidence about the clandestine relationship between Amerigo and Charlotte, it is to this lady that Maggie turns to for some comfort in her hour of distress.

The remarkable fact about Maggie's handling of the situation is that her reaction to the truth about her husband and Charlotte is not implosive. She reaches out to the outside world -for affirmation and if need be confrontation. She does not merely rue over her victimization - if ever she thinks of her state as such - but approaches her problem with a level-headed realism. Though she succumbs to her grief momentarily in Fanny's presence, she is quite confident that she will surmount her problem. She tells Fanny Assingham, "I doubtless shan't be [unhappy] a great while. (GB p.382)

This confidence is the proof that she has already

decided to tackle her problem and try to solve it. For her there is no turning away from reality, no mere introspection but rather headlong action not only to assert her own personality but to reorganise her life in the way she thinks best.

The denouement in The Golden Bowl, a bit melodramatic perhaps, is however a real scene, an actual, physical experience. It is neither imaginary nor a reported event. In a symbolic gesture, the actual golden bowl is displayed and destroyed in this scene. The ironic coincidence is that once it was pronounced unfit as a wedding gift because Amerigo had perceived the hidden flaw but Maggie has innocently brought it home as a birthday gift for her father. The destruction of the bowl at once signifies the exposure of its hidden flaw - and also Amerigo's past. At the same time it also means the shattering of Maggie's illusions about her life. She had sincerely "believed" in its soundness and worth but as she tells Amerigo later, "she didn't know at all then, what she was taking with it." (p.432)

The confrontation scene between the Prince and Maggie is devoid of all melodrama, all hysterical accusations. It is rather subdued because all apprehensions

and agitations have been expended during the period of Maggie's uncertainty but at this hour of reckoning, all is calmness and all is civility. In fact their exchanges on the subject is so objective and even at times so rhetorical that it makes one think that it relates not to themselves so intimately and vitally but to some other people. However there is a difference in the composure of these two persons as they stand there viewing and discussions the broken bowl. For Amerigo, it is more or less a question of how best to tackle a tricky situation.

Amerigo was at any rate having the sensation of a particular ugliness to avoid, a particular difficulty to count with, that practically found him as unprepared as if he had been, like his wife, an abjectly simple person. (GB p.430)

But an "abjectly simple person" he is not and he musters all his personal charm to tide over the awkwardness of the moment. "You've never been more sacred to me than you were at that hour - unless perhaps you've become so at this one." (GB p.435) As far as his intentions and attitude towards his marriage is concerned, there is indeed some truth in what he says but this is a right statement said at the wrong time. However, the speech does touch Maggie in the way it is

intended to, because she has always been passionately attracted to him.

But she is brutally frank in her manner as she relates to him about the circumstances which led to the discovery and purchase of the golden bowl and later on, the revelations of the little Italian which precipitated the present crisis. The 'case' against her husband is what she outlines here.

'... Why, the whole case - the case of your having for so long successfully deceived me. The idea of your finding something for me - charming as that would have been - was what had least to do with your taking a morning together at the moment. What had really to do with it,' said Maggie, 'was that you had to: you couldn't, from the moment you were again face to face. And the reason of that was that there had been so much between you before - before I came between you at all.'

(GB p.435)

At this point Maggie has "ceased not to know" and armed with this knowledge, she moves a step further on the psychological plane. As even Amerigo can grasp, this constitutes a great change in their relationship. It is as though, on the chessboard of their 'placings' in these two marriages, Maggie's movement away from ignorance and unawareness alters the whole scheme of their entwined lives. In spite of the hurt caused by her

knowledge, Maggie is in full control of the situation and is fully aware of her new found power.

Depth upon depth of her situation,
as she met his face, surged and sank within
her; but with the effect somehow, once more,
that they rather lifted her than let her
drop. She had her feet somewhere, through
it all - it was her companion, absolutely,
who was at sea. (pp. 437-438)

Maggie's self-assuredness comes from the fact that she does not suffer from any sense of inferiority. She has always been rich and has had the self-confidence which this condition can afford one. She has, at no time in her life felt deprived of human affection as she has had a warm and satisfying relationship with her father, though she had lost her mother early in life. But most important of all, Maggie has not been unduly impressed or enchanted by the charm of the old world civilization. The fact that she should single out Lady Castledean as a representative of the aristocratic English society and hold her up for castigation rather than admiration speak amply for her attitude towards the old breed and all that they stood for.

To be sure Maggie is enchanted by Amerigo's impressive past, the romance of his genealogy and the

fact that he belongs to the old world civilization. But her overall response to him is sexual and physical. She is aware of him as a real person, rather than a personification of some impossible ideals. Amerigo's impress upon Maggie is the total antithesis of the one that Osmond had on Isabel. This heroine's response to Osmond was all intellectual, all cerebral. But for Maggie, the first four years of her life with her husband, have been years of fulfilment as a wife and as a mother, Endowed with all the material comforts of life, the devotion of a loving father and the contentment in a satisfying man-woman relationship, Maggie had temporarily been lulled into a psychological lethargy, the kind of stupor which a surfeit of any kind can induce. This constituted her insensitivity to people and events around her.

But the moment Maggie "ceases not to know" about her husband and Charlotte, she becomes fully alert and aware of reality. A similar juncture had been reached by Isabel Archer too, but whereas her story ends more or less at her "possession" of the truth about her husband and his motive for marrying her, Maggie's story gathers momentum from this point onwards. As Isabel

recedes into passive suffering and goes back to Rome, Maggie springs into action, as though to take "the assault of life full in the face." She has so far been playing a secondary role in her own life because other forces and other people seem to have manipulated her. Maggie's move is her attempt at breaking out of this psychological hemming-in and re-organising her life. The sudden switch of emphasis upon Maggie is described through this apt analogy.

'... and she felt not unlike some young woman of the theatre who, engaged for a minor part in the play and having mastered her cues with anxious effort, should find herself suddenly promoted to leading lady and expected to appear in every act of the five. (GB p.439)

In order to perform as it were, in this new found capacity, she is seen assuming a variety of roles to meet the exigencies of the various situations that she has to cope with. And As Maggie's image as a performer, an actress is emphasized, there is an air of unreality about the whole situation.

"... they might have been figures rehearsing some play of which she herself was the author; they might even, for the happy appearance they continued to present, have been such figures as would, by the strong note of Character in each, fill any author with the certitude of success, especially of their histrionic. (GB p.458)

Maggie is now the key figure, the main character in the overall drama and her relationship with all the others have changed drastically with her attainment of the state of conviction. Without really upsetting the apparent social situation, she has to work out a "new system" of relations. (GB p.462)

Charlotte too is aware of the "new basis" of Maggie's relationship with all the others who are closely associated with her, in especial with herself. She is apprehensive about this "new system" of Maggie's public behaviour and is desperate to find out how much Maggie knows about herself and the Prince. In keeping with the old adage of offence being the best defence, Charlotte extracts an avowal from Maggie that there is nothing amiss between them and that she (Charlotte) is not guilty of any misdemeanour against her step-daughter. Not being content with a private denial from Maggie, Charlotte manipulates a highly melodramatic scene where they are seen kissing each other by all the others present on the occasion.

Though Maggie is seemingly acquiescent to Charlotte's manipulation, she is fully aware that it is Charlotte who is really in a spot. The restriction

imposed on her actions and movements by the unmentioned but vividly felt tension is such that she is repeatedly referred to as a caged animal.

Charlotte hung behind, with emphasized attention; she stopped when her husband stopped, but at the distance of a case or two, or of whatever other succession of objects; and the likeness of their connexion would not 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.
(GB p.493)

Though Adam Verver too is aware of the new situation, it is mostly through Maggie's sensibility that the "crisis" of their little circle is presented and Charlotte's "aspect of isolation" is emphasized.

The somewhat sadistic animal imagery associated with Charlotte is redeemed and relieved by a note of compassion felt by both Maggie and her father. The particular instance which illustrates this compassion is where Charlotte is seen enlightening sightseers on some fine points of an artefact - a duty she seems to be doing to a rehearsed perfection. Maggie sees in uselessness so that Charlotte's very voice sounds to her "like the shriek of a soul in pain." This moment of sympathy is shared by Adam Verver too, and on later

reflection Maggie realizes an odd truth about the nature of things.

There was, honestly, an awful mixture in things, and it was not closed to her after-sense of such passages - we have already indeed, in other cases, seen it open - that the deepest depth of all, in a perceived penalty, was that you couldn't be sure some of your compunctions and contortions wouldn't show for ridiculous.
(GB p.497)

In delineating the character of Charlotte with the aid of such a reaction even from the wronged heroine, James once again displays his sympathy for the 'other' woman of his fiction. There is no down-right condemnation, no narrow-minded vindication for the heroine alone. It is as though he enjoins the reader to listen to the other side of the story too - the version of the inevitable wrong-doer.

This is exactly what he seems to be doing when Charlotte tells Maggie of her decision to take Adam Verver back to the states. The version that she is giving is both right and wrong at the same time. She is right when she says that Maggie has always been her difficulty, so she is aiming for the "definite break" from her.

'You and he together - since it's always with you that I've had to see him. But it's a difficulty that I'm facing, if you wish to know; that I've already faced; that I propose to myself to surmount. The struggle with it - none too pleasant - hasn't been for me, as you may imagine, in itself charming; I've felt in it at times, if I must tell you all, too great and too strange, an ugliness. Yet I believe it may succeed.'

(GB p.513)

It is indeed true that the togetherness between father and daughter has had its adverse effect on the other two partners. And now Charlotte is proposing to take her husband exclusively to herself, "to possess him" as she puts it.

But she is wrong in making out that the decision to go back to the states is hers because it is not. What she is trying to do here is give a face-saving reason for their eventual departure from England. In quite a dramatic reversal of roles, the 'caged' Charlotte seems bent on the offensive and makes the direct accusation that Maggie has acted against her but has failed. Maggie concedes the point while all the time aware of Charlotte's predicament and is quite determined to help Charlotte retrieve what little dignity she can out of the debacle of her life. "She was ready to lie again if her companion would but give her the opening. Then she should know she had done all." (GB p.513) She allows Charlotte to

walk away with her admission "I've failed" and is thus convinced that "she had done all."

What Maggie has done is that she has employed all her wits and guiles in order to separate the Prince from Charlotte and thus save her marriage as well as her father's. In order to do so she is prepared even to sacrifice her close association with her father. She has already made this choice very clear to her father while they were spending some time together in a park.

'Ah, it's just he who's my selfishness. I'm selfish, so to speak, for him, I mean,' she continued, 'that he's my motive - in everything. (GB p.476).

And she continues to explain her 'motive.'

'My idea is this, that when you only love a little you're naturally not jealous - or are only jealous also a little, so that it doesn't matter. But when you love in a deeper and intenser way, then you are, in the same proportion, jealous; your jealousy has intensity and, no doubt ferocity. When, however, you love in the most abysmal and unutterable way of all - why then you're beyond everything, and nothing can pull you down.' (GB p.476)

This conviction of Maggie's can be seen as accomplishing two things in the novel. On the intimate, personal level, Maggie is making a clean break from her

undue attachment to her father and is opening for the more fulfilling one with her husband. This is a very normal human reaction and is proof of her psychological growth. Secondly, Maggie's stand adds the human touch to a situation where aestheticism seemed to be the 'touchstone' of everything in life. All along, human relationships were contracted with a view to supply the right balances, the right forms to an ordered life. The human element was relegated to the background only or considered not at all. It was precisely on the basis of such a calculation that Charlotte was 'had' as a wife for Adam Verver. Even towards the end of the novel this aspect is touched upon during the last tea that these two couples share before the Ververs leave for America.

The two noble persons seated, in conversation, at tea, fell thus into the splendid effect and the general harmony; Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene. The fusion of their triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestation of a rare power of purchase (*italics mine*)

(GB p.541)

But eventually the novel does move away from such a static view of life because in the end Charlotte is shown as transcending the "fixedness" with which idea she was brought into the affluent circle of the Ververs. During their last meeting Maggie perceives the change and sees at once that Charlotte had indeed established a rapport with her husband and therefore whatever she was doing, it was their joint effort at last.

It was the strangest, once more, of all impressions; but what she most felt, for the half-hour, was that Mr. and Mrs. Verver were making the occasion easy. They were somehow conjoined in it, conjoined for a present effect as Maggie had absolutely never yet seen them; and there occurred, before long, a moment in which Amerigo's look met her own in recognitions that he couldn't suppress. (GB p.539)

And once again Charlotte is shown in the light of Maggie's compassionate understanding. Charlotte's presence, her beautiful composure, the possibility of her 'mission' in America, all these are construed by Maggie as positive features in a situation which, on the most intimate level she knows to be a great loss for Charlotte. She had earlier sensed this anguish and she tells her husband, "I see it's always terrible for women." (GB p.534)

So when Maggie says "that they were parting in the light of Charlotte's value" it is to be understood that in her estimation it is Charlotte's new value which is leaving its mark on their lives. The initial value for which she was procured for Adam Verver is no longer valid. If in the earlier instance her value was to provide an outward symmetry to their elegant life-style, her value now is esteemed on the human level. Once a genuine threat to Maggie's marriage, she nevertheless provided her with the necessary awareness to regard her husband as a dear human being and not merely as a highly decorative acquisition only. Moreover by Charlotte's assertion of her exclusive right over Adam Verver, she affords Maggie to attain full stature as a mature woman by being 'weaned' as it were from her father's influence. In Charlotte's retreat from London there is nothing of the ignominy of Mme Merle's eventual oblivion nor the moral impoverishment of Kate Croy. However negative and amoral, Charlotte Stant definitely revives and revitalizes other more positive values through contrast with her own.

As for Maggie, the character portrayal is kept under deliberate control and she is far more subdued

than all of James's other heroines. There is nothing of the high drama of Milly Theale's apotheosis in life nor the sustained psychological suspense of Isabel Archer's situation. Instead, Maggie is presented as a person who can relate to people and events around her. She is also vulnerable in the real, physical way, not merely on the intellectual level like Isabel Archer, for instance. It is precisely on this aspect that she becomes immensely aware of her husband after she realizes that his affections are placed elsewhere. She relates to him best in this very important aspect between a man and a woman. While it is true that mere physical compatibility is not the only factor upon which a healthy relationship can be built, it is also true that without this element mere cerebration does not suffice between a man and a woman if the relationship is to have any lasting meaning for them.

As the story develops towards such a humanizing view of human existence rather than the beautiful but impractical poetic vision of Isabel Archer and Milly Theale, the symbolic significance of the golden bowl too undergoes a change in order to adequately express this new meaning. This essay stated in the beginning that

the golden bowl is the symbol of Prince Amerigo's personality as indeed it is in a sense. But as it lay smashed before Maggie and Amerigo, it assumes other symbolic values as well. For Maggie it embodies the hidden flaws in her apparently flawless marriage to Amerigo and at that moment it personifies in her confused consciousness all that is evil and sordid in human relationship. The fact that Maggie makes the purchase where Charlotte and Amerigo failed to do so is much more than a mere coincidence. In a sort of perverse poetic justice, the purchase of the golden bowl means for Maggie the acquisition of the damning evidence against Amerigo and Charlotte. The almost ceremonial breaking of the bowl by Fanny Assingham signifies the exposure of the hidden flaw or evil in the philosophy of Prince Amerigo and his kind. He has always held that one should always do the best for one's self without injury to others. But in his interpretation of this it meant without jeopardizing one's interests. This has constituted the vital flaw in his philosophy and the exposure of this flaw seems to be the moral thesis of the novel. Therefore his adultery with Charlotte can be seen as only a corollary to this question. In the context of the complex attitude of Adam and Maggie Verver towards their respective partners, one inclines

to agree with J.A. Ward's analysis of the nature of evil in The Golden Bowl.

It is a gross over simplification to assume that the only evil is the adulterous tie between Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant. In The Golden Bowl James takes American innocence less at face value than in any previous work; he dispassionately analyses the serious moral shortcomings of the Ververs. He neither judges them nor implies that they are better or worse than the Europeans, but he dramatizes their role in the creation of the flaw in the golden bowl. The adultery is the objectification of the evil, the prime dramatic act of evil; but behind the actual adultery is a complex of motives and attitudes which leads inexorably to the relatively simple matter of unfaithfulness and comprises the essential evil.²

However, the most difficult aspect of a moral reading of the novel is the impossibility of a direct comparison between the two philosophies as represented by Amerigo and Charlotte, and Adam and Maggie.

In the end we see that even Maggie is, in a way trying to do the best for herself but with a great difference. Her aim is to re-establish her relationship with her husband without inflicting pain on anyone concerned. One may argue that her great care for her father also hampers any direct action against Charlotte and

²J.A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, pp.139-140.

this is indeed irrefutable. However it would be more appropriate to say that she is not merely seeking poetic justice nor is she bent on reasserting her moral rights alone but is seen as genuinely trying to re-adjust a world gone slightly awry, the responsibility for which, she realizes, is partly hers too.

By coming to terms with the "base, ignoble world", Maggie seems to become more human than the previous heroines of Henry James. As such, she lacks the poetic grandeur of a heroine like Milly Theale, or the psychological dimension of Isabel Archer. In the face of the deception she has suffered, she does not display the stoic resignation of Catherine Sloper nor the unbending puritanism of Euphemia Cleve. She is no longer an ingenue like Daisy Miller. Indeed James's heroine has travelled a long way from Schenectady, has tamed a gallant from Rome and is now ready to settle down and assert her rightful place in the high society of London. At long last, in Maggie Verver, James's heroine has come home to roost among her own kind. If as Phillip Rahv³ suggests that James's "passionate pilgrims, such as the heiress, are driven, despite all vacillations and retractions, by

³Phillip Rahv, The Heiress of All The Ages, pp.122-123.

their need to master the world," then Maggie seems to have achieved her goal.

Despite many serious reservations about the novel as a whole, Mathiessen however concedes that in Maggie, James has created a heroine who sustains the absorbing drama.

Its dynamics are provided entirely by Maggie, who combines Milly Theale's capacity for devotion with Kate Croy's strength of will. James's values of the heart, in contrast to those of the mere intelligence, are realized in her to the full. She thus provides us with material for understanding his conception both of love and of religion.⁴

The premise of this essay is that in Maggie Verver, there is a coalescence, a synthesis of the qualities of many of James's earlier heroines. And the ultimate understanding of this synthesis would seem to reside on the moral plane. Christof Wegelin had very aptly summed up this understanding.

The subject of the novel is the gradual coalescence of Maggie's and the Prince's moral consciousness. And their silence about their attitude towards Mr. Verver is part of what finally constitutes their common moral code.⁵

⁴The Major Phase, p.96.

⁵Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, p.129.

Maggie's final acceptance of the Prince when viewed from this point, can be seen as bringing about a vital change in his philosophy - that one can do the best for oneself with a little compassion and forbearance for the less fortunate ones of the world like Charlotte Stant. This fusion is best described in Stephen Spender's analysis of the novel.

For just as the subject of The Golden Bowl reaches far beyond the international situation, so the closing scene represents more than a social fusion. It is in fact a symbolic interfusion of two virtues - of the discipline of Maggie's spiritual energy by Amerigo's form, the quickening penetration of his form by her spirit - possible only to the high intelligence on which their love is based.⁶

This "high intelligence" is moreover informed with a humility which recognises and accepts the inherent limitations of one's humanity. Therefore Maggie Verver is seen as the most humane of James's heroines and her personality brings in a new warmth into the cool, sophisticated atmosphere of the high society of James's fiction.

⁶Stephen Spender, The Destructive Element, p.92.

CONCLUSION

In a study of this sort where the main focus has been on the feminine characters or heroines, the first logical question to be asked would be in relation to the author's attitude to his women. What specific views does he wish to convey through their portrayals? Is he intrigued and fascinated by them because of their sex? Because they belong to a certain category of women or because they are natives of a specific country? Or is it because the reading public preferred novels about heroines rather than heroes and does it mean the decline of heroes in fiction in general? Or further still, does any sociological upheaval of that period of history warrant a greater emphasis on women characters? And most important of all, is it true that in the fiction of this author, the heroines far eclipse his heroes?

The only definite answer to these and other allied questions that can be found easily is to the last one, which would be a big Yes. It is indeed true that in James the most engaging characters are his women - both his heroines and the anti-heroines. As to the other questions, the answers or some approximations to them will

have to be gleaned from the individual novels in proportion to the particular emphasis given by James on his individual heroines.

Over and above the questions cited which are mostly personal and sociological, one can still add another - the most relevant to this study what has been the artistic quest of the author in his investigation into the consciousness of his heroines? As a workable answer to this, one would not be far wrong in saying that his probe has been for a more complete understanding of reality. This is a concept which lends itself to various interpretations and significations. But confining oneself to this particular Jamesian milieu and the nature of his probe one would like to assert that reality, for the artist, is nothing but the essential truth of being. The search or quest for reality then can be understood as the search for one's essential self.

Taken from this view point then, James's heroines are seen as striving after this reality or finding their true selves in a world dominated by superior forces and more experienced beings of an older civilization, conditioned by situations and their own limited psyches. The maturing of this self from a relative subservience to

established forms, through the hazards of experience to a final state of moral independence is the pattern which can be traced in the development of James's heroines. This search for self takes many forms - many devices are employed to conduct this probe and it is in the investigation of these forms and devices that the answers to the various personal and sociological questions asked earlier can be found.

If one were to generalize on James's quotation of George Eliot on women in his preface to The Portrait of a Lady, the statement could be taken as James's own attitude towards women. That he considered "these frail vessels" to possess a finer sensibility, better equipped to handle the moral questions of life is amply illustrated by the fact that in his fiction he does make them the repositories of all that is true, noble and beautiful in the human mind.

The feminine properties of introspection, meditation and inwardness were indeed fit vehicles for James's artistic quest. However, he does not lay any undue stress on the heroine's femininity as a sex apart and therefore none of his heroines are depicted either as an absolute

mother-figure or lover. It is as though he makes them transcend the question of their primeval and original role and invests them with an awareness of themselves as not merely being the female of the species but as thinking, feeling individuals. In the context of this observation one can draw a distinction between Henry James and D.H. Lawrence in their treatment of their women characters. Though Lawrence also has created memorable heroines in his fiction, his emphasis in the portrayal of most of them is primarily on their instinctive life whereas James's pre-occupation is with the inner life or consciousness of his heroines. This has drawn much adverse criticism, that James's women are sexless, ethereal.

However valid these observations may be vis-a-vis another viewpoint like Lawrence's, their relevance in this study is only tangential. The emphasis being on the inward life of the heroines we have to see how they actualise their insights in a world which is of necessity so antithetical to their sensibilities.

Initially the world in which the heroines have to contend for the assertion of their selves is depicted as essentially European in nature. Except for Catherine Sloper of Washington Square all the other heroines find

themselves against "the bribes and lures, the beguilements and prizes" of Europe and its fast vanishing civilization. Like Mme Merle of The Portrait of a Lady, the Europeanized people are after attaining these "prizes" as ends in themselves only.

It is to such a Europe and to such an attitude to life that James's heroine embarks on her voyage of discovery. The diametric opposition between American naivete and European callousness to human sensibility is best exemplified by Daisy Miller's history. Her innocence, spontaneity and her superficial understanding of society is no match for the established forms of Europe. In her attempt to establish the validity of herself, Daisy is literally strangled by the more experienced "culture" of Europe. Though clearly the prototype of all his American heroines, she remains only a sketch, one which the author tried to defend in later years by calling her "pure poetry." However the main impact of Daisy Miller in the evolution of the Jamesian heroine is that James puts a greater premium on the corollary to the American - European tension that is, he emphasizes the truth that innocence and personal integrity cannot be equated with mere correct social behaviour. Translated into his artistic canon,

this served James to expand his vision beyond the international tension and seek for deeper insights into human consciousness than could be provided by the mere opposition between different cultures. Daisy dies young, inviolate and innocent in every sense of the word as till the last she is not fully aware of her own limitations nor does she come into contact with the evil that is possible in this world. Her attempt was at a grasping at new sensations, new relationships in the way she saw best but her best turned out to be pitiably inadequate to cope with the alien culture to which she has been exposed. In the final analysis Daisy remains more or less static in the opposition of cultures.

But Euphemia Cleve of Mme de Mauves (despite the chronological transposition) does become directly involved in the civilized life of the Europeans. Whereas Daisy's encounter with Europe was merely social and hence superficial, Euphemia does become a part of this world when she marries a French nobleman with "a long pedigree" who marries her because of her wealth. In Euphemia's story, James introduces the mercenary motive of the Europeans and Europeanized Americans like Gilbert Osmond, who marry or attempt to marry the heroines because of their wealth. In the account of the personal relationship between

Euphemia and her husband the opposition between cultures is made more personalized as the innocent American girl is made use of because of her undisguised fascination with the old world culture and the naive belief that anyone 'with a long pedigree' must be a 'fine gentleman.' But when her romantic sensibilities come face to face with the decadence of the de Mauves' way of life, Euphemia withdraws into the rigidity of her puritanic forebears. In her rejection of her contrite husband, one sees not only the author's exposure of the baseness of the European man but also a certain lack of human sympathy in the American girl whose naive conception of life is that it has to be either all black or all white. This is not to say that there is any condonation of the baron's infidelity but only to point out that Euphemia allows personal justification supremacy over human accommodation. Though one may ascribe her attitude to an aspect of her American origin, the direction is towards a broader conception of human relationship and the moral questions involved. Euphemia Cleve, according to D.S. Maini "is not James's ideal of the American woman"¹ because she represents an extremely unpleasant side of the American psyche. The

¹D.S. Maini, The Indirect Vision, pp.96-97.

theme of the young, innocent American girl being victimized by the European men she marries, first explored here remains for James the stock circumstance for portraying his heroines.

In Washington Square, the heroine is depicted in an all American milieu but the moral question is an expansion of the one introduced in Mme de Mauves. Catherine Sloper is victimized because of her wealth but the actual theme of the story is woven round not so much the mercenary motive but the question of violating the sanctity and privacy of the individual self. The manipulation and domination of another self by whatever means then becomes the nature of the evil in this very compact narrative. In the heroine's experience therefore she has to contend with not merely what is committed but what is intended against her as well. In the range of heroines chosen for study in this work Catherine Sloper does stand apart because of her all-American background and a certain incompleteness of her experience. But the thematic importance of this story is undeniable when one realizes that it is in this story that James articulates his belief in the sanctity of the individual mind and how this belief affords him the exploration into the inner life of the protagonists. More and more, as he proceeds

to probe the depths of the individual psyche, he seems to value the moral victory of Catherine Sloper rather than that of Euphemia Cleve for instance, whose victory is fraught with the death of her husband. Catherine has evidently suffered a great personal hurt but she emerges from the experience with her personal dignity intact and inviolate and therefore her triumph is to be reckoned in terms of the inner life of consciousness.

It was however in The Portrait of a Lady, that James deliberately puts the entire emphasis upon the heroine's consciousness. On the social level her story is not much different from Mme de Mauves's but apart from the mercenary design with which Osmond marries Isabel, his crime against her is shown as his attempt to subjugate her will to his own and make her mind a "mere appendage to his." The enunciation and exploration of such a delicate moral balance in personal relationship is possibly only through a subjective analysis and this is done through the heroine's consciousness. As he was to assert in his preface to this novel, Isabel's consciousness is the subject of the novel. By doing so he also succeeds in creating one of his most memorable heroines. What he accomplishes in The Portrait of a Lady remained more or less his operative leitmotif till the end of his artistic

career. This novel is an important land mark in James's career because it was a success with the reading public and marked a distinct phase in his creative life. But more important than this, it was here in this novel that he articulates one of the most basic needs of modern man - the need to assert oneself away from and independent of any social or cultural association only.

The validity of the self can be established not in contrast to others but in a clear minded perception of one's relation to oneself. If the former were so, James's international theme would have remained his artistic goal but as he progressed to his last great novels, one sees that this theme per se was inadequate for his artistic exploration. Though he does not discard the theme, he uses it more as a metaphorical backdrop against which the heroine can discover herself. The mode which James employes in The Portrait first to probe the consciousness of the heroine establishes the pattern which was to be adopted by later novelists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce to explore the tormented and tortured psyches of twentieth-century man.

The statement of James's artistic faith which is so clearly defined in The Portrait of a Lady, however is

not fully explored as the heroine Isabel Archer's career ends on an equivocation, as many readers tend to see it. But when one views this novel not as an entity in itself but rather an important signpost in the development of the Jamesian heroine, such equivocation as indeed there is becomes merely a stage in the process of attaining psychological maturity by the heroine.

As one progresses to the novels of James's great maturity; the exploration of the heroine's inner self becomes more exhaustive and the heroine's impact in her milieu becomes more dominant and affirmative. This impact is felt most in the moral life of the characters who share the heroine's history.

As far as the delineation of the heroine is concerned, Milly Theale of The 'Wings of the Dove emerges as the most poetic vision of James's heroine. She embodies in her personality, the many facets of a psyche placed in a vulnerable situation and who, like all the other heroines, is seeking for a reality outside of this situation. Because of her stricken condition and her extra-ordinary aloneness in the world, Milly remains outside the ken of human palpability;

at no given time is the association of an identity with her self complete. She is at once a dove, a princess, a star, an angel, a priestess and of course the American girl too. Yet none of these singly sufficed to encompass her total personality. And therefore she retains an absolute poetic grandeur till the end. But this is not to say that perforce she is less real for the reader's understanding. Milly Theale possesses the qualities of James's American heroines - her naivete, her spontaneity, her lack of pretensions and her generosity. A quarter of a century after Daisy Miller, Milly emerges a more rounded version of the young girl from Schenectady. Just as Daisy dies because of her failure to grasp the European psyche, Milly too dies because she cannot bear the pain of discovering the true nature of this psyche, the deception she suffers at the hands of "the tough English gang." In these two heroines one sees the extreme vulnerability of American innocence and especially in the case of Milly, James seems to stress that such a personality is viable only in the realm of poetry. It is interesting to note that the earlier version of such an American girl, Daisy, was defended by James as "pure poetry" and the later exposition of this character Milly too remains truly

poetic till the end of her career.

The polarity between the conception of a heroine like Milly Theale and her European experience however does not find permanence in James's portraiture of his last heroine, Maggie Verver of The Golden Bowl. Though Maggie too is an American, she is different from the other heroines in many ways. She embodies the spirit of the established nouveau rich of America who by now tend to view Europe not so much with the tinted vision of the admirer but with the sharpened senses of acquisitiveness. In such a sensibility the old-world glamour of Europe is a purchasable commodity to lend historical authenticity to American opulence. For all the other heroines, their wealth was more of a liability than anything else but by the time Maggie appears on the scene the heroine's wealth has become a certain attitude to life. Therefore the fact that Prince Amerigo is motivated by the Verver millions to marry Maggie becomes more of a happy coincidence than any serious plotting and planning on his part.

The most important difference about Maggie is that unlike the previous heroines, she is no longer a star struck outsider, because she actually belongs in

the world in which she is depicted. She need not seek for acceptance as Daisy does, as Euphemia and Isabel pay for it with their personal freedom and as Milly dies so pitiably in the attempt to belong there.

Though Maggie too suffers disillusionment and the pain of being deceived, she is not a 'victim' in the sense that the previous heroines are. For the first time the Jamesian heroine is made to bear directly part of the onus of the overall evil that threatens to upset the beautifully arranged life of the characters.

This crucial twist in the delineation of the heroine perhaps makes the synthesis between the two different backgrounds possible. In the admission of her responsibility for the situation is an accommodation for human failure. Again one must not overlook the fact of Maggie's practical attitude to life which would insist that life must go on and that life can never be totally good or totally bad. In Maggie's case, there is no striving after a magic succour for life's ills but it is as though she makes her terms with the 'base ignoble world' when she accepts her responsibility for part of its sordidness. In Maggie Verver then James presents a

heroine who is vulnerable because she is human and not because she is merely naive and idealistic. Because of her realistic attitude to life she assimilates some of the practical, pragmatic world-view of Europe but this assimilation is not the consequence of condoning moral lapses but the attempt to make people, including herself, accept the moral responsibility of their actions.

That James chose to confine his characters to the leisured and monied classes of America and Europe alone is often cited as depriving his fiction of a great amount of "felt-life". But in as much as his probe ultimately led to a more complete understanding of the inner self, perhaps the psyches of these privileged people did prove more suited to the nature of his exploration than, say, that of a factory worker or a farmer. After all, James himself belonged to this class and hence could observe the subtle undercurrents of personal and social interaction at close quarters and infer whatever significance he would out of his observations.

The heroines chosen for study in this work all happen to be American girls. The question of coincidence about this fact applies to this work but when one ponders

over the considerations which led to the choice of these particular girls, one realizes that the very nature of the choice is determined by the author's pattern of developing the career of that 'certain young American girl.....' For these girls the European experience is necessary for the expansion of their intellectual, social and moral horizons, as well as discovering their identities. There is a certain consistency in the pursuance of an artistic conviction in the development of James's American heroine from the awkward, precocious ingenue to the accomplished cosmopolite of The Golden Bowl.

The deep psychological probe into the heroine's consciousness has much to do with James's own American origin, his sojourns in Europe and his eventual settlement in England. His constant awareness of America as an emerging culture as compared to Europe puts his heroines in a defensive situation, intellectually cringing in the presence of a seemingly superior culture with all its established forms. Their encounter with this civilization is always fraught with disillusionment and personal tragedy but yet like Isabel Archer, they seem unable to reject these forms altogether. If this inability is viewed as some kind of lingering admiration for the old

culture then it would mean that they retain some vestiges of their American origin till the end.

However, judging by the evidence in his novels, one could say that James's disenchantment with America increased with the passage of time. Maggie Verver, though an American, is as Europeanized as any of them. The process of this disenchantment seems to have started in The Portrait of a Lady and became more or less complete in The Golden Bowl. America is shown more and more as a land of exile and intellectual banishment. For example, when Mrs. Touchett hears that Mme Merle had gone away to America, she remarks that "she must have done something dreadful." Again in The Golden Bowl the punishment that Charlotte is taking is not so much in being separated from Amerigo but being taken away to the mythical American City and the Verver Museum and never to come back to civilization.

The inherent vulnerability in the American psyche is its spontaneity - which indicates a certain shallowness, in the sense that it is a premature reaching out for experience without the basis of any analysis of any sort, personal or social. Such a gesture is inimical to the inner-self as the encounter is bound to be damaging to

personal dignity and identity. On the other hand there is indeed much to be deplored in the European insistence upon appearances alone without any moral relevance as James consistently points out in his fiction. But by using the weakness of one as a counterfoil to that of the other, James seems to have arrived at a very private code of survival of the moral self in perfect peace with itself. Therefore the compromise that the Jamesian heroine makes with the "base, ignoble world" is not by being overwhelmed by it, but, to quote Isabel Archer, 'to extract from it some recognition of one's superiority.'

This superiority can be viewed as the heroine's heightened consciousness which stands for the Jamesian moral code. To a certain extent perhaps James can be regarded as a moralist. But contrary to Phillip Rahv's assertion that James is a 'traditional moralist' James is a moralist who will judge on the merit of the protagonist's own conviction rather than any outside consideration. This conviction rests of James's own philosophy of morality whereby he holds that every individual soul is a free agent and that none shall manipulate, coerce or violate its sanctity by any means whatsoever. According to this code therefore we see that in Washington Square

the charge of immorality is directed more towards Dr. Sloper than Morris Townsend though on a superficial reading of the novel one would think that the latter is the sole guilty person. Catherine herself, in later years thinks that while her erstwhile lover merely 'trifled with her affection' it was, her father who 'broke its spring,' thereby making it clear that her father's is the greater moral lapse. Again in Isabel's history too the recognition of her betrayal takes place long before she actually learns of Osmond's past involvement with Mme. Merle and their joint maneuver to gain control of her wealth. Moreover, Osmond cannot be accused of being unfaithful to her as Amerigo has been to Maggie, yet with reference to the Jamesian moral code Osmond is much guiltier of the two. Merton Densher too has not committed a tangible crime against Milly but in his attempt to manipulate her affection for him he is just as guilty as though he had. It would therefore be correct to say that a close analysis of such moral considerations provide the psychological atmosphere in which the development of the Jamesian heroine is best observed.

If a chart of the evolution of the Jamesian heroine can be drawn, one sees that the apex is achieved

in the portrayal of the heroine in The Wings of the Dove. The qualities in the personality of the heroine, the moral perspectives and even the social tensions are unambiguously stated. Milly, the American heiress is a victim of European avarice and the evil that accompanies it. In the portrayal of Milly Theale, James creates a truly tragic heroine. In this novel, Europe is depicted at its cruellest, in curbing the free expansion of American innocence and the spontaneity and enthusiasm for life.

However in the next novel, The Golden Bowl, there is a tapering off of the poetic tension which sustains Milly's drama till the end and the polarity of the international vision is abandoned for a more pragmatic compromise. Maggie Verver is therefore the most un-American of James's heroines and is therefore more in command of her situation from the start. There is even a hint of cynicism in the portrayal of this heroine. Unlike Milly's, Maggie's history is hardly a tragedy in the real sense. Therefore her heroic proportions are so toned down that at times she seems like an understudy temporarily filling in for the leading lady.

But this in no way should be construed as

diminishing Maggie's importance because her history ultimately constitutes the mirror of James's world-view. Life, the old master seems to be saying, cannot be all poetry or all prose. Euphemia Cleve discovered too late that all the prose was not in America and Milly Theale is distressed to realise that if you want to have poetry in Europe, you have to create it yourself by making believe. But the Jamesian heroine discovers that somewhere between these two, there has to be a viable scheme to make life livable for oneself as well as for others. Euphemia caused her husband's death and Milly herself is destroyed in the search for poetry. But in Maggie's scheme of things there seems to be something worth living for, for everyone concerned. This ~~was~~ made possible because the heroine proves that one must transcend the pursuit of mere self-aggrandisement and accept human limitations as part of one's reality. She is not striving after ready-made anodynes for life's ills and it is because of this level-headed approach to life that it seems possible for Maggie to build life anew with her Prince. Though her decision at one level appears only a social adjustment one must not lose sight of the fact that she has been able to arrive at this decision only on account of her acceptance of her moral

responsibility for the situation between Charlotte and her husband. Maggie, more than any other heroine of James "learns how to adjust European attitudes to the needs of her personality."²

Maggie, therefore personifies the new world-view which states that material and social privileges need not necessarily be incompatible with moral consciousness and that the chasm between the conditions of life and art can be bridged with a bit of accommodation for human limitations.

"All" seems to have been given to the Jamesian heroine.

²Phillip Rahv, The Heiress of all the Ages, p.104.

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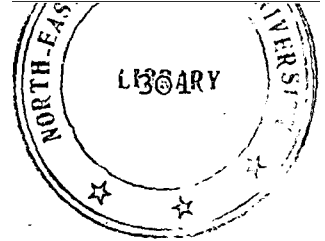
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