

# THE HEROINES OF HENRY JAMES

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**INTRODUCTION**  
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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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup>Henry 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 ..."<sup>3</sup>. 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; ..."<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup>Henry James, AF, p.11.

<sup>4</sup>Henry 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.<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> Lisa 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.

<sup>6</sup> Henry 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."<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>

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.

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

<sup>8</sup>J.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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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

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<sup>9</sup>Appignanesi, p.80.

<sup>10</sup>Preface, 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.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>11</sup>J.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.<sup>12</sup>

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

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<sup>12</sup>Yvor 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.<sup>13</sup>

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

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<sup>13</sup>Henry 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.<sup>14</sup>

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

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<sup>14</sup>Appignanesi, 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,"<sup>15</sup> 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; ...<sup>16</sup>

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

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.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Edited 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.

<sup>16</sup>Notes - p.283.

<sup>17</sup>Notes, p.282.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

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 ..."<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.

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<sup>19</sup>Notes. p.281.

<sup>20</sup>Notes, 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.

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**CONCLUSION**  
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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"<sup>1</sup> because she represents an extremely unpleasant side of the American psyche. The

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<sup>1</sup>D.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 choses 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 is 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."<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>2</sup>Phillip Rahv, The Heiress of all the Ages, p.104.