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A MAGNIFICENT FORM

A MAGNIFICENT FORM?: THE SHAPE OF DOMINATION IN HENRY JAMES'S
WASHINGTON SQUARE, THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, THE WINGS OF THE DOVE,
AND *THE GOLDEN BOWL*

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2005)
(English and Cultural Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: A Magnificent Form?: The Shape of Domination in Henry James's
*Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and
The Golden Bowl*

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 117

ABSTRACT

Using the psychoanalytic framework provided by Jessica Benjamin, this thesis examines relationships of domination in four of Henry James's novels: *Washington Square*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*. Combined with triangular theories of desire, Benjamin's intersubjective model illuminates the subtle and intricate relationships of domination and submission in James's writing. For James, as for Benjamin, identity and subjectivity are negotiated in and through relationships. These relationships are not simply struggles for power, but struggles between individuals who desire both attunement and assertion. As in sadomasochistic relationships, these desires often manifest as, respectively, submission and domination. In these four novels, subjectivity is bound up with the problems of desire and freedom. The Jamesian heroine desires both recognition and attunement with others; she also both fears and desires freedom. The world through which she moves is both a world of objects and objectification, and a world of other subjects and relationships. Attempting to move through this world fraught with contradictions, the Jamesian heroine will, in the more optimistic novels, find herself in intersubjective relationships. In the darker novels, she becomes eternally caught in the sadomasochistic cycle of domination and submission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the enthusiastic help and support of my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Adamson, without whose unflagging encouragement and many insights this thesis would not have been possible. I also wish to thank my second and third readers, Dr. Mary O'Connor and Dr. John Ferns, for their extremely helpful suggestions and interest in this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Fancy Work for Life: <i>Washington Square</i>	17
3	A Dark Carriage: <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>	34
4	To Annex and Possess: <i>The Wings of the Dove</i>	65
5	A Cluster of Possessions: <i>The Golden Bowl</i>	87
6	Conclusion	110
	Works Cited and Consulted	113

1. Introduction

Although critical readings of Henry James's works have come from all points on the theoretical compass, the psychological and philosophical dimensions of his work maintain a central focus of critical interest. Both kinds of readings, especially when applied to *The Portrait of a Lady* (first published 1881; for textual reasons, I refer to the 1908 New York Edition), tend to focus on James's treatment of freedom, domination, gender, and sexuality. As yet, however, there have been few analyses of James's novels that account for the other side of the coin that is domination: submission. The desire to submit to a powerful other is at least as powerful, in James's novels, as the desire to dominate the other. In this dissertation, I look at how the conflicting desires for submission and domination structure relationships between characters in four of James's major novels: *Washington Square* (1881), *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

To this end, I adopt the framework provided by psychoanalyst and philosopher Jessica Benjamin, whose approach to theory is highly synthetic and inclusive. Benjamin's blend of psychoanalysis and philosophy allows competing theories about James to come together, the sum becoming more than its parts. Her *The Bonds of Love* (1988) and *Like Subjects, Love Objects* search for the psychological foundations for philosophical concepts including, most importantly, intersubjectivity. She also synthesizes different branches of psychoanalysis—Freudian and Winnicottian, in particular, and of philosophy—phenomenological and post-structural, for example. She also addresses one of the most important problems in psychoanalysis: the refusal to see

the mother as a subject, and offers an alternative revision, in which the mother's subjectivity is crucial to the infant's development. Benjamin's main focus is on the problem of domination, and on how to break the bonds that lock the dominator and the dominated together. Her solution to this problem is mutual recognition, or the awareness that the subjectivity of the other is necessary for that of the self.

Benjamin's theoretical framework begins with Hegel who, like James, was preoccupied with consciousness. In his philosophical work, Hegel outlines movements of consciousness that, I argue, are analogous to James's own plots—which are, first and foremost, about consciousness. Hegel's famous discussion of lordship and bondage in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* posits the meeting of two self-consciousnesses as having, essentially, two possible outcomes. Ideally, each self-consciousness recognizes the other as separate from itself. They are equal but different. Both find themselves and achieve self-awareness through this mutual recognition. The other possible outcome is that the two will engage in a life-or-death struggle. If one dies, the victor has not really won, because there is no one left to recognize his victory. If one chooses to surrender rather than die, however, the victor enslaves him. This brings us to the state of lordship and bondage Hegel describes. The master instills fear in the slave and forces him to labour. The master is thus at one remove from labour and its product, as the slave mediates between them. He is also at one remove from the slave, however, because it is through enforced labour that he controls the slave. As counterintuitive as it may seem, this arrangement is, in some ways, better for the slave than his master. This is true because of the inherent qualities in the states of lordship and bondage. First, in lordship, one is

dependent on the slave's recognition that one is master. Even this recognition is unsatisfying, however, because it comes from one who is not perceived as equal, but merely as an object. The master thus has no true self-conception and, because of his remove from labour, is apt to squander his time. This combination, lack of meaningful recognition and of creative work, leads to stagnation, or metaphorical death. The slave, meanwhile, possesses certain advantages despite his position. Although forced to labour for the benefit of another, the labour he does benefits him psychically, as it allows him to make a creative and potentially permanent mark on the external world. The slave's work "is desire held in check" (118). The product of his labour thus reflects his desire as well as his fear of the master.

The Hegelian drama of lordship and bondage appears to be a binary relationship between master and slave, but there is, in fact, a third component to the relationship, one that, for Hegel, is crucial: the slave's labour and its products. This is an essential part of the relationship—in fact it *is* the relationship. That is, the master and slave do not relate to each other as human beings, because that would mean they were equal, but through the work that the slave does for the master. Thus, I propose to consider the relationship of domination as having at least three parts. In psychoanalysis, the triangular relationship is, of course, the Oedipal one. It is in the Oedipal phase, Benjamin argues, that object love develops. I suggest that the triangular Oedipal relationship is central to James's major works. This is not a new argument, but one that has been developed by two of the most important James scholars, one psychoanalytic, the other moral-philosophical. The first, Lichtenberg (1986), argues that James

utilized the formal aspects of triangular Oedipal relationships as themes in his tales and novels. On close examination, the issues between his characters are generally not sensual love and jealousy, but struggles about dependence, possessiveness, and control. Only in the works of the final period do the triangles (such as exist in all possible variations in *The Golden Bowl*) stimulate in the reader a feeling of romantic passion—restrained or actual. (219)

Similarly, Robert Pippin (2000) notes that in James's work the triangle

is so frequently and confidently invoked that its presence alone implies some ambition toward a repeated or even archetypal pattern of resistance. Some element of the basic Jamesean human drama [. . .] makes self exposure, the risks of love or even moral acknowledgement, difficult, potentially painful, even frightening. (81)

Building on the work of both Pippin and Lichtenberg, I will explore the psychological meaning of the Jamesean triangle, looking at the ways it reflects Oedipal struggles for domination, and the ways in which it represents the paradox Benjamin uncovers: the desire to submit to a powerful other.

Hegel's discussion of lordship and bondage, briefly outlined above, is the basis for Jessica Benjamin's theories of submission and domination. Her work is also indebted, however, to the object-relations school of psychoanalysis, especially the work of Donald Winnicott. In *Playing and Reality* (1971), Winnicott articulates the difference between object-relating and object-use, the latter of which forms a larger part of his work.

Whereas “relating may be examined as a phenomenon of the subject,” in which the environment is unimportant except “in terms of projective mechanisms,” usage “must take into account the nature of the object, not as a projection, but as a thing in itself” (88). Thus, for Winnicott, the subject must deal with the environment as it is, not as he imagines it to be. This sets the stage for Benjamin’s intersubjective work on submission and domination, because intersubjective psychoanalysis, like object relations, stresses the impact of the outside world’s reality on the subject. Unlike object relations, however, intersubjectivity imagines the meeting of two (or more) subjects, with equal consciousness, will and desire. In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin explores how individuals relate to each other in this intersubjective space.

Object love, a concept introduced by Freud, emerges from the Oedipal phase and is based on difference—in fact, it is “loving someone because they are different” (Benjamin *Bonds* 106). Identificatory love, in contrast, is the wish to “be like” the other. It consists of “loving someone as a subject, as an admired agent” (106). I will discuss Isabel Archer’s relationship to Madame Merle, for example, as one based on identificatory love. Her relationship with Osmond, by contrast, is based (at first) on ideal love, “a deformation of identificatory love into submission” (122). Ideal love “takes the passive form of accepting the other’s will and desire as one’s own; from there it is just a step to surrender to the other’s will” and is “the wish for a vicarious substitute for one’s own agency” (122). Identificatory love becomes ideal love when the former is not satisfied through mutual recognition. Benjamin views mutual recognition, in which two selves recognize each other as “like [each other] yet distinct” (23), as the foundation of

intersubjectivity, in which “the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right” (20). The intersubjective view assumes that we are able and need to recognize that other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing similar mental experience. Thus the idea of intersubjectivity reorients the conception of the psychic world from a subject’s relations to its object toward a subject meeting another subject. (20). Here, we can see that Benjamin’s “subject” is analogous to Hegel “self-consciousness.”

Like Hegel, Benjamin recognizes the likelihood that the two subjects meeting may clash. She stresses that “domination begins with the attempt to deny dependency on others, from the need for recognition” (52). As a psychoanalyst, Benjamin sees the master-slave relationship as the externalization of an internal conflict: “The assertion of one individual (the master) is transformed into domination; the other’s (the slave’s) recognition becomes submission. Thus the basic tension of forces *within* the individual becomes a dynamic *between* individuals” (62). This relationship “is asymmetrical. It can be reversed [. . .] but it can never become reciprocal or equal” (62), a point that is crucial to understanding Jamesian relationships, such as, for example, Kate Croy and Merton Densher’s cycling between submission and domination. Until, perhaps, the end of the novel, Densher and Kate’s relationship never changes, only their positions within it.

Unlike Hegel, Benjamin considers the implications of submission and domination for relations between the sexes and for erotic life. Drawing on Pauline Réage’s *Story of O*, she argues that sadomasochism is a particular form of (erotic) domination, in which subjugation takes the form of transgressing against the other’s body, violating his

physical boundaries. The act of violation of the body becomes a way of representing the struggle to the death for recognition. Ritual violation is a form of risking the psychological, if not the physical, self (53). Although there is never explicit physical violation in James's writing, his language constantly conjures up its shadow. Sadomasochism as described here by Benjamin is relevant to James, because, although James's characters apparently "have no bodies," the body is, as Peter Brooks points out, of supreme importance in James. In passing, Brooks makes the fascinating argument that "Henry James's heroines create a far more erotic bodily presence than has usually been allowed, especially those such as Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove* and Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl* who use the body as power, and by that power indeed create the deviation of plot" (*Reading for the Plot* 144). Thus, the (female) body has tremendous power to shape the narratives of characters' lives—its power is greater than morality, as Densher's willingness to overcome his moral reservations in exchange for sexual access to Kate, for example, shows. James obscures the body in acknowledgement of this power and in fear of it—a fear that is clear in James's extreme dread of sexuality. The body is a locus of domination so powerful it must be hidden.

Thus, rather than sadomasochism being a physical manifestation of a psychological struggle, as Benjamin argues, does the Jamesean narrative reverse this, making psychological struggles stand in for struggles over the body? Is James's erasure of the body, despite its urgent presence in the text, a kind of sadism? Or is it the logical end of the sadomasochistic relationship, in which the body is annihilated (as in Hegel's life-and-death struggle). Benjamin argues that "Metaphorically [. . .] and sometimes

literally, the sadomasochistic relationship tends toward death, or, at any rate, toward deadness, numbness, the exhaustion of sensation” (65). Such an “end is ironic because such a relationship is initiated in order to reintroduce tension—to counteract numbness with pain, to break encasement through violation” (66). I will discuss this with regard to the desire of the James heroine to “have lived,” asking whether the Jamesean heroine seeks sadomasochistic relationships to gain a sense of living.

I complement my use of Benjamin’s framework, which stems from the object relations and intersubjective schools of psychoanalysis, with the affect theory pioneered by Silvan S. Tomkins. Briefly, affect theory (in which “affect” is the biological basis of emotion), analyses the role of the emotions in driving human behaviour. Although Tomkins developed this realm of psychoanalysis, it has been subsequently refined and expanded by several other psychoanalysts and applied to literature by critics. Most of what I use in this paper comes from the work of Donald L. Nathanson, who concentrates on the role of shame and pride in the development of the self, which I take to be key in understanding James’s work and helpful in illuminating Benjamin’s. This is because, according to Nathanson, shame and pride are integral to the sense of self. In James’s novels, the experience of shame leads to a deterioration in the sense of an integral self, which paves the way for submission and domination.

In James’s novels, identificatory and object love create triadic and quadratic, rather than dyadic, webs of domination and submission. Benjamin’s portrait of the relationship of domination illuminates the fine threads of these webs. These triangles and squares are unstable as they are based on oscillation between the dominator and the

dominated. The Jamesian heroine must unravel these webs to destroy them: she must discover the dominators to resist them, and in doing so also ends the tension between those who dominate her, ending their relationships which are based on struggles for dominance rather than mutual recognition. For example, in *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly Theale frees herself by discovering Densher's and Kate's use of her, and at the same time (whether intentionally or not) destroys their relationship, which is based on struggle for control and power, and cannot sustain itself without the use of Milly as intermediary-object to control. They have used Milly in ways they themselves do not realize: as a means to resist their own potential objectification at each other's hands. The same scenario occurs again and again in James's writing, from the relatively comic *Washington Square* to the denser and darker *The Golden Bowl*.

In *Henry James and the Morality of Fiction* (1993), Greg Zacharias studies James's moral vision based on the "figures of speech which recur throughout James's writing at moments when moral issues come into focus" in James's fiction in the context of "analogous tropes from James's non-fiction" (xi). Zacharias's analysis contributes to my own in that he studies the moral meaning behind "the relationship of an inexperienced, submissive central character to an experienced, dominating mentor" that recurs with such frequency in James's novels (xix). For Zacharias, James's morality can be defined by "the way characters exercise power and the consequences of the mentor's domination—for good or ill" (xx). My analysis contributes to Zacharias' by supplementing his moral analysis with a psychoanalytic lens and with the philosophic background of Hegel's master and slave dialectic.

In *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), Peter Brooks describes James's later novels as "melodramas of consciousness." He argues that *The Portrait of a Lady* is such a work because the choices Isabel faces "are themselves progressively polarized and intensified, so that Isabel's final decision to return to Gilbert Osmond in Rome is freighted with lurid connotations of sacrifice, torture, penance, clausturation" (157). This melodramatic effect makes James's study of consciousness exciting, and allows him "to make ethical conflict, imperative, and choice the substance of the novel" (159). Isabel's awakening to good and evil is the nexus of the plot, and nothing is more melodramatic than the stark opposition of these two poles. Brooks' analysis is relevant to my own because he positions consciousness between good and evil, just as I locate it in the struggle between master and slave. Brooks' analysis illuminates the role of consciousness as mediator of good and evil in James's fiction. Mature consciousness develops when, Brooks writes, the existence of good and evil is recognized. Likewise, I argue that consciousness develops when the subject is able to recognize his or her entanglement in domination and move into the intersubjective space.

In *Imagination and Desire in the Novels of Henry James* (1984), Carren Kaston argues that Isabel, like Catherine Sloper, the heroine of *Washington Square*, is a renouncing character. Isabel chooses "to renounce the material of her life to another imagination, her husband's" (40). Unlike Catherine Sloper, Isabel has a rich imagination "of what she might have from life" (39). Ralph recognizes her imaginative vision and wants to give her "the power to be the supreme imager of her experience" (42). He wrongly assumes "that it is possible to give independence as a gift" (44). The power that

Ralph gives her, or tries to give her, instills in Isabel a profound anxiety. Kaston writes, “Isabel’s anxiety about having power causes her to make a marriage in which she has none” (44-45). She thus chooses submission as an escape from power—or, as Erich Fromm might say, an escape from freedom.

In contrast to Isabel, Pansy is “a model of female submissiveness and victimization,” like Catherine Sloper, but more so (47), argues Kaston, noting that Isabel, like Pansy “is ultimately reduced to the status of a work of art by another artist” (48). However, Kaston fails to note that while Isabel flees freedom and chooses submission, Pansy has never been free nor known anything but imprisonment. Kaston is concerned with Isabel’s attachment to Pansy and argues that her decision to return for Pansy’s sake “functions as a substitute for protecting herself by staying away” (48). For Kaston, Isabel’s protection of Pansy is a symbolic protection of herself from Osmond, rather than simply a selfless act. This leads me to consider the possibility of a power relationship between Isabel and Pansy.

Kaston argues, quite insightfully, that “Caspar’s sexuality, stereotypically romantic, actually qualifies him as a kind of rapist lover: he inspires in Isabel sexual fantasies of powerlessness and forced penetration” (54). Kaston’s argument weakens when she argues that Isabel fears instances of sexuality, whether with Caspar or Osmond (45). While accepting Kaston’s description of Caspar as a fantasy “rapist lover” who inspires in Isabel fantasies of erotic submission, I argue that Isabel refuses Caspar *in spite of* these fantasies, rather than because of them. She is frightened not by Caspar’s aggressive sexuality but by the freedom he offers her. In *The Portrait of a Lady* and

elsewhere, Kaston proposes, James questions “that vision of human relations, especially sexual relations, based on domination and passivity. What was necessary above all to keep sexual possession from becoming an extinction of self for the woman was a sense of self-possession which would ultimately make the very metaphor of possession obsolete” (55). Kaston argues that this is demonstrated in Isabel’s fear of Caspar’s sexuality as having the power to engulf her. I suggest that the problem is not domination and passivity in sexual relations, but in human relations more generally, as in Osmond’s relationship with Isabel. In fact, I propose that erotic domination and submission offer a space in which issues of possession can be explored without the consequences of social relations. “Isabel is in danger of being appropriated by Osmond’s mind, and becoming merely a figment of a man’s imagination,” Kaston observes (61). This insight can be further explored with reference to Benjamin’s work, and discussed in terms of intersubjectivity. Benjamin argues that the subject must offer resistance as proof of his or her separate existence, as only a separate subject can provide recognition. Given this framework, Osmond loses interest in Isabel not because she ceases to conform to his will, but because she conforms too well. The master is interested primarily in breaking down the subjectivity of the other, in order to test his or her own subjectivity, but, once the other has become an object, he or she can no longer provide recognition of the master. The master-slave relationship is by definition finite, as its logical end involves the (actual or metaphorical) destruction of the slave as subject.

In *The Disruption of the Feminine in Henry James* (1992), Priscilla Walton examines the “conception of freedom” in *The Portrait of a Lady* (51). The novel’s

ideological vantage point is, writes Walton, liberal humanism, and thus constructs people as “thinking, knowing, self-controlling beings” (51) with “unique, distinguishable, irreplaceable identities” (52). However, she argues, “the text raises questions about subjectivity and so can be seen to undercut its own humanist premise” (52). Walton’s main criticism of the novel is a feminist one, because, she contends, “the novel suggests that Isabel is free to choose, but that because she is female and hence somewhat irrational and unstable, she will choose erroneously” (52-53) and thus the text “works to justify patriarchal authority” (53). However, the novel demonstrates the “idea of conflicted, split subjectivity, and dramatizes the extent to which society limits and thus forms all its ‘free’ subjects (both male and female), and—at least potentially—offers a critique of its ideology through its own self-reflexivity” (53). Walton’s analysis intersects with my own in her preoccupation with the connection between freedom and subjectivity in James’s work. Where I differ from Walton is in my reading of Isabel. I argue that Isabel’s freedom is given meaning by her marriage to Osmond: like Milton’s Adam she must be free to fall if she is to be free at all, a concept Frye discusses in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Walton argues that Isabel is subject to society, in other words a subject only as allowed by society, but the fact that she makes a bad decision I think supports her freedom. Isabel has freedom but fears it, and thus desires submission, in the way Benjamin describes. She submits to Osmond precisely because she is free but is afraid of that freedom.

In *The Phenomenology of Henry James* (1983), Paul B. Armstrong contends that *The Portrait of a Lady*, most tellingly of all of James’s works, explores “the relation

between possibility and limitation” (101), or freedom and necessity. The novel “shows Henry James’s understanding that freedom and necessity depend on each other in a kind of existential dialect” (103). This is reminiscent of Hegel’s dialect of master and slave, We might consider the master as associated with freedom; the slave, with necessity. Armstrong explicitly refers to Hegel, writing,

The work of moving from bondage toward freedom through self-consciousness that Isabel undertakes in her marriage to Osmond bears a revealing resemblance to the workings of Hegel’s ‘master-slave’ relationship. As Osmond’s slave in the bondage of their marriage, Isabel might be said to come to self-consciousness through ‘fear’ and ‘labor’; she becomes conscious of her consciousness, namely, as the object of her master’s will and as the ultimate stake in their struggle over his claims to power. Like Hegel’s master, Osmond objects to and objectifies Isabel’s consciousness and, in his superiority, never attains the self-consciousness she does because he never suffers so radically. Just as Hegel’s slave is more free than his master, Isabel’s trials make her more free because she is more humbly self-aware than Osmond. (125)

Modifying Hegel’s work, Jessica Benjamin would say that neither slave nor master is free, both being equally “un-free,” equally bound to each other. Armstrong argues that in Isabel’s “moment of vision at the end, she shows a resoluteness and resignation achieved by mastering that paradoxical reciprocity of freedom and necessity” (131). This “paradoxical reciprocity of freedom and necessity” is similar to Benjamin’s paradox of recognition and assertion. To be able to assert oneself requires freedom and the

acceptance of that freedom. The connection between recognition and necessity is more tenuous. Whereas recognition entails the acknowledgement of the other's subjectivity, necessity implies duty to the demands of civilization or society, rather than an affirming relationship between individuals. It thus has a more negative connotation. However, when balanced with freedom, necessity does not negate the subject. Similarly, recognition and assertion are only positive when they exist simultaneously. In his discussion of Isabel and Caspar, Armstrong contends that "To flee from one's sexual impulses (as Isabel does) is to increase one's bondage to them" (133). If Armstrong is correct on this point, it is possible to read Isabel's flight from Caspar as indicative of her desire for bondage and submission.

In "Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity: Regression and Style in the Life and Works of Henry James," Joseph D. Lichtenberg discusses James's voyeurism and omnipotence and their impact on his life and work, with particular reference to *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*. Lichtenberg argues that the people in James's

life and in his stories often seem to lack a distinctive center of gravity. They exist in a peculiarly unbalanced way as extensions or mental representatives of others. The manipulation of one character by another is unending and it is a rare Henry James character that can seem to withstand this partial or total engulfment. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), Milly Theale lives out her tragic last days engulfed in the plots of others. Kate Croy, strong as she is, cannot disengage herself from her past entrapments and determine her own future. Merton Densher chooses to live in the theater of his mind with the dead Milly, rather than with the live Kate. (218)

This ties in nicely with Benjamin's argument that consciousness is necessarily intersubjective, that solitude is not the "natural" state of the self but merely one point on a continuum. Lichtenberg's comments, quoted above, reveal the negative aspects of this sort of interconnectedness, as does the situation in *The Wings of the Dove* he describes.

Although Benjamin focuses on dyads, such as the mother and infant, her analysis can be expanded to analyze relationships of domination and submission that involve multiple players, like those in James's novels. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer finds herself in a web spun by characters both sympathetic and antipathetic. Although Osmond's attack on her freedom is the most obvious, it would be impossible without Madame Merle. It also comes to be as a result of Ralph Touchett's making Isabel wealthy, of course, but also because of her fear of Caspar Goodwood's sexuality and the kind of freedom he represents. Pansy, too, becomes a force larger than her diminutive presence might seem to allow. Despite Isabel's capacity for relating freely and intersubjectively, her fear of self-assertion, made clear in her encounters with Caspar, combines with Osmond's refusal to acknowledge her subjectivity to reduce the figurative space in which she moves.

2. Fancy Work for Life: *Washington Square*

In *The Jameses: A Family Narrative* (1991), R. W. B. Lewis describes *Washington Square* as the drama of a “low-keyed and well-mannered but nonetheless brutal battle of egos between the implacably self-assured Dr. Sloper, his passively stubborn daughter, Catherine, and the engaging bolder Morris Townsend” (69). Lewis’ “brutal battle of egos” is reminiscent of Hegel’s description of the life-and-death struggle between two self-consciousnesses. Also, in Lewis’ schema, Townsend, Sloper and Catherine are all relatively equal. Lewis envisions *Washington Square* as

the invasion of a singular Eden, the special Eden of Henry James: a world of childhood innocence and pleasure, of tender associations and clearer moralities; which yet, as represented by Washington Square, had a long, rich, decent social history. It is the invasion of this world by the hard facts of human nature and conduct; by greed, hypocrisy, cruelty, unbending vanity and selfishness, blind illusion. (69)

In this useful, if brief, analysis of the novel, (Lewis’ book is primarily biographical, not critical) he constructs *Washington Square* as, at first, the world of childhood, which is, of course, the setting for Oedipal struggles. Clearly, Catherine is, at least at first, very much a child, psychologically, but I propose that Dr. Sloper is, as well. His stubbornness and selfish desire to control Catherine are childish and show that he has not reached the developmental stage in which the other is understood as a separate subject, rather than an object of the self’s omnipotent control. Thus, I argue that, despite the triangular nature of the relationships (quadrangular if we include Mrs. Penniman), we should not read Dr.

Sloper as having an exclusively paternal relationship to Catherine, because to do so is to participate in the denial of her subjectivity. Rather, we must realize the flaws in Dr. Sloper's attitude toward her, flaws that are not merely signs of paternalism but also of infantile narcissism.

Dr. Sloper is at times the narrator's ally, at times the object of his mockery. After meeting with Mrs Montgomery, who tells him that Catherine would do better not to marry Morris, "Doctor Sloper went away with the words gently humming in his ears – 'Don't let her marry him!' They gave him the moral satisfaction of which he had just spoken, and their value was the greater that they had evidently cost a pang to poor little Mrs Montgomery's family pride" (104). Is the doctor's "moral satisfaction" simply due to the affirmation that he was correct in his assessment of Morris, the happiness at having his view of the outside world corroborated? Or does the "moral" indicate that he feels this justifies his interference in the Catherine-Morris affair, which is certainly one of the major moral questions in the novel. Or, is Dr. Sloper's satisfaction a sadistic pleasure in Mrs. Montgomery's pain? In short, is Dr Sloper primarily altruistic or sadistic?

Catherine's refusal to promise her father that she will never marry Morris, despite knowing she never will, is, combined with her refusal of Morris at the novel's end, indicative of her emotional growth. Her refusal has been construed as revealing her pride, independence, and rebellion, as well as a petulant childishness. I suggest, however, that it is an adult existential insistence on being allowed to choose for herself. Catherine asserts her power to choose and forces her father to acknowledge that she has this power of choice. By cutting her out of his will as a result of her choice, Dr. Sloper

does exactly what Catherine wants: he recognizes her self-assertion by allowing it to affect him. Her decision is thus not childish, as it stems not from a petulant belief in her omnipotence, but is a testing of her ability to influence the other who has, up to this point, acted on her without expecting her to resist.

When Dr. Sloper asks Catherine to promise,

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 his 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.

(206)

Although he continues to treat her as a child Catherine reacts differently, refusing to be infantilized. As in a psychoanalytic session, this is her chance to re-work developmental conflicts. Dr. Sloper's "pushing" is like Hegel's life-and-death struggle: it tests the independence of her self-consciousness from his control. Whereas in the past Catherine chose surrender and bondage, she now chooses to fight back, preferring metaphorical death to the shame of defeat.

Catherine repeats that she cannot promise, to which "her father exclaimed, 'I had no idea how obstinate you are!'" (206). Clearly, Dr. Sloper is not used to meeting

resistance from Catherine, as she has been in the “slave” position for so long. He has made her into a thing, and thus cannot comprehend that she does not respond perfectly to his desires. That Catherine no longer fits his image of her forces Dr. Sloper to re-evaluate himself, as he has been like Hegel’s master whose worldview is skewed because it is never challenged.

In his interview with Mrs Montgomery, Morris’s sister, Sloper says that Catherine is so soft, so simple-minded, she would be such an easy victim! A bad husband would have remarkable facilities for making her miserable; for she would have neither the intelligence nor the resolution to get the better of him, and yet she would have an exaggerated power of suffocating. (99)

Later in the novel, however, we see that this valuation of Catherine is incorrect: she is, in fact, able to “get the better of” people, as she does both Sloper and Morris.

Catherine, after refusing to promise her father that she will not marry Morris, “knew herself that she was obstinate, and it gave her a certain joy” (207). This “certain joy” is not a sign that Catherine is shallow and enjoys confounding her father, because, as we know, she is very attached to him. It reveals, rather, the healthy satisfaction she experiences in rebelling against what Hegel would call the master. Essentially, Catherine has re-initiated the life-and-death struggle for recognition from her father, forcing him to reckon with her as a self-consciousness. She is, thus, in Benjamin’s words, asserting herself and demanding that her father recognize her subjectivity.

In her final scene with Morris, Catherine rejects the warlike view of life adopted by other characters in the novel. When Morris asks her whether they can be friends,

Catherine replies that they “are not enemies” (217). This curious turn of phrase, in context with the rest of the visit, reveals that Catherine has “moved on” from Townsend in the most fundamental way. She responds to his pathetic offer of friendship with the utmost propriety and what Morris calls “her confounded little dry manner” (219). She has rejected Morris but does not deny the importance he once held for her. This mature approach allows Catherine to recognize her emotional attachment to this man while asserting her own dignity as a subject.

During Townsend’s final visit, Catherine is stunned that although “it was the man who had been everything” the man now in front of her “was nothing” (216). She reflects, “how long ago it was—how old she had grown—how much she had lived! She had lived on something that was connected with *him*, and she had consumed it in doing so” (216). The emphasis here—as in *The Wings of the Dove*—is on the importance of *having lived*. Townsend’s importance to Catherine is not denied, but has become fuel for her life. She is, thus, not entirely a “renouncing character” as Kaston calls her, as she does not renounce life itself. Rather, she chooses not to tether her life to anyone else—neither Townsend nor Sloper—by refusing to compromise her integrity for either.

The last sentence in the novel, “Catherine, meanwhile, in the parlor, picking up her morsel of fancy-work, had seated herself with it again – for life, as it were” (220), follows her final rejection of Morris. This brief sentence is the only information we are given about what Catherine’s future holds. What is the significance here of “for life”? Does it mean that this is how she will spend the rest of her life, doing fancy-work and such quiet, seemingly trivial (“morsel” “fancy”), solitary tasks (as a typical spinster, in

short)? Or does it have more positive connotations—i.e. Catherine is choosing life—living—rather than romantic paralysis? This would support my existential reading of the text. This reading might be tempered, though, by the paradigmatically Jamesian “as it were,” which suggests a limited sphere of life. Given that James devoted his life to artistic production—which is, essentially, what Catherine’s “fancy work” is, though, it is credible that the “as it were” refers rather to the limited number of ways to live, rather than to any limitation in Catherine’s particular choice.

Although the focus is on Morris’ desire to marry Catherine for her money (or, to marry Catherine’s money), and, thus, on his reduction of her to an object, Catherine is also guilty of objectifying him. Early in their courtship, “she could believe again that this beautiful young man was her own exclusive property” (164). Catherine sees Morris as “resplendent” (164), and “owning him” or his affections (or thinking she does) gives her a sense of self-worth, just as James’s later characters—Osmond and Adam Verver, for example—measure their worth by the works of art, from bibelots to women, that they possess.

Robert B. Pippin, in *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, notes that the Jamesian triangle (heiress-fortune-hunter-accomplice) is “squared” in *Washington Square* and *The Golden Bowl*, with the addition of the despotic father. I assume, then, that Pippin is implying that Mrs. Penniman is an accomplice. Her role, I think, is closer to that of a Fanny Assingham (in that she seems to be in love with Morris on some level, as Colonel Assingham suggests Fanny is in love with Amerigo) than a Charlotte, a Madame Merle, or a Kate Croy. A much more comic character than these other accomplices

(perhaps, in part, because her age precludes her from being a serious object of sexual desire), Mrs. Penniman is driven not by greed but by misguided romantic folly and an attempt to vicariously fulfill her desire for Morris. Her delusions, rather than plotting, drive her contributions to the unfolding narrative.

Mrs. Penniman is doubtless one of the most colourful characters in the novel. Her crucial involvement in the plot stems from a combination of confused romanticism and repressed erotic desire. Her desire is for Morris, but results mainly from her romantic projections and his ability to manipulate them. Because she herself is not able to pursue this desire, she attempts to live vicariously through Catherine, as well as to use Morris's relationship with Catherine as a pretext for enjoying his society. Although cast as an absurd character, I suggest that she is a tragicomic one, representing the woman whose desire is not reciprocated and, thus, is made monstrous.

Although Mrs. Penniman positions herself as a helper and *confidante* to Morris and Catherine, she is motivated by her love of romantic intrigue, but also, I argue, by her attraction to Morris, rather than an altruistic desire to help the young couple. Her attraction to Morris is not purely sexual, but includes her desire for recognition. Catherine realizes, when she returns from Europe, "that Mrs. Penniman had enjoyed a whole year of her lover's society, and it was not a pleasure to her to hear her aunt explain and interpret the young man, speaking of him as if her own knowledge of him were supreme" (159). As this quotation shows, Mrs. Penniman revels in her knowledge of Morris as much as in the time she spends with him, because it gives her a sense of superiority over

Catherine, and, thus, strengthens her position in the Sloper family, in which she is very much the “third wheel” to Catherine and Dr. Sloper.

Part of Doctor Sloper’s attitude toward Catherine stems from his own sense of failure. For years he has defined himself through his profession, “of exercising a skill of which he was agreeably conscious, and it was so patent a truth that if he were a doctor there was nothing else he could be” (29). By his own standards he fails when he is unable to save either his wife or son. For this, “he escaped all criticism but his own, which was much the most competent and most formidable. He walked under the weight of this very private censure for the rest of his days, and bore forever the scars of a castigation to which the strongest hand he knew had treated him” (29-30). The castigation image underlines the masochistic element in the doctor’s psyche, which he soothes by dominating Catherine and Mrs. Penniman.

Doctor Sloper’s desire for perfection extends to Catherine, and he, thus, feels her so-called shortcomings as though they are his own. The narrator tells us, “Doctor Sloper would have liked to be proud of his daughter; but there was nothing to be proud of in poor Catherine. There was nothing, of course, to be ashamed of, but this was not enough for the Doctor, who was a proud man” (35). Doctor Sloper’s desire to be proud of Catherine is bound up with his own sense of shame. He is disappointed in Catherine because, he thinks, she is a tangible proof of his own shortcomings. This attitude is based on a failure to see Catherine as a separate subject: she remains for her father an extension of himself.

Although the doctor pretends to give Catherine liberty, and may even believe himself that he does, it is utterly meaningless. While he “had a great idea of being largely just: he wished to leave his daughter her liberty, and interfere only when the danger should be proved” (68), he does not see that to “interfere only when the danger should be proved” is just as domineering as interfering from the outset. Whether one interferes early or late is merely a matter of calculation, and does not change the fact of interference. The tenuous liberty he pretends to afford Catherine is further qualified when, in answer to Morris’s observation that Catherine seems “quite her own mistress,” he replies that “Literally, she is. But she has not emancipated herself morally quite so far, I trust, as to choose a husband without consulting me. I have left her at liberty, but I have not been in the least indifferent” (88). Sloper’s use of the word “morally” here is just as deceptive as his use of “literally.” The real freedom Catherine lacks is neither moral nor literal, but psychological. By calling it “moral” instead, Sloper disguises his need to dominate his daughter as a concern for her welfare. When Sloper tells Morris that Catherine “is past the age at which people are forbidden, and I am not a father in an old-fashioned novel. But I shall strongly urge her to break with you,” (93) he reveals the originality of his characterization. In creating Sloper, James has made a break with the “old fashioned novel” and its fathers. Whereas the fathers in old-fashioned novels often had total control over their daughters, Sloper must settle for psychological control, and it is this that James depicts with originality and finesse.

Morris asks Sloper whether he enjoys making Catherine miserable, to which the doctor replies, “I am perfectly resigned to her thinking me a tyrant for a twelve-month [.

. .] for a lifetime, then. She may as well be miserable in that way as in the other” (92). Not only is the doctor “resigned” to Catherine thinking him a tyrant but, I suggest, he actually enjoys this prospect because her recognition of his tyranny affirms his victory and dominance. He admits as much to Mrs. Almond when he tells her that both Mrs. Penniman and Catherine are afraid of him, and that ““it is on that that I build—on the salutary terror”” he inspires (95). Sloper recognizes that his mastery rests on terror, and, thus, seeks to maintain Mrs. Penniman and Catherine’s fear of him.

Sloper believes that women are meant to be victims, as shown when he tells Mrs. Montgomery that ““You women are all the same! But the type to which your brother belongs was made to be the ruin of you, and you were made to be its handmaids and victims”” (101). This statement reveals two important things about Sloper: first, he sees people as “types” rather than as individuals, and, thus, cannot empathize with others; second, he sees women as naturally victims, and, thus, cannot conceptualize Catherine as an agent. Sloper’s lack of sympathy for Catherine is partially based on his theory that women are predisposed to suffering. He tells Mrs. Montgomery that people like Morris insist ““that some one else shall suffer for them; and women do that sort of thing, as you must know, wonderfully well”” (101).

Like Mrs. Almond, Mrs. Penniman attempts to defend Catherine to Sloper. Her attempts are not as convincing, however, to us or to Doctor Sloper, because of the contempt he and the narrator both have for her and her lack of perception. It is to her credit, however, that she defends Catherine, becoming angry when Sloper implies that she is “weak-minded”: ““if you regard Catherine as a weak-minded woman you are

particularly mistaken” (71), she remarks passionately, before moving “majestically away” (71). Although she is a ridiculous character, Mrs. Penniman is sympathetic because of her impulse to side with the weak and the downtrodden. She is, like Catherine, a victim of Sloper’s domination, but refuses to accept his view of reality. While her own sentimental and absurdly romantic view of life is painted as comic, it is also a triumph over Sloper’s rigid and unromantic view of life, which is perhaps equally absurd.

Combat metaphors reveal the intensity of Mrs. Penniman’s struggles with Sloper. The former “was not provided with a line of defence against her brother, so that indignant negation was the only weapon in her hands” (188). While Sloper’s attitude is primarily one of amused detachment, Mrs. Penniman’s is one of intense engagement with life. They are, thus, polar opposites, at least in terms of their attitudes toward life. Although Mrs. Penniman seems to be present in the narrative largely for comic relief, she is also a philosophical foil to Sloper. She immerses herself in the comedy of life while he imagines himself the director. Catherine, ultimately, chooses a middle road: she comes to see things as they are—something Mrs. Penniman never accomplishes—but also maintains a participatory role in life by fulfilling the role of “spinster” to its utmost potential, thus defying the stereotypes associated with this role. Her final outlook on life is existential, thus combining the best of both Mrs. Penniman and Sloper’s approaches: the former’s zest and the latter’s clear-sightedness.

Although the reader can see how misguided Mrs. Penniman is in her decision to aid Townsend, it is nevertheless indicative of her desire to participate in life. Delivering

Catherine a message from Townsend, despite the former's objections, Mrs. Penniman tells her that she has "gone too far to retreat" (214). Again we see her using combat metaphors to infuse drama into an otherwise banal situation. No longer stifled by her brother, Mrs. Penniman no longer has any need to retreat. While this does lead her to make a decision Catherine dislikes, and which the reader must also recognize as foolish and unnecessary, it brings closure to Catherine's relationship with Morris, thus allowing the former to continue with life. Mrs. Penniman's final, fateful action is to invite Morris to the house without consulting Catherine. She, thus, spurs him into action and allows Catherine to exorcise him from her life and return to the peacefully productive life she has carved out for herself.

Together, Mrs. Penniman and Mrs. Almond undermine Sloper's perspective and force the reader to question the reliability of his perceptions. Mrs. Almond is an *eirōn* character, a word Frye takes from the Greek and which means "the man who deprecates himself" (*Anatomy* 40) whereas Mrs. Penniman is an odd combination of *alazon*, or "someone who pretends or tries to be something more than he is" (Frye, *Anatomy* 39) and a fool or court jester type who has access to a higher truth. They are, also, because of Mrs. Sloper's death, Catherine's primary female role models. Doctor Sloper's silencing of them, particularly Mrs. Penniman, is, thus, part of his effort to keep Catherine entirely to himself and under his control.

In her comic way, Mrs. Penniman reveals several truths about Sloper. When she attempts to convince Morris to elope with Catherine, Mrs. Penniman says that Sloper "will never be vanquished by argument. I have studied him. He will be vanquished only

by the accomplished fact” (111). She explains, “he will come round afterward [. . .] He cares for nothing but facts—he must be met by facts” (111). Although Mrs. Penniman is acting partly out of her desire to participate in romantic intrigue, we should take seriously her claim to have “studied” Sloper, and must agree with her that he cares for facts, not arguments. This is true because arguments must come from other subjects, whose existence Sloper is unable to recognize. Arguments involve the realities of others, and Sloper knows no reality but his own.

In Sloper’s absence, Mrs. Penniman “enjoyed her uncontested dominion in the empty house” (150). Unlike Catherine, Mrs. Penniman is interested in power. She refuses to submit to Sloper because she believes in her own power. This ultimately traps her, however. Whereas Catherine’s refusal to engage in struggle with her father breaks the cycle of domination, Mrs. Penniman’s constant contestation of Sloper’s authority keeps her locked in this cycle. She, thus, occupies an ultimately ambiguous position: she is too be lauded for refusing to submit to Sloper, but, unlike Catherine, she persists in seeing life in terms of domination and submission. She, thus, remains bound to Sloper out of habit.

Part of Doctor Sloper’s aversion to Morris is the challenge another male poses to his own patriarchal authority. Doctor Sloper is surrounded by women—Catherine and his sisters—and is not used to being confronted by a pretender to the throne, as it were. Although, as we have seen, Mrs. Penniman longs for the throne, she never imagines taking it while Doctor Sloper is present. Furthermore, Sloper is accustomed to her ways, and, thus, can control them to some extent. Morris Townsend, on the other hand, is an

unknown quantity, which is anathema to Sloper, a man of science. Sloper prefers his own small kingdom to the possibility of conquering a larger one. He is disgusted to find Townsend ““amazingly conceited”” (73), a judgment based solely on the fact that “Morris looked at him, smiling, without a sign of evasiveness” (73). Of course, Sloper himself might be called conceited, and it is not conceit *per se* that bothers him. Rather, he is reacting to the interruption of his obsessively controlled world.

Battle metaphors reveal the degree to which Sloper is troubled by Morris’s sally into his territory, or, indeed, by any opposition to his authority, despite his attempt to project an air of amusement with the situation. This also supports Brooks’ and Frye’s arguments that James’s writing is fundamentally melodramatic. In speaking to Mrs. Almond about Mrs. Penniman’s role in the situation, Sloper says that he ““will have no treason”” in his house (95). He tells Mrs. Penniman herself that anything she does to aid or comfort Catherine will be ““distinctly treasonable”” and that ““high-treason is a capital offence”” (127). She replies that he seems to ““talk like a great autocrat”” (127). This is, of course, precisely what he is. That is, he is an autocrat, but not a great one—his court consists only of Mrs. Penniman and Catherine, neither of whom satisfy him, the former because she offers too much resistance; the latter, too little.

Despite his tendency to dismiss Catherine, Sloper is occasionally surprised by her. For the reader, this destabilizes Sloper’s self-presentation as wise and insightful. When Catherine says to him, ““if I don’t obey you, I ought not to live with you—to enjoy your kindness and protection,”” Sloper experiences ““a sudden sense of having underestimated his daughter; it seemed even more than worthy of a young woman who had revealed the

quality of unaggressive obstinacy” (146). As soon as Doctor Sloper has decided that Catherine “is not brilliant,” she makes a humorous comment that leaves her father speechless and confused: he “stood staring; he wondered whether his daughter were serious” (58). By using humour to deflect her father’s awkward and condescending questions, Catherine moves toward an escape from domination.

Sloper reflects that Catherine will do as he has bidden her because she is “not a woman of great spirit” (105). The narrator ponders whether Sloper “had hoped for a little more resistance for the sake of a little more entertainment” (105). This parallels Benjamin’s argument that the “exhaustion of satisfaction” gleaned from the sadomasochistic relationship “occurs when all resistance is vanquished, all tension is lost” which means that the relationship returns “to the emptiness from which it was an effort to escape” (66). Sloper’s desire for “a little more resistance” from Catherine echoes the sadist’s wish for a victim who is not too compliant and can provide the resistance necessary for the sadist to realize his power. This power is meaningless if it cannot be put into action by subduing a resistant slave. Of course, Catherine is, in fact, more resistant than Sloper realizes: “It never entered her mind to throw her lover off [. . .] To be good she must be patient, *outwardly* submissive, abstain from judging her father too harshly, and from committing any act of *open* defiance” (107, my emphasis). She refrains from giving her father the satisfaction of combating her defiance, but maintains a quiet resolution that is much more difficult to defeat.

Unlike her father, Catherine does not see things in either/or terms. Her thinking is less rigid and more imaginative, as shown when she reflects that “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 quiet, as a great physical weight keeps us motionless. It never entered into her mind to throw her lover off; but from the first she tried to assure herself that there would be a peaceful way out of their difficulty” (107). Although the narrator’s tone might be called mocking—“it never entered her mind”—it shows something else: Catherine’s ability to maintain mental independence. Although Catherine’s thinking may be limited, it is certainly no more limited than Sloper’s. Furthermore, the limitations of her mind are imposed by her love for both her father and Morris, whereas Sloper’s limitations stem from a narcissistic inability to recognize the subjectivity of the other.

Part of the problem in Doctor Sloper’s relationship with Catherine is his inability to see his own greatest weakness: his lack of empathy. In her misery, Catherine tells him ““if you knew how I feel—and you must know, you know everything—you would be so kind, so gentle,”” to which he replies, ““Yes, I think I know how you feel”” (87). Yet, his next thought is practical and calculating: he exhorts her to ““be so good as to mention to no one that you are engaged”” (87). Sloper’s capacity for empathy is handicapped by a narcissistic fear of injury to the image of himself that he cultivates and aspires to project.

I suggest that existing criticism of *Washington Square* be enriched by an acknowledgement of the multiple relationships of domination in the text. The most important “square” in the novel is not Washington Square, but the invisible one connecting Sloper, Townsend, Catherine, and Mrs. Penniman. The novel can not be understood, as Zacharias argues, simply in terms of the struggle between Catherine and

her father, but must be read as a struggle between four separate self-consciousnesses
battling to break free from the square in which they are entrapped.

3. A Dark Carriage: *The Portrait of a Lady*

The Portrait of a Lady succeeds because of its heroine, whose psychological development is the focus of the novel—or rather, *is* the novel. In this sense the work might be described as more a portrait than a novel, in that the focus is on an in-depth exploration of a single individual. However, Isabel's development does not take place in a vacuum—she is, even when alone, defined in and through her relationships with other people. In some cases this is a positive, as with her friendship with Ralph. In others, it seems negative—her entanglement with Osmond and Madame Merle, for example. Yet even this bizarre triangle refines and nurtures Isabel's sense of herself. Many of her relationships are complicated by Isabel's dread of eroticism, which is also a dread of losing her personal integrity. Isabel fears Caspar's sexuality, taking refuge in Madame Merle's maternal yet erotic friendship, ultimately finding herself only with Ralph, who does not pose a sexual threat. From this web of erotic relationships a very different Isabel than the solitary figure of the beginning of the novel emerges—her character has been shaped, for better and for worse, by the characters who surround her. Our last vision of her, however, is of a woman alone, as she flees from Caspar. We are left to wonder whether or not Isabel returns to Osmond, and thus, whether she chooses attunement over assertion—the possibility of balancing the two would seem impossible in a relationship with Osmond. What we *are* left with is a woman who is no longer a “portrait,” with the isolation from others this implies, but a character who seems about to step off the page, because she has been brought to life through struggle and communion with others.

Deeply introspective, Isabel recognizes her own desire for attunement. Her “deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world” (41). This is a perfect description of how Isabel inhabits the intersubjective space—she is able to take pleasure in and through her relation to the outside world. She sees the relationship between her soul and the world as a reciprocal one. This reflection takes place in New York, however, begging the question of whether Europe robs her of the capacity to relate intersubjectively. Isabel, seated alone with a book in New York, experienced, despite her strong imagination “a want of fresh taste in her situation which the arrival of an unexpected visitor did much to correct” (31). Isabel “had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering” (41). She longs to assert her subjectivity by going out into the world but, almost paradoxically, her vision of entering the world involves experiencing the realities of others, attuning herself with that “unexpected visitor” and others.

Ralph recognizes Isabel’s desire for self-assertion, but underestimates her complementary need for attunement. He wants Isabel to be free and independent, but at the same time has a somewhat paternalistic attitude toward her. In some ways, his love for Isabel is what Benjamin calls “ideal love.” This is noteworthy because “ideal love” is usually associated with a woman adoring a man who has the power and agency she desires but cannot possess. Ralph’s illness puts him in an analogous position. James describes Ralph’s infirmity as follows: “Living as he now lived was like reading a good book in a poor translation—a meagre entertainment for a young man who felt that he might have been an excellent linguist” (45). In contrast, Isabel is described, by Mrs.

Ludlow, as “so original” (38). To this, Mr. Ludlow replies, “I don’t like originals; I like translations [. . .] Isabel’s written in a foreign tongue” (38). Juxtaposed, these two statements implicitly link Ralph with Isabel. Isabel is able to experience the world directly, while Ralph can only do so through an intermediary—Isabel “translates” the world for him. Thus, their relationship is mutual, even if at times Ralph seems condescending. In his paternalistic idealization of her, Ralph fails to notice that Isabel is vulnerable to the desire to be passive and submit. So taken is he with Isabel’s self that he cannot imagine her own impulse to efface that very self. Deep in Isabel’s soul “lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive. Isabel’s thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it; after a little it ended in alarms” (56). Isabel longs to submit because she fears self-assertion. As a woman, she has been cautioned against putting herself forward too much. She is deeply self-conscious, and “it often seemed to her that she thought too much about herself; you could have made her colour, any day in the year, by calling her a rank egoist” (56). Isabel’s uneasy sense of self manifests itself in her inability to deal with compliments. Her response to them “seemed sometimes rather dry; she got rid of them as rapidly as possible. But as regards this she was sometimes misjudged; she was thought insensible to them, whereas in fact she was simply unwilling to show how infinitely they pleased her” (59). Isabel’s pleasure in compliments reflects her desire to improve and perfect herself. Her awkward response to them points to her shame about this concentration on the self.

More than any other character in the novel, Ralph respects and admires Isabel's subjectivity. He is less clear-sighted about her thirst for recognition and connection. When asking his father to bequeath a large sum to Isabel, Ralph tells him that he hopes he "shall live long enough to see what she does with herself" because although she is "entirely independent" of him and he "can exercise very little influence upon her life," he would "like to do something for her" (160). Here, we see Ralph's unselfish interest in the lives of other people. He wants to "put a little wind in her sails," "to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants" (160). He wants to make her rich, defining rich as allowing people "to meet the requirements of their imagination" and believing that "Isabel has a great deal of imagination" (160). A large part of his motivation is that if "she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support," which he wants "cannily to prevent" (160). He sees that she "wishes to be free" and that his father's "bequest will make her free" (160). Mr. Touchett agrees, but with reservations. He is "not sure it's right" and asks Ralph whether he fears "putting too much" wind in her sails (161). Ralph replies that he "should like to see her going before the breeze" (161). When his father observes that Ralph speaks as if it were for his "mere amusement," Ralph answers, "so it is, a good deal" (161). Mr. Touchett observes that the matter seems immoral because it does not seem "right to make everything so easy for a person" (162). Confident in Isabel, Ralph replies that "it surely depends upon the person. When the person's good your making things easy is all to the credit of virtue. To facilitate the execution of good impulses, what can be a nobler act?" (162). Clairvoyantly, Mr. Touchett asks whether it has occurred to Ralph "that a young

lady with sixty thousand pounds may fall a victim to the fortune-hunters” (162). Ralph concedes this, but says that it is a risk that has “entered into” his “calculations,” but, while “appreciable” it is “small” and he is “prepared to take it” (162). Of course, this is exactly what does happen: Isabel does fall victim to a fortune hunter. Ralph’s error is in this “calculation,” which is a temporary slip from his usually more humane view of other people.

One of Isabel’s most intense relationships is with Madame Merle. By marrying Osmond Isabel is also symbolically “marrying” Madame Merle in a number of ways. Isabel not only meets Osmond through Madame Merle, Osmond is also very similar to Mme Merle. The relationship of the two women and their connection through Osmond can best be understood with reference to Eve Sedgwick’s theory of erotic triangles, which she articulates in *Between Men* (1985). Although Sedgwick is mainly concerned with triangles involving two males who are rivals for the affections of one woman, she does not limit the triangle to this model, leaving room to explore relationships between women that are mediated through a man who serves as a conduit, as the woman does in Sedgwick’s primary use of the triangle. This reading helps to illuminate both Isabel’s decision to marry Osmond and her conflicted experience of sexuality. If, using Sedgwick’s framework, we posit the relationship between Madame Merle and Isabel as a homosocial one, we can see her domination taking hold even before her marriage to Osmond. Under Madame Merle’s spell, Isabel begins to cede her subjectivity. Isabel quickly forms an intimacy with Madame Merle. The metaphor James uses to describe Isabel’s confiding in Madame Merle both objectify Isabel and sexualize the relationship:

“The gates of the girl’s [Isabel’s] confidence were opened wider than they had ever been; she said things to this amiable auditee that she had not yet said to any one. Sometimes she took alarm at her candour: it was as if she had given to a comparative stranger the key to her cabinet of jewels” (163). Post-Freud, it is impossible not to read Isabel’s “cabinet of jewels” and Madame Merle’s key to as having sexual undertones. The “cabinet of jewels” also suggests the mercenary nature of Madame Merle’s interest in Isabel. Thus, Madame Merle’s interest in Isabel is at once erotic and financial. Isabel’s attraction to Madame Merle is based on both object and identificatory love. The former “had never encountered a more agreeable and interesting figure than Madame Merle; she had never met a person having less of that fault which is the principal obstacle to friendship—the air of reproducing the more tiresome, the stale, the too-familiar parts of one’s own character” (163). So, Isabel is attracted to Madame Merle’s difference from herself. She is also attracted to Madame Merle’s recognition of her. Madame Merle is highly attuned to others: “she rose from the piano or remained there, according to the convenience of her auditors, which she always unerringly divined. She was in short the most comfortable, profitable, amenable person to live with” (167). We should resist simplistically labeling Isabel and Madame Merle’s feelings for each other as homoerotic, while acknowledging that latent same-sex desire is one of many ingredients in their relationship.

Isabel fears self-assertion of two kinds. First, as her relationship with Caspar shows, she fears her own erotic desires. Second, as her wish to use her fortune to help Osmond suggests, she is afraid of having power. While Isabel professes a desire for

independence, she is less certain when that independence is simply handed to her in the form of money and, consequently, power. Isabel realizes that her inheritance is power, but this “acquisition of power made her serious; she scrutinised her power with a kind of tender ferocity, but was not eager to exercise it” (182). Mrs. Touchett impresses on Isabel the freedom this confers, “‘you’re completely your own mistress and are as free as the bird on the bough. I don’t mean you were not so before, but you’re at present on a different footing—property erects a kind of barrier’” (190). Interestingly, the “barrier” image comes up in Mrs. Touchett’s description of the power of wealth. She offers to accompany Isabel, but wants her to understand that she can do as she pleases, being very much “‘at liberty’” (190). Mrs. Touchett’s protective, even slightly maternal, role toward Isabel changes after the latter’s inheritance. This leaves Isabel all the more alone, without even the dubious guidance of her aunt. In this she is like Catherine Sloper, Kate Croy, and Maggie Verver, all motherless daughters with either useless female guidance (as in Catherine’s case, where her only maternal figure is Mrs. Penniman), or none at all (as in Maggie’s case). The absence of a maternal figure runs through James’s works and is nearly always a liability for the daughter. Isabel’s attraction to Madame Merle, an older woman, can be partially explained as her latent desire for a mother.

Osmond and Madame Merle are inextricably linked, not only in their relationship but in Isabel’s mind, because Madame Merle introduces Osmond to Isabel. She is the link between them, just as Osmond is the link between Madame Merle and Isabel if we look at the triangular relationship through the lens of homosociality provided by Sedgwick. Isabel reflects that her “‘new relation’” to Osmond “‘would perhaps prove her

very most distinguished. Madame Merle had had that note of rarity, but what quite other power it immediately gained when sounded by a man” (225). This can be explored with reference to Benjamin’s view of gender. That is, that, in “ideal love,” a woman idealizes a man who possesses the power of which society deprives her. Osmond, both Isabel and Madame Merle believe, is such a man. Given the nineteenth-century context, there is some truth in the scenario in which women can only access power indirectly, through a man whose access to power is less circumscribed. While Madame Merle tends to objectify people by instrumentalizing them, Osmond does so by commodifying them. This is particularly true with regard to his view of women, because, unlike men, they are not liable to be objects of his envy. Osmond tells Isabel that ““a woman’s natural mission is to be where she’s most appreciated”” (226). When she speaks of living in Italy, he expresses pleasure to hear her ““talk of settling”” as Madame Merle had told him that Isabel was ““of a rather roving disposition”” (227). Madame Merle had told him that Isabel had ““some plan of going round the world”” (227). Isabel responds to his condescending manner of speaking, admitting that she is ““rather ashamed”” of her plans (227). Osmond’s contempt has had the intended effect on Isabel: it has degraded her sense of self by instilling her with shame. By excising some of her subjectivity, Osmond makes Isabel an object more malleable to his desires.

Osmond’s fascination with Lord Warburton, and the latter’s romantic entanglements with Pansy and Isabel, is a textbook example of Sedgwick’s theory of erotic triangles. Osmond’s desire that Pansy marry Warburton stems from his own envious fascination with Warburton. Osmond observes that Warburton is ““detestably

fortunate” to be “a great English magnate, to be clever and handsome into the bargain” and to enjoy Isabel’s favour (256). He ends by saying that Warburton is a man he could envy (256). Isabel observes that Osmond seems to be “always envying some one. Yesterday it was the Pope; to-day it’s poor Lord Warburton” (256). He defends himself by saying that his envy is “not dangerous; it wouldn’t hurt a mouse. I don’t want to destroy the people—I only want to *be* them. You see it would destroy only myself” (256). Thus, Osmond’s envy—at least his own interpretation of it—is not the Kleinian “angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable—the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it” (212), but a symptom of his own ambition and sense of inferiority. Nonetheless, his treatment of Pansy and Isabel suggests a desire to spoil the other’s zest for life. This is not a contradiction, but an illustration of Osmond’s differential treatment of men and women. Men are to be envied (but in a more benign sense than the Kleinian) or despised, whereas women are to be envied (in the Kleinian sense) to the point of obliteration.

Osmond demands that his wife, like his daughter, be perfectly malleable to his desires. He particularly detests Isabel’s zest for life, wishing her to be, like Pansy, more passive. Osmond “thought Miss Archer sometimes of too precipitate a readiness. It was a pity she had that fault, because if she had not had it she would really have had none; she would have been as smooth to his general need of her as handled ivory to the palm” (259). Without this “readiness” for experience and emotion, Osmond imagines that Isabel would be like one of his bibelots, made of beautiful ivory and fitting easily into his collection. Although he does not love Isabel, Osmond is jealous of anyone or anything

that distracts her from him. When Isabel suggests to Osmond that she stop in Italy on her trip around the world, he tells her not to: “Don’t put us in a parenthesis—give us a chapter to ourselves. I don’t want to see you on your travels. I’d rather see you when they’re over. I should like to see you when you’re tired and satiated [. . .] I shall prefer you in that state” (261). Osmond predicts that Isabel will “be tired some day” (262). Little does she know at this point that Osmond will tire her by squelching her vital energy. She will be tired, not by experience, but by suffocation.

Isabel is entranced by Pansy, who appears to embody the perfection Isabel seeks for herself. Entertaining Isabel, “Pansy rose to the occasion as the small, winged fairy in the pantomime soars by the aid of the dissimulated wire” (267). The narrator’s voice is mocking here: Pansy does not fly with her own wings, but on the “dissimulated wire” in Osmond’s hands. She is no more than a pretty puppet. Isabel wonders at Pansy: “how prettily she had been directed and fashioned; and yet how simple, how natural, how innocent she had been kept” (267). She, thus, sees the contradiction between Pansy’s “naturalness” and her cultivation. Pansy tells Isabel that she does not “like to do anything that’s not expected; it looks as if one had not been properly taught. I myself—I should never like to be taken by surprise. Papa left directions for everything. [. . .] When the sun goes off that side I go into the garden. Papa left strict orders that I was not to get scorched” (269). Pansy sees Isabel to the door, but, “looking rather wistfully beyond,” tells her, “I may go no further. I’ve promised papa not to pass this door” (270). Isabel tells Pansy that she is “right to obey him; he’ll never ask you anything unreasonable” (270). Little does Isabel know, of course, that Osmond will ask Pansy to

reject the man she loves. Pansy agrees, “I shall always obey him” (270), which, we later learn, is no idle promise. Unwittingly, Isabel is already entangled in Osmond’s domination of his daughter.

Osmond is right that Pansy needs Isabel, although the nature of this need is not what he believes. While Osmond believes that Pansy needs Isabel’s money in order to marry well, he is blind to the fact that Pansy needs Isabel’s greatness of spirit. It seems that it is too late for Pansy to have this herself, but Isabel offers her the protection she so desperately needs, as well as the genuine affection she craves. Pansy’s submission is not only a response to Osmond’s domination, but also her own strategy for being recognized by others. She constantly seeks approbation, and “Isabel approved in abundance, and the abundance had the personal touch that the child’s affectionate nature craved. She watched her indications as if for herself also much depended on them—Pansy already so represented part of the service she could render, part of the responsibility she could face” (298). Perhaps Isabel’s tragedy is that she wants to give, to render service to Pansy and Osmond, but discovers that she has, instead, been taken from. This diminishes her sense of her own generosity. Pansy tells Isabel that she admires Isabel “so much that I think it will be a good fortune to have you always before me. You’ll be my model; I shall try to imitate you though I’m afraid it will be very feeble” (299). Pansy’s self-effacement is accurate here: she is, indeed, a “very feeble” imitation of the magnificent Isabel. Osmond seems utterly incapable of speaking about his daughter without being patronizing. He tells Isabel that they have his “poor child to amuse us; we’ll try and make up some little life for her” (297). He diminishes Pansy’s subjectivity on two

counts here. First, he reduces her to a mere plaything for his and Isabel's amusement. She is, like Osmond's sketching, nothing but a pleasant diversion for him. Second, he predicts making "some little life" for her. Interestingly, he has, or at any rate comes to have, grander aspirations, when he decides that Pansy should marry Lord Warburton. Yet this is not so much for Pansy as for himself. Again remembering Sedgwick's triangles, Osmond seeks to unite himself with Warburton, and all that Warburton represents, through his daughter.

Ralph, who wants to see for himself how Isabel is since her marriage, regrets his actions during Isabel's and Osmond's courtship. He reflects on "what a fool he had been to put the girl on her guard. He had played the wrong card, and now he had lost the game. He should see nothing, he should learn nothing; for him she would always wear a mask" (330). Ralph has little pride, and "would gladly have consented to pass for a goose in order to know Isabel's real situation" (330). Seeing her, he observes that "if she wore a mask it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it; this was not an expression" (330). Ralph attributes this change to Osmond's influence, "for he knew that Isabel had not faculty for producing studied impressions" (330). She is weighed down both literally and figuratively: "her light step drew a mass of drapery behind it; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament" (331). Ralph remembers Isabel as a "free, keen girl" (331). He sees now "quite another person [. . .] the fine lady who was supposed to represent something [. . .] she represented Gilbert Osmond" (331). Seeing this, Ralph reflects, "'Good heavens, what a function'" (331). Like James, Ralph is an observer, but not an impartial one: he

is horrified to see Isabel transformed into an appendage of Osmond. While Ralph observes Isabel with wonder and sympathy, he observes Osmond, just as intently, with disgust and horror. Ralph “recognised Osmond [. . .] he recognised him at every turn. He saw how he kept all things within limits; how he adjusted, regulated, animated their manner of life. Osmond was in his element” (331). Unlike Ralph, the observer who values others’ freedom, Osmond wants to be observed, and wants to fine-tune the actions and natures of those whom he ensnares into his performance. Ralph observes that “under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world. Far from being its master as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant, and the degree of its attention was his only measure of success” (331). Everything Osmond does is “*pose—pose* so subtly considered that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse. Ralph had never met a man who lived so much in the land of consideration” (331). The thing Osmond “had done in his life most directly to please himself was his marrying Miss Archer; though in this case indeed the gullible world was in a manner embodied in poor Isabel, who had been mystified to the top of her bent” (331-332). Here, we see how Isabel is, for Osmond, but a representative of the “gullible world”—that being the world of Osmond’s projections.

Ralph’s keen interest in Isabel affirms their common humanity. Unable to experience the world first-hand, Ralph experiences it through attunement with Isabel. Ralph is kept alive by “the fact that he had not yet seen enough of the person in whom he was most interested [Isabel]: he was not yet satisfied” (332). He wants to see what Isabel “would make of her husband—or what her husband would make of her” (332),

suggesting the power of subjects to shape each other, or, more ominously, the way in which the master objectifies the slave and molds him or her. Meanwhile, Ralph “sat all day in a chair—almost any chair would serve, and was so dependent on what you would do for him that, had not his talk been highly contemplative, you might have thought he was blind” (332). To what extent is he blind with regard to Isabel? Or does he see—at times—too well? He is “kept alive by suspense” (333). With the same emotion, “the excitement of wondering in what state she should find him,” Isabel goes to see Ralph in Rome (333). Their genuine interest in each other, and in each other’s lives contrasts with Osmond and Madame Merle’s interest in what people can do for them.

Protecting Pansy becomes Isabel’s *raison d’être*, perhaps more so after the loss of her own child. Her sense of Pansy’s “dependence was more than a pleasure; it operated as a definite reason when motives threatened to fail her. She had said to herself that we must take our duty where we find it, and that we must look for it as much as possible” (341). Isabel decides “not to neglect Pansy, not under any provocation to neglect her—this she had made an article of religion” (341). Pansy is “ingeniously passive and almost imaginatively docile; she was careful even to moderate the eagerness with which she assented to Isabel’s propositions and which might have implied that she could have thought otherwise” (341). Her passivity is so extreme that she desires not even to appear to have independent thought. At dances and parties with Isabel, Pansy “always, at a reasonable hour, lest Mrs. Osmond should be tired, was the first to propose departure. Isabel appreciated the sacrifice of the late dances, for she knew her little companion had a passionate pleasure in this exercise, taking her steps to the music like a conscientious

fairy” (342). As elsewhere in the novel, Pansy is described as a fairy, which is as cruel an irony as her name, because there is nothing of the wild or the natural about her. She is, rather, a “conscientious” fairy, which sounds like a contradiction in terms. In the carriage with Isabel, Pansy always “sat in a small fixed, appreciative posture, bending forward and faintly smiling, as if she had been taken to drive for the first time” (342). Pansy and Isabel often take walks together. Whereas Isabel “had a swift length of step, though not so swift a one as on her first coming to Europe,” Pansy “moved with a shorter undulation” (342). Yet again, James provides us with a small detail to illustrate the difference between two characters. Isabel’s long strides indicate her vitality, even if they are “not so swift” since meeting Osmond. In contrast, Pansy’s small steps accord with her timidity and fear of “stepping out” on her own.

Isabel feels anxiety about the freedom she has as a subject, which leads her to desire attunement, even if it takes the perverse form of submission. In an attempt to quiet this anxiety, she attempts to reduce and objectify herself in relation to Osmond. Feeling guilty for “deceiving” him before they were married, she reflects that “she had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was” (357). This desire to reduce the self parallels the masochistic impulse to annihilate the self described by Benjamin. Isabel “had no opinions—none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved for it” (359). During their courtship, Isabel “had imagined a world of things that had no substance” (357). She had had a “wondrous vision” of Osmond, “fed through charmed senses and oh such a stirred fancy!—she had not read him right” (357). Clearly, Isabel

fell in “ideal love” with Osmond, but, tragically, he does not represent the ideals she values. In her desire to attune herself, and in her idealistic optimism, Isabel projected her own lofty ideals onto Osmond. In the belief that she would be submitting to those ideals, Isabel submitted to Osmond, with tragic consequences as she discovers that Osmond has no ideals at all, only a selfish desire to *appear* to value the world of ideals and of art.

The first half of the novel aligns us with Ralph in his curiosity about what Isabel will do. Hence it is, amongst other things, an inquiry into what the good and free life is. Before their marriage, Isabel believes that Osmond possesses this knowledge; she is rapidly disillusioned. While Osmond “would never have recovered from the shame” of failing for one moment to lead the “aristocratic life” of “high prosperity and propriety,” Isabel believes that the aristocratic life is “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” (361). Osmond is only interested in appearances, seeing the “aristocratic life,” in contrast with Isabel, as “altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude” (361). The attitude of “conscious calculation” is always a dangerous one in the novel, and is associated primarily with Osmond and Madame Merle. Even Ralph, however, lapses into it when he makes Isabel rich, a “calculation” with calamitous results. Isabel resists this “rigid system” that encloses her in a “sense of darkness and suffocation,” at first “humorously, ironically, tenderly; then, as the situation grew more serious, eagerly, passionately, pleading” (361). She “pleaded the cause of freedom, of doing as they chose, of not caring for the aspect and denomination of their life” (361). Osmond responds to these entreaties with “scorn, and she could see he was ineffably

ashamed of her” (362). He, thus, comes to treat her with contempt, as he does the rest of the world.

Osmond believes that the existence of other subjects is a threat to his own subjectivity. He, thus, seeks to destroy the life of others, so that they become merely tangential to his ego demands. Isabel realizes that, in Osmond’s mind, her “real offence” is “her having a mind of her own at all” (362). Isabel is more vital than Osmond at first guessed, more resistant to his domination than most people. Even while she tries to please him, he hates her for the fact that she has an independent mental existence. He would like her mind “to be his—attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park [. . .] It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching” (362). Osmond wants Isabel to be what he has made Pansy: a “pretty piece of property”—of *his* property. He values her intelligence, but expects it “to operate altogether in his favour, and so far from desiring her mind to be a blank he had flattered himself that it would be richly receptive” (362). He expects her “to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences” (362). In other words, Osmond demands the impossible of Isabel: that she be both a separate person and a mirror for his thoughts. Her separate subjectivity is necessary for her to acknowledge his subjectivity, but is also a threat to the pre-eminence of his ego. He wants her to recognize his “superiority,” but also to be incapable of doing anything else.

The Countess Gemini is “often extremely bored—bored, in her own phrase, to extinction” (374). Her boredom contributes to her meddling in Isabel and Osmond’s marriage. Before Isabel’s marriage, the countess contemplated “putting her on her

guard,” but decides not to in the belief that she “would not be an easy victim” (376). Interestingly, Isabel told Caspar before her marriage that she would not be “an easy victim” (144). The implication remains that Isabel is a victim, and cannot escape victimhood. Although “not very exact at measurements, it seems to the Countess “that if Isabel should draw herself up she would be the taller spirit of the two. What she wanted to learn now was whether Isabel had drawn herself up; it would give her immense pleasure to see Osmond overtopped” (376). The Countess is motivated neither by altruism nor cruelty when she tells Isabel the truth about Osmond and Madame Merle. Rather, she wishes to use Isabel as an instrument to do what she herself cannot do: dominate Osmond. Unable to judge others except against herself, she fails to see that Isabel is as little interested in dominating as Warburton is in Pansy.

Unlike Osmond, Goodwood has a strong sense of who he is. Goodwood “presented rather a hard surface” (383). This “hard surface” is the integrity of a sense of self. When touched, “he rarely showed it [. . .] by the usual signs; he neither blushed, nor looked away, nor looked conscious. He only fixed his attention more directly; he seemed to consider with added firmness” (383). It is notable here that Caspar does not blush, because, according to Nathanson, blushing is a physiological indication of shame (55). Unlike Osmond, who diffuses shame with contempt, Caspar does not experience significant shame, as represented here by his lack of blushing. Caspar’s lack of shame is part of his certainty about who he is, and is thus part of the reason he does not, as Osmond does, threaten the subjectivity of others in an effort to have his confirmed.

Although Ralph's mistake in making Isabel rich has tragic consequences, he remains a highly sympathetic character, and symbolizes both Isabel's freedom and need for human connection. While Caspar also symbolizes these things, Ralph is more disinterested and has a much more nuanced relationship with Isabel. Interestingly, though, Osmond despises Ralph but not Caspar, despite the latter being in love with his wife. Isabel knows that Osmond objects to her visiting Ralph because he "wished her to have no freedom of mind, and he knew perfectly well that Ralph was an apostle of freedom" (386). It is because of this that Isabel finds it "a refreshment to go and see him" (386). She does this in spite of Osmond's wishes, but discreetly, as she has not yet "undertaken to act in direct opposition to his wishes; he was her appointed and inscribed master" (386). The idea of violating this contingency of marriage fills Isabel "with shame as well as dread" (386). Osmond has not as yet forbidden Isabel to visit Ralph, and she knows that "if he should put forth his authority, she would have to decide, and that wouldn't be easy" (386). This prospect "made her heart beat and her cheeks burn, as I say, in advance; there were moments when, in her wish to avoid an open rupture, she found herself wishing" that Ralph would leave Rome despite the risk to his health (386). Catching herself thinking of this, Isabel chastises herself as "a feeble spirit, a coward" (386). She does not love Ralph less than before, but almost anything seems "preferable to repudiating the most serious act—the single sacred act—of her life. That appeared to make the whole future hideous" (386). She knows that to "break with Osmond once would be to break for ever; any open acknowledgement of irreconcilable needs would be an admission that their whole attempt had proved a failure" (386). There would be "no

condonement, no compromise, no easy forgetfulness, no formal readjustment,” (386) because “there was no conceivable substitute” for the success of their marriage (387).

Caspar seems to grow physically as the novel progresses, perhaps because his erotic presence looms larger for Isabel in the wake of her disappointing marriage. When Caspar comes to Rome after Isabel’s marriage, he appears “bigger and more overtopping than of old, and in those days he certainly reached high enough” (409). People “whom he passed looked back after him; but he went straight forward, lifting above them a face like a February sky” (409). He had always, she reflects, presented himself “as a person destitute of the faculty of compromise, who would take what he had asked for or take nothing” (411). Contrary to what one might expect, Osmond enjoys Caspar’s company. Osmond “declared he liked to talk with the great Goodwood; it wasn’t easy at first, you had to climb up an interminable steep staircase, up to the top of the tower; but when you got there you had a big view and felt a little fresh breeze” (413). This contrasts with Madame Merle’s description of Osmond as an “abyss.” Symbolically, Caspar is ascent; Osmond, descent. Goodwood’s capacity for empathy comes through most strongly in his relationship with Ralph. Although Goodwood “was not supposed to be a man of imagination,” he “had enough to put himself in the place of a poor gentleman who lay dying at a Roman inn” (413). While Goodwood might not have the frivolous, superficially artistic imagination of Osmond or the energetic literary imagination of Henrietta, he has something far more important: the ability to imagine the suffering of others. Just as Caspar shows his love for Isabel with actions—by, for example, making repeated trips across the Atlantic—no easy feat at this time!—to see her, he shows his

sympathy for Ralph by visiting him when he is ill. Goodwood's sympathy for Ralph lies in the fact that he "couldn't bear to see a pleasant man, so pleasant for all his queerness, so beyond anything to be done. There was always something to be done, for Goodwood, and he did it in this case" by frequently visiting Ralph at his hotel (413). Unlike Madame Merle, who uses her knowledge of other people to manipulate them, Caspar uses his to act with genuine compassion. His propensity for action also contrasts with Osmond's indolence, which becomes a symbol of his selfishness. Caspar acts because he cares about the world and the people in it; Osmond is idle because he cares only what the world thinks of him, not for the individuals who people it.

Caspar symbolizes freedom, both negative and positive, while Osmond symbolizes restraint and bondage. Osmond seems at times to envy Caspar's freedom, although he clearly does not envy Caspar as much as he does Lord Warburton. When Caspar tells Osmond that he has no plans for the summer, Osmond replies, "Happy man! That's a little bleak, but it's free" (423). "Oh yes," Caspar replies, "I'm very free" (424). Here he suggests the downside to freedom: the lack of real connection with other people. Caspar comes to symbolize both the freedoms and challenges of Isabel's unmarried life. He is "the most discordant survival" of Isabel's single life, he is "the only one in fact with which a permanent pain was associated" (404). Their last interview before her marriage "was like a collision between vessels in broad daylight" (404). The meeting was horrible for Isabel because Caspar "represented the only serious harm that (to her belief) she had ever done in the world: he was the only person with an unsatisfied claim on her. She had made him unhappy, she couldn't help it; and his unhappiness was

a grim reality” (404). Although he “had not been violent,” there “had been a violence in the impression. There had been a violence at any rate in something somewhere” (404). Caspar’s manner reveals a “kind of bareness and bleakness” because it lacks “the social drapery commonly muffling, in an overcivilized age, the sharpness of human contacts” (405). Unlike Osmond, Caspar is not bound by social conventions. He is, thus, free from the stresses of “overcivilized” life, but also condemned to loneliness because of his detachment from the social world in general, and from Isabel in particular.

Both Isabel and Osmond have perverse ideas about marriage, and it is, in part, these ideas which trap Isabel. Her parents having passed away, Isabel has little guidance but her idealism as she begins married life. She tells Ralph that she will not accompany him on his journey because she is afraid, not of her husband, but of herself (419). She adds, “‘If I were afraid of my husband that would be simply my duty. That’s what women are expected to be’” (419). This alarming picture of marriage is not borne out by any relationships in the novel other than Isabel’s and Osmond’s. Isabel’s ideas and ideals about marriage are drawn entirely from art and imagination, which is not necessarily wrong, but lacks a grounding in reality. The similes Osmond uses to describe his relationship with Isabel reveal the sadomasochistic inequality of their connection. He tells Caspar that he and his wife are “‘as united, you know, as the candlestick and the snuffers’” (420). Isabel, one assumes, is the candle, Osmond the snuffer who extinguishes her. Isabel’s marriage to Osmond and her return to him (which the ending suggests), might then be connected with her fear of seeing and assertion, and her masochistic attraction to darkness. Isabel’s travels make her even more valuable to

Osmond. After them, she feels “older—ever so much, and as if she were ‘worth more’ for it, like some curious piece in an antiquary’s collection” (276). Little does she know that this is to be her destiny, because of her marriage to Osmond.

Like the sadomasochistic relationships Benjamin describes, Madame Merle’s and Osmond’s relationship ultimately leads to emotional deadness. Madame Merle tells Osmond that she would give her “‘right hand to be able to weep,’” and yet she cannot, because “‘it would make me feel as I felt before I knew you’” (434). He has, she says, “‘not only dried up my tears; you’ve dried up my soul’” (434). He refutes this by saying that the soul cannot be altered, but she denies this, and tells Osmond that he has destroyed hers (434). Their relationship, more than Osmond’s and Isabel’s, follows the pattern of master and slave. For all her plotting and self-possession, Madame Merle is more a victim than Isabel. By this I do not mean that she is more deserving of our sympathy (although surely she merits a little), but that she loses all sense of self, whereas Isabel, even in her darkest moments, retains a spark of vitality and independence. “‘Is this the way we’re to end?’” Osmond asks Madame Merle, with “‘studied coldness’” (434). While Osmond shows a “‘conscious indifference,’” Madame Merle’s “‘self-possession tended on the contrary to diminish, and she was nearer losing it than on any other occasion on which we have had the pleasure of meeting her’” (435). She accuses Osmond of enjoying his triumph too much, his triumph being that he has made his wife afraid of him (435). He replies that “‘Isabel’s not afraid of me, and it’s not what I wish’” (435). He asks Madame Merle, “‘To what do you want to provoke me when you say such things as that?’” (435), and she replies that she has “‘thought over all the harm’” he can do her, and

that Isabel “was afraid of me this morning, but in me it was really you she feared” (435), showing how Madame Merle has incorporated Osmond, and how this incorporation has leached out her own being. Osmond observes, “I’ve not made *you* afraid of me that I can see [. . .] how then should I have made her? You’re at least as brave” (435). Madame Merle tells Osmond that “There’s something after all that holds us together” (436). “Is it the idea of the harm I may do you?” he asks (436). She replies, “No; it’s the idea of the good I may do you. It’s that [. . .] that made me so jealous of Isabel. I want it to be *my* work” (436). Despite his cruelty to her, Madame Merle still wishes to serve Osmond. Like Hegel’s and Benjamin’s slave, working for a master and effacing herself for him allows her access—at least in her mind—to his power.

Ironically, Osmond preaches to Isabel about the need to take responsibility for one’s choices. He tells her that they must “accept the consequences of our actions” (446). Isabel does not need Osmond to tell her this: she is committed to embracing freedom, even when it includes unbearable and unforeseen consequences. Osmond tells her that what he values most “is the honour of the thing” (446). For him, this means the *appearance* of the thing, not its actual integrity. These words “were not a command, they constituted a kind of appeal; and, though she felt that any expression of respect on his part could only be a refinement of egotism, they represented something transcendent and absolute” (446). She decides that “if she must renounce,” she will let Osmond “know she was a victim rather than a dupe” (446). That is, she has acted ethically, not foolishly, and is thus the victim of the evil of others, rather than of any stupidity on her own part. At

the end of this conversation, Isabel's "faculties, her energy, her passion were all dispersed again; she felt as if a cold dark mist had suddenly encompassed her. Osmond possessed in a supreme degree the art of soliciting any weakness" (447). Isabel fears "the violence there would be in going [to England] when Osmond wished her to remain" (449).

Although there is no suggestion that Osmond is physically abusive, Isabel's fear of his "violence" underscores the intense damage his psychic violence does to her.

Isabel's choice of suitors is in some ways a choice between women, as well as between men. In choosing Osmond over Caspar, she is also choosing Madame Merle over Henrietta, who champions Caspar's suit. Isabel is unable to reconcile the mental and the erotically physical. She is attracted to both Henrietta and Madame Merle because of their mental and artistic accomplishments, and is, thus, unable to bear the revelation that they are also women with erotic and emotional needs. While Mrs. Touchett is in many ways, like Henrietta, a caricature, she is also, like Henrietta, a model of female assertion. That these two characters are used humourously suggests James's discomfort with the "new woman," but they remain sympathetic characters and Isabel's female allies. Seeing Mrs. Touchett again, "Isabel wondered, as she had wondered the first time, if her remarkable kinswoman resembled more a queen-regent or the matron of a gaol" (472). Deciding that Mrs. Touchett must resemble one or the other reveals Isabel's discomfort with strong, self-sufficient women. In marrying Osmond, Isabel is fleeing Mrs. Touchett and Henrietta, because they represent a freedom that frightens her.

The novel has a double climax: Caspar's kiss and Ralph's deathbed. Both force Isabel to see how her decisions have shaped her life. On his deathbed, Ralph tells Isabel

that “there’s nothing makes us feel so much alive as to see others die. That’s the sensation of life—the sense that we remain. I’ve had it—even I. But now I’m of no use but to give it to others” (477) and that life is better than death, ““for in life there’s love. Death is good—but there’s no love”” (477). This reminds Isabel that life is not about sensation but about love, which she forsook (in Caspar) in the misguided belief that there was more. Of her marriage to Osmond, Ralph observes that Isabel ““wanted to look at life”” for herself, but was not allowed, ““you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional”” (478). Isabel sobs, ““Oh yes, I’ve been punished”” (478). Most readers will agree that Isabel’s punishment far outweighs her “crime” in thinking she could choose freely. Yet the ferociousness of her punishment, of her misery, does, ironically, give weight to that freedom. Ralph does not deny Isabel’s freedom, but acknowledges it by listening to her tell her story. Ralph “listened to her a little” before continuing by asking Isabel where things stand between her and Osmond. She tells him, ““I don’t know—I can’t tell. I shall stay here as long as I may. I don’t want to think—I needn’t think. I don’t care for anything but you, and that’s enough for the present. It will last a little yet. Here on my knees with you dying in my arms, I’m happier than I have been for a long time”” (478). She and Ralph are happy in this moment of attunement. It is one of very few such moments for Isabel, and is possible with Ralph because his dying means that she does not perceive him as a sexual threat. She lives “from day to day, postponing, closing her eyes, trying not to think. She knew she must decide, but she decided nothing; her coming itself had not been a decision. On that occasion she had simply started” (481). Isabel is afraid of making decisions, of

exerting her subjectivity. Finally, she is able to become a subject with the support of Ralph. On Ralph's deathbed, they look "at the truth together" (478) and finally, in Ralph's words, "'needn't speak to understand each other'" (479). Isabel experiences true attunement with Ralph who, unlike Caspar, is not a sexual threat, and, thus, does not inspire her with terror.

The ending of *The Portrait of a Lady* is one of the most frustrating and unsatisfying in the history of the novel. It confounds the reader on not one, but two, fronts, the first having to do with the substance of Isabel's decision; the second with its psychology. That is to say, the first question is, does Isabel go back to Osmond? The second question presupposes a positive answer to the first, as it asks why Isabel would make such a choice. The second, however, is often asked prematurely, based on an unstudied assumption that Isabel does, indeed, go back to Osmond, as Henrietta informs Caspar that her friend has started for Rome. Whether this means she is returning to Osmond permanently, or perhaps only bidding Pansy farewell, remains unclear. I argue that it matters little to our understanding of Isabel's psychology which it is. In fact, the ambiguity itself is key to James's construction of his most famous heroine. It does not matter where Isabel is going "to," only what she is fleeing "from." Whether or not she is returning "to" Osmond is immaterial next to the fact that she is running "from" Caspar. Isabel fears Caspar's sexuality; the only thing she fears more is her own, which he alone seems capable of awakening. Osmond, in contrast is a "sterile dilettante" who values only the most superficial aspects of Isabel, and these very little compared to the money she brings him. Isabel fears the self-knowledge and acknowledgement of her physical

desires that Caspar evokes; Osmond, as odious as he is, is a “safe” alternative because he does not demand that Isabel have a self at all. Isabel tells Caspar that she is returning to Osmond, ““To get away from *you!*”” (488). At this moment she realizes that “she had never been loved before” (488). She experiences this as a sensuous—“hot wind of the desert”—but violent—“forced open her set teeth”—emotion. This vision of erotic love contrasts with the reality of Isabel’s marriage to Osmond, with its slow suffocation and his insistence on form over feeling. She fears that Caspar “would break out into greater violence,” but instead he is “perfectly quiet; he wished to prove he was sane, that he had reasoned it all out” (488). He tells her that it is ““too monstrous of you to think of sinking back into that misery, of going to open your mouth in that poisoned air”” (488). He tells her that he is hers ““for ever—for ever and ever. Here I stand; I’m as firm as a rock”” (488). They can, he tells her, ““do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything? What is it that holds us, what is it that has the smallest right to interfere in such a question as this?”” because ““the world’s all before us—and the world’s very big. I know something about that”” (489). In this scene, Isabel is torn between her desires for attunement and assertion. She longs to submit to the help Caspar offers, to “let him take her in his arms,” but feels compelled “to appear to resist,” to “to catch herself.” Her desire to submit is part of her fear of freedom, not simply a healthy desire for attunement. Isabel says at one point that her idea of happiness is a dark carriage, on a dark night, going over roads she cannot see. Caspar’s “white lightning” kiss is opposed to this, as it illuminates her rather than freeing her from the responsibility of making decisions. The diction leading up to this kiss supports Carren Kaston’s argument that Caspar is a sort of

“rapist-lover.” Isabel’s fear of sexuality leads her to confound violence and desire, pushing her away from Caspar. When he comes upon her in the grounds at Gardencourt, he stops her from rising with

a motion that looked like violence, but felt like—she knew not what, he grasped her by the wrist and made her sink again into the seat. She closed her eyes; he had not hurt her; it was only a touch, which she had obeyed. But there was something in his face that she wished not to see. That was the way he had looked at her the other day in the churchyard; only at present it was worse. He said nothing at first; she only felt him close to her—beside her on the bench and pressingly turned to her. It almost seemed to her that no one had ever been so close to her as that. All this, however, took but an instant, at the end of which she had disengaged her wrist, turning her eyes upon her visitant. ‘You’ve frightened me,’ she said. (486).

Isabel is afraid here of Caspar’s closeness, which compels her to obey him, to subjugate her will to his.

As is typical of romantic discourse, Caspar uses the language of possession to express his love for Isabel. Yet unlike Osmond, Caspar does not actually want to “own” Isabel like a commodity. Caspar begs her to “‘be mine as I’m yours!’” as he gives up “argument, and his voice seemed to come, harsh and terrible, through a confusion of vaguer sounds” (489). The depth of Caspar’s passion frightens Isabel, who replies, “‘I beseech you to go away!’” (489), to which he answers, “‘Ah, don’t say that. Don’t kill me!’” (489). He is, obviously, speaking figuratively, but the metaphor is apt, because, to

use Bataille's idea, Caspar longs to overcome the "gulf of death" (Bataille 12) by connecting with Isabel. Repeatedly described as hard and firm, Caspar is locked within himself, which intensifies his need for Isabel. To be with Caspar is impossible for Isabel because of her inability to deal with his sexuality. Osmond may dominate Isabel externally, but Caspar inspires Isabel with the wish to submit and she fears she would lose herself in submission to him, which, unlike submission to Osmond would be complete. In a rare erotically charged scene, Isabel

felt his [Caspar's] arms about her and his lips on her own lips. His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So had she heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. But when darkness returned she was free. (489)

Their kiss, filtered through Isabel's consciousness, is described in terms of possession and freedom—it is an "act of possession" after which Isabel is "free." The erotic "white lightning" is accompanied by the sense of drowning—being "wrecked and under water," a claustrophobic image as well as a morbid one. The white lightning illuminates something for Isabel: her deep desire for darkness. After the kiss, Isabel "moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing)" (489). When she comes to the door, "she put her hand on the latch. She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path" (490). The encounter with Caspar restores Isabel's moral and

subjective integrity, but only because it reaffirms her fear of real attunement. Isabel is able to empathize deeply, as she does with Pansy, but not to attune erotically, because this threatens the boundaries of the self, boundaries she assiduously maintains.

The Portrait of a Lady is, psychologically and philosophically, a novel about our conflicted relationship with freedom. Isabel's freedom remains theoretical until it is too late which, the novel suggests, is a condition for the existence of that freedom. Furthermore, freedom can never be experienced alone or in a void, but must be negotiated in the interpersonal—ideally the intersubjective—world. Both Isabel and Ralph are apostles of freedom, but their path is obstructed by Osmond and Madame Merle, who cannot see that the freedom of the other is a condition for one's own freedom. Like its ending, the novel's message is bittersweet: true freedom is possible, but is not necessarily desirable.

4. To Annex and Possess: *The Wings of the Dove*

Unlike *The Portrait of a Lady*, which makes Isabel its centre of interest, *The Wings of the Dove* gives as much, if not more, space to its plotting couple as to its American innocent. More so than in previous novels, James is interested here in the interaction of multiple consciousnesses, rather than the development of a single one. In the novel's prefaces, he writes of how the novel involves "a fusion of consciousness" (11). The focus is, thus, less on the double-edged sword that is moral autonomy, and more on the collision of different people's claims to freedom and desires for recognition. Although their plot is villainous, Kate and Densher never completely lose our sympathy, because we observe their struggles for recognition and assertion, both with each other and within the wider context of the novel's society. Likewise, Milly is torn between her desire to live, or to assert herself, and her desire to be loved, or recognized. Her tragedy and her nobility lie in her realization that she can only satisfy these desires simultaneously in death. This is because the intersubjective experience is denied her, a result of being drawn into Kate's and Densher's drama of domination. Kate and Densher ensnare Milly into a triangle that ultimately grows out of their control and severs their connection with each other.

The scant details we are given about Kate's relationship with her father, Lionel Croy, ensure our sympathy for her by showing us the obstacles to her development. As James writes in his preface, the image of Kate's

so compromised and compromising father was all effectively to have pervaded her life, was in a certain particular way to have tampered with her spring; by

which I mean that the shame and the irritation and the depression, the general poisonous influence of him, were to have been *shown*, with a truth beyond the compass even of one's most emphasised 'word of honour' for it, to do these things. (10)

Although his role is slight, the novel does begin with Lionel Croy, and his meeting with Kate. During this meeting, he “judged meanwhile her own appearance, as she knew she could always trust him to do; recognising, estimating, sometimes disapproving, what she wore, showing her the interest he continued to take in her” (24). Here, we see Kate gaining recognition from her father, but through evaluation and judgment. This uneasy relationship sets the stage for submission-domination in her erotic relationships, as becomes clear in her involvement with Densher. With her father, Kate has become accustomed to receiving recognition based on external factors, such as her appearance, rather than on an acknowledgement that she has an inner life. Lionel’s recognition of his daughter is described in negative terms. Kate “virtually knew herself the creature in the world to whom he was least indifferent” (24-25). The implication of the negative diction here is that Lionel is indifferent to Kate as well, even if he is more indifferent to everyone else. Thus, we learn that Kate receives little or no recognition from her father, which may explain her struggles for recognition and assertion with Densher and others. When we first meet Kate, we see her seeing herself in her father’s eyes. She knows that “it gave him pleasure that she was handsome, that she was in her way a tangible value” (25). Here, Kate’s appearance, her superficial existence, becomes a means of objectifying her. Because she is beautiful, Kate is “a tangible value,” in that she may be “exchanged” for

money through marriage. Kate sees herself here as her father sees her: as an object whose value depends on the evaluative gaze of the other. Aunt Maud demands of Kate that her father “shall simply cease to exist” for her (29). Thus ends Kate’s relationship with her father, thrusting her into a more complex web of relationships, in which she works out some of the problems from her relationship with him.

Kate’s relationship with her sister, Marian, also lays the groundwork for her initiation into Aunt Maud’s world of domination and submission. Marian both dominates and instrumentalizes Kate, just as Kate later does Densher and Milly. Kate senses that Marian “would make her, Kate, do things” and acknowledges “her [Kate’s] own state of abasement as the second-born” (39). From birth, then, Kate has had to struggle to be recognized, to climb out of the submissive position. She knows that for Marian she exists only as an object, her subjectivity denied by Marian’s seeing her life as “mere inexhaustible sisterhood” (39). Part of Kate’s inability to recognize others—Milly in particular—as subjects is that she is unaccustomed to being treated or even recognized as one herself. Marian instrumentalizes Kate by reducing her to a means by which to obtain money from Maud Lowder. Kate is keenly aware of this, as she watches her sister “neglect nothing that would make for her submission to their aunt” (39). Marian’s plan is that “Kate was to burn her ships, in short, so that Marian should profit” (39). Marian is no better off than Kate, though, not only because she is miserably poor—the sisters share “an almost equal fellowship in abjection” (40)—but because her domination of Kate entraps her within the system of objects. Like Hegel’s master, she is dependent on her slave for a recognition that that slave cannot provide.

Together, Marian and Lionel Croy lay the groundwork for Kate's entrapment. By objectifying her, they ascribe more value to their own comfort and success than to hers. In encouraging her to "work" Maud Lowder, they also instrumentalize her. Like Densher, neither of them are able to succeed through conventional means. Thus, they use the only asset they have: Kate's desirable body. Kate resists prostituting herself through Aunt Maud, but her father will not offer her an alternative. He, Kate tells Densher, "won't help me, won't save me, won't hold out a finger to me" (59). Kate wants to escape from Maud by living with her father and sharing his reduced state in life, but, she explains to Densher, he "insists that it's through her [Maud] and through her only that I may help him; just as Marian insists that it's through her, and through her only, that I can help *her*" (59). Kate's desire to help her family is genuine, but Marian and her father do not allow her to help them as a subject. Kate is able to see that her position as a young, attractive and unmarried woman is "a value, a great value, for them both" (60). In fact, she realizes, it is "*the* value—the only one they have" (60). Kate is, thus, given all the burden of providing for her family, with none of the freedom to choose her means of doing this. As a woman, the only "respectable" avenue to wealth open to her is marriage.

Kate is one of James's most multifaceted characters. Although her actions are cold and calculating, she is, like Milly, a victim. In his essay on the occult aspects of James's works, Frye argues that the "sinister force" that grips Densher cannot be identified with Kate Croy, because, although "she is more resolute and ruthless than he is," she is "quite as trapped in what seems to her an inescapable situation" (122). Thus Frye, like many other critics, resists a simple polarization of Milly as tragic victim and

Kate as duplicitous villain. James's characteristic use of ambiguity here serves both a moral and a literary purpose. It expands our moral sympathy by showing us Kate's motivations, while concurrently expanding literary conventions that demand a "villain" and a "hero." With his keen sensibility, James rejects such simplistic formulae, because they do not take into account the complexity of human psychology. Moreover, in addition to feeling sympathy for Kate, many readers also feel attracted to her, as Milly is at their first meeting. This is due not only to Kate's beauty, but to her vivacity and imagination. Unlike, say, Henrietta Stackpole, Kate is able to be lively without being vulgar. She appreciates refinements "of consciousness, of sensation, of appreciation" (75). One suspects that conversation with Kate would be much more lively than with Milly. She is "intelligent"; her descriptions have a "free and humorous colour" (56). Densher realizes that Kate "had more life than he to react from" (56). She is, thus, not only more cunning, but also more charming, than he.

James hints that Kate's predicament is not nearly as unique as one might hope. Her predicament is common enough for her time and place: she is torn between love and necessity, forced to marry for one or the other. The world of "necessity" is the world of objects, while the world of love, which Kate ultimately abandons, is the world of intersubjectivity. When she begins her relationship with Densher, Kate is "just the contemporary London female, highly modern, inevitably battered, honourably free" (51). Here, James points to the hardships of freedom, especially for women. One might be "honourably free," but unable to escape the "battered" condition of poverty and dependence on others. As "a young person who wasn't really young, who didn't pretend

to be a sheltered flower” (51), Kate is free from the objectifying stance of the falsely modest woman. Yet, this freedom is severely limited. While Kate is free to see Densher and to fall in love with him, she is essentially prevented from marrying him. Thus, her freedom is just enough to bring her pain. It is a freedom calculatingly doled out by Aunt Maud. Kate suspects that her aunt’s “diplomacy” in accepting Densher is strategic: “It was as if Densher were accepted partly under the dread that if he hadn’t been she would act in resentment” (52). As the queen of the object world, Maud metes out what passes as “freedom” to her niece and others. She, thus, represents the normative views of society as a whole, which allow only the appearance of freedom, at least when it comes to those unable to purchase it.

Densher is, essentially, Kate’s accomplice, as well as her lover. This represents a shift for James, as in previous works, most notably *The Portrait of a Lady*, the primary antagonist is male (i.e. Osmond or Morris Townsend), while the accomplice is female (like Mrs. Penniman or Madame Merle). Densher is, as critics including Julie Olin-Ammentorp (2003), author of “‘A Circle of Petticoats’: The Feminization of Merton Densher,” have argued, feminized. Olin-Ammentorp contrasts Densher with Lord Mark and Sir Luke Strett, in comparison to whom, she writes, “Merton Densher is only marginally masculine” (537). Densher has “a sense, or at least an appearance, of leisure,” (46) that separates him from other men of his social class, putting him in a more stereotypically feminine position. His inability to make enough money to support a wife also excludes him from one of the important roles of the male in Victorian society, that of the provider. Ultimately, Densher is put into a degrading feminine role: that of the

prostitute. By seeking a fortune by making Milly fall in love with him, rather than through labour or business, he denies his ability, as a male, to succeed in the world of work. Furthermore, he prostitutes himself in acquiescence to Kate's plot, rather than independently. James's decision to cast Kate, rather than Densher, as the lead antagonist reveals his growing willingness to bend gender norms—if only in his writing. This also fits into the more general experimental nature of the later novels. Densher's awareness of his own deficiencies leads him to seek out what he lacks in Kate:

Having so often concluded on the fact of his weakness, as he called it, for life--his strength merely for thought--life, he logically opined, was what he must somehow arrange to annex and possess. This was so much a necessity that thought by itself only went on in the void; it was from the immediate air of life that it must draw its breath. So the young man, ingenious but large, critical but ardent too, made out both his case and Kate Croy's. (48)

That Densher sees himself as having strength only for thought, and not for life, places him in the passive feminine position. His desire to “annex and possess” (48) these qualities in someone else suggests that his love for Kate is, like Isabel's attraction to Osmond, ideal. This cements his passive feminine position within the relationship. The gender polarity between Kate and Densher may be reversed, but it is, as Benjamin would argue, no less threatening to the full subjectivity of them both.

If Densher is feminized, it should come as no surprise that Kate is masculinized. At one point she is described as “violent and almost unfeminine” (56), a turn of phrase that subtly suggests that violence is incompatible with femininity. Kate's masculinity also

accentuates the homoerotic, triangular desire that connects her with Milly through Densher. Kate tells Densher that, in his place, she could be in love with Milly (405). Likewise, Milly is attracted to Kate. Before being introduced to Kate, Milly describes her to herself as “the handsome girl” (99). Like Densher, Milly falls under Kate’s spell. Even while in conversation with Susan Stringham, “her eyes were mainly engaged with Kate Croy” (99). Milly is fascinated by Kate’s difference from her. She wonders why “she was so different from the handsome girl--which she didn't know, being merely able to feel it; or at any rate might learn [. . .] why the handsome girl was so different from her” (102). Their attraction is, unlike Isabel’s fascination with Madame Merle, based on object, rather than identificatory, love. Densher becomes a conduit between Kate and Milly, which places him in the position ascribed to the woman in the traditional erotic triangle. Kate’s masculinization affects her relationship with Densher, as well as with Milly. Kate tends to objectify Densher as though it were proof of her love, a common trope in love poetry by male poets. Looking at Densher, Kate muses that “his long looks were the thing in the world she could never have enough of. What she felt was that, whatever might happen, she must keep them, must make them most completely her possession” (54). Kate’s view of Densher, reduced here to his “long looks,” feminizes him in relation to her traditionally masculine stance. This foreshadows Densher’s feminine role in the plot to ensnare Milly.

Part of the tragedy of *The Wings of the Dove* is that, in a vacuum, Kate’s and Densher’s relationship would be close to Benjamin’s intersubjective ideal. When they first met, “Densher's perception went out to meet the young woman's and quite kept pace

with her own recognition” (48). As James himself writes in the “Preface to the New York Edition,” Kate and Densher are “a pair of natures well-nigh consumed by a sense of their intimate affinity and congruity, the reciprocity of their desires [. . .] with qualities of intelligence and character” (14). Given the social forces at work against them—represented by Maud Lowder—Kate and Densher’s relationship becomes almost obsessive. They are “passionately impatient of barriers and delays,” wholly committed to “the enrichment of their relation, the extension of their prospect and the support of their ‘game’” (14). In the social context of a stratified class system, their passion becomes a liability. They have little in common, but, as the narrator observes, “it is nothing new indeed that generous young persons often admire most what nature hasn't given them” (48). Densher “had repeatedly said to himself--and from far back--that he should be a fool not to marry a woman whose value would be in her differences; and Kate Croy, though without having quite so philosophised, had quickly recognised in the young man a precious unlikeness” (48). Their mutual attraction is, thus, object, rather than identificatory, love. The twist, though, is that the gender polarity is in many ways reversed: Kate tends to dominate Densher, who generally submits to her. As Benjamin explains, while domination is not intrinsically male or masculine, and submission not naturally female or feminine, the structures of the family and of child-rearing have developed in such a way as to promote male dominance and female submission. So, James’s portrayal of Kate and Densher de-naturalizes gender stereotypes while exploring the ways in which erotic love can morph into domination and submission.

That Kate and Densher's relationship begins as an intersubjective one, in which both take pleasure in the subjectivity of the other and their ability to share like states of consciousness, is what makes its later breakdown into domination and submission so interesting. Rather than falling into static roles, in which one person always dominates and the other always submits, Kate and Densher constantly struggle to find their place in the sadomasochistic duality. An excerpt from James's preface reads,

It is into the young woman's 'ken' that Merton Densher is represented as swimming; but her mind is not here, rigorously, the one reflector. There are occasions when it plays this part, just as there are others when his plays it, and an intelligible plan consists naturally not a little in fixing such occasions and making them, on one side and the other, sufficient to themselves. (11)

Simply reversing their roles in the dual structure of master and slave is not enough, as Kate and Densher remain locked into a structure that only allows for one subject to exist at a time. Benjamin writes,

as long as the shape of the whole is not informed by mutuality, this longing [for wholeness] only leads to an unequal complementarity in which one person plays master, the other slave. And even when men and women reverse their roles, as they often do, the sense of 'playing the other' is never lost. (82)

In the plot of the novel itself, this oscillation between submission and domination is concretized when Densher demands that Kate sleep with him in return for his continued participation in the plot to entrap Milly. It is at this point that Densher's and Kate's relationship becomes irrevocably based on domination and submission, rather than

intersubjectivity. By demanding that Kate meet him in the terms of the marketplace—in an exchange—Densher severs the, albeit already fraying, cord that drew them together as co-conspirators against Milly.

Kate's and Densher's scheme mars their relationship even before Milly's final bequest, which leads them to realize that they shall never be "as they were." The plot, hatched by Kate, uses Densher. Thus, Kate comes to instrumentalize Densher, who was once, more or less, her equal. She tells him, "You're what I have of most precious, and you're therefore what I use most" (217). This logic casts Kate as subject, Milly as object, and Densher as instrument. Densher retaliates against this use of him by objectifying Kate sexually when he demands that she sleep with him in exchange for his courtship of Milly. By objectifying Milly, they have created a territory in which people have value as objects, whether sexual, financial, or instrumental. They cannot objectify Milly without dragging themselves and each other onto this terrain. Densher begins to objectify himself as his guilt over his and Kate's manipulation of Milly. He does this, as Isabel Archer flees freedom, to abnegate his sense of responsibility and guilt. When he says to Kate, "I'm in your power" (405), he demeans himself even further by refusing to acknowledge his role and volition in the plot against Milly. This also poisons his relationship with Kate, as he begins to split her and Milly into *femme fatale* figure and innocent dove. His growing inability, or unwillingness, to see either himself, Milly, or Kate as complex subjects makes it impossible for he and Kate to ever be "as they were."

By villifying Kate and idealizing Milly, Densher participates in what seems to be the project of many of the characters in the novel: the objectification of Milly through

hyperbole and symbolism. Although the most important mask Milly assumes is that of the “dove,” she also adopts the persona of the princess and, later, of the priestess. To a certain extent, Milly participates in her own objectification. It is Kate who first tells Milly she is a dove (173), an appellation that leads to Milly’s view of herself as a princess. She accepts the label “dove” as though it is “an *accolade*; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed” (173). In fact, Milly is, in terms of social and economic status, the American equivalent of a “princess.” It is troubling, though, that she links being a “dove,” with the aesthetic and moral quality this invokes, with her status as a wealthy aristocrat “with whom forms were to be observed” (173)—who merits a certain kind of elevated treatment and attention. When Kate calls her a “dove,” Milly experiences it

like an inspiration: she found herself accepting as the right one [. . .] the name so given to her. She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. (173)

Milly adopts the view of herself as a “dove” to guide her behaviour, and, thus, reifies the myths that others construct about and around her. By adopting the persona of the dove, Milly becomes both symbolically larger and psychologically smaller. Her identity, unlike Kate’s uncertain attempts to define herself in relation to Densher, her father, and Aunt Maud, amongst others, becomes a symbol. She consciously embodies an aesthetic and moral standard, thus objectifying herself, but not in the material, financial terms by

which others often objectify her. Rather than entering the world of subjects, Milly asserts herself by crafting the kind of object as which she wishes to be seen.

If Milly is a “dove” and Kate, as her last name suggests, a “crow” (reminiscent of Madame Merle, whose last name means “blackbird” in French. Interestingly, “un beau merle” is used ironically to refer to “a nasty type”), then Maud Lowder is a bird of prey. Densher accuses Kate of speaking about her aunt “as if she were a vulture,” (61) to which Kate retorts, “Call it an eagle—with a gilded beak as well, and with wings for great flights” (61). In this brief play of similes, Densher and Kate introduce the negative and the positive aspects of domination, and how it can either deform one into a “vulture” or elevate one to the status of an eagle. Predatory imagery continues to adhere to Maud. Going to meet her for the first time, Densher feels as though “he was in the cage of the lioness without his whip” (63). He imagines what Maud must be thinking: “I can bite your head off any day, any day I really open my mouth; and I’m dealing with you now, see--and successfully judge--without opening it” (67). Densher’s and Kate’s use of animal imagery such as this to describe Maud does more than express their domination by her: it also helps them to retain egoistic integrity by de-humanizing her, thus distancing themselves from her and all that she represents. Densher perceives that Maud, like Madame Merle, has an arsenal of social weaponry at her disposal. Yet, at their first meeting, she does not touch her “arms of aggression, her weapons of defence” (64). As the representative of the society that forbids Kate’s marriage to Densher on financial grounds, Maud Lowder inspires dread and despair in both Kate and Densher, ultimately leading them to plot to use Milly.

Although Maud is described as a predator and figure of dread, she is also a coldly calculating woman who manages the marriage market to the advantage of herself and her family. Kate calls her the “Britannia of the Market Place” (37). This is germane to my discussion because Kate’s and Densher’s use of Milly can be seen as the logical extension of a diseased institution: the marriage market. Maud’s view is representative of her society. That is, the belief that one should marry for money and prestige, which entails valuing objects over people, rather than for love, which affirms the subjectivity of self and other simultaneously. Although Maud seems to reign supreme over the marketplace of society, she is objectified by the very system she seeks to control. When, in the novel’s first scene, Lionel Croy tells Kate that she must “work” Aunt Maud, he denies Maud’s subjectivity by making her an exploitable resource. Maud herself uses economic language to describe her plans for Kate. She tells Densher, of Kate’s “value;”: “‘I’ve watched it long; I’ve been saving it up and letting it, as you say of investments, appreciate; and you may judge whether, now it has begun to pay so, I’m likely to consent to treat for it with any but a high bidder’” (65). At one of Maud’s parties, Merton realizes that Kate now lives according to the “‘value’ Mrs. Lowder had attached to her. High and fixed, this estimate ruled on each occasion at Lancaster Gate the social scene” (206). We might argue that Aunt Maud is, in Frye’s words, the “sinister force” that grips Densher, rather than Kate Croy, by dragging them both into a world in which commodities usurp subjectivity. Hence, Kate’s and Densher’s sacrifice of Milly for her money is, while uniquely horrible, a symptom of the immorality and inhumanity in the very fabric of social life.

Densher and Kate are not the only ones Maud indirectly brings into the arena of fierce social and economic competition. She also, likely unwittingly, kindles Susan Stringham's sense of shame and desire to prove herself worthy. In the past, Maud "patronisingly pitied" Susan, (93). Susan's desire to prove herself to Maud ends with her treating Milly as a thing to be displayed, rather than as another human being. When we meet Susan, though, she is looking forward to trumping Maud with "Milly Theale, who constituted the trophy producible by poor Susan" (98). Lord Mark later echoes this sentiment. When Milly tells him that Susan has nothing to give Maud, he replies, "'Hasn't she got you?'" (103). Lord Mark, who is finely attuned to the thoughts and actions of others, realizes that Milly is seen by most people as a prize, rather than as a thinking subject. In her innocence, Milly does not yet see this herself, and so responds to Lord Mark's comment as a joke. Although Susan's use of Milly as a trophy is obviously not as pernicious as the way in which Densher and Kate use her, it re-inforces Milly's position as object within the narrative and in the minds of other characters. Even Susan, who is Milly's closest companion, commodifies her. As a result, though, Susan herself is instrumentalized by those who wish to gain access to Milly. She realizes this, when she observes that, to Maud, "that her own light was too abjectly borrowed and that it was as a link alone" to Milly that Maud deigns to spend time with her (163). Maud, the champion of a materialistic society, values people only as objects, and Susan, eager for any recognition from Maud, submits to this.

Lord Mark is one of Aunt Maud's "prize" guests, because of what is called his "genius" and, of course, also because of his title. He is thus, like everyone else, a

commodity for Maud. Densher, too, later objectifies Lord Mark in an effort to assert and re-affirm his own subjectivity. Lord Mark is clearly less masculine than Sir Luke, but his gender identity is less clear in comparison to Densher's unstable position on the gender spectrum. While, unlike Sir Luke, Lord Mark lacks an occupation, he, unlike Densher, is accepted by Aunt Maud as a viable suitor for Kate. Densher relishes seeing Lord Mark because, as Marcia Ian (1984) writes in "The Elaboration of Privacy in *The Wings of the Dove*," "permits Densher again to become again the subject, not the object, of perception, the seer, not the seen" (115). Densher later, though, will reconstruct Lord Mark's subjectivity in order to ease his own guilt. Just as he casts Kate as guilty for their plot to ensnare Milly, he curses Lord Mark for telling Milly of his involvement with Kate. Densher tells Milly that Lord Mark "told her, the scoundrel, that you and I are secretly engaged" (361). By calling Lord Mark a "scoundrel" for telling Milly the truth, Densher implies that the telling, rather than his and Kate's actions, are the sin. Although Densher at times seeks agency, at others he hides behind objectification by projecting his own agency onto others, consequently casting himself as an instrument of their actions, rather than himself an actor.

If Lord Mark is relatively passive, Sir Luke Strett makes up for it in his exercise of benevolent power. As Olin-Ammentorp argues, Sir Luke "defines powerful masculinity in the novel" (537). Like Caspar Goodwood, Sir Luke has a "strong face and type" (304). Sir Luke's subjectivity is protected both because of his definite masculinity and his professional success. He is "the greatest of medical lights [. . .] the right, the special man" (142), "the great doctor" (379). Sir Luke "greatness" cannot be explained

with reference to his professional success alone. It seems more intrinsic and general, as vague but as definitely real as Milly's illness. His prescriptions are not those of a doctor, but of a philosopher. He tells Milly that the way to fight her illness is to "accept any form in which happiness may come" (151). Although Sir Luke is, like Maud, a locus of power in the novel he, unlike her, is interested in people *as* subjects. His interest in Milly is not that of a doctor who reduces his patient to a body, but that of a doctor who treats the whole patient, body, mind, and soul, and, consequently, values that patient as a subject rather than as an object. By the end of the novel, Sir Luke is attributed almost fantastic powers over life and death. Densher tells Kate, "It was Sir Luke Strett who brought her [Milly] back. His visit, his presence there did it" (367). His subjectivity is secure enough that he does not threaten that of others. Rather, he encourages it. He tells Milly, for example, that she shall have a "splendid life" and that "the world" is before her (259). She, along with most of the other main powers, grants Sir Luke the power of recognition. This does not pave the way for him to dominate them, however, because he does not claim to be the only one capable of granting the desired recognition.

Densher both admires and fears Sir Luke, the most masculine figure in the novel. As he feminizes himself by submitting to Kate and essentially prostituting himself to Milly, Densher seeks recognition of his masculinity by Sir Luke. Desiring Sir Luke's approbation, he also fears his judgment. The possibility of being thought contemptible by Sir Luke awakens Densher's sense of shame. He wonders whether,

It mightn't be best just to consent, luxuriously, to *be* the ass the whole thing involved. Trying not to be and yet keeping in it was of the two things the more

asinine. He was glad there was no male witness; it was a circle of petticoats; he shouldn't have liked a man to see him. He only had for a moment a sharp thought of Sir Luke Strett. (302)

Although Densher does not mind women knowing that he objectifies himself, he *does* mind Sir Luke's knowing. Later, feeling trapped, Densher is relieved by Sir Luke's arrival. Densher reflects that "it was just by being a man of the world and knowing life, by feeling the real, that Sir Luke did him good. There had been in all the case too many women. A man's sense of it, another man's changed the air" (353). This subtly misogynistic idea suggests not only Densher's awareness of Sir Luke's masculinity, but also his own femininity, in that he groups himself rather than the women, but then seems to desire to align himself with Sir Luke. Densher's interest in Sir Luke is, I argue, not only a compensation for his own feelings of emasculation, but homoerotic desire. His sustained interest in Sir Luke suggests this, particularly when we see him contemplating, for example, "the breadth of Sir Luke's shoulders" (350). He finds support in "Sir Luke's personal presence" (354). To Kate, Densher calls Sir Luke "magnificent" (360). Densher's desire for Sir Luke takes the socially acceptable form of admiration, which becomes submission to (in Densher's view) Sir Luke's superior masculinity.

The Wings of the Dove, like *Washington Square*, is fundamentally an existential novel. At its core, *Wings* is about life and death, asking such existential questions as what it means to have lived and how one may give one's death, as well as one's life, meaning. As James writes in his "Preface to the New York Edition" (1909), he conceived of the novel as being "the picture of the struggle involved [in Milly's quest to

live], the adventure brought about, the gain recorded or the loss incurred, the precious experience somehow compassed” (3). This being James, the “struggle” is primarily psychological; the “adventure,” philosophical. The focal struggle in the novel is Milly’s struggle to make meaning of her life—a struggle Densher’s and Kate’s objectification of her appears to thwart. Ironically, it is against them that Milly is able to give meaning to her life—or rather to her death. James’s project is complicated, as he notes in the preface, that while the novel’s central figure is suffering from a terminal illness,

the poet essentially *can’t* be concerned with the act of dying. Let him deal with the sickest of the sick, it is still by the act of living that they appeal to him, and appeal the more as the conditions plot against them and prescribe the battle. The process of life gives way fighting, and often may so shine out on the lost ground as in no other connexion. (4)

Early on, Milly realizes, prophetically, that her death will have more meaning than her life. She predicts: “Since I’ve lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die, no doubt, as if I were alive—which will happen to be as you want me’ [. . .] ‘you’ll never really know where I am. Except indeed when I’m gone; and then you’ll only know where I’m not’” (128-29). Although James had little use for religious themes or symbols in his novels, he comes very close to employing the basic Christian *mythos* in *The Wings of the Dove*. Not only is the dove a Christian symbol but, like Christ, Milly chooses a death that she knows will benefit those who have betrayed her. As James writes in his preface, the novel’s

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, as so to achieve, however briefly, and brokenly, the sense of having lived. (3)

The importance of "the sense of having lived" is so striking here, and demands that the reader considers to what extent Milly achieves this. James's choice of tense here—"having lived"—suggests that Milly's bequest to Densher, coming after her death, as it were, could create this sense of having lived—either in a positive way as a great act of self-sacrifice and forgiveness, or in a more tragic way, in that, for Kate and Densher (at least at first), the only importance of her "having lived" was that she might provide them with this money on her death. The terrible irony buried in the past perfect "having lived" is that Milly's life does come to matter only after her death. Milly's death is framed as an act of her will, but whether it is the loss or assertion of her will is debatable. We learn that Milly has decided to die as follows: "She has turned her face to the wall" (334). While this might be read as an act of surrender, it is important to note that Milly makes a choice here—she is the subject of the sentence, her face is not turned to the wall by forces. Milly chooses to turn away from life, making death an act that expresses her subjectivity. As Gary Kuchar (2003) writes in "Henry James and the Phenomenal Reader: Consciousness and the Variation of Style in *The Wings of the Dove*," Milly "comes to possess her own awareness of death as an enabling existential limit rather than

a vague, spectral idea of termination” (574). Milly defeats Kate and Densher’s plot, which involves valuing her death higher than her life, by choosing to do so herself.

Milly’s death is the termination of several relationships; not only her own relationships with others, but also, it is suggested, Kate’s and Densher’s relationship with each other. When Milly dies, Densher’s ability to love dies with her. As Kate says to him, Milly’s “memory’s your love. You *want* no other” (407). He does not deny this, and Kate is left with the knowledge that Densher is no longer in love with her, even though he agrees to ““marry you, mind you, in an hour”” (407). Densher tells Kate that he will marry her ““as we were”” (407), but she replies, shaking her head, ““We shall never be again as we were!”” (407). It is, thus, unclear whether or not Milly and Densher do marry, but this detail is not as important as their realization that both they and their relationship have suffered a kind of symbolic death. Death, as Benjamin points out is the logical end, whether literally or metaphorically, of the sadomasochistic relationship. She writes, “Metaphorically, then, and sometimes literally, the sadomasochistic relationship tends toward death, or at any rate, toward deadness, numbness, the exhaustion of sensation” (65). Milly’s death means the end of Kate’s and Densher’s relationship not only because of their realization of her goodness and the evil they have done, but because her death ends the triadic sadomasochistic relationship in which they have become completely invested. As Benjamin argues, and James shows, relationships based on domination and submission are necessarily finite, because they inevitably reach a point of death, whether actual (like Milly’s) or psychological (like Kate’s and Densher’s).

The society created and depicted in *The Wings of the Dove* is a perverse one, in which the only way to act freely is to die, because this punishes those who seek to live beyond its dictates. Ultimately, *The Wings of the Dove* is about two elemental conflicts: innocence against experience, and the individual against society. Milly's innocence clearly contrasts with Kate's and Densher's "experience," and eventually triumphs over them, by refusing to abdicate her altruism. The other basic conflict is that between the individual, Milly, and society, in this case represented chiefly by Densher and Kate. The triangle is important here because it increases Milly's isolation. She finds herself victim of her friend and love-interest, betrayed by both Eros and Ananke. In realizing that Densher and Kate have a relationship unbeknownst to her, Milly is also realizing that there is a world outside of that which she can imagine—a world of experience, yes, but also a world of *others*, a world with laws and designs alien from her beliefs and desires.

5. A Cluster of Possessions: *The Golden Bowl*

As the title suggests, *The Golden Bowl* is a novel of objects. Even the characters are objectified, although they struggle to exist as subjects in a world of objects. While Maggie and her father Adam Verver are collectors of art, they are also “collectors” of people. Just as their wealth allows them to acquire works of art, so too it allows them to “acquire,” through marriage, the handsome Prince Amerigo and beautiful Charlotte Stant. In some ways, though, the Prince and Charlotte objectify the Ververs, by instrumentalizing them as means to an end: their wealth. None of the four are particularly comfortable with being objectified, and they are, thus, caught up in a perpetual struggle in which they see subjectivity, which they are (largely) unable to see in others. The other roadblock they face in becoming subjects is that theirs is a world in which only objects have value. Thus, to assume subjectivity is to give up what has previously made one “valuable” and desired by others. The path to intersubjectivity is made even more treacherous by the constant shifts of power and assertion. At one moment Adam seems to be holding the reins; the next, Charlotte. All of the four major characters, as well as Fanny Assingham, take their turns at directing and coercing the movements of the others, and of the plot. Likewise, the four central characters all seem at one point or another to be utterly objectified, instrumentalized, and commodified. Thus, it is appropriate that the novel is called *The Golden Bowl*, not only for the symbolic and actual significance of the bowl within the text, but for the way in which the novel focuses on objects, rather than subjects.

Even James's relationship to the novel, as given to us in his preface, smacks of the conflicted relationship between people and objects. He acknowledges his tendency to deal with the subject-matter of his novels "through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it" (19). This detachment contributes at once to the sense that James's characters are subjects, in the fullest sense—that they have complex inner-lives *and* that they are, to him, objects. That is, they are to be witnessed and judged, rather than interacted with. James acknowledges that in *The Golden Bowl* "the majesty of authorship" might "*ostensibly* reign," but that he catches himself

disavowing the pretence of it while I get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle that provides for the others in the circling tiers the entertainment of the great game. [In *The Golden Bowl*] There is no other participant, of course, than each of the real, the deeply involved and immersed and more or less bleeding participants. (20)

In this uncharacteristically intimate description of his relationship with his characters, James's language evokes the essential sadomasochistic struggle. Here, James's characters *do* have bodies—contrary to what some critics and, indeed, much of his writing, suggests. Their bodies, like that of the masochist, only feel real—to themselves as to others—when "engaged in the struggle" and "more or less bleeding." Corporeality, for James, only exists as a negative, always associated with pain rather than pleasure.

He seems uncomfortable “living and breathing and rubbing shoulders” with his characters, and soon resumes his distant stance. He speaks of the characters as “the small handful of values” with which he plays, reducing the interaction between characters to something resembling a mathematical equation. The novel continues, or rather dramatizes, James’s great question: what is the relationship between the human and the object?

The Prince, Amerigo, struggles against objectification, even as he positions himself as a collector’s item for the Ververs. In defence, he struggles to own objects, as the first line of the book: “The Prince had always liked *his* London” (43, my emphasis), suggests. Despite his poverty, the Prince assumes a proprietary, possessive stance. Amerigo’s object-status is more persistent than his subjectivity, however. As Frye (1993) asserts in “Henry James and the Comedy of the Occult,” the Prince “acquires the status of an expensive but uniquely desirable collector’s item” for Adam Verver (117). As Maggie tells him, he is ““a part of his [Adam’s] collection [. . .] a rarity, a beauty, an object of price” (49). Amerigo is himself aware of this, as when he says to Maggie, ““I cost a lot of money”” (49). Here he presents himself as a valuable possession. Maggie attempts to deflect this crass valuation, replying that she hasn’t ““the least idea [. . .] what you cost,”” (49). Maggie rejects the Prince’s self-objectification, refusing to see him as an object or herself as an objectifier. He persists, asking, ““Wouldn’t you find out if it were a question of parting with me? My value would in that case be estimated”” (49). At this point Maggie is drawn into the game. She looks at him then “as if his value were well before her” and says, ““Yes, if you mean that I’d rather pay than lose you”” (49). Here

the Prince is objectified—or rather, he objectifies himself and invites Maggie to participate. He introduces the idea that he only has value in relation to his absence—that his only value is based on the negative rather than the positive. Charlotte refers to the Prince as an object possessed by Maggie when she asks him, “aren’t you conscious every minute of the perfection of the creature of whom I’ve put you into possession” (61). To call Maggie a “creature” is to rob her of subjectivity too, as the Prince implies when he replies, “It wasn’t only a matter of your handing *me* over—it was a matter of your handing her” (61). Here, he endows Charlotte with subjectivity in relation to his and Maggie’s objectivity, putting responsibility and blame for their betrayal onto her shoulders. He himself objectifies Maggie in a more traditional way: he, following patriarchal custom, disguises his objectification of her as praise. He regards her, and thinks “how she had struck him, in respect to the beautiful world, as one of the beautiful, the most beautiful things” (48). Like Adam Verver, Amerigo can think of no higher praise for a person—or at any rate for a woman—than to call her a “beautiful thing.” Ironically, Amerigo fails to realize that he himself is made into a “beautiful thing” by becoming part of the Ververs’ collection. He, at times, seems to acknowledge this, but only with humour, so it is unclear to what extent his own objectification rankles in him. To Maggie he says that she laces him in a class with “the little pieces that you unpack at the hotels, or at the worst in the hired houses, like this wonderful one, and put out with the family photographs and the new magazines. But it’s something not to be so big that I have to be buried” (50). Rather ominously, she replies, “you shall not be buried, my dear, till you’re dead. Unless indeed you call it burial to go to American City” (50).

While Amerigo is not buried in this way (i.e. sent to American City), Charlotte is, as punishment both for objectifying herself and for her sexual transgressions. Because of her sex she, not Amerigo, is objectified to the point of symbolic death.

Just as Merton Densher essentially prostitutes himself to Milly, Amerigo marries Maggie for her money. This seems less objectionable, however, because, while Milly tends to treat people as subjects, Maggie and her father objectify Adam, using him for his prestige as much as he does them for their money. Amerigo is like

some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, mediaeval, wonderful, of which the 'worth' in mere modern change, 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.

(56)

Basically, this means that Amerigo's worth is held to be in *being* rather than *doing*. This, by the gender roles of the Edwardian world, feminizes him. In this way he is like Densher, who is able to earn money by paying court to Milly, rather than by working. He might work for money, but he is worth more as an aristocratic man of leisure. Worth more, at any rate, to collectors like the Ververs. For the Ververs, Amerigo's value is decidedly that of an object, rather than of a subject. As Anna Despotopoulou (2000) writes in "Invisible Buildings: Maggie's Architectural Adventures in *The Golden Bowl*,"

Adam's sustained metaphors, however, [. . .] attempt to immobilize the Prince and extract his personal identity. What attracts the Ververs to the Prince initially is his dark and intricate history, his 'wicked' past, built out of family passions, intrigues, and beautiful palazzos. Their romantic imagination is aroused by the innumerable volumes overflowing with stories about his ancestors, which the Ververs unearth meticulously, keen to learn more about his past than about the actual product of this past. At first, the Prince accepts his new role as a static object for display in Adam's museum-like house and acknowledges his fixed monetary and material value. (419)

The key words in this passage are "at first." At first, Amerigo accepts his objectification. At first, Densher submits to Kate's plan. Both men come to rebel against this feminizing objectification, and react by asserting their masculinity through their sexuality: Densher by demanding that Kate sleep with him; Amerigo by resuming his affair with Charlotte. At Matcham, where Amerigo and Charlotte conduct their affair, Amerigo begins to see himself as a possessor, like Adam, rather than as a possession. He likes Matcham above all because of "his extraordinarily unchallenged, his absolutely appointed and enhanced possession of it" (286). Here, he regains the sense of possession he had before his marriage, which we learn of in the novel's first sentence as he enjoys "his London" (43). Here, and through his affair, he basks in his domination of women. He reflects

that he had after all gained more from women than he had ever lost by them; there appeared so, more and more, on those mystic books that are kept, in connexion with such commerce, even by men of the loosest business habits, a balance in his

favour that he could pretty well as a rule take for granted. What were they doing at this very moment, wonderful creatures, but trying to outdo each other in his interest? (286)

Amerigo has been emasculated by being “possessed” by Adam, another man. Even if he, Amerigo, is unable to own things the way Adam does, he is able to feel himself superior to women, by objectifying them and telling himself that he has profited more by them than they by him. Both Amerigo and Densher, thus, react by attempting to take the place of the dominator, rather than by seeking to interact intersubjectively. By objectifying women, they actually re-inforce the system in which one is *either* subject or object.

Charlotte is one of the most consistently objectified characters—unfortunately not surprising given that she is also a beautiful young woman. It is her desirable body upon which the plot turns, and she is an object desired by both Amerigo and the Ververs. Charlotte “was admirably attached to Maggie—whose possession of such a friend might moreover quite rank as one of her ‘assets’” (55). Marriage, then, is not the only way of “acquiring” people, the novel suggests: one’s circle of friends may also, in this commodified world, be seen as “assets” (or, one assumes, liabilities, as the case may be). Even love and desire outside the normative institution of marriage becomes about possessing the other as object. Observing Charlotte at Fanny Assingham’s, the Prince is affected by the parts of her body “as a cluster of possessions of his own” (72); he sees her features as “items in a full list, items recognised, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had recognised, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had been ‘stored’—wrapped up, numbered, put away in a cabinet” (72), now it was as if “the door of the

cabinet had opened of itself; he took the relics out one by one” (72). Here the intensity of the Prince’s association with Charlotte is conveyed by his proprietary familiarity with her body—but it is not merely as a possession that he sees Charlotte—it is as an assortment of possessions—ones that are divided, to be taken “out one by one”—her body is dismembered for him to reassemble and give meaning to. With characteristic Jamesian reticence, the Prince imagines Charlotte’s body as mechanical rather than fleshly. The Prince reflects that “he knew [. . .] the perfect working of all her main attachments, that of some wonderful finished instrument, something intently made for exhibition, for a prize” (73). Charlotte is, thus, made into a mechanical object—this obscures her status as a bodily object, as flesh, as a sexual object for the Prince—and yet his intimate knowledge of her body reveals this even as it is expressed in the language of mechanics, or art—her arms have “the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors in the great time had loved and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze” (73). It is ironic that the Prince sees her as a precious metal, but would not marry her because she was not wealthy, as is his observation that she is like a full purse:

the extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower, which gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces, but having been passed empty through a finger-ring that held it together.

It was as if, before she turned to him, he had weighed the whole thing in his open palm and even heard a little the chink of the metal. (73)

She is sexualized here, through the flower and purse metaphors, but also commodified, through the money metaphor. Amerigo gradually loses interest in Charlotte because he

has so thoroughly objectified her. He reflects that “it was pitiful to make her [Charlotte] beg of him. He *was* making her—she had begged; and this, for a special sensibility in him, didn’t at all do” (105). His own domination of Charlotte makes him despise her. He comes to regard her as pitiful. In Benjamin’s terms, she is no longer able to offer resistance and recognition, and, thus, cannot confirm the Prince’s tenuous sense of himself as a subject. By objectifying Charlotte, the Prince, and the Ververs, unwittingly erode their own claims to subjectivity.

Despite her constant objectification by others, Charlotte’s subjectivity is never completely squelched. This is perhaps why, despite being, strictly speaking, an antagonist, she is often cited as the most likeable character in the novel. In a sound critique of Nussbaum’s analysis of James’s work, Richard Posner (2001) observes that “Charlotte [. . .] whom I am not alone in finding more endearing than Maggie, the ostensible, and to Nussbaum the actual, heroine” (232). Charlotte proves her affection for Amerigo “in bringing them [Maggie and the Prince], with her design, together” (55). This is reminiscent of Kate Croy bringing Milly and Densher together, or of Madame Merle bringing Isabel and Osmond together. If only temporarily, Charlotte is the “puppet master.” While looking at Charlotte, the Prince objectifies her (as described in the previous paragraph) but, in the midst of this, reflects that her dark head “gave her at moments the sylvan head of a huntress” (73)—although she is still a part-object (only her ‘head’ is a huntress), she is a menacing kind of subject—a huntress. The Prince casts her as villain, as an actor. Even though he wants power and possession, he does not want to take responsibility for betraying Maggie, and, thus, creates a fantasy in which the

responsibility is all Charlotte's. To her husband, Fanny argues that Charlotte facilitated the Prince's marriage to Maggie in that "She kept off, she stayed away, she left him free; and what, moreover, were her silences to Maggie but a direct aid to her" (98). This interpretation of Charlotte's silence is classic James—giving meaning to what is not said. The meaning of the unsaid in James is explored by Brooks, who reveals how, in *The Wings of the Dove*, James uses the unarticulated, or "desemanticized blanks" to maintain "the darkness of the abyss (*Melodramatic* 184-185). Here Fanny also underplays her own sizeable role in arranging the Prince's marriage to Maggie, giving Charlotte some of the responsibility. She, also, suggests that Charlotte had the Prince, or could have had him, in bondage—"she left him free." Charlotte's agency here is a matter of doing nothing—it is a negative agency.

In contrast, Fanny Assingham seeks agency by doing rather too much—by meddling in the affairs of others. Despite this, she is not an unsympathetic character. Fanny tells her husband that it was she "who named Maggie to him [the Prince] [. . .] He had never heard of her before" (91). He replies, "Then it's grave" (91), to which she replies "Do you mean grave for me?" (91), he says "Oh that everything's grave for 'you' is what we take for granted and are fundamentally talking about. It's grave—it *was*—for Charlotte. And it's grave for Maggie. That is it *was*—when he did see her. Or when she did see him" (91). Although generally unassuming, Colonel Assingham sees what his wife does not: the danger of entangling oneself in the affairs of others. Fanny is irritated at her husband's ironic insights, as they force her to confront the reality of her involvement. She tells him that he does not "torment" her as much as "he would like"

because ““you think of nothing that I haven’t a thousand times thought of, and because I think of everything that you never will”” (91). In this conversation we see the Assinghams’ awareness of the dangers of the situation, and of Fanny’s responsibility in it. Colonel Assingham pushes Fanny to consider the situation. He is something of an *iron*, as he seems to know more than he lets on, as while Fanny is talking about Maggie, Charlotte and Amerigo, the Colonel “had listened more than he showed” (91). Fanny tells her husband that Maggie ““wasn’t born to know evil. She must never know it”” (94), which is tragically ironic, because it is finally seeing evil that allows Maggie to act and move forward, like Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady*. James’s conviction that certain people, usually female, must be protected from evil runs through his works, especially those that deal with children and their corruption by adults—*The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *What Maisie Knew* (1897) being the best (and best-known) examples. The Colonel responds to this with “a queer grim laugh; the sound of which in fact fixed his wife before him. ‘We’re taking grand ways to prevent it’” (94), highlighting the role of the Assinghams in keeping Maggie blind. To his wife, the Colonel says, ““you’ve got a precious power of thinking whatever you do want. You want also, from moment to moment, to think such desperately different things”” (96). Here, he is observing that his wife cannot see reality objectively, only as she wants to see it. He also suggests to her: ““you fell violently in love with the Prince yourself, and that as you couldn’t get *me* out of the way you had to take some roundabout course. *You* couldn’t marry him, any more than Charlotte could—that is not to yourself. But you could to somebody else—it was always the Prince, it was always marriage”” (96). We are given no indication of the

Colonel's tone—is he teasing? Serious? But either way this statement introduces a possible motive for Fanny's involvement. To this outrageous statement, Fanny replies, but “with an absence of all repudiation of his exposure of the spring of her conduct; and this abstention, clearly and effectively conscious, evidently cost her nothing” (96). The narrator's language—“exposure”—suggests that the Colonel's suggestion is accurate. But how could this “abstention” cost Fanny nothing? The answer is that Fanny sees herself and her husband as existing on another plane, looking down on, and occasionally interfering in, the lives and marriages of the Ververs and their spouses.

Maggie and Adam Verver are a curious pair. Although the former is ostensibly the heroine and victim of the novel, many readers find them difficult to like because of their greedy mania for collecting and their almost incestuous devotion to each other. Throughout the novel, we see the relationship of Maggie and Adam as more like husband and wife than any other in the novel. For instance, “it was of course an old story and a familiar idea that a beautiful baby could take its place as a new link between a wife and a husband, but Maggie and her father had, with every ingenuity, converted the precious creature into a link between a mamma and a grandpapa” (151). Later, Charlotte observes to Fanny that “Maggie thinks more on the whole of fathers than of husbands” (221). This bizarre relationship can, in part, be explained by the fact that Adam is a widower, and that Maggie has, thus, come to replace his first wife. Even his marriage to Charlotte does little to change this. The selfish greed of Maggie and her father is clearest, not in their purchases of *objets d'art*, but in their plot to acquire Charlotte. Maggie argues that having Charlotte will make them “grandier” (167). When Adam asks whether this is

because Charlotte is so handsome (167), Maggie returns that it is because she is so great, “Great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life” (167). This rather vague assessment of Charlotte’s greatness deflects the erotic connotations of her being desirable for her handsomeness, but retains the ornamental appeal Charlotte has for them. They are attuned to each other, so much so that neither has made the necessary foray into independent subjectivity. As Gore Vidal writes in his magnificent introduction to the novel, they “are so perfectly attuned that neither has to *tell* the other anything at all about the unexpected pair that they have acquired” (12). Adam and Maggie’s symbiotic relationship means that they both seek the other’s leave to marry. Amerigo asks Maggie about Adam’s “motive in letting me have you” (49). Similarly, Adam asks his daughter whether she should like him to marry, speaking “as if, coming from his daughter herself, it *might* be an idea; which for that matter he would be ready to carry right straight out should she definitely say so” (161). Vidal ponders, “does Maggie lead him? Or does he manage her? Can it be that it is Adam who pulls all the strings?” (13). These questions are at the heart of the novel and, with James’s characteristic ambiguity, are never satisfactorily answered. Or rather, the answer is not as neat as one might hope. In *The Golden Bowl*, as in all of James’s best works, no single character “pulls all the strings.” Rather, they attempt to pull or be pulled by turns, creating a veritable tangle in the process.

Our first view of Adam is, from our perspective and the author’s, an objectifying one. He is seeking isolation as escape. We learn that “his vision sometimes ached” for the “impersonal isolation” of solitude (130). Yet, James turns his microscope on Adam,

observing him even when he most desires not to be observed: “Adam Verver at Fawns, that autumn Sunday, might have been observed to open the door of the billiard-room with a certain freedom--might have been observed, that is, had there been a spectator in the field” (129). Stylistically, James is pointing to the impossibility of ever being truly “alone.” As Benjamin argues, solitude is but one point on the intersubjective continuum, because we are social beings. Following British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, her work is founded on “the assumption that we are fundamentally social beings” (17). Adam’s necessarily unsuccessful attempts to escape into solitude cut him off from the intersubjective realm of development, in which subjectivity develops relationally. James is not the only one to objectify Adam. Maggie also does so, when she decides to mend the relationships of the four central characters in such a way that her father need never discover the truth. Here, she is taking a paternal role toward her own father, which signals the beginning of her necessary separation from him.

Yet, for much of the novel, Adam does seem to hold the reins to which Maggie, Charlotte and Amerigo are yoked. He envisions himself as high above the other characters, looking at what he had done,

showed him where he had come out; quite at the top of his hill of difficulty, the tall sharp spiral round which he had begun to wind his ascent at the age of twenty, and the apex of which was a platform looking down, if one would, on the kingdoms of the earth and with standing-room for but half a dozen others. (133)

Surveying his realm from on high, Adam must see the other characters as laughably small, not even on the narrow plane of subjects, on which he himself walks. He allows

himself more agency than the people who surrounds him. Adam's high opinion of himself is inseparable not only from his success in business but also his success as a man of taste. To himself, Adam reflects that,

no man in Europe or in America, he privately believed, was for such estimates less capable of vulgar mistakes. He had never spoken of himself as infallible--it wasn't his way; but apart from the natural affections he had acquainted himself with no greater joy of the intimately personal type than the joy of his originally coming to feel, and all so unexpectedly, that he had in him the spirit of the connoisseur. (139)

Like Osmond, Adam wishes to be recognized as a man of art, rather than a man of business. Both Adam and Osmond value the world of objects, in which the collector is the sole subject, higher than the world of business, in which transactions occur, at least in theory, between subjects. Adam decides that there is

the affinity of Genius, or at least of Taste, with something in himself--with the dormant intelligence of which he had thus almost violently become aware and that affected him as changing by a mere revolution of the screw his whole intellectual plane. He was equal somehow with the great seers, the invokers and encouragers of beauty--and he didn't after all perhaps dangle so far below the great producers and creators. He had been nothing of that kind before--too decidedly, too dreadfully not; but now he saw *why* he had been what he had, why he had failed and fallen short even in huge success; now he read into his career, in one single magnificent night, the immense meaning it had waited for. (140)

This lofty view of his passion for collecting aligns Adam, he thinks, just beneath “the great producers and creators”—much like the original Adam. His world, like Eden, is shattered by knowledge—knowledge of evil, yes, but also knowledge that human relationships cannot be as easily managed as the collections in museums. This has been his mistake in the past, as when, unromantically, he thinks of his decision to marry Charlotte, to make her part of his collection, as a “majestic scheme” (188). Here, we see him calculating the advantages of marrying Charlotte from the point of view of his and Maggie’s benefit, thus denying Charlotte any real subjectivity.

Adam’s inability, or unwillingness, to differentiate between people and works of art is made absolutely explicit. He likens both his marriage and his daughter’s to the acquisition of pieces for his collection: “It had served him to satisfy himself, so to speak, both about Amerigo and about the Bernardino Luini he had happened to come to knowledge of at the time he was consenting to the announcement of his daughter’s betrothal, so it served him at present to satisfy himself about Charlotte Stant and an extraordinary set of oriental tiles” (179). The narrator continues by describing the appeal of the tiles, but not of Charlotte, which can leave little doubt about which interests Adam more. The appropriation of both is “all at bottom in him, the aesthetic principle [. . .] the idea (followed by appropriation) of plastic beauty” (179). He values Charlotte because she, like the oriental tiles, is a “thing” of beauty. His aesthetic appetite is not satisfied by admiration, however, but requires incorporation into his collection. Adam reduces not only individuals to museum pieces, but all of civilization to a museum:

It hadn't merely, his plan, all the sanctions of civilization; it was positively civilisation condensed, concrete, consummate, set down by his hands as a house on a rock--a house from whose open doors and windows, open to grateful, to thirsty millions, the higher, the highest knowledge would shine out to bless the land. (142-143)

Adam Verver is, we come to see, a caricature of the first Adam, founder of civilization. For Adam Verver, creation and civilization are purely aesthetic, signaling the subordination of the subject to the object. Furthermore, he does not create anything himself (in this he is like the original Adam), but merely acquires. He is not to be commended as a man with high aesthetic principles, but condemned for his insatiable appetites, even if they are (as one would expect with James) highly refined and socially condoned.

Adam even views his own grandson on a spectrum with works of art. Although the narrator writes that, while Adam was not taking life “as a collector he was taking it decidedly as a grandfather” (144), it is clear that he cannot separate these two pieces of his identity (I shall let the reader determine which of the two is dominant). Adam reflects that,

In the way of precious small pieces he had handled nothing so precious as the Principino, his daughter's first-born, whose Italian designation endlessly amused him and whom he could manipulate and dandle, already almost toss and catch again, as he couldn't a correspondingly rare morsel of an earlier *pate tendre*.

(144)

This image of a grandfather “manipulat[ing] and dandl[ing]” his grandson would be innocent, were it not for the context, which establishes Adam as someone who sees himself as having a divine right to manipulate other people, and to look down on them as though they were, like the Principino, mere infants. Furthermore, we see Adam, not Amerigo, playing with the Principino. Maggie spends Sundays

with her little boy, in whose apartment she either frequently found her father already established or was sooner or later joined by him. His visit to his grandson, at some hour or other, held its place, in his day, against all interventions, and this without counting his grandson's visits to *him*, scarcely less ordered and timed, and the odd bits, as he called them, that they picked up together when they could.

(150)

The baby is more like Adam's and Maggie's son than like Amerigo's and Maggie's, which tightens the incestuous knot that binds them. Later, the Principino becomes a convenient instrument in Maggie's plan to protect her father. As Fanny Assingham observes to her husband, Adam is “protected and amused and, as it were, exquisitely humbugged--the Principino, in whom he delights, always aiding--he has safely and serenely enough suffered the conditions of his life to pass for those he had sublimely projected” (319). Even the nickname “Principino” suggests that the baby is a rare item which Adam has successfully obtained. That is, it denotes his aristocracy, which is the main quality Amerigo brings to Adam. As the grandfather of a prince, Adam has himself become like royalty. He is a part of his collection, of his family, as much as they are a

part of him. Like Charlotte and Amerigo, the child becomes a piece in Adam's collection—a piece from which he must ultimately be parted.

Maggie, whose growing toward subjectivity is the main psychological plot, is introduced as though she were an object. In his preface to the novel, James writes, he begins by “showing Maggie Verver at first through her suitor's and her husband's exhibitory vision of her” (21). Like one of Adam Verver's museum pieces, she is “exhibited” rather than introduced. This is partly due to her objectification by Amerigo, but also partly a result of her necessary objectification by James, for whom she is a piece of his art. Still, James inarguably aesthetically objectifies his characters. This is shown by his mania for “portraits” and in his prefaces, in which he painstakingly describes his deliberate, aesthetic shaping of the novel to follow. Colonel Assingham, whose perspective is relatively detached and fair, tells his wife that Maggie “always seems to me more than anything else the young woman who has a million a year,” (93) and both he and Fanny agree that this may be part of her attraction for Amerigo. Like Osmond, Amerigo marries money with a woman attached to it, not the other way around. Maggie is, like Isabel to Osmond and Madame Merle, or Milly to Kate and Densher, reduced to an appendage of her material wealth. She is also, in the first volume, objectified as a means of exchange between Adam and Amerigo. As Kevin Kohan (2000) writes in “*The Golden Bowl* and the Subversion of Miraculous Forms,”

Of course, in the First Book, “the Ververs” really only means Adam. It is for him more than for Maggie that the marriage contract has been struck. The Prince

recognizes this, thinking far less, just before his visit with Fanny at the beginning of the novel, of his future bride than of his future father-in-law. (301)

This is reminiscent both of Sedgwick's erotic triangles and Gayle Rubin's argument that marriage is essentially trafficking of women to cement male relations and privilege.

There is, thus, a triangular element within this novel of quadrangular relationships.

Despite his obsessive paternal love, Adam objectifies Maggie as much as Amerigo does. He sees in her

the appearance of some slight slim draped "antique" of Vatican or Capitoline halls, late and refined, rare as a note and immortal as a link, set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse and yet, for all the sudden freedom of folds and footsteps forsaken after centuries by their pedestal, keeping still the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue; the blurred absent eyes, the smoothed elegant nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase. (93)

Here, we see that Adam's tendency to objectify the other is not malicious, and not limited to Amerigo and Charlotte. Rather, it has become a habit of mind for him, most likely as a result of his childish psychic state—his "innocence" and even his appearance suggest an infant, re-inforced by his mania for art and collecting. Growing up in this world, it is no surprise that Maggie, at first, accepts objectification. Unlike Adam, though, she is able to develop beyond this stage, and stakes a claim for herself as subject.

Gradually, Maggie shakes off her objectification. Nonetheless, it is too engrained to ever be completely lost. We do not have access to Maggie's thoughts until the second

half of the novel. Then, we see that she thinks in metaphors that objectify both others and her own mind. She thinks of her unanswered questions as being

like a roomful of confused objects, never as yet "sorted," which for some time now she had been passing and repassing, along the corridor of her life. She passed it when she could without opening the door; then, on occasion, she turned the key to throw in a fresh contribution. So it was that she had been getting things out of the way. They rejoined the rest of the confusion; it was as if they found their place, by some instinct of affinity, in the heap. What she should never know about Charlotte's thought--she tossed *that* in. It would find itself in company, and she might at last have been standing there long enough to see it fall into its corner.

(335)

Maggie's choice of metaphors reveals the degree to which she is surrounded by objects, both mental and physical. Her objectification of her world, no doubt a consequence of her father's mania for collecting, also manifests itself as an objectification of other people, even of herself. Her immature inability to relate as a subject to other subjects is bound up with her infantile attachment to her father. Maggie is freed, at least partially, from the world of objects when Fanny smashes the golden bowl, symbolizing the lie behind the aesthetic "perfection" of the two marriages. The breaking of the bowl forces Maggie to realize that, to put it simply, things are not always what they seem. It is the climax of her realization that she must look beyond the aesthetic surface of people and social forms, accepting their flaws rather than putting them on pedestals.

Maggie's psychological and moral development is not complete, nor must we necessarily embrace her decisions, as critics including, most recently, Martha Nussbaum, do as models for ethical behaviour. Indeed, Maggie's choices are problematic according to the ethical system Nussbaum herself espouses in *Sex and Social Justice* (1999) in which, as discussed earlier, instrumentalization is condemned as the most potentially damaging form of objectification. As Maggie begins to realize the truth about Charlotte and Amerigo, she also becomes more skilled at using people, although she justifies her actions as having moral and loving goals. For example, thinking of Fanny Assingham, she looks forward to "using her friend to the topmost notch" (425). Finally, Maggie is using rather than being used. While we can applaud her escape from blind victimization, the structure that allows for this kind of victimization—that is, the structure that refuses to acknowledge the co-existence of multiple subjects—remains in place. In fact, this objectifying structure is actually *bolstered* by Maggie's decision to participate in it. The other side of Maggie's development—change might be a more apt, less laudatory, term—is her coming to see Amerigo as her possession. When he returns home, after a day spent with Charlotte, a day during which Maggie begins to realize the truth, she finally reflects that "it was long since anything had been so sweet to her as the particular quality suddenly given by her present emotion to the sense of possession" (339). One continues to feel sympathy for Maggie despite this, because she is merely reacting to a world, represented by Charlotte and Amerigo, that has instrumentalized and commodified her. From this perspective, her growth is not so much moral as practical: she learns the rules of the game into which she has been cast against her will.

In *The Golden Bowl*, every one is, without knowing it, being objectified by someone else. Each character believes him or herself to be acting as an independent subject while using others—holding the golden bowl, as it were. Their tragedy is that they are all blind to their own objectification, whether in the form of instrumentalization or commodification. Until the golden bowl, representing the world of objects, is broken, none can exist as a subject, because, according to Benjamin's intersubjective theory, subjects exist only in and through relations with other subjects. Thus, to objectify others must lead to an ultimate objectification of the self. Consequently, *The Golden Bowl* is not only about Maggie's growing into subjectivity, but about the development of subjectivity of all the characters involved. Each character is involved with the subjectivity of the others, whether by supporting it by intersubjective recognition or thwarting it by objectification. *The Golden Bowl* was James's last completed work, and culminates his life-long fascination with the interaction between people and *objets d'art*, and people *as objets d'art*. Also, it is the novel in which the characters are the most tightly connected, the most implicated in each other's subjectivity. In *The Golden Bowl*, James has moved from the triadic to the quadratic relationship, which is both more symmetrical and more complex. It is also more self-contained: *The Golden Bowl* has the most limited character list of any of James's novels, and yet sustains as much drama and delicacy as any of the more densely populated novels. It never becomes a perfect circle of intersubjectivity—in which attunement and assertion are so finely reciprocal as to create permanent, indistinguishable tension.

6. Conclusion

Although not the first to explore triadic and quadratic relationships, one of James's great contributions to the novel is his careful observation of how these relationships contribute to the development or destruction of the subject. In *Washington Square*, we follow Catherine's attempts to negotiate her identity in relation to both father and lover. As in the Oedipal triangle, it is the third point in the triangle who forces the subject to make the necessary separation from the dyadic relationship. Rather than transferring herself from father to lover, however, Catherine ultimately destroys the triangular matrix by refusing to let either man define her identity. For Catherine, the triangle is a provisional form that allows her to define herself outside the more insular dyad in which her father assumes the dominant role. As she gravitates toward Morris, Catherine's bonds to her father wane. Morris, though, does not offer Catherine the recognition she seeks. Rejected by her lover and having rejected her father, Catherine moves outside the triangle, from which point she responds to both men intersubjectively, having negotiated a coherent identity for herself. Catherine's final fate—living, a spinster, in her father's house, has been interpreted as representing her inability to cut the cord, as it were. However, that she does this without compromising her integrity by ceding to her father's exhortation that she promise not to marry Morris, Catherine remains attuned to her father, but on her own terms.

Likewise, the conclusion of *The Portrait of a Lady* can be read as either tragic or comic. This hinges on whether we see Isabel's return to Osmond (which the narrative only implies) as a victory of his domination over her, or of her commitment to her ideals.

The latter reading, I argue, is more consistent with Isabel's character, which is radiantly idealistic. Her (supposed) return to Osmond is *not* the triumph of his will or her submission, but the affirmation of her freedom of choice in marrying him. Even as she realizes that her marriage has been a trap, and a triangle (with Madame Merle) rather than a dyad, Isabel refuses to compromise her own ethical code and, ironically, her own freedom.

In *The Wings of the Dove*, the triangle becomes a demonic form. In their plot, Densher and Kate refuse Milly subjectivity. Her final action, her bequest to them, is a superb assertion of subjectivity that has been interpreted as sadistic and dominating—meant to wrench Kate and Densher asunder. Given James's idealization of Milly in particular and the American girl in general, though, it seems more plausible to read her bequest as an assertion of subjectivity that establishes the transcendence of morality over the objectifying world. The Kate-Densher-Milly triangle is only one of the triangles that structures the novel. The other most significant triangle is that which connects Maud (who, as I have argued, represents the commodifying social economy of marriage) with Kate and Densher, leading to their instrumentalization and manipulation of Milly. The form crumbles, in the end, rather than, as Kate and Densher had intended, reverting to a dyad after Milly's death, as Kate and Densher find the bond that connects them less intense than that which joined them to Milly.

The Golden Bowl "squares" James's earlier triangles with a quadrangle of relations that is far more insular than any of his triangles. This almost inbred insularity limits and defines the scope for subjectivity of each of the characters. While constantly

trying to engineer the contours of the triangle, each character, at one time or another, finds him or herself sinking into the “golden bowl” of objectivity that lies in the square’s centre. Maggie, the focal point of consciousness in this novel, only achieves a firm grip on subjectivity when she recognizes the square: that is, when she realizes that she has been interacting with three other subjects, rather than cradling a bowl of objects. By finding herself in this intersubjective context, Maggie is able to break the square in half, smashing the golden bowl of objects in the centre.

James’s novels are studies in the most delicate shadings of human emotion, action and speech. Thus, they help to develop ideas like Hegel’s, which are, superficially, about binary relationships. James focuses on the spectrum between submission and domination, finding interest and drama in the subtlest distinctions. His novels, thus, show the psychological complexity behind what seem like simple moral issues. As Benjamin argues, submission and domination are inextricable from each other and equally damaging. More subtly, James shows us the same thing by revealing the range of attitudes that weld domination and submission together. James explodes the notion that domination and submission is necessarily a binary relationship. By focusing on triadic and quadratic, rather than dyadic, relationships, James complicates the oversimplification of the master-slave binary. This is a radical move, because it shows how we are all—whether as a cast of characters or members of society—implicated whenever a person or group is being dominated. Yet the triangle need not be a locus of domination and submission. It is simply the site where “you and me” become part of something greater, where the whole of humanity exists.

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