

Introduction

The works of Henry James are concerned with human relations as they manifest themselves within the social structures that we identify as ‘civilization.’ In his novels James depicts nineteenth century and early twentieth century Western European society wherein the imposition of ‘culture’ upon ‘nature’ is a process that arises as a consequence of humankind’s inherited traditions.¹ The social structures that comprise civilization as we know it are artificial constructions wherein *codes of conduct* are devised which act as forms of restraint upon ‘primitive’ natural instincts. Furthermore, these codes of conduct provide the means of ‘refining’ individual energies by placing human activity within a *frame of reference* that embraces ethical values and aesthetic ideals.² A system of beliefs is thereby established and social control is maintained by means of hegemony - a network of religious, political and economic forces in the guise of public institutions that combine with ideological and cultural assumptions to create a complex web of internal and external ‘realities’. Thus, a world-view or ‘social reality’ is promulgated by the hegemony of a ruling class, the aim of which is to direct the behaviour of individuals in such a way as to preserve class distinctions and retain existing power bases.³ Simultaneously it ensures (or seeks to ensure) that, within certain prescribed boundaries, individuals in society might co-exist with some degree of harmony and mutual benefit.

The civilization that Henry James depicts in his novels comprises a rich culture in the form of aristocratic traditions belonging to the old world societies of England and Europe. In

¹ Huxley, Julian. ‘Evolution and Human Progress’, in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, London, 1949, p. 185. The author writes of ‘social evolution, operating by the transmission of ideas and institutions through the social heredity we call tradition.’

² In 1883 Sigmund Freud makes the observation : ‘...this habit of constant suppression of natural instincts gives us the quality of refinement.’ Quoted in Figs, Eva. *Patriarchal Attitudes*, London, 1970, pp. 136-137.

³ Nead, Lynda. *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*, Oxford, 1988. p. 5.

contrast to this cultural heritage, James also explores the values and beliefs of the 'new world', which are located for him primarily in the principles and practices of American democracy. Throughout the nineteenth century old world traditions were increasingly subjected to critical scrutiny and the changing conditions that gradually effected 'modernity' reflect a shift in social consciousness within Western civilization. This change was most discernible in European and English societies, where the spread of egalitarian ideas was accompanied by a corresponding decline in the aristocratic monopoly of power bases.⁴ The nineteenth century was an era of rapid transition and the result of Industrialization and of British Imperialism was the creation of new sources of wealth - a phenomenon which saw the rise of the middle class to a position of social importance. The ensuing struggle for power among individuals in society is portrayed by James in his novels, wherein the upward mobility of an affluent middle class proves instrumental in effecting change within the existing social system.

Patriarchy forms the basis of social reality in Western civilization and male predominance is evinced by the figure of the father as head of the family, while state institutions are similarly directed and controlled by men. Patriarchy constitutes thereby a 'sexual class system'⁵ that accords authority to males even as it rationalizes the marginalization of women to positions of subordination as the 'helpmates' of man.⁶ As a system of social control Patriarchy precedes Capitalism, but Industrialization generated the growth of *laissez-faire* economics and capitalist strategies exacerbated sex-role divisions by empowering men as wage earners even as it sought to restrict middle class women to the

⁴ The Eighteenth Century American and French Revolutions instigated change in aristocratic structures while, in England, the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884 progressively enfranchised adult males. Kitson Clark, G.S.R., *An Expanding Society, Britain 1830-1900*, Victoria, 1967. pp . 24, 28, 38.

⁵ Eisenstein, Zillah R. (ed.) *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, New York, 1979, p. 17.

⁶ Queen Victoria, ironically, expresses a belief in woman's subordination when she declares: 'Let woman be what God intended, a helpmate for a man - but with totally different duties and vocations.' Quoted in Bingham, Colin. *The Affairs of Women: A Modern Miscellany*, Sydney, 1969, p. 134.

domain of domesticity. However, as historians agree, the 'ideal of womanhood' espoused by nineteenth century patriarchy, which aimed at segregation of the sexes, was essentially a bourgeois ideology⁷ whereby a new and powerful class aspired to emulate the behavioural patterns of an older, aristocratic order. While Patriarchy traditionally imposed sexual restraints, Capitalism inflicted economic inequality upon middle class women who, by complying with the demands of bourgeois gentility, were denied access to paid employment and thereby rendered wholly dependent upon the auspices of men.⁸

The system of social relations implemented by nineteenth century Patriarchal-Capitalist society proved vastly unequal to the needs of women and accordingly - as the century progressed - confrontations arose between the sexes wherein women increasingly demanded social reforms. Economic necessity provided the impetus that eventually *compelled* impoverished gentlewomen to openly question the validity of sex-role divisions and the problem of 'excess' women in society became an issue that demanded intelligent resolution. Fear of poverty and the alienation it inevitably incurred gradually effected a change in the consciousness of women whereby conventional ideals of femininity underwent transformation. Consequently, the cultivation of 'idleness' and 'physical frailty' - characteristics popular in the early part of the century⁹ - became an outmoded practice that was superseded in due course by adherence to a more vigorous persona. Additionally, the idea of work became increasingly synonymous with the idea of independence, and by the end of the century 'honourable endeavour' was a notion that found favour with a large number of middle class women.¹⁰ Other challenges to the

⁷ Figs, Eva. *op.cit.*, p. 73.

⁸ 'The Englishwoman's Journal', 1866, Vol. viii, p. 59. The writer declares: 'My opinion is that if a woman is obliged to work, at once (although she may be Christian and well bred) she loses that peculiar position which the word *lady* conventionally designates.' Quoted in Davidoff, Leonore. *The Best Circles : Society Etiquette and The Season*, London, 1973, p. 95.

⁹ Nead, Lynda. *op.cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁰ In 1889 the reformer Maria Grey remarks: 'Within these few years a vast and sweeping change has taken place...causing a reaction from this doctrine of idleness and dependence as essential to ladyhood toward the opposite extreme, of work and independence as essential to honorable womanhood.' Quoted in Murray, Janet H. *Strong-Minded Women and Other Lost Voices from Nineteenth-Century England*, Harmondsworth, 1984, p. 260.

existing status quo also arose which paralleled the demands of women for greater equality. Religious doubt became a factor that undermined the authority of Christianity,¹¹ while scientific knowledge sought to uncover new justifications that would sustain the notion of female inferiority - a belief that could no longer be absolutely attributed to Divine predestination.¹²

Within nineteenth century Capitalist-Patriarchal society the condition of women was essentially one of vulnerability. Contemporary ideologies encouraged a *psychological* acceptance of the subordinate role as 'natural' to women and consequently there was much ambivalence in women's own response to the prevailing social reality.¹³ On the one hand pressure was exerted for reforms that would effect a condition of greater equality, but simultaneously, the desire for change was impeded by anxieties which found expression in a corresponding wish to retain the structures of an existing status quo.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as the century unfolded women increasingly made inroads upon exclusively male preserves and accordingly the notion of 'separate spheres' as a 'natural' division lost much of its credibility. Similarly, in the latter part of the century, women began to perceive that the rigid codes of conduct placed upon them were, in reality, strategies of coercion which aimed at restricting individual liberty. Dissatisfaction with artificially imposed limitations inevitably caused middle class women to question ideological assumptions, and thus new codes of conduct began to evolve. By choosing to emerge from the seclusion of the home women were subjected to new experiences that provided them with greater knowledge, and this in turn led to their increased understanding of the social reality.

¹¹ Webb, R.K. *Modern England: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, London, 1969, p. 408. The author notes that: 'Religion ... rapidly declined in real importance after 1870.'

¹² Conway, Jill. 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution', in Vicinus, Martha (ed.) *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, Bloomington, 1972, p. 153.

¹³ Webb, Beatrice. *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, 1892-1905*, Vol. 2. Ed. Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, London, 1983, p. 53. Webb's ambivalence is apparent when she writes: '...so woman, with her long periods of passive existence and her constantly recurring physical incapacity, seems ordained to watch over the young and ... preserve for all the community the peaceful and joyful home.'

¹⁴ Bedarida, Francois. *A Social History of England 1851-1975*. Trans. A.S. Forster, London, 1979, p. 120.

In the novels of Henry James the author examines relations between the sexes as they existed in nineteenth and early twentieth century society. The world that he depicts is primarily that of the rich and powerful - a fashionable elite which comprises the middle and upper middle class and the aristocracy. For Jamesian women characters the struggle to achieve autonomy reflects the behaviour of contemporary women in society wherein expressed dissatisfaction with existing conditions was symptomatic of the development of individual consciousness - a phenomenon that is shown to be largely socially determined. The development of individual consciousness is synonymous with the evolution of personal identity - with the ability to be aware of who and what one is. As an author James is primarily interested in uncovering the thought processes of characters, and with discovering thereby the *source* of those impulses that motivate action. By focussing upon the consciousness of characters, James is able to explore the 'interior landscapes'¹⁵ of the mind - evoking thereby the subjective reality of an individual and observing how this relates to the external stimuli of an 'objective' reality. Consciousness for James is essentially allied to Conscience - to the possession of a moral sense - an awareness of good and evil as it pertains to the self and the social reality. Thus conscience is the arbiter of action, while the *choice* of a particular action may prove revelatory of the *quality* of an individual's consciousness.

For James, human action and human feeling are inseparable components and it is therefore the most sentient beings who succeed in arousing his interest :

This in fact I have ever found rather terribly
the point - that the figures in any picture, the
agents in any drama, are interesting only in

¹⁵ Sears, Sallie. *The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James*, New York, 1968, p. 159. The author uses this term in her discussion of James's art.

proportion as they feel their respective situations;
 since the consciousness, on their part, of the
 complication exhibited forms for us their link of
 connexion with it.¹⁶

Since it is James's conviction that the 'feeling' individual most richly rewards authorial investigation his leading characters are invariably depicted as highly sensitive individuals, while the ability to feel is in itself a condition that constitutes 'experience' and leads to the development (or enlargement) of consciousness. In the *Art of the Novel* James defines experience as 'our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures'¹⁷ and accordingly, for the highly sensitized, the capacity to *apprehend* may prove enlightening:

Experience ... is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative ... it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.¹⁸

Growing estrangement from the values of late nineteenth century society saw James increasingly emphasize the need to preserve moral integrity as a means of counteracting the effects of materialism. 'Discrimination' and 'taste' therefore are attributes which he sees as antidotal to encroaching philistinism and therefore his principal characters - as superior specimens of humanity - provide examples for emulation :

¹⁶ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Princess Casamassima"', in *The Art of the Novel*, New York, 1934, p. 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁸ James, Henry. 'The Art of Fiction', in *Selected Literary Criticism*, Ed. Morris Shapira, London, 1963, p. 56.

How can one consent to make a picture of the preponderant futilities and vulgarities and miseries of life without the impulse to exhibit as well ... some fine example of the reaction, the opposition or the escape? One does, thank heaven, encounter here and there symptoms of immunity from the general infection; ... and one sees thus that the tradition of a high aesthetic temper needn't after all, helplessly and ignobly perish.¹⁹

By the expression of such sentiments James reveals his traditionalist sympathies and for the author, the decline of the tradition of *noblesse oblige* was a matter for grave concern.

Within the affluent society that constituted late nineteenth century England the demands of Appetite had become insistent, and in James's novels, money and sex emerge as the dominant preoccupations of individuals. The widening basis of fashionable society was largely due to the fact that, increasingly, the mere possession of wealth might procure an individual's entree into exclusive circles and accordingly, the desire for money (and its accompanying status) resulted in the creation of a more competitive and ruthless environment.

The acquisition of wealth and status for women in the nineteenth century was dependent upon the sponsorship of men and consequently marriage remained the most common means of securing material advancement. Nevertheless, women's response to existing social conditions did undergo considerable transformation. In the second half of century the Woman Question became an issue of fierce debate, both in England and America, and the movement for emancipation (emerging from tentative beginnings) became a conscious struggle that effected a change in the perceived identity of women.

¹⁹ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Lesson of the Master"', in *The Art of the Novel*, p. 223.

In this thesis the period of James's writing selected for study extends from the 1880s to the early twentieth century. However, although *Washington Square* was written in 1880, it deals with an earlier period of American history located in the 1840s, while *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians*, written in the 1880s, depict society in the 1870s.

Following James's development as an artist in a chronological order of progression, the works selected are chosen to facilitate observation of James's depiction of women's response to changing social conditions.

In his fiction James is interested in charting the progress of characters toward a condition of greater self-knowledge, whereby understanding of the social reality - acquired through personal experience - leads to the development of individual consciousness. Women are frequently chosen by James as leading characters and as an artist he displays sensitivity toward their condition of vulnerability - a condition which impels them to take risks in order to satisfy personal ambitions. Nevertheless, despite James's apparent sympathy, it is significant that almost all of his heroines *fail* to achieve independence or attain the satisfaction of their desires. Accordingly the reader is left to wonder why failure should *necessarily* be the inevitable fate of a Jamesian heroine.²⁰

Do women fail in James's novels because the author is simply depicting the reality of their condition within a Patriarchal-Capitalist society? Or is James's response to women complicated by ambivalence? Does his position of authority - as the creator of his creatures - evoke the conventional response of contemporary nineteenth century males who sought to 'protect' and thus 'appropriate' the lives of genteel women by confining them within a gilded cage and proclaiming it to be a measure taken for their own good?

²⁰ Jamesian males often fail as well but, *being male*, they invariably have alternatives left open to them that are not available to women, and therefore 'failure' is much less incapacitating.

James is vividly aware of the existence of the cage and of women's strong desire to be released from captivity; nevertheless, few of his heroines ever escape its confines. Does this response reveal an unconscious bias on his part, which sees (as indeed others saw) the proper place for woman as being under the guidance and the authority of man? Does the conventional view of relations between the sexes, which saw middle class women valued as precious ornaments, and thus as 'protected' possessions of 'chivalrous' men constitute a 'civilized' society? And if so, must women continue to sacrifice their desires - sublimating individual ego - in order to preserve social 'harmony' by providing an example of selfless service through their unswerving devotion to 'duty'?

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as women began to emerge from the muddlement effected by their ignorance of social conditions in the 'real' world, they inevitably aroused male hostilities.²¹ Accordingly, nostalgic yearning for an idealized type of 'womanly woman' was expressed by a majority of men (and by many reactionary women) who clung persistently to the 'ideal' in the very teeth of an emergent 'real'. While James is aware that social change is inevitable and that, in fact, only *knowledge* gained via experience can enable the individual to evolve to a new state of consciousness, his response to women's emancipation remains nevertheless ambivalent. It is fundamentally a protective stance that he adopts, fearing the moral consequences of female emancipation, and by doing so the author articulates the anxieties of his contemporaries, many of whom doubted whether - within a predatory environment - the survival of the 'fittest' would also ensure the survival of the 'best'.²²

²¹ Allan, James McGrigor. 'Woman Suffrage Wrong', 1890. 'Not woman's enlightened advisers and true friends, are those who encourage her to risk all that solid power, and legitimate sovereignty which she now exerts over man ... to try a wild experiment, and rush into a revolt which can only end in ignominious and ridiculous defeat.' Quoted in Figes, Eva. *op.cit.*, pp. 104-105.

²² Trevelyan, G.M. 'Macaulay and the Sense of Optimism', in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, p. 51.

In this thesis I intend to examine the *developing consciousness* of Jamesian women characters as they respond to changing social conditions. Furthermore, by looking at their development, I also hope to gain a measure of insight into the nature of James's *own* response to the efforts of women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century society to attain to a condition of individual freedom.

Chapter One :

ENTRAPMENT

“I never congratulate any girl on marrying;
I think they ought to make it somehow not
quite so awful a steel trap.” *

Washington Square (1880)

The Portrait of a Lady (1881)

* *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 300.

In *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady*¹ James examines the ways in which middle and upper-middle class women endeavoured to find fulfilment within a Patriarchal-Capitalist system of government. Published in 1880 and 1881 respectively, a difference of thirty years separates the 1840s society depicted in *Washington Square* from the 1870s world of *Portrait*, and the existence of this time-gap affords comparison between changing social attitudes and the corresponding consciousness of individual women characters. Within nineteenth century Western civilization women suffered from sexual discrimination and the source of this injustice originated from ancient feudal laws that allotted to women the status of bondswoman or slave.² The preservation into 'modern' times of barbarous laws and customs was a practice vigorously contested by social reformers in the nineteenth century, who sought to expose ideological falsifications which aimed at disguising the true nature of human relations in society.

In 1825 William Thompson protested against social injustice in England by indicting

... the so-called system of morals [that] is
 little more than a mass of hypocrisy preached
 by knaves, unpractised by them, to keep their
 slaves, male as well as female, in blind
 uninquiring obedience.³

¹ Hereafter called *Portrait*.

² 'The Property of Married Women', London, 1856, in *On the Property of Married Women and The Law of Divorce*, being a bound compilation of nineteenth century legal treatises, held by University of N.S.W., p. 90 declares : '...the provisions of our common law, so far from being founded on the refined idea of an affection so strong that two existences might by its influence merge into one ... are precisely those which belong to the relation of master and bondswoman; as indeed might be expected from the age in which this law [of property] assumed its principal features.'

³ Thompson, William. *Appeal of One Half the Human Race* 1825. Cork, 1975, p.ix.

Traditionally obedience was deemed essential for womankind and toward that end all their training was directed. Biblical justification of female inferiority was supported by the eighteenth century writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau which were highly influential and provided a 'civilized' basis for the management of women in Western society. In *Emile* Rousseau differentiates sharply between the sexes, declaring :

It is the part of the one to be active and strong, and of the other to be passive and weak. Accept this principle and it follows in the second place that woman is intended to please man. ⁴

In accordance with this theory he further rationalizes :

Being destined to obey a being so imperfect as man (often with many vices and always with many shortcomings), she must learn to submit uncomplainingly to unjust treatment and marital wrongs. ⁵

Marriage and maternity were held to be the destiny of all women ⁶ and this conviction served to justify their exclusion from the masculine world of public affairs. In 1869 the English reformer John Stuart Mill opposed conventional opinion in his essay 'The Subjection of Women', a treatise that recognized how false indoctrination deprived women of basic human rights and thus devalued them as people :

All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make

⁴ Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *Emile for Today: The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. Selected, Translated and Interpreted by William Boyd, London, 1956, p.131.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁶ Foster, Shirley. *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual*, London, 1985, p.5.

complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have - those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man. ⁷

Denied access to self-determination, women were tacitly encouraged to employ subversive strategies in order to obtain personal satisfaction. Rousseau unashamedly recommends the cultivation of duplicity in woman when he asserts :

Guile is a natural gift of her sex
The characteristic cunning with which women are endowed is an equitable compensation for their lesser strength. ⁸

In contrast, J.S. Mill more perceptively identifies the effects of social repression upon individual character :

An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek for power : refused the command of itself, it will assert its personality by attempting to control others. ⁹

As Mill foresees, the struggle for power in an unequal society inevitably provokes predatory behaviour, and in James's novels *Washington Square* and *Portrait* heroines are trapped by the machinations of individuals (of either sex) who vie for supremacy in a materialistic world.

⁷ Mill, John Stuart. 'The Subjection of Women', in *Essays on Equality, Law and Education*, Vol. XXI, Canada, 1984, pp. 271-272.

⁸ Rousseau, J.J. op.cit., pp. 140-141.

⁹ Mill, J.S. 'The Subjection of Women', op.cit., p. 338.

Within the super-civilized society that James depicts elaborate appearances serve to disguise the elementary nature of human desire. Awareness of human nature as it pertains to the motivations of others is needed if individuals are to survive unscathed the experience of their neighbours and in *Washington Square* and *Portrait* it is the general lack of this necessary awareness that constitutes the downfall of Catherine Sloper and Isabel Archer. In *Washington Square*, America in the 1840s is presented as a simpler and more limited world than it will later become in James's novels, and Catherine Sloper is a seemingly less complex person than the more contemporary heroine of *Portrait*. Limited by social conventions and by her more modest natural endowments, James's depiction of Catherine's character shows how self-confidence and spontaneity have been undermined by exposure to male prejudice. Because of her sex, Catherine Sloper is a disappointment at birth to her fastidious father, who subsequently endeavours to bear philosophically with the unremarkable nature of his child :

Dr. 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 and would have enjoyed being able to think of his daughter as an unusual girl He had moments of irritation at having produced a common-place child. ¹⁰

Neither brilliant nor beautiful, Catherine is a guileless and so a defenceless heroine who predictably falls in love with a beautiful but worthless young man. What makes her history so interesting is the ensuing clash of wills that arises between a supposedly pliant, simple-minded female and her disapproving, authoritative parent. In *Washington Square* the development of the altercation between Catherine and her father demonstrates how

¹⁰ James, Henry. *Washington Square*, London, 1921, p. 11.

little the feelings of a woman might be valued, or her rights respected by her male ‘protectors.’ Within the environment that constitutes New York society in the 1840s the life of this Jamesian heroine is doomed to frustration. Catherine will never ‘ornament’ her world and the combination of plainness and low spirits in her personality has a negative effect upon potential suitors. The lack of alternatives open to ‘respectable’ women in early to mid-nineteenth century society was likely to promote feelings of inadequacy in ‘unmarketable’ girls like Catherine, who shows she has absorbed her father’s low opinion of her character when she tells Morris Townsend : ““You know how little there is in me to be proud of. I am ugly and stupid.””¹¹

In direct contrast to Catherine Sloper, the heroine of *Portrait*, Isabel Archer, is a woman of spirit, intelligence and considerable beauty. Nevertheless, despite the possession of these ‘superior’ qualities, Isabel also experiences frustrations and disappointments which arise as a consequence of limitations imposed upon the female sex. As young marriageable women both Catherine and Isabel are totally unprepared to cope with the situations that life presents and in these novels women’s education is shown to be grossly inadequate to their needs. For Catherine, the arts of dancing and music comprise the greater part of her ‘accomplishments’, while Isabel - more fortunate and more contemporary - receives (with her sisters) the doubtful benefits of a makeshift education described by James as :

... no regular education ... they had been at once spoiled and neglected; they had lived with nursemaids and governesses (usually very bad ones) or had been sent to superficial schools, kept by the French, from which, at the end of a month, they had been removed in tears.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹² James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, New York, 1975, p. 40.

As a consequence of this pseudo-education both heroines are possessed of romantic illusions that cannot be substantiated in the clear light of reality. As young adults James's heroines are eager to engage with life, and for them both, the accomplishment of this ambition involves participation in the usual activities associated with social interaction. Within the world that James depicts recognition for a woman largely depended upon her ability to marry - a fact which was recognized by J.S. Mill :

A single woman ... is felt both by herself and others as a kind of excrescence on the surface of society, having no use or function or office there. She is not indeed precluded from useful and honourable exertion of various kinds : but a married woman is *presumed* to be a useful member of society unless there is evidence to the contrary. ¹³

In *Washington Square*, Catherine Sloper, quite predictably in accordance with her social conditioning, expects that she will marry. She attends her evening parties and sees her younger cousins become engaged without doubting that this fate will also become her own. Catherine is too naive to realize the part that appearance and manner plays in the spontaneous selection of a marriage partner, but her father's awareness of her situation is unflatteringly exact : "Catherine is not unmarriageable, but she is absolutely unattractive."¹⁴ Within her limited circle Catherine is an anomaly because she fails to conform with notions of the type that is recognizably 'marriageable.' Mrs. Almond shows greater perception than the Doctor in putting a correct analysis upon the condition of her niece :

"Catherine does very well; she has a style of her own ... The reason Catherine has

¹³ Mill, John Stuart. 'On Marriage', in *Essays on Equality, Law and Education*, Vol. XXI, Canada, 1984, pp. 41-42.

¹⁴ James, Henry. *Washington Square*, p. 40.

received so little attention is that she seems
to all the young men to be older than themselves.
She is so large, and she dresses - so richly.
They are rather afraid of her, I think. ¹⁵

However, despite Mrs. Almond's insightful sympathy, she concludes her analysis by confirming the Doctor's cynical opinion of Catherine's real attractions - the expectation of a large inheritance :

“... if our young men appear disinterested ...
it is because they marry, as a general thing,
so young, before twenty-five, at the age of
innocence and sincerity, before the age of
calculation. If they only waited a little,
Catherine would fare better ... Wait till some
intelligent man of forty comes along, and he
will be delighted with Catherine.” ¹⁶

In contrast to Catherine's placid acceptance of social convention the heroine of *Portrait* is presented as a very 'modern' young woman who possesses decided 'intentions of her own.' ¹⁷ Isabel Archer wishes to experience life intensely and the difference of thirty years in this novel's setting results in a change of perspective that manifests itself in the heroine's belief that a single life is more conducive to the realization of personal ambitions. Consequently Isabel maintains that : '... a woman ought to be able to live to herself .. and ..it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex.' ¹⁸ While marriage for women meant greater social status, this condition could only be achieved by the loss of personal liberty, and it is primarily for this reason that, in refusing the offers of Goodwood and Warburton, Isabel is convinced she is acting in her own best interests. Seeking to justify the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 64.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 55

unconventionality of her behaviour she tells her cousin Ralph : “I don’t see what harm there is in my wishing not to tie myself. I don’t want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do.”¹⁹

Only love can compensate the loss of liberty for Isabel, and while she denies wishing to ‘drain the cup of experience’,²⁰ she nevertheless insists, more modestly, upon seeing things for herself. It is the desire to develop her *own* understanding of life, based upon independent action, that makes freedom so essential for Isabel - a fact which she endeavours to explain to Lord Warburton :

“I can’t escape my fate ... I should try to escape it if I were to marry you I can’t escape unhappiness ... In marrying you I shall be trying to ... I can never be happy in an extraordinary way; not by turning away, by separating myself ... From life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer.”²¹

In *Washington Square*, Catherine Sloper - having received the questionable benefits of her father’s ‘stock of unexpended authority’²² - has grown to be a model of Rousseau’s ideal of womanhood. Described as ‘excellently, imperturbably good; affectionate, docile, obedient and much addicted to speaking the truth’,²³ Catherine, as such, is totally unprepared to suspect the existence of guile in others, and thus the flattering attentions of Morris Townsend are received by her as expressions of sincere regard. Dr. Sloper’s cynical (but realistic) conviction that it is Catherine’s ‘lively taste’ in expensive dress that is the initial cause of Townsend’s interest is based upon his greater knowledge of the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

²² James, Henry. *Washington Square*, p. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

world. Meeting Catherine at an evening party, the Doctor taunts his daughter : ““You are sumptuous, opulent, expensive ... You look as if you had eighty thousand a year.””²⁴ To his unsympathetic eyes Catherine’s lack of beauty or wit are factors that necessarily preclude romantic attachment, while his opinion of Morris Townsend, once formed, is inexorable. Nevertheless, as he informs Mrs. Almond, the Doctor does not judge the young man lightly : ““What I tell you is the result of thirty years of observation; and in order to be able to form that judgement in a single evening, I have had to spend a lifetime in study.””²⁵ Unfortunately for Catherine, however, a sheltered and banal existence has failed to equip her with the necessary skills with which to detect the artful practices of a polished adventurer. Economic necessity motivates Morris Townsend’s desire for marriage with Catherine Sloper, and while the girl presents herself as easy prey, it is only the Doctor’s opposition that threatens the realization of his ambitions.

In *Washington Square* Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend personify the ways in which women in early to mid-nineteenth century society were controlled by men. Both the Doctor and Townsend are authoritarian egotists, who expect from women unqualified admiration and obedience. Consequently a battle of wills ensues between them for the possession of Catherine, who becomes a bone of contention that each man feels he must coerce into submission and so frustrate the intentions of his rival. As a concerned parent, Dr. Sloper has a moral advantage over Townsend and his opposition is therefore, in some sense, justified. However, inequality between the sexes manifests itself in the Doctor’s imperious manner towards his daughter, while his refusal to accept women as equals renders him incapable of treating Catherine’s feelings as serious, and thus as deserving of respect. There is irony in the fact that the Doctor’s sharp intelligence flourishes at the expense of a more sympathetic understanding and his inability to imaginatively identify

²⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

with the problems of his only child effects a subsequent estrangement that is impossible to repair.

In *Washington Square* and *Portrait* the theme of courtship and marriage is complicated for the two heroines by their possession of large fortunes. Catherine Sloper does not regard her wealth as intimidating but rather she accepts it with vague complacency, failing to see what dangers may attach to it. Conversely, Isabel Archer is initially a woman of modest, independent means, and it is in this capacity that she receives and refuses offers of marriage from both Goodwood and Warburton. Isabel's condition is dramatically changed, however, by the inheritance of a fortune - the result of Ralph's deliberate attempt to free the girl from the constraints of economic necessity : "“If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support. That's what I want cannily to prevent. She wishes to be free, and your bequest will make her free.””²⁶

Within the materialistic world that James's novels depict wealth inevitably attracts predators and in *Portrait* Gilbert Osmond succeeds in attaching Isabel's affections where others have failed. The peculiar glamour of the man captures her imagination and evokes thereby her sympathy:

She had carried away an image from her
visit to his hill-top ... the image of a quiet,
clever, sensitive, distinguished man,
strolling on a moss-grown terrace and
holding by the hand a little girl.²⁷

Isabel's fertile imagination rapidly constructs the romantic picture of 'a lonely, studious life in a lovely land',²⁸ while sympathy enables her to discover in Osmond the existence

²⁶ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 160.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

'... of an old sorrow that sometimes ached today; of a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but that had an element of nobleness; of a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated.' ²⁹

In depicting the courtship of this couple James shows how Isabel and Osmond are each partly responsible for the unfortunate outcome of their relationship. In accordance with customary conventions both practise self-deception and each is guilty of false projections that, in turn, inspire unrealistic expectations. Within nineteenth century society existing inequality between the sexes inevitably promoted unnatural relations - a problem that J.S. Mill was to address in his essay 'The Subjection of Woman' :

... the position of looking up to another is extremely unpropitious to complete sincerity and openness with him. The fear of losing ground in his opinion or in his feelings is so strong, that even in an upright character, there is an unconscious tendency to show only the best side, or the side which, though not the best, is that which he most likes to see : it may be confidently said that thorough knowledge of one another hardly ever exists, but between persons who, besides being intimates, are equals. ³⁰

In *Washington Square* the mercenary pursuits of Morris Townsend are executed in a manner that is relatively simplistic and unimaginative. His assault upon the affections of Catherine takes a predictable form wherein the socially dominant male asserts precedence to simultaneously charm and coerce the 'inferior' female into a compliance with his wishes. While the designs of Morris Townsend are essentially transparent, the predatory nature of Gilbert Osmond in *Portrait* is far more subtle and therefore difficult to discern.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Mill, J.S. 'The Subjection of Women', op.cit., p. 279.

Although Isabel's fortune is the initial reason for his pursuit, Osmond is also captivated by the personal attractions of the girl, and he badly miscalculates her character when he sees her as a woman conducive to his happiness. Within Isabel's nature the sense of duty is highly developed, and it is partly owing to this conditioning that she first experiences the need to justify her life of idle pleasure - a life that is, ironically, the result of inherited wealth. In succumbing to the attractions of Gilbert Osmond, Isabel's perspective undergoes a shift whereby : 'The desire for unlimited expansion had been succeeded in her soul by the sense that life was vacant without some private duty that might gather one's energies to a point.'³¹ This new awareness prepares Isabel for still further changes and activates a prophecy made earlier to her by Henrietta Stackpole :

“... you think you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing yourself and pleasing others. You'll find you're mistaken. Whatever life you lead you must put your soul in it ... and from the moment you do that it ceases to be a romance I assure you : it becomes grim reality! ... You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views - that's your great illusion my dear. But we can't. You must be prepared on many occasions in life to please no one at all - not even yourself.”³²

In *Washington Square* Catherine Sloper's illusions are shattered when both the Doctor and Morris Townsend realize they are powerless to command her unqualified obedience. Revenge follows swiftly and takes the form of abandonment. Morris physically repulses Catherine and absconds while the Doctor unleashes the stored venom of his contempt in a denunciation that results in permanent emotional estrangement. Catherine is left with the fruits of knowledge as the reward of her experience; the essence of which is her realization

³¹ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 297.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

that : 'Morris Townsend had trifled with her affection, and that her father had broken its spring.'³³ Upon this barren but realistic understanding Catherine re-assembles a viable construct for social interaction. For many women in early to mid-nineteenth century society *duty* provided a justification for living,³⁴ and in accordance with the conventional practices of middle class philanthropy Catherine becomes in time

... an admirable old maid. She formed habits, regulated her days upon a system of her own, interested herself in charitable institutions, asylums, hospitals, and aid societies; and went generally, with an even and noiseless step, about the rigid business of her life.³⁵

The experience of betrayal deprives Catherine Sloper of romantic illusions, forcing upon her an acceptance of the practical realities that underlie human relations. Catherine survives the experience, but only at a cost of personal suffering and the awareness that 'there was something dead in her life.'³⁶ In both novels Jamesian heroines awaken to the knowledge that it is self-interest which motivates much of human behaviour and they experience accordingly loss of innocence - or ignorance - of worldly affairs. Consequently each adopts, of necessity, the prosaic viewpoint of maturity that recognizes how, upon many occasions, it is possible for a woman 'to please no one': not even herself.

In *Washington Square* and *Portrait* James's leading characters are supported by a variety of female types whose diversity further serves to delineate the condition of women within

³³ James, Henry. *Washington Square*, p. 215.

³⁴ Ellis, S. *The Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, 1839, p. 223. Ms. Ellis writes : '... the humblest occupation, undertaken from a sense of duty, becomes ennobled in the motive by which it is prompted, and that the severest self-denial may be blessed and honoured by the Father of mercies, if endured in preference to an infringement upon those laws which he has laid down for the government of the human family.' Quoted in Banks, J.A. and Olive Banks. *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*, Liverpool, 1964, p. 23.

³⁵ James, Henry. *Washington Square*, p. 215.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the existing social structure. While Catherine Sloper demonstrates the inarticulate condition of women generally in the 1840s, her aunt, Lavinia Penniman, is depicted as a weak and foolish woman whose lack of understanding is largely the result of a restrictive upbringing. A childless widow of indeterminate means, Lavinia lives dependently upon her brother and, as the self-appointed companion of his child, she contrives to live vicariously through her. Excessive sentimentality reduces Lavinia almost to a condition of idiocy, that is nevertheless highly dangerous to her associates, and while her impoverished character suggests the deprivation of human rights, she is herself supremely unconscious of personal disadvantage. Vanity and sentiment prevail with Lavinia to the end and she remains throughout a fantastic and futile figure.

Contrasting Lavinia's condition of childlike dependency, her sister, Mrs. Almond is depicted as a woman of common-sense and sympathetic understanding. Wife to a 'prosperous merchant'³⁷ and mother of a 'blooming family'³⁸ Mrs. Almond conforms with the traditional patterns of womanhood - a practice that earns her approval from the Doctor (and it would also appear, by his tone, from the narrator himself). Nevertheless, it is significant that the life of this capable woman is wholly devoted to the service of family and friends, and beyond this narrow sphere she evinces no desire to transgress.

In *Washington Square* the world inhabited by women is essentially one of limitation where confinement weighs heavily upon the human spirit restricting its spontaneous expression. Conversely, women characters in *Portrait* are offered greater opportunities for freedom of action. In this novel there are many subsidiary women characters who are depicted in various stages of development and the number of personalities portrayed allows for differences in the response to social conditions to be exhibited.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

Isabel's aunt, Mrs. Touchett, is unusual for a woman of her generation because she chooses to assert self-will and, disregarding the conventions surrounding marriage, she lives apart from her husband and child for the greater portion of her life. For Mrs. Touchett, marriage is a matter of politics not sentiment, and Ralph sees his parents relationship as one of role reversal wherein seemingly : '... his father ... was the more motherly; his mother, on the other hand, was paternal.'³⁹ Mrs. Touchett's general attitude toward life is one of barely disguised hostility; a reaction that conveys profound mistrust - a fear of being exploited that even death itself cannot dispel : '... the worst of dying was ... that it exposed one to be taken advantage of.'⁴⁰ James portrays Mrs. Touchett as a woman who, in the interest of maintaining personal autonomy, has devoted a lifetime to the suppression of her emotions. However, the deaths of both husband and son cause her to doubt the validity of her conduct, and consequently Isabel believes that : '... it had come over her dimly that she had failed of something, that she saw herself in the future as an old woman without memories.'⁴¹

For failing to observe the customary duties of a wife, Mrs. Touchett is finally punished, and by depicting her life as ultimately sterile James implies, by contrast, that human feeling and commitment to others are necessary to meaningful existence. Isabel pities the pragmatic nature of her aunt, believing that upon such a constitution : 'Nothing tender, nothing sympathetic, had ever had a chance to fasten no wind-sown blossom, no familiar softening moss.'⁴² *Trust* is a missing ingredient within Mrs. Touchett's nature and it is one generally considered necessary for harmonious relationships. However, in order for trust to exist, people must believe that a just system governs their society. The inequality surrounding relations between the sexes arouses resentment in Mrs. Touchett which is manifested in her suppressed hostility and her subsequent need of dramatic

³⁹ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 473

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

statement. Strong-willed and obstinate, she flings down a gauntlet to challenge a society that would restrict personal autonomy; but, (as James chooses to depict it), the outcome of efforts too strenuously exerted rebound upon herself to further disadvantage, by depriving Mrs. Touchett ultimately of emotional fulfilment.

Contrasting Mrs. Touchett, Madame Merle is a woman who has, to all appearances, found the happy medium through which to operate harmoniously in society. Ralph Touchett believes that his mother's admiration of her friend is such that "If she were not herself (which she after all much prefers), she would like to be Madame Merle."⁴³ Both women are strong-willed individuals who refuse to relinquish control of situations, but nevertheless their manner of asserting themselves differs considerably in practice.

Having survived the effects of youthful misalliance with a 'nonentity' whom she chooses to describe as 'a positive adventurer',⁴⁴ Madame Merle, at forty, is a widow whose social ambitions have been frustrated by lack of money and its accompanying status. Without means to implement her desires, social 'success' for this woman depends upon her ability to perform and, by cultivating to perfection the arts and graces valued by 'high-civilization', she is able to generate an illusion of personal grandeur. Additionally, a 'large experience' of the world - gained 'experimentally' - ensures that Madam Merle retains few illusions and she is therefore able to inform Isabel Archer: "... a woman, it seems to me, has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl"⁴⁵

Worldly ambitions have eroded personal integrity in this woman, while enslavement to convention has caused her to disavow motherhood and relinquish the care of her illegitimate child into the hands of its father, Gilbert Osmond. It is Pansy's future that

⁴³ Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

motivates her to promote the marriage of Osmond and Isabel, and the failed ambitions of the mother are thus rekindled by the desire to secure 'greatness' for her child. Like her friend Mrs. Touchett, Madam Merle is ultimately punished for transgressing moral codes when skill in manipulating others rebounds upon herself. The recognition that she is superfluous to Osmond and disliked by Pansy is compounded by knowledge of Isabel's and Mrs. Touchett's outright rejection. Consequently, when she professes to a greater unhappiness than Isabel's own, Madam Merle does not lie, and her characteristic lament : "If I could only begin again - if I could have my life before me"⁴⁶ is one that reflects the feelings of other women in this novel.

Like Mrs. Touchett, Madame Merle must accept a condition of alienation that results from decisions taken and habits formed, in which neither is spared the grief that comes with knowledge of personal failure. Unable to admit defeat, however, Madame Merle chooses exile, preferring to depart from a scene of action she can no longer control. America, the land of her birth, ironically becomes her destination, where it is not inconceivable that the spirit of democracy will provide opportunity for rehabilitation. While James chooses not to validate the self-assertive, amoral practices of Madame Merle, he nevertheless portrays her as a talented, if 'misdirected' woman whose intelligence cannot be suppressed by artificial limitations. Denied free expression of her faculties, she seeks power through others, and her conduct justifies the claims of social reformers who professed that equal opportunities between the sexes were fundamental to harmonious human relations.

Within the Patriarchal society that James depicts female strategies of self-preservation necessarily include subterfuge and artifice. For the greater part of the nineteenth century, the 'success' of a woman largely depended upon her 'womanliness' - by which was meant her seeming ability to conform to the expectations of men. In his influential writings Rousseau advises : 'The more womanly a woman is, the better. Whenever she

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

exercises her own proper powers she gains by it: when she tries to usurp ours she becomes our inferior.’⁴⁷ In *Washington Square* and *Portrait* punishment in the form of rejection is inevitably metered out to those who covet male privileges, while the ‘proper powers’ assigned to women are predictably those of service, modesty and praise.⁴⁸

Seeking to expose ideological falsifications within nineteenth century society, J.S. Mill asserts :

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others[furthermore he maintains] ... this great means of influence over the minds of women having been acquired, an instinct of selfishness made men avail themselves of it to the utmost as a means of holding women in subjection, by representing to them meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness.⁴⁹

In *Portrait*, Pansy Osmond and the Misses Molyneux (Lord Warburton’s sisters) are young women who are products of a system of training that emphasizes obedience and passivity - qualities that make them malleable to the designs of their ‘superiors’. The Misses Molyneux are minor figures, but the ‘extreme sweetness and shyness of (their) demeanour’⁵⁰ is characteristic of specific forms of cultivation. In this novel, social training for marriageable girls is shown to be based upon a process of selection, whereby experience is censored to permit only the surface impressions of everyday ‘reality’. In Gilbert Osmond’s daughter, Pansy, the extent to which restrictions might be imposed

⁴⁷ Rousseau, J.J., *op.cit.*, p. 134.

⁴⁸ Ruskin, John. ‘Of Queens’ Gardens’ in *Sesame and Lilies*, London, MCMVII, p.73. Ruskin sees woman’s mission as being that of passive encouragement : ‘Her great function is Praise; she enters no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest.’

⁴⁹ Mill, J.S. ‘The Subjection of Women’, *op.cit.*, pp. 271-272.

⁵⁰ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 73.

upon individual freedom is given a vivid exposure. Pansy's 'natural' simplicity and sweetness of manner largely results from a process of careful cultivation impressed upon her by a convent upbringing. There she is taught to respect authority and she learns through practical experience that obedience is rewarded by affection and approval.

'Innocence' was a primary drawcard for nineteenth century gentlemen and Pansy's aspiring suitor, Edward Rosier, is enthralled by the imagined extent of his beloved's ignorance :

He was sure Pansy had never looked at a newspaper and that, in the way of novels, if she had read Sir Walter Scott it was the very most ... [she] would not have walked alone, nor have received letters from men, nor have been taken to the theatre to see the comedy of manners. ⁵¹

Rosier's obsession with innocence (or moral purity) reflects a widespread perversion within nineteenth century society whereby men of experience gained renewed self-confidence in their 'superiority' by ensuring that the women they chose to marry were far more ignorant - both mentally and physically - than themselves. While J.S. Mill understood that 'the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal', ⁵² William Thompson alludes to the existence of darker designs :

The great bulk of men, however, from the wretched training in which they been brought up, necessarily pursue mere individual selfish gratification on the very bosom of love, their sexual feelings have nothing of sympathy in them. Nay, some are brutal enough to associate - and as a point of morals too! - antipathy towards

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 311.

⁵² Mill, J.S. 'The Subjection of Women', *op.cit.*, p. 299.

their companions who presume to share
unreservedly and affectionately in their
enjoyments; passive endurance being in their
minds the perfection of conduct in their slaves! ⁵³

In *Portrait*, Isabel sees Pansy Osmond as a ‘childish martyr decked out for sacrifice’ ⁵⁴ and this masochistic image captures the essence of the girl’s fate. Reared to fulfil the desires of others, and ‘impregnated with the idea of submission’, ⁵⁵ resistance is impossible for Pansy, whose situation demonstrates how girls could be subjected to conditions that ultimately deprived them of basic human rights.

The arranged marriage of convenience desired by Gilbert Osmond for his child is a fate that has already overtaken his sister, the Countess Gemini who, like Pansy Osmond, has also received the doubtful ‘benefits’ of a convent education. Subsequent experience however, has ensured that romantic illusions are no longer relevant to her existence and consequently the Countess informs Isabel Archer : ““I don’t want to know anything more - I know too much already. The more you know the more unhappy you are.”” ⁵⁶

Discontented and bored with life, the source of her frustration arises from her alliance with a ‘low-lived brute’ ⁵⁷ who happens to possess an Italian title. Disposed of in marriage by her mother, Amy Osmond as the Countess Gemini, must make the best of an unwholesome bargain. Her nervous disposition reacts, however, in flamboyant gestures of defiance that represent her as an eccentric figure to Isabel Archer while, to the staunchly moral Mrs. Touchett, the sister of Gilbert Osmond has passed beyond the limits of social acceptability. In the course of a long marital mutiny the Countesses reputation has suffered depreciation and Mrs. Touchett, among others, disdains contact with such a ‘highly compromised’ character.

⁵³ Thompson, William. *op.cit.*, p. 94.

⁵⁴ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 391.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Despite her volatile nature the Countess possesses a modicum of common-sense and she tells Isabel Archer matter-of-factly : ““When I discovered, ten years ago, that my husband’s dearest wish was to make me miserable ... ah, it was a wonderful simplification!””⁵⁸ It is *this* woman who is instrumental in freeing Isabel from her remaining illusions. For the Countess, her brother Osmond has no mystery. She ridicules his pretensions : ““... he has always appeared to believe that he’s descended from the gods””⁵⁹ and she knows, from experience, that Osmond is incapable of loving anyone but himself. Realistically therefore, she believes Isabel can only profit from knowledge of the truth. Not a morally fastidious person, the Countess sees Isabel’s ‘high moral tone’ as unnecessarily debilitating and she demurs : “Don’t try to be too good. Be a little easy and natural and nasty; feel a little wicked, for the comfort of it, once in your life!”⁶⁰

James depicts the Countess Gemini as a bird of bright plumage flapping ineffectually within the perimeters of her cage. Life for this woman is a series of ‘pretty perversities’, the aimlessness of which are generating within her a mental and spiritual stagnation. Hating the falsity of her Florentine existence, she loathes the hypocrisy of ‘virtuous’ society women. Allied to an obnoxious husband by a legal system that binds and by the realities of economic necessity - the Countess Gemini is trapped by the social system and firmly placed within a mould she is unable to resist. Seeing no means of escape, and lacking aptitude for innovation, the Countess - like Pansy Osmond - must bow to authority and for her, consciousness is the awareness of futility and frustration.

In *Portrait* the characters depicted are principally American expatriates who have adapted to the ideas and attitudes of the European ‘old world’. The Touchetts, Madame Merle, Gilbert Osmond and his sister the Countess Gemini, have all become Europeanized, while

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

Isabel Archer undergoes a process of transformation. Unlike these characters, however, Henrietta Stackpole presents an aggressively *American* stance. American girls such as Isabel and Henrietta are products of the 'new world' where, in the 1870s, democratic ideals encouraged free expression in young women. Consequently both Isabel and Henrietta hold many theories and opinions, but only Henrietta carries personal expression into the public arena; being by profession a 'literary lady' who works for a living as a journalist. Arriving in Europe she immediately experiences feelings of constriction and her prosaic simplicity contrasts sharply against old world sophistication. By European standards Henrietta leads a bohemian existence believing that - as a literary woman - she might 'go everywhere and do everything'⁶¹ and inevitably Gilbert Osmond considers her a 'monster' :

“You know I never had admitted she’s
a woman ... she reminds me ... of a new
steel pen - the most odious thing in nature.
She talks as a steel pen writes; she thinks
and moves and walks and looks exactly as
she talks.”⁶²

Henrietta sees her relation to men as being one of equality and her direct gaze and freedom of manner is indicative of a new type of womanhood. Ralph Touchett recognizes her as the 'Future' - but significantly, it is not one to which he looks forward. Unimpressed by the past, Henrietta is critical of European traditions; she asks embarrassing questions and challenges established opinion. Five years intermittent exposure to European culture, however, effects change even within Henrietta's consciousness and, more surprising still for Isabel Archer, is her friend's decision to marry an Englishman. But marriage for this woman is essentially a clear-sighted plan of action - one that allows her to further pursue her investigations into the 'inner life' of the English national character. In *Portrait*, Henrietta Stackpole is presented as the least victimized of characters. She takes the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 409.

initiative in life and is thereby able to decide her own future with clear, wide-open eyes. Her ability to sustain an independent status is founded upon American democratic principles which she accepts as a basic human right - the most fundamental of which is the ability to obtain paid employment.

Self-sufficiency is the characteristic trait that distinguishes Henrietta Stackpole as a woman of the Future, but ironically, the possession of this quality makes it impossible for male characters to treat her seriously. Ralph Touchett genuinely admires Henrietta but nevertheless : ‘... it seemed to him that if she was not a charming woman she was at least a very good “sort”’.⁶³ Later he reflects : ‘...he liked (Henrietta) exactly as much as he had always done; he had never doubted for a moment that she was an excellent fellow.’⁶⁴ Ralph’s definition of a ‘charming woman’ seemingly conforms with conventional ideals that depicted a ‘charming’ and thus a ‘desirable’ woman as powerless, compliant and ornamental. Additionally, his need to de-sexualize Henrietta suggests that, for many men within nineteenth century society, it was difficult to conceive of women as sexual beings unless they conformed with masculine notions of femininity - notions that were based upon a premise of inferiority.⁶⁵ Henrietta’s failure to conform with this basic principle results in either open hostility - as with Gilbert Osmond - or in an amused depreciation that is indulgently tolerant, which is the attitude adopted by Ralph Touchett. Only the eccentric Mr. Bantling, with his innate curiosity, is able to respond naturally to Henrietta’s liberated style and, unlike other male characters, he is seemingly not intimidated by the idea of according equality to a woman.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 413.

⁶⁵ Walker, A. *Woman Physiologically Considered as to Mind, Morals, Marriage, Matrimonial Slavery, Infidelity and Divorce*, 1840. The author asserts: ‘It is evident that the man, possessing reasoning faculties, muscular power, and courage to employ it, is qualified for being a protector: the woman, being little capable of reasoning, feeble, and timid, requires protection. Under such circumstances, the man naturally governs: the woman as naturally obeys.’ Quoted in Banks, J.A. and Olive Banks, op.cit., p. 22.

In his 'Preface' to *Portrait*, written in 1908, James describes Henrietta Stackpole as an 'anomaly' ⁶⁶ and justifies his allowing her character 'so officiously, so strangely, so almost inexplicably, to pervade' ⁶⁷ the novel by attributing its purpose to that of *amusement* :

There was the danger of the noted 'thinness' - which was to be averted ... by the cultivation of the lively ... Henrietta must have been at that time a part of my wonderful notion of the lively. ⁶⁸

It is interesting to observe that James's estimation of Henrietta's character provided in the 'Preface' corresponds with the evaluation given her by male characters in the novel. This correspondence suggests that James's *own* ideal of womanhood was also that of his era - an ideal that was constructed upon the premise of female inferiority. Henrietta is conspicuously lacking in those 'noble' self-sacrificing qualities considered worthy to inspire male adoration and consequently, as James remarks, 'she may run beside the coach', ⁶⁹ but she will never be 'accommodated with a seat inside.' ⁷⁰ In this novel Henrietta's independent type is given an ironic treatment - a fact which seems to indicate that, for James also, absolute equality between the sexes was an undesirable prospect. If women such as Henrietta Stackpole were to insist upon equality then, by definition, they could not *really* be women. ⁷¹

⁶⁶ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Portrait of a Lady"', in *The Art of the Novel*, p. 55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷¹ Shaw, George Bernard. 'The Womanly Woman', in Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak, (ed.) *Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women*, New York, 1969, p. 54. Shaw draws attention to hypocrisy in male attitudes to women by focusing upon William Stead's response to the artist, Marie Bashkirtseff: 'When he found Marie Baskirtseff's account of herself utterly incompatible with the account of a woman's mind given to him by his ideal, he was confronted with the dilemma that either Marie was not a woman or else his ideal did not correspond to nature. He actually accepted the former alternative.'

Isabel Archer is disillusioned by her friend's decision to marry but she forgets that she had once experienced similar sentiments :

“You talk about one's soaring and sailing,
but if one marries at all one touches the earth.
One has human feelings and needs, one has a
heart in one's bosom, and one must marry a
particular individual.”⁷²

The binding nature of marriage (in a time when divorce meant social suicide) made the individuals choice of a partner crucial to future well-being. Within European society conventional morality decreed that a woman must remain with her husband and, while the ladies of Florence engage in illicit affairs, most are careful to preserve an appearance of fidelity. Conversely, marriage in the new world was not considered absolutely binding and consequently Henrietta urges Isabel to leave her husband, assuring her : ‘ “.. nothing is more common in our Western cities, and it's to them, after all, that we must look in the future.”’⁷³ It is at this precise point that the narrator significantly chooses to interrupt Henrietta, declaring : ‘Her argument, however, does not concern this history, which has too many other threads to unwind.’⁷⁴ Presumably the exact nature of those social injustices that served to disadvantage married women are, in themselves, of less interest to James than are the dramatic reactions of individuals to existing circumstances. Nevertheless, the disadvantageous position of women married to ‘unchivalrous’ men becomes increasingly apparent in the course of his narrative.

In *Portrait*, sexual passion is perceived by Isabel Archer as an emotion that threatens to extirpate individual freedom. Fear of being appropriated by a dominant male causes her initially to balk at the idea of marriage - suspecting it to be reductive of intellectual

⁷² James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 293.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

expansion. Restrained and solitary by nature, and shrinking instinctively from ‘coarse-minded’ males, Isabel is nevertheless attracted to the cultivated manner of Gilbert Osmond. The air of aestheticism he exudes causes her to imagine that, by marrying this man, she can adhere to human needs for affection while simultaneously preserving and enhancing the life of the mind. Ironically, however, it is Isabel’s mind that is the precise target of Osmond’s displeasure - for him: ‘She had too many ideas and ... she must get rid of them.’⁷⁵

Traditionally the role of woman was perceived to be that of ‘helpmate’ and in this capacity she was expected to make the life of man ‘sweet and agreeable.’⁷⁶ The teachings of Rousseau prescribed that woman ‘... will be her husband’s disciple, not his teacher. Far from wanting to impose her tastes on him, she will share his.’⁷⁷ While agreeing essentially with this viewpoint, John Ruskin qualifies it slightly, remarking : ‘A woman may always help her husband by what she knows, however little; by what she half-knows, or mis-knows, she will only tease him.’⁷⁸ Overriding the opinions of both men J.S. Mill rejects rhetorical justifications of inequality and he exposes the ulterior motives underlying patriarchal practices :

All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds.⁷⁹

In *Portrait* Gilbert Osmond seeks to appropriate the mind of Isabel Archer, believing it will easily accommodate itself to his pleasure; that he will, in effect, be able to ‘tap her

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 359.

⁷⁶ Rousseau, J.J., op.cit., p. 135.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 153.

⁷⁸ Ruskin, John. op.cit., pp. 79-80.

⁷⁹ Mill, J.S. ‘The Subjection of Women’, op.cit., p. 271.

imagination with his knuckle and make it ring.’⁸⁰ However, by failing in his design, Osmond takes ‘revenge’ upon his wife by hating her, and in time Isabel perceives : ‘The real offence ... was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his - attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park.’⁸¹

Marriage brings change to Isabel Archer and in both *Portrait* and *Washington Square* Jamesian heroines suffer disillusionment as a result of their contact with the social reality. Catherine Sloper possesses none of Isabel’s personal advantages and she lacks awareness of life’s abundant possibilities. Nevertheless she also undergoes the effects of change and she suffers from feelings of disillusionment that arise in consequence of her thwarted desire for marriage. Intimidated by her father, Catherine’s fear of Dr. Sloper is compounded by a growing fear of Morris Townsend when she returns from Europe to find him no longer responsive to her plaintive pleas for marriage.

In the novels of Henry James *interest* in a character invariably lies in the ways in which individuals contrive to assimilate experience and adjust themselves to changing fortunes. Discussing this aspect of characterization, James asserts that it is not ‘the passion of hero and heroine that gives ... interest, but it is they themselves, with the ground they stand on and the objects enclosing them, who give interest to their passion.’⁸² ‘The ground they stand on’ is, for James, the personal morality that informs the consciousness of an individual which is evolved through the direct experience of life. In *Washington Square* Catherine Sloper’s new awareness begins with the discovery that the father whom she has worshipped is, in reality, ‘not very fond’⁸³ of her. Early attempts to supplicate his authority had conformed with practices deemed appropriate for a dutiful daughter, wherein ‘good’ behaviour might merit reward : ‘To be good, she must be patient, respectful,

⁸⁰ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 296.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁸² James, Henry. Quoted in Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Treacherous Years, 1895-1900*. London, 1969, p. 332.

⁸³ James, Henry. *Washington Square*, p. 170.

abstain from judging her father too harshly, and from committing any act of open defiance.’⁸⁴ However, the realization that she is held in contempt despite all self-abasing efforts to placate incites Catherine’s sense of justice. Her subsequent rebellion is a revolution in the life of a girl trained to obey; who has been taught to entirely depreciate personal desires. Returning from Europe, Catherine’s process of self-assertion, or ‘hardening’, has begun. Accordingly she tells her Aunt Penniman :

“I have been as good as I could, but he doesn’t care. Now I don’t care either. I don’t know whether I have grown bad; perhaps I have. But I don’t care for that. I have come home to be married - that’s all I know.”⁸⁵

For Morris’s sake Catherine has endured the lacerating effects of Dr. Sloper’s contempt and her new authority is born of the necessity to assert human rights for autonomous action. There is irony in Catherine’s efforts to secure a future that is based upon illusion and the subsequent betrayal by Townsend adds to her awakening consciousness the knowledge that she is both ‘despised and forsaken.’⁸⁶ Regarding Morris : ‘... she felt a wound ... it seemed to her that a mask had suddenly fallen from his face ... she was smothered and stunned.’⁸⁷ Personal catastrophe forces Catherine to confront reality :

Her trouble was terrible; but was it a thing of her imagination, engendered by an extravagant sensibility, or did it represent a clear-cut reality, and had the worst that was possible actually come to pass?⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 97-98.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 193.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 194-195.

Catherine Sloper internalizes her trauma and learns the art of dissimulation. Preserving an appearance of equanimity, she deflects the sarcasm of her father and acquires dignity through self-restraint. Dr. Sloper is never able to penetrate his daughter's defensive reserve, but he nevertheless consoles himself with reassuring theories that reflect his own prosaic viewpoint : ““She has had her little dance, and now she is sitting down to rest.””⁸⁹

Duty serves to preserve meaning for Catherine, who becomes in time ‘greatly liked’ among her social set, for whom she is distinguished as a ‘kindly maiden aunt.’⁹⁰ Before his death, however, Dr. Sloper makes a final bid to subdue, once and for all, the rebellious spirit of his child, requiring from her a promise never to marry Townsend. Now in full possession of her powers, Catherine remains impassive : ‘She knew herself that she was obstinate, and it gave her a certain joy. She was now a middle-aged woman.’⁹¹

Awareness of the reality of her situation frees Catherine Sloper from delusions, allowing her thereby to assume a measure of control over her life, while a final confrontation with the aging Townsend dissolves forever the last vestiges of romantic vision :

...fair and well preserved, perfectly dressed, mature and complete ... she saw his glossy perfumed beard, and his eyes above it looking strange and hard. It was very different from his old - from his young - face. If she had first seen him this way she would not have liked him.⁹²

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

In *Washington Square*, Catherine Sloper comes into possession of her faculties after struggling with concepts that dictate subservience to male authority. Her independence is, however, gained only through suffering, and by accepting the knowledge that she has failed to attain the happiness she desired. Contrasted with the ideals of youth, 'reality' appears impoverished. Her life is rigid and conservative but, by adopting the role assigned to her by 'circumstances', Catherine becomes a 'useful' and thus a 'respected' member of society. Her 'little dance' has had to suffice for a lifetime and in 'sitting down to rest' she is, effectively, abstaining from all further experimentation within the realm of the human heart.

There is victory amidst defeat for this Jamesian heroine, however, in the fact that bitterness is rejected by her and she is therefore able to preserve personal integrity, but even so, Catherine's new awareness can only take her so far. Growing older within her society, she learns to please herself to a certain extent and accordingly becomes 'a person to be reckoned with'⁹³ but the spring of her affections is broken and thus a vital element of her nature has been sacrificed to expediency. Mrs. Almond's analogy vividly encapsulates the condition of her niece : "The state of mind after amputation is doubtless one of comparative repose,"⁹⁴ and while, to all appearances, Catherine's existence is useful and 'honourable' - it is not the life she would have chosen, if *choice* had been permitted her.

In *Washington Square* Catherine's aspirations for a meaningful life are short-circuited by contact with the social reality and consequently she is able to function only within a limited sphere. In *Portrait*, Henrietta exhorts Isabel to abandon her unwholesome situation before the 'worst' occurs, fearing her friend's character will be ruined by the subversive attacks made upon it by Osmond. Isabel, however, is rather more confident : "It won't get

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

spoiled ... I'm taking very good care of it.”⁹⁵ For Isabel, marriage with Osmond proves, ironically, to be the challenge of a lifetime wherein her youthful ideas on the nature of heroism find unexpected actualization. However, in discovering that she is indeed capable of heroism, Isabel also realizes how little ‘pleasure’ is involved in the experience. Consequently, confrontation with the reality of entrapment with a ‘sterile dilettante’⁹⁶ demands all her ‘superior’ resources. As a young woman Isabel had wished not to evade the inevitable clashes and blunders that are the common lot of ordinary mortals, realizing instinctively that such encounters are an essential part of human development. It is, accordingly, through suffering that she discovers the reality of her situation and in doing so, learns the nature of her own being, and thus the self-obsessed girl undergoes metamorphosis to become a woman who is capable of deep sympathies.

At Gardencourt Isabel is given a second opportunity to choose her course of action, and her decision *this* time is made with full awareness of the consequences. Predictably she chooses a moral existence that satisfies the demands of conscience and which effectively extinguishes the threat of passionate exhortations. Presented with two unattractive alternatives in the shape of male ‘protectors’ (or predators), Isabel prefers to conform to a situation for which she is partly responsible rather than entertain an intimate relationship with an aggressive male figure. Accordingly Isabel chooses *convention* and in doing so she chooses a *cage* - but she returns to it with full consciousness of its being so.

In *Portrait* Isabel’s destiny is shown to result from a number of interwoven factors - from pride and impetuosity and inexperience - all of which combine with social forces to perpetuate her condition of ultimate captivity. Resisting enslavement to her senses, she refuses to embrace those ‘freedoms’ offered her by Goodwood, whose searing passion evokes ‘the hot wind of the desert’⁹⁷ - which is, for her, an overpowering principle of

⁹⁵ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 418.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

destruction. Consequently Isabel is grateful for her cage because, while it undoubtedly holds limitations, it also provides shelter from aspects of life that threaten to overwhelm her consciousness.

The preservation of a sense of personal identity is a fundamental right that both heroines assert in these novels. Refusing to be appropriated as objects of convenience, Isabel and Catherine ultimately reject sexual passion and retreat to a place of emotional isolation. Given their imperfect, compromised condition in society, women characters in these novels must find some form of *resolution* if they are to live positive lives. Resolution for James's heroines is essentially *conservative* and it conforms to the conventions of the time. In *Washington Square* Catherine Sloper lives by doing her 'duty', which she believes to consist of selfless acts for other people, and Isabel Archer in *Portrait* will also, presumably, employ duty as the principal justification of her existence.

The nineteenth century ideology upon which James's concept of a 'good' woman is based is compounded by his own conviction that the values expressed in conventional morality are necessary to individual and social well-being.⁹⁸ For James, the *quality* of personal experience is what invariably distinguishes characters of a 'finer grain' from others. Being aware of the existence of good and evil, and consciously choosing to do 'good' - to act from purely disinterested motives, constitutes 'honourability' for him - the stuff of which his heroines (and heroes) are composed. Knowledge of the self and of the social reality is acquired (for Jamesian characters) only through painful experience, and this knowledge alone can confer upon individuals a state of consciousness from which position *real* choice becomes possible. It is therefore presented as a personal victory for Catherine and Isabel that, having suffered intensely, each woman chooses to act with

⁹⁸ Wardley, Lynn. 'Woman's Voice, Democracy's Body, and *The Bostonians*', in *ELH*, Vol. 56, No.1, Fall, 1989, p. 644. The author discusses James's essay 'The Question of Our Speech' wherein he associates speech with culture itself, seeing woman as the 'guardian of the sacred flame of inherited civilization'.

moral integrity. Within their captivity - James seemingly implies - they have, by adopting this stance, achieved (paradoxically) the disinterested nobility of 'free spirits.'

To a modern mind, compliance with the dictates of an unequal society appears highly irrelevant and grossly unfair. In *Portrait* Henrietta Stackpole's more 'modern' consciousness questions the validity of existing conventions (but, ironically, she is finally made to accept them all). Henrietta's consciousness, however, is not depicted as one of 'finer grain' and while she provides insight into alternatives, they are not presumably possibilities for a character of Isabel Archer's extreme sensibility. Unlike Henrietta, Isabel is incapacitated by her acceptance of tradition : she *believes* in the conventions that bind and for her therefore 'marriage meant that a woman should cleave to the man with whom, uttering tremendous vows, she had stood at the altar.'⁹⁹ The fact that such vows are rendered meaningless by the lack of love or human sympathy cannot negate for Isabel the validity of a 'magnificent form' that is, for her, 'something sacred and precious.'¹⁰⁰

In *Portrait* Mr. Touchett differentiates between women as a sex when he advises Ralph and Lord Warburton to marry :

"The ladies will save us ... that is the best of them will - for I make a distinction between them. Make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting."¹⁰¹

However, *why* it becomes necessary that men should be saved, and why the 'best' of women must be sacrificed to this purpose is a question that neither the 'gentlemen', nor James himself, seems to consider requires answering. Isabel and Catherine are both

⁹⁹ James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 449.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

‘good’ women and, in making the lives of ‘bad’ men ‘interesting’, they are ground in ‘the very mill of the conventional!’¹⁰²

Within the fiction of Henry James ‘reality’ is invariably presented as Janus-faced. The social reality which dominates a materialist world is that of *expediency*, wherein wealth and status are primary considerations. The struggle for supremacy that this reality provokes creates an imbalance with *another* kind of reality, less conspicuous but, for James, equally valid, which lies within the realm of the imagination, where feelings and ideals inspire action. As a moralist, James habitually upholds *feeling* as necessary to an individual’s humanity, and in *Portrait* it is the dying Ralph Touchett who inspires within Isabel a deeper awareness of this fact: “‘Dear Isabel, life is better; for in life there’s love. Death is good - but there’s no love.’”¹⁰³ Ralph’s disinterested love provides an example of humanity that inspires Isabel’s respect and his vision allows her to experience the truth of his metaphysical insight: “‘What have we to do with pain? That’s not the deepest thing; there’s something deeper.’”¹⁰⁴

In *Washington Square* and *Portrait* inequality between the sexes is inevitably paralleled by an existing imbalance between human values and materialistic ones. Feeling individuals of both sexes experience suffering and in doing so they undergo change, developing thereby a heightened awareness of the human condition. Accordingly the consciousness of Isabel and Catherine moves from a state of ‘innocence’ (or ignorance) of the social reality and develops toward a greater understanding of human motivation that affords them a more accurate perspective upon which to base individual hopes.

Awareness for these women, however, comes only with hindsight, when opportunities for personal fulfilment are no longer viable options. In both novels Jamesian heroines are shown to achieve important victories when they successfully establish and maintain

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 478.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 477.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 478.

individual integrity, but apart from this fundamental advance, they are otherwise subsumed by the system and consequently they must live in accordance with its dictates.

In the nineteenth century the hierarchical class structure that separated people into economic groups promoted the notion that middle and upper-middle class women - as 'ladies' - were ornamental rather than utilitarian creatures.¹⁰⁵ Within this system of stratification Isabel Archer and Catherine Sloper are undoubtedly cast as 'ladies' and, while their status affords some social 'considerations', it also exacts heavy penalties. Confinement is a quality that is suggested in the very titles of these works, wherein the framed 'portrait' both exhibits and restricts its subject, while the term 'Washington Square' evokes a sense of limited space - the 'Square' within which genteel women must confine and define themselves. In both novels the *potential* of women characters remains *unrealized* and their energies are held in check as if placed behind bars. Isabel and Catherine, like other female characters depicted, experience the effects of social pressure but, unlike others, they become *conscious* of their caged condition.

In *Portrait* the character of Henrietta Stackpole is presented as *anomalous* among women and, by European standards, she is not even a 'lady'. In James's subsequent novels other women characters - like Henrietta - will chaff under the restrictions of respectability, and in some cases present themselves as aberrations from the social scene. The ideology that exalted 'selfless service' as an ennobling experience for women is questioned by these characters, who demand real freedoms that are founded upon equal opportunities. Thus the concept of 'woman as victim' - and as *willing* victim - that emerges from *Washington Square* and *Portrait* begins to be actively challenged in James's later works, wherein women characters protest against constriction as a social evil that constitutes a violation of human rights and reflects the inhuman practices of a materialist society.

¹⁰⁵ Ruskin, John. op.cit., p. 82. The author was moved to remark the debilitating effects of female education: 'You bring up your girls as if they were meant for sideboard ornaments, and then complain of their frivolity.'