

Chapter Three :

SEXUALITY AND POWER

“I liked it - while I was safe. Then I grew afraid ... Afraid of everything. You don't know - but we're abysses.” *

The Other House (1896)

The Spoils of Poynton (1897)

* *The Other House*, p. 219.

The nineteenth century world that James's novels depict is a Patriarchal- Capitalist society whose division of the sexes into 'separate spheres' is largely responsible for the unequal conditions existent between men and women. In the early part of the century inequality for women manifested itself in sexual and economic oppression - conditions that gave rise to the 'cult of the domestic angel', an ideology that strongly prevailed during the years 1837-1857.¹ However, by the late 1850s some middle class women were beginning to question the validity of existing social and cultural assumptions, demanding wider opportunities and seeking to replace the ideal of 'self-sacrificing angel' with that of the independent, educated woman.² In an era of rapid transition that saw religious and social ideas come increasingly under attack,³ the desire to keep power concentrated in the hands of men made it expedient that women be convinced that a natural order - religious or biological - predestined them to assume a subordinate position within the social-sexual hierarchy. Accordingly, ideologies woven into the fabric of economic, political, and social thought endeavoured to justify inequality between the sexes and to reinforce thereby existing power structures, which were those of the bourgeois ruling class.

The puritan work ethic that underlies a Capitalist economy combines with middle class morality in seeking to promote maximum productivity in the business world.⁴ Order and stability are intrinsic to continued production and profitability and thus, the segregation of male and female into 'separate spheres' was seen as highly conducive to a smooth running and profitable economy. While this system proved advantageous to men, for whom employment in the outside 'sphere' provided access to economic power and self-determination, middle class women - confined to the unpaid sphere of the home - were rendered financially dependent by this arrangement and thus made vulnerable to male domination.

¹ Murray, Janet H. *op.cit.*, p. 5.

² *Ibid.*

³ Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, New Haven, 1957. pp. 58-60.

⁴ Figs, Eva. *op.cit.*, pp.137-138.

In seeking to justify the segregation of middle class women to the sphere of the home, the Capitalist-Patriarchal system that governed nineteenth century society used religious opinion, and later, scientific 'evidence' to maintain that spiritually, physically and intellectually women were the inferior sex⁵ - a condition that duly conferred authority upon men and seemingly 'proved' women unfit to face the rigours of a competitive environment. Simultaneously, however, women were promoted as the *moral* superiors of men and it was therefore argued that woman's mission was to be found in the regeneration of man.⁶ Within the confines of ordered domesticity therefore, bourgeois womanhood was expected to find fulfilment as wife and mother, and in this role, assigned to her by 'nature', she was viewed as a pivotal component, vital to the continuance of social harmony and economic profitability.⁷

Ideologies surrounding bourgeois womanhood promoted the feminine ideal which was feted and presented positively as a goal worthy of emulation. As one historian notes :

Power is both regulatory and productive and so the image of the feminine ideal cannot be seen simply in terms of a range of social, legal, political and cultural practices which restricted women and limited their pleasures; rather, respectable femininity was also actively produced around definitions of pleasure. The definition of what was pleasurable and gratifying to women operated as a positive incitement to behaviour.⁸

Social approval, recognition and status were accorded to those who could embody the cultural ideal of 'true' womanhood. Writing in 1865, John Ruskin defines the desired model of the type: 'She

⁵ Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, New Jersey, 1981. By applying his theory of natural selection to the human species the writer finds it expedient to argue: 'Thus man has ultimately become superior to woman.' p. 328.

⁶ Charles Kingsley maintained woman is '...the natural, and therefore divine, guide, purifier, inspirer of the man'. Quoted in Basch, Françoise. *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel*, New York, 1974, pp. 5-6.

⁷ Gorham, Deborah. *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁸ Nead, Lynda. *op.cit.* p. 24.

must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise - wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation.’⁹

Beneath the surface of a culturally created ideal that propounded moral purity as intrinsic to bourgeois womanhood, a fundamental anxiety persisted which permeated relations between the sexes. This anxiety arose from the fear which men attached to the nature of female sexuality.¹⁰ Sensual indulgence and the uninhibited pursuit of pleasure were viewed by a Capitalist society as detrimental to material progress¹¹ - unregulated female sexuality therefore presented itself as a subversive force capable of effecting social disruption, whereby power might be wrested from the hands of men.

Accordingly, female sexuality was the subject of much debate throughout the nineteenth century wherein men sought to negate, and thus diminish, a power that had the potential to undermine their absolute authority. An article in *The Westminster Review* (1850) denies sexual passion in women even as it simultaneously reveals the anxiety that unregulated female sexuality provoked :

In men, in general, the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous... In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-existent, till excited If the passions of women were ready, strong and spontaneous, in a degree even approaching the form they assume in the coarser sex, there can be little doubt that sexual irregularities would reach a height, of which, at present, we have happily no conception.¹²

⁹ Ruskin, John. *op.cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁰ Banks, Olive. *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, p.71. The author notes: ‘This belief in women’s natural moral superiority is in sharp contrast to the earlier view, firmly entrenched in Christian thinking, that women were fundamentally evil, temptresses who would lead men into sin. Basic to this attitude, of course, was a conception of sex as itself evil, but it also implied a view of women as actively sexual creatures and not, as in the nineteenth century, passive victims of male lust.’

¹¹ Cominos, Peter T. ‘Late-Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System’, *op.cit.*, p. 37. Cominos observes: ‘To maintain the correlation between industry and continence it was necessary to encourage the diversion of vital energy from making love to ‘getting on.’’

¹² ‘The Westminster Review’, 1850. Quoted in Nead, Lynda, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

In 1855 a contrary opinion was offered by Dr. George Drysdale, who published anonymously a work in which he maintained that women *did* in fact experience sexual passion :

There is a great deal of erroneous feeling attached to the subject of sexual desires in woman. To have strong sexual passion is held to be rather a disgrace for a woman, and they are looked down upon as animal, sensual, coarse and deserving reprobation ... In woman, exactly as in man, strong sexual appetites are a very great virtue ...¹³

Continuing this debate, Dr. William Acton (1875) asserts :

As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband's embraces, but principally to gratify him; and, were it not for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions. No nervous or feeble young man need, therefore, be deterred from marriage by an exaggerated notion of the arduous duties required from him. ¹⁴

The smooth running of a Capitalist-Patriarchal society depended upon the willingness of women to observe moral codes laid down for them to obey. Sexuality must be restrained and controlled, and accordingly patriarchal ideology subjected the image of woman to a deliberate split - a dichotomy that assigned values of 'virtue' and 'vice' to regulated and unregulated female sexual practices. ¹⁵ Deriving from mythology, the dichotomy of virgin/whore contrasted a fallen, degenerative Eve with Christianity's virgin/madonna figure Mary. These diverse images were instrumental in establishing and maintaining moral boundaries and served to mark class distinctions which controlled the

¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁴ Dr. W. Acton, 'The Perfect Ideal of an English Wife', (1875) in Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p. 128.

¹⁵ French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, London, 1982, p. 23.

sexuality of bourgeois women, for whom respectability was a basic pre-requisite.¹⁶ Nevertheless as the century progressed women began to resist social and cultural assumptions that sought to define their nature and thereby restrain individual liberty. Consequently, as Janet Murray observes, during ‘..the final third of the nineteenth century, as women were making political and economic gains, conservative sentiment turned from extolling their selfless, missionary love to damning them for unfeminine moral license of all sorts.’¹⁷

Simultaneously, however, conservative condemnation of new freedoms was paralleled by *support* from avant-garde movements that championed women’s rights for self-determination. The work of Henrik Ibsen was a powerful source of social enlightenment both on the continent and in England. In 1889 Ibsen’s controversial play *A Doll’s House* appeared in London, while *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* followed in 1891.^{17a} In these plays issues pertaining to female emancipation were raised which directly reflected and articulated the growing awareness in society of women’s dissatisfaction with the existing status quo. Similarly in Henry James’s novels *The Other House* (1896) and *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) the behaviour of women characters demonstrates a changing awareness that, in turn, effects new attitudes which challenged moral codes perpetuated by a conservative ideology. The relationship between sexuality and power becomes the fundamental issue in these novels wherein emergent female sexuality assails the masculine bastions of economic privilege and patriarchal control.

In *The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Other House* power and sexuality clash when women characters seek to assert themselves in order to gain a footing of equality with men. The heroes of these works, Owen Gereth and Tony Bream, are very alike as individuals and each is endowed with social power that results from inherited wealth (birth) and gender. In *The Spoils of Poynton* Owen Gereth is the newly created master of *Poynton*, a Jacobean house renowned for its matchless treasures, while Tony Bream, the hero of *The Other House* is a successful banker; the owner of

¹⁶ Basch, Françoise. op.cit., p. 8. With reference to this dichotomy Basch notes that ‘...the mutation of the Eve myth into the Mary myth, of temptress into redeemer, implied a fundamental process of desexualization of the woman, who was bit by bit deprived of her carnal attributes.’

¹⁷ Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p. 40.

^{17a} Cunningham, Gail. *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, New York, 1978, p. 46.

Bounds and, within his provincial setting at Wilverley, a pillar of English society. Pleasant and unassuming, Owen Gereth's modest demeanour is disarming, and among women his apparent naivety invites confidence and sympathetic engagement. Similarly, Tony Bream is characterized primarily by boyish impetuosity - a quality that manifests itself in bouts of unconventional spontaneity, and by an enthusiastic manner towards women that is described by his neighbour and business partner, Mrs. Beever, as 'intensely familiar.'¹⁸ Moreover, Bream's informality inspires within Mrs. Beever a suspicion that he is 'a possible source of danger to her ... sex',¹⁹ and James highlights Tony's effect by declaring : 'had [Mrs. Beever] been a woman - she never thought of herself so loosely - she would, in spite of her age, have doubtless been conscious of peril.'²⁰

Bream's 'familiarity' with women is quickly established as a curious and somewhat disturbing trait. His 'irregularity' of manner is further emphasized and reflected by allusions made to the decor and atmosphere of his mansion 'Bounds' which appears 'quite violently' new, 'large', 'showy' and 'splendid', and which contains 'many large pictures',²¹ all of which looked very 'recent', suggesting the modern schools of painting, quite possibly those of the Impressionists, Symbolists or Decadents. The Bream household arrangements further serve to reinforce the informality and ostentation of its master and they are evidenced in the 'irregular' mealtimes and by the free-handed hospitality dispensed by the host, wherein adherence to all things 'new' implies an unequivocal endorsement of modernity. By contrast, it is the neighbouring Mrs. Beever, described by one character as 'early Victorian', who embodies traditional values, and the existing disparity between the two houses is indicative of an ever widening division between old values and new freedoms that was becoming evident in bourgeois society towards the end of the nineteenth century.

In *The Spoils of Poynton* traditional values are again contrasted with a changing consciousness among individuals in society - a change that effects James as constituting a gradual dissolution of 'formality' and consequently, it is implied, with a lowering of the social and moral tone. Wealth at *Poynton*, however, is not particularly 'old', having been largely amassed by Mrs. Gereth and her

¹⁸ James, Henry. *The Other House*, [New York], 1947, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

late husband in the course of their lifetimes. Nevertheless, a high moral tone is conveyed by the 'things' themselves. Individually accumulated, their aesthetic perfection imparts an aura of splendour which is evocative of 'high art' and consequently, of great refinement. *Poynton's* aesthetic beauty is entirely the result of Mrs. Gereth's life-long obsession with *objet d'art*. Among the flawless decor of halls and chambers only one room contrasts with the harmonious whole and reflects within it the character and concerns of her son, Owen Gereth. This room is one wherein Owen conducts business with men 'red-faced and leather-legged'²² and which his mother describes as 'the one monstrosity of Poynton.'²³ Containing 'tobacco-pots' and 'bootjacks', it is filled with instruments of castigation, among which their owner boasts the possession of 'eighteen rifles and forty whips.'²⁴ This primitive domain symbolizes the true basis upon which the ephemeral treasures of *Poynton* rest and it reveals the underlying reality of a social system that thrives upon exploitation.

In *The Spoils of Poynton* Owen Gereth's inability to appreciate his mother's treasures as anything other than 'family furniture' suggests an element of personal brutality that makes him impervious to delicate and sensitive issues. Compounding this defect of 'taste', his casual, familiar manner is expressed through the use of contemporary slang, the informality attaching to which seemingly undermines his exclusive position in society. Similarly, Tony Bream in *The Other House* is a character whose 'excessive' tendencies and exuberant love of 'elegance' and display tends towards vulgarity. Consequently, we are told, he exudes: 'a certain quality of passive excess which was the note of the whole man and which ... began with his neckties and ended with his intonations.'²⁵ In both novels attitudes adopted by these men are meant to suggest a general falling away from high standards and 'correct' behaviour which had traditionally served to delineate class distinctions in society. However, appearances are deceptive, and despite the seeming *bonhomie* displayed by these disarmingly 'modern' young men, the underlying power structures remain unchanged. While surface impressions may suggest ineffectuality and egalitarian sympathies, they belie reality, and merely serve to engage the affections and the support of women.

²² James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, London, 1922, p. 51.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 20.

Within this setting of male power and dominance the world inhabited by James's women characters is one of struggle and frustration. Throughout the nineteenth century, the importance of the home was repeatedly stressed.²⁶ As the allotted sphere of woman, 'the home as status object and as emotional bulwark against a crude commercial world gained the importance of a cultural institution.'²⁷ Ideology surrounding it promoted the home as a place inviolate; the symbol of woman's essence, wherein order and beauty could manifest itself, and woman's affection could therein *influence* and direct the practical decisions of man.

As mistress of *Poynton*, Mrs. Gereth's lifetime devotion to *objet d'art* has resulted in the transformation of her home into a 'temple of taste'. However, the English custom of expropriating widows is a tradition that fails to recognize the sentiments of individuals, or to acknowledge, practically, ideological constructs that glorify 'woman's sphere.' Although Mrs. Gereth, as a widowed lady still 'young in the fifties'²⁸ speaks of a loving husband and of 'their perfect accord and beautiful life together,'²⁹ the reality of her position as a social 'inferior' is made explicit by her husband's will : a legal bond that strips her of power and authority.

The house and its contents had been treated as a single splendid object; everything was to go straight to his son, his widow being assured but a maintenance and a cottage in another county. No account had been taken of her relation to her treasures ... He [Mr. Gereth] appeared to have assumed she would settle questions with her son and that he could depend on Owen's affection and Owen's fairness.³⁰

Denied legal justice, Mrs. Gereth must look for *moral* justice from her son. However, the insensibility to aesthetic beauty that 'taints' the character of Owen Gereth renders him incapable of

²⁶ J.P. Norris (1871) maintains: 'The home is to our nation what the cell is to the plant - the essential element of organization'. Quoted in Roberts, David. *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, London, 1979, p. 207.

²⁷ Murray, Janet H. *op.cit.*, p. 79.

²⁸ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

entering imaginatively into his mother's passion for her *objet d'art*. Writing in 1890, James McGrigor Allan eulogises upon woman's supremacy in the home and he asserts: 'In all languages, the words *Wife, Mother* are spoken with reverence, and associated with the highest, holiest functions of woman's earthly life.'³¹ Nevertheless, this fanciful ideal, put forward as a sop to increasing dissent among women bears little relation to the truth of everyday practices in a materialist society.

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, the relationship between Mrs. Gereth and her son is not one that accords with ideological constructs that extol the 'joys of maternity' and depict the 'perfect harmony' resulting from family life. In contrast, Mrs. Gereth's needs have not been met, and the dominant emotion arising from her involvement with male relatives is one of outrage at the miscarriage of justice. Fleda Vetch, Mrs. Gereth's young protege, marvels at a relationship existing between mother and son wherein 'there was no fundamental tenderness out of which a solution would irrepressibly spring.'³² Owen's dominant social position is justified by law, and in refusing to part with 'the furniture' he asserts male privilege at the cost of moral integrity: "... what was the good of *Poynton* pray without the furniture? Besides, the furniture happened to be his, just as everything else happened to be."³³

In *The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Other House* the situation of younger women is also precarious and fraught with difficulty. Even in the latter part of the century economic security chiefly depended upon the appropriation of a 'suitable' husband around whom woman's separate sphere of home and family could be organized. While marriage was consistently upheld as woman's mission in life, practical figures relating to population in England made marriage for *every* woman a social impossibility.³⁴

³¹ Allan, James McGrigor. Quoted in Figs, Eva. op.cit., p. 104.

³² James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 39.

³³ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁴ Foster, Shirley. op.cit., p. 7. The author notes: 'by mid-century there were half a million more women than men.' She attributes this to the fact that 'many men were marrying later or not at all' while 'growing numbers of eligible bachelors ... emigrated to the colonies.'

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, two young women are juxtaposed as contrasting types, one of whom is the 'good' heroine, whereas the other is necessarily 'bad'.³⁵ While Mona Brigstock seeks to contract an advantageous marriage in order to ensure future well being, she is nevertheless the child of a 'respectable' family, whose 'big commodious house'³⁶ *Waterbath* meets the standards required for the family's inclusion among fashionable bourgeois society. In this novel aesthetics and ethics are continually interlinked, and Mrs. Gereth's objection to Mona as a potential daughter-in-law arises initially from her reactions to the badly decorated *Waterbath*, which was of: '... an ugliness fundamental and systematic, (and so) the result of the abnormal nature of the Brigstocks, from whose composition the principal of taste had been extravagantly omitted.'³⁷

The proliferation of cheap commercial 'gimcracks' at the Brigstock residence manifests itself for Mrs. Gereth as an insult to tradition and identifies the family as having embraced the modern spirit of materialism - a spirit that was thought by traditionalists to be symptomatic of a general moral decline.³⁸ Despite the fact that *Waterbath* leaves much to be desired, it nevertheless provides Mona with a secure base that confers social status and assists thereby her matrimonial endeavours. In contrast, James's 'good' heroine, Fleda Vetch, 'with her mother dead',³⁹ entirely lacks a home within which to base her own manoeuvres. While Fleda's father 'paid some of her bills (he) didn't like her to live with him',⁴⁰ and the lack of family security that his irresponsibility effects makes Fleda's social position exceedingly fragile. Friendship with Mrs. Gereth provides the girl with temporary asylum, but her underlying economic condition is portrayed by James as grim. Only her sister Maggie's marriage to a poor but presumably well-connected curate offers any possibility of relief and, in her protracted stay at *Poynton*, Fleda begins to assume the role of unpaid companion: a position that is seen by her critics as being parasitical in its nature: '... people were saying that

³⁵ Ethics and aesthetics are inextricably interwoven into the characters of Mona and Fleda, giving value to each. James evinces a decided partiality for Fleda's 'fineness' over Mona's insensate condition.

³⁶ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁸ Nead, Lynda. *op.cit.*, p. 9. The author observes: 'During the nineteenth century moral and cultural values were continually drawn together. Ethics and aesthetics were part of the definition of respectable values and the categorization of acceptable and non-acceptable social codes.'

³⁹ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

she fastened like a leech on other people - people who had houses where something was to be picked up.'⁴¹

In the latter part of the century employment for middle class women was still extremely limited although much improvement had taken place. The early stand-by of governessing that had been the support of impoverished gentlewomen in early to mid-century, had been improved and given greater status by the establishment of schools which provided formal teacher training.⁴² Clerical work, however, provided the greatest area for female employment, rising from a one percent involvement in 1861 to eighteen per cent in 1901,⁴³ while the invention of the typewriter in the 1880s provided another area for the involvement of female workers.

Despite the increasing availability of some forms of employment for women, in *The Spoils of Poynton* the peculiar constitution of James's heroine does not accord with the intellectual rigours demanded by teaching nor with the routine existence of the trained office worker. Fleda Vetch's 'fine' discrimination denotes an artistic temperament and the narrator confides, with some irony, that :

She had lately, in Paris, with several hundred other young women, spent a year at a studio, arming herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter. She was determined to work, but her impressions, or somebody's else, were as yet her only material.⁴⁴

The problem of Fleda's economic survival is one that would most conveniently be solved by marriage to a man of 'substance'. However, in lieu of such an engagement, the girl is forced to confront her delicate position. In 1853 Margaretta Grey attacked the impracticability of social etiquette that decreed 'a lady must not work', she writes :

It appears to me that, with an increase of wealth

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴² Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p. 226.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 318.

⁴⁴ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, pp. 12-13.

unequally distributed, and a pressure of population, there has sprung up among us a spurious refinement, that cramps the energy and circumscribes the usefulness of women in the upper classes of society. A lady, to be such, must be a mere lady, and nothing else. She must not work for profit, or engage in any occupation that money can command.⁴⁵

Although middle class women were increasingly seeking to undertake paid work, the stigma attached to employment persisted in conservative pockets of society. In *The Spoils of Poynton* Fleda Vetch is extremely sensitive to her need to acquire a means of support, while protecting simultaneously her class status as a 'lady.' Fleda affects to paint, but the sensitivity that makes her 'artistic' also renders her incapable of taking practical action. It is characteristic of Fleda that she 'dodged and dreamed and fabled and trifled away the time',⁴⁶ and her unsuccessful relationship with Owen Gereth reflects a general debility that effectively serves to retard her progress within a materialistic society.

The economic vulnerability of Fleda Vetch echoes the actual desperation of many women in nineteenth century England, where 'excess' women suffered hardship because they lacked sufficient means of support. William Greg, in 1862, asks : 'Why are women redundant?'⁴⁷ and decides that the problem of single women can be resolved - not by making employment more available - but by sending them to the colonies where he assumes they will find husbands and homes. Protests naturally greeted this approach, and in 1870 Mary Taylor asserts that woman can survive only by learning to help herself. She concludes :

When once she [woman] has become aware of the strong desire that some men have to prevent her acquiring the power of earning money, she will see that the difference of faculty, the weaker intellect, the sensitive brain, and etc., that are

⁴⁵ Grey, Margareta. Quoted in Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p. 266.

⁴⁶ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Greg, W. Quoted in Murray, Janet H. op.cit., pp. 50-54.

attributed to women, were discovered when an argument was needed for a certain conclusion, not used in order to arrive at it.⁴⁸

The problem of economic security that plagued many women in the nineteenth century is once again evident in James's novel *The Other House*. While Fleda Vetch reputedly 'hadn't a penny in the world',⁴⁹ Rose Armiger is only slightly more fortunate, possessing an annual income of two hundred pounds. An orphan without a home of her own, Rose's extended stay at *Bounds* provides welcome sanctuary, and her visit there is countenanced by the long standing friendship between herself and Tony's wife, Julia. Keenly appreciative of her surroundings, Rose is quick to inform her suitor, Dennis Vidal: "Don't you see what it is for a poor girl to have such an anchorage as this - such honourable countenance, such a place to fall back upon?"⁵⁰ But as Vidal reminds her, 'sanctuary' is entirely dependent upon the continued existence of the fragile Mrs. Bream, and he exhorts the girl to consider: "... the great change that would take place in your situation if she *should die*."⁵¹ Rose, however, is able to counter this hypothetical proposition only by resorting to ambiguity: "What else in the world but that change am I thinking of."⁵²

Contrasting the inscrutable manner of Rose Armiger, Jean Martle is younger, inexperienced, and quite securely placed within the existing social system, owing to the support provided by a prosperous and indulgent father. Accordingly, Mrs. Beever believes: "Jean Martle would probably some day have money and would possibly some day have sense"⁵³ and her estimation is partly justified when the death of this parent endows the young woman with an annual income of three thousand pounds. Like Mona Brigstock, Jean Martle's position within the bourgeoisie is secure. Losing her father's physical protection, she gains the authority accorded by his wealth while (in the background) female relatives presumably provide emotional support and contribute thereby toward the girl's general aspect of well being.

⁴⁸ Taylor, Mary. 'Redundant Women'. Quoted in Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p. 61.

⁴⁹ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Existing within the 'separate sphere' of domesticity women in these novels form amalgamations and endeavour to encourage and promote each other's welfare. In *The Spoils of Poynton*, Fleda, her sister Maggie, and Mrs. Gereth work together at times to achieve a measure of autonomy, while Mrs. Brigstock strives to advance the matrimonial cause of her daughter, Mona. Conversely, in *The Other House*, Rose Armiger (with the death of Julia Bream) is conspicuously alone and she exists entirely without the assistance of a female support network.

From the very beginning Rose is portrayed by James as an enigmatic figure. Encountered initially in an attitude of woe, she possesses 'a kind of foreign charm';⁵⁴ a physical appearance that is capable of chameleon-like change, vacillating from extreme plainness - that is at times almost ugly - to sudden transformations wherein she appears remarkably 'handsome.' Like Fleda Vetch, Rose's past is shadowed by adversity. Damaged by contact with a 'wicked' stepmother, the grim struggle for autonomy, within strictly limited means, has seemingly exacerbated her need for acceptance and security. In the opening of *The Other House*, the anticipated return of Rose's suitor provokes little enthusiasm on her part. She tells Tony Bream that the relationship : "... isn't love's young dream; it's rather an old and rather a sad story. We've worried and waited - we've been acquainted with grief. We've come together a weary way."⁵⁵

Sexual passion for Rose Armiger is wholly directed toward the person of Tony Bream.

Accordingly, the arrival of an old suitor at the moment when Tony is likely to be set free by the death of his wife produces a situation that is fraught with difficulty for Rose. Throughout this novel James characterizes her indirectly - through the impressions of others - so that her personal viewpoint is never disclosed. Presumably nineteenth-century theories of Determinism are at work in the construction of Rose's character, wherein heredity and conditioning combine to help explain her temperament. Tony Bream and his house *Bounds* seemingly represent everything that she has hitherto been denied: the expression of strong physical passions and the security provided by

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

unlimited wealth. It is, accordingly, the perceived *need* for these things that apparently motivates her actions.

In both novels, Marriage presents itself as the most obvious destiny for women characters because, supposedly, it offers economic security and emotional fulfilment. In *The Spoils of Poynton* two contrasting female types reflect changing attitudes and behaviour amongst middle class women.

Mona Brigstock is described by James in his 'Preface' to the work as:

...the awful Mona Brigstock, who is *all* will, without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision ... Everyone, every thing, in the story is accordingly sterile *but* the so thriftily constructed Mona, able at any moment to bear the whole of her dead weight at once on any given inch of a resisting surface.⁵⁶

As the 'bad heroine' Mona embodies attitudes that challenge traditional values which serve as the basis of patriarchal control.⁵⁷ James depicts her as a grossly materialistic individual who is irrevocably linked with the decor of her family home. Strong-willed and opinionated, Mona is nevertheless physically attractive, and consequently much admired among her social set: 'Tall, straight and fair, long-limbed and strangely festooned',⁵⁸ Mona's strong physical presence accords with her self-assertive style that finds expression in boisterous 'horseplay' and a romping 'familiarity' with Owen Gereth - a brand of behaviour that infuriates his mother. While Mrs. Gereth likens Mona's voice to 'the squeeze of a doll's stomach',⁵⁹ Fleda equates her eyes with 'blue beads.'⁶⁰ Closer inspection of Mona's general 'mulishness' allows Fleda to detect the ways in

⁵⁶ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton"', in *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁷ Murray, Janet H. *op.cit.*, p. 40. The author notes: 'Fashionable middle class women of the late 1860s who were becoming overtly flirtatious and sexually assertive ... were attacked with as much horror as were those women seeking an education or a political voice. For many Victorians, this decline in feminine modesty was akin to the demand for a wider sphere for women, another sign of the steady degradation of the sex.'

⁵⁸ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

which - instead of dutifully 'meeting the expectation'⁶¹ of others, the girl would rather 'plant her big feet and pull another way.'⁶²

Mona's tall athleticism and unladylike stubbornness are characteristics that are meant to strengthen her appearance of vulgarity, opposing as they do the traditional image of respectable womanhood.

⁶³ In this novel double-standards are applied to behaviour deemed acceptable in males and females and these become evident when Fleda willingly excuses the vacuous taciturnity of Own Gereth, inferring: '...an answer was almost as hateful to him as a 'trick' to a big dog'⁶⁴ while Mona is berated for similarly refusing to perform; and for showing a disinclination to expose herself to ridicule and abuse when visiting the highly judgemental ladies at *Poynton*.

As historians have noted, 'by the 1870s ... the lines of respectability were becoming blurred'⁶⁵ with external appearance and behaviour no longer clearly distinguishing the prostitute from the 'decent' woman. As early as 1868 Mrs. Eliza Lynn Linton's essay 'The Girl of the Period' denounced the emerging 'freedoms' of Englishwomen and sought to defend traditional standards :

Time was... a girl ... could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature, but ... (she)... was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who, when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his rival; one who would consider his interests as identical with her own, and not hold him as just so much fair game for spoil.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Nead, Lynda. *op.cit.*, p. 28. As the author notes, conventionally, 'respectable womanhood' '..was defined for woman in terms of dependency, delicacy and fragility; independence was unnatural, it signified boldness and sexual deviancy.'

⁶⁴ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 27.

⁶⁵ Nead, Lynda. *op.cit.*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ Linton, Eliza Lynn. 'The Girl of the Period'. Quoted in Murray, Janet H. *op.cit.*, p. 42.

The character of Mona Brigstock appears to embody many of the qualities deemed repugnant by Mrs. Linton, including the modern girl's tendency toward:

...slang, bold talk, and general fastness; to the love of pleasure and indifference to duty; to the desire of money before either love or happiness ... to the worst forms of luxury and selfishness ... arising from want of high principle and absence of tender feeling.⁶⁷

Mona's disregard for convention violates accepted codes of decency; lacking moral scruples, her motives are undisguised. Forthright, strong and assertive, she acts in an 'unwomanly' fashion to get what she wants and she transgresses thereby established barriers erected to preserve male authority. Besides her 'masculine' ability to dominate others, the 'massive maiden at Waterbath'⁶⁸ exudes a physicality that strongly suggests unrepressed sexuality. Although her 'obstinacy' is similar to Mrs. Gereth's, it is Mona's potent sexuality that makes her a socially dangerous force, and while James describes Mrs. Gereth's fallible nature as constituting 'an admirable fine paste',⁶⁹ Mona is consistently derided and described by Mrs. Gereth unequivocally as "'a brute.'"⁷⁰ Ironically, Mrs. Gereth's moral outrage arises from frustration: Mona succeeds in seducing her son, whereas Mrs. Gereth's own candidate fails dismally to do so. Using her sexuality to attract and hold Owen Gereth, Mona insists that he draw up settlements before marriage - ensuring thereby against Mrs. Gereth's own condition of widowed penury. Furthermore, the girl is unashamedly covetous of the spoils, and as Owen reveals: "She wants them herself ... she wants to feel they're hers; she doesn't care whether I have them or not. And if she can't get them she doesn't want *me*."⁷¹

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Mona's passionate nature, that reputedly finds expression in outbursts of jealous rage, is not entirely without its justification - given the fact that Mrs. Gereth works actively to secure her

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁸ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 175.

⁶⁹ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton"', *The Art of the Novel*, p.131.

⁷⁰ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 213.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 141.

downfall, while Fleda subconsciously desires it. With the spoils returned to Poynton, however, Mona 'takes means'⁷² to secure Owen's captivity and evidence of her sexual prowess lies in the hasty marriage which follows their reunion, as well as in the continued marital relations of the couple after the ceremony. Mona Brigstock uses passion as a weapon in her fight to secure wealth and status. Her reliance upon sexuality is the result of social conditioning, but her 'modernity' is apparent in the overt behaviour that allows her to dispense with conventional modesty. As a person 'who blooms and expands with success',⁷³ Mona's natural charm - as even Fleda can recognize - is 'very great',⁷⁴ and while James sees her success as the defeat of moral values, he also perceives that she represents a new type of woman - a survivor - who 'won't die.'⁷⁵

By contrast, Fleda Vetch is depicted as the traditional, 'virtuous' woman; as one who lives within the guidelines of patriarchal ideology. Writing in 1890, James McGrigor Allan describes the purpose and quality of a virtuous woman :

In every pure and legitimate relation - as daughter, sister, wife, mother - woman is the direct assistant of individual man (swaying him by her beauty, good temper, good sense, womanly graces, accomplishments, and instinctive tact.)⁷⁶

Virtuous women were expected to find fulfilment in selfless service towards men,⁷⁷ and while women were considered mentally inferior, they were simultaneously elevated to a position of moral and spiritual 'superiority'. Set apart in her 'separate sphere', the bourgeois woman was expected to remain 'pure-minded', because she was sheltered from the gross realities of a materialist society.

⁷² Ibid., p. 213.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 224.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 214.

⁷⁶ Allan, James McGrigor. Quoted in Figes, Eva. op.cit., pp. 104-105.

⁷⁷ Ellis, S. *The Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, 1839. The author advises concerning woman's role: 'Her part is to make sacrifices, in order that his enjoyment may be enhanced.' Quoted in Banks, J.A. and Olive Banks. op.cit., p. 23.

An article in the *Saturday Review*, 1865, supports women's segregation on the basis that her innocence must be preserved in order to balance the depravities of man :

No woman can or ought to know very much of the mass of meanness and wickedness and misery that is loose in the wide world. She could not learn it without losing the bloom and freshness which it is her mission in life to preserve. ⁷⁸

Primarily, however, a good woman's mission in life was to elevate the nature of man who, it was generally agreed, was 'naturally' inclined toward the expression of strong physical passions.

The nineteenth-century division of women into 'good' and 'bad' types - into virgins and whores - meant that 'virtuous' women were invariably seen as asexual beings and thus made to assume a false position engineered to assist men's control of their own 'natural' sexual urges. While James, in the 'Preface' to *The Spoils of Poynton* sees Fleda Vetch as a 'free spirit' who is "'successful", only through having remained free', ⁷⁹ she may also be viewed as a pathetic victim of Capitalist-Patriarchy. Fleda's rigid adherence to ideological constructs that demand self-sacrifice results in the repression of her instinctive desires - a process that ultimately renders her sexually and economically impotent. In 1851 Harriet Taylor had noted the intrusive power of ideologies, observing: 'How wonderfully the ideas of virtue set afloat by the powerful, are caught and imbibed by those under their dominion', ⁸⁰ and she rejects outright the notion 'that the paramount virtue of womanhood is loyalty to men. ⁸¹ The fictional Fleda Vetch is, however, less fortunate than the reformer Harriet Taylor. James's 'good' heroine is trapped by her commitment to an ideal of loyalty that turns a spontaneous passion for Owen Gereth into something 'unnatural', because denied and repressed. Consequently, passion acquires an element of perversion for Fleda, and evokes masochistic tendencies by becoming her 'little gagged and blinded desire.' ⁸²

⁷⁸ 'Saturday Review', 1865, in Pearsall, Ronald. *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality*, London, 1969, p. 98.

⁷⁹ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton"', *The Art of the Novel*, p. 130.

⁸⁰ Taylor, Harriet. Quoted in Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p. 32.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁸² James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p.105.

Repression inflicts a general obliqueness upon Fleda's powers of perception which are accordingly rendered highly subjective. Her fertile imagination insists upon perceiving Owen Gereth as a weak being who is unfairly victimized, and therefore greatly in need of her help. While Fleda correctly perceives weakness in Owen, her error lies in the interpretation she attributes to its cause.⁸³ What she represses is the conscious recognition that 'weakness' in Owen means 'moral weakness' arising from his masculine need of sexual gratification - a condition that enslaves him to his senses and finds expression in his involvement with the sensual Mona Brigstock. While Fleda's love for Owen is intense, she can only express it as a 'virtuous' woman and therefore, as a moral 'superior', she exhorts him to observe ethical standards - the execution of which, ironically, entails his remaining faithful to Mona.

The dichotomy of virgin/whore as a means of explaining and containing female sexuality had, during the nineteenth century, made conventionally 'virtuous' women fearful of admitting to the possession of strong physical passions.⁸⁴ In *The Spoils of Poynton* the two bourgeois women depicted display quite different responses in their expression of sexuality. As a woman who embodies traditional values, Fleda Vetch's eventual breakdown into an open admission of passion is a traumatic event which affects Owen Gereth as an 'awesome' revelation. The language with which James surrounds this erotic episode serves to emphasize the 'holiness' of the virtuous woman, while Owen's behaviour reinforces the 'sacredness' of their emotion. Realizing that he is loved by Fleda, James describes Owen's reaction thus :

He clasped his hands before her as he might
have clasped them at an altar ... soothing her
into a seat as if she had truly been something
sacred ... he dropped before her on his knees ...⁸⁵

More significantly, however:

⁸³ Cominos, Peter. 'Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict', op.cit., p.157. Cominos observes that in the nineteenth century: 'Repressive innocence created psychological resistance to the conscious acknowledgement of sexual realities unpalatable to the world of respectability in its mindless innocence.'

⁸⁴ In 1840 Charlotte Bronte advised Ellen Nussey : '..no young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made.' Quoted in Murray, Janet H. op.cit., p.110.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

He made the whole *fall*, as she yet felt it, seem
 only his - made her, when she rose again, raise
 him at last, softly, as if from the abasement of it. ⁸⁶

While Fleda surrounds her passion with a profound sense of guilt, Owen Gereth glimpses 'salvation' in his love for a 'pure' woman, whose assistance he believes, will enable him to relinquish a purely physical attachment to Mona Brigstock.

Two kinds of love are offered in *The Spoils of Poynton*. The physical, wholly sexual aspect is embodied in Mona Brigstock, and carries with it an association with all things 'bad' - with vulgar consumerism and the greedy materialistic desires that perpetuate its existence. Conversely, Fleda offers a moral or 'spiritual' love that is desexualized and perceived as 'higher' because it is supposedly selfless. Between these two women and their representative values, Owen Gereth must choose. However, the nature of his 'fatal flaw' renders him powerless before the temptations of the flesh and, while recognizing the 'quality' of Fleda's love, he nevertheless needs 'help' to overthrow the dominance of purely physical desires.

Acceptance of patriarchal conventions surrounding female morality prevents Fleda Vetch from taking positive action to secure the fulfilment of her desires. The moral code to which she adheres makes it impossible to accept Owen's love without the sanction of authoritative bodies (Church and State), just as previously 'good form' had prevented acceptance of a material gift. ⁸⁷ The social forms that control Fleda's behaviour are fundamentally punitive toward women and allegiance to them leads only to sacrifice and renunciation. Absorbed by her personal struggle to personify an ideal, Fleda exhorts Owen also to 'be perfect' ⁸⁸ but ironically, this impossible condition is not expected of men who - being morally inferior - are only 'naturally' subject to err.

⁸⁶ Ibid. (my italics.)

⁸⁷ It seems significant that the only 'gift' Fleda is willing to accept is one she equates with 'the measure of her deserts': a small pincushion that works with pins the letter F, this gift is a suitably masochistic totem for the would-be martyr.

⁸⁸ James, Henry. *The Spoils of Poynton*, p. 169.

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, Fleda's inability to compromise between extreme notions of good and bad; virtue and vice, demonstrates the inflexibility of bourgeois codes of conduct. Society's insistence that 'good' women redress the balance of male incontinence (and its associated guilt) by submitting to a process of idealization that places them upon pedestals as sacred icons, demonstrates the unwillingness of men to confront their own sexuality with integrity. The 'good' woman as sexual martyr is symbolized in this novel by Fleda's attraction to the 'Maltese cross' and the punitive foundations upon which nineteenth century capitalist-patriarchy is based may be seen to subject women to a process of dehumanization that renders them sexually sterile and economically bankrupt.

From the 1870s onward increasing agitation surrounded the question of woman's role in society but, as Jeffrey Weeks notes: 'Reformers were directing their energies ... at many of the wrong targets, illustrating the typical nineteenth century preference for moral campaigns rather than for structural social reforms.'⁸⁹ On the one hand, women increasingly wanted greater freedom - both economic and sexual - but conversely, it appeared to many that limited opportunities made marriage still present itself as the most viable option. While the double standard surrounding morality was perceived by women as fundamentally unjust, it nevertheless appeared less threatening to some than the proposed increase in sexual freedom. Consequently: '... the double-standard left most feminists (reformers) convinced that it was in their interests to increase rather than release the taboos against extra-marital sex, and they quite logically then lent support to the social purity campaigns.'

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The latter part of the nineteenth century was an era of conflicting viewpoints and the 1890s saw the emergence of the 'new woman', a 'type' whose independent attitude and desire for sexual and economic autonomy challenged the conservative ideas of some feminist reformers who advocated increased purity for *all*. By the 1890s Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen among others had begun to champion the rights of women, and in their writings to dramatically promote ideas that challenged conservative ideologies and questioned the validity of bourgeois social institutions. In 1891 Henry

⁸⁹ Weeks, Jeffrey. *op.cit.*, p. 88.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

James saw Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler*, in which the character of Hedda expressed many of the tensions inherent within Western European society. Describing his impressions of the character James writes :

Her motives are just her passions ... and that character - complicated, strange, irreconcilable, infernal
And then one isn't sure she is wicked, and by no means sure ... that she is disagreeable. She is various and sinuous and graceful, complicated and natural. ⁹¹

Furthermore, he elaborates :

It is ... the picture ... of a condition. It is the portrait of a nature ... and of a state of nerves as well as of soul, a state of temper, of health, of chagrin, of despair. ⁹²

Henry James first noted his ideas for *The Other House* in 1893 when it was entitled 'The Promise' and intended as a work for the stage.⁹³ At that time, the part of Rose Armiger was assigned by James to Elizabeth Robbins, the actress who had created the role of Hedda for London audiences in 1891. Abandoned as a play, *The Other House* was written as a novel in 1896, and many scholars have since remarked the influence of Ibsen in this work⁹⁴ and most particularly, James's indebtedness to the play *Hedda Gabler*.

In *The Other House* as in *The Spoils of Poynton* two heroines are presented whose natures are diametrically opposed. Accordingly they are classified by James as either 'good' or 'bad', while their valuation depends entirely upon the *sexual* nature of either woman. As the 'good' heroine, Jean Martle in *The Other House* is depicted as conventionally middle class - a woman whose behaviour accords with conservative ideologies that define womanly behaviour as passive, obedient and asexual. Tony Bream's early impressions of the girl show her as 'panting and pink'⁹⁵ and expressing a conventional love of babies that symbolizes her essential womanliness. It is in fact the

⁹¹ Egan, Michael. *Henry James: The Ibsen Years*, London, 1972, p. 62.

⁹² Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane. (ed.) *Modernism 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth, 1976, p.196.

⁹³ Edel, Leon. Introduction. *The Other House*. ed.cit., pp. x-xi.

⁹⁴ For a comparison of the works of James and Ibsen see Michael Egan's, *Henry James: The Ibsen Years*.

⁹⁵ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 63.

'extreme juvenility'⁹⁶ of her nature that attracts and holds the interest of Bream while, on her part, Jean Martle finds the Wilverley banker 'formidable' - an impression that conveys the slightly intimidating quality of Tony's masculinity : '.. at the Bank, the girl noticed him enough to feel rather afraid of him: that was always with her the foremost result of being noticed herself.'⁹⁷

Bream's highly 'excitable' nature is soothed and flattered by the girl's compliancy and accordingly he tells her : "'You produce an effect on me for which I'm particularly grateful ... I mean you sooth me ... you keep me cool.'"⁹⁸ Tony's dependence upon Jean's youthful innocence has the immediate effect of instilling within her a sense of responsibility; awakening a desire to assist him and consequently, we are told : 'she already, on the spot, looked older.'⁹⁹ Four years later, at the commencement of Book Two, Jean Martle has physically matured. Emotionally, however, she retains her earlier juvenility, a quality that is characteristic of sexual innocence. Although she loves Tony Bream, the girl does not question the validity of his vow never to re-marry, and she is able to sublimate her feelings for the man by over-zealously embracing the concerns of his child, Effie.

Throughout the nineteenth century respectable women were exhorted to contain and suppress their sexuality even as they were, simultaneously, informed that physical passion was a weak - almost non-existent emotion within their biological constitution.¹⁰⁰ Chaste conduct on the part of women presumably assisted the behaviour of men, and in *The Other House*, Tony Bream is characteristically grateful for Jean's emotional reticence : "'I know that ...what you show isn't at all the full measure of what you feel.'"¹⁰¹ For Bream, the preservation of appearances is enormously important and by this means he is able to shelter behind forms and conventions that make his life 'delightful' and seemingly secure. Highly susceptible to 'the "usual" flashes of fondness'¹⁰² with

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, Clement. 'Humanitarian', 1894. Seeking to justify the double standard the author writes: 'It is relatively less excusable, for a woman endowed with modesty, consecrated with the gift of purity, and provided with the natural relief from the baser and more animal part of her nature to be immoral, than it is for a man to obey the nature of his sex with no established safeguard of modest purity and natural help whatever.' Quoted in Cominos, Peter. 'Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict', op.cit., p. 160.

¹⁰¹ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 120.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 118.

regard to women, Bream's relationship with Jean is controlled by his oath never to remarry - a vow which effectively deters female expectation and consequently, for him:

There had been no worrying question of the light this particular flash might kindle ... It would lead to exactly nothing ... that had been settled all round in advance. This was a happy, lively provision that kept everything down, made sociability a cool, public, out-of-door affair, without a secret or a mystery - confined it ... to the breezy, sunny forecourt of the temple of friendship, forbidding it any dream of access to the obscure and comparatively stuffy interior.¹⁰³

Tony Bream's sexual attractiveness inevitably makes women 'like him too much'¹⁰⁴ and accordingly it is Jean's refusal to marry Paul Beever - a decision that announces her true feelings - which ultimately sparks catastrophe. Subsequent events conspire to blow apart the polite world of surfaces that constitutes *Bounds* and Jean Martle, like other characters, must assume responsibility for her actions which no longer, in retrospect, appear entirely 'innocent'.

Like Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton*, Jean's subconscious desires contradict her actions. The child, Effie Bream, has been essentially exploited by her and used to control and suppress 'unorthodox' emotions - as the girl herself can finally acknowledge: "It was just because she was yours that she was mine ... What could I do, you see.... To you I couldn't be kind."¹⁰⁵ Awareness of sexual passion sweeps away ignorance for this woman, but self-knowledge is accompanied by a knowledge of evil, which subsequently effects the loss of innocence: "But all the horrible things - I didn't know them till today! There they were - so near to us."¹⁰⁶ Passion, once activated within Jean Martle, is intense and merciless in its condemnation of her rival, the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

murderess Rose Armiger, whom she wishes to 'burn alive.'¹⁰⁷ The desire for vengeance on the part of this seemingly 'virtuous' woman demonstrates the destructive potential of strong human passion and seemingly justifies thereby the need for its suppression.

As a conventional, middle class woman, Jean Martle is conditioned to abhor destructive actions even while simultaneously she recognizes the existence of such emotions within herself. Within the society that James depicts *guilt* effectively restrains unregulated passions, and accordingly, the expression of sexuality in this woman is chastened and subdued by the tragic circumstances that call it into being. In a state of contrition, the girl is ready to develop and mature within the punitive system of patriarchy, and the ensuing relationship between herself and Bream will predictably be one that incorporates restraint, because, for them both, passion is founded upon the knowledge that 'our freedom is horrible!' ¹⁰⁸

In *The Other House*, the good heroine attains to a knowledge of passion that is simultaneously identified with knowledge of evil, and therefore she is effectively tamed and made socially acceptable at the moment of sexual awakening - limited once again by the fear of human nature that her vision inspires. Sexual passion presents itself in this novel as a dangerous force, the unleashing of which proves catastrophic. Tony Bream responds positively to Jean Martle's 'tameness' because, fundamentally, it makes him feel safe. As Lynda Nead observes, traditionally woman was 'believed to play an essential part in the construction and perpetuation of social and domestic order', ¹⁰⁹ and James's 'good' heroine (while not entirely blameless) represents woman's commitment to the 'civilized' values pertaining to order, sanity and the existing status quo. By contrast, Rose Armiger personifies the abyss - a glimpse into which so terrifies both Tony Bream and Jean Martle.

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¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁰⁸ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁹ Nead, Lynda. op.cit., p. 24.

¹¹⁰ Berland, Alwyn. *Culture and Conduct in the Novels of Henry James*, London, 1981, p.12. Discussing the nature of the abyss in James's work, Berland writes: '...the abyss of the unprotected self; the self left without guard from its own hungers and lusts and needs - the primitive imperatives of sex and acquisition - without guard against its own assertively egotistic being.'

Good and bad heroines in *The Other House* embody the qualities of order and anarchy. As James's 'bad' heroine Rose Armiger is both unwilling and unable to adhere to conventional mythologies that represent respectable women as fundamentally asexual beings. Like Tony Bream, she is a sexually compelling figure whose physical presence exerts a strong influence upon others. From the first, James characterizes Rose as a highly 'unusual' woman. Described as 'handsome', she is also intelligent and self-assertive. Her strength of purpose and disregard of social constraints makes her behaviour almost 'masculine', while her obsession with Bream becomes, increasingly, a passion that draws the attention of other characters, who protest in general amazement that they have 'never seen anything like it.'¹¹¹ James's indirect treatment of Rose's character, together with the complexity of her nature, combines to present her as an enigmatic figure who is driven by inner compulsion: "You know what I am ... it's before anything a woman who has such a need as no woman has ever had."¹¹²

Portrayed as a woman who is seemingly without conscience or compassion, Rose's nature negates conventional theories of woman's essential purity and passivity. As an 'exception' among women, her 'unnaturalness' is emphasized initially by her professed indifference to children, and by her remorseless, undisguised pursuit of Tony Bream, which incorporates the 'unwomanly' tactic of confrontation. For Bream, Rose's passion is intimidating:

It represented something that no lapse could long quench - something that gave out the measureless white ray of a light steadily revolving. She could sometimes turn it away, but it was always somewhere; and now it covered him with a great cold lustre that made everything for the moment look hard and ugly - made him also feel the chill of a complication for which he had not allowed.¹¹³

¹¹¹ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 191.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

In depicting Rose's obsession with Bream : "I've an idea that has become a passion with me,"¹¹⁴ James takes her beyond the realm of 'normality' to embrace a condition of deviancy that finds its ultimate expression in an act of 'madness' - her murder of the child, Effie Bream. Neurosis characterizes Roses's behaviour and thus her potent sexuality is discredited and classified as 'abnormal'.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s male fears of unregulated female sexuality increased in proportion to the demands of women for greater personal freedom. Male paranoia found expression in various artistic genres of the time, particularly in the area of art and literature.¹¹⁵ In the works of painters, the Decadent and Symbolist schools depicted woman as temptress and deceiver, while in literature Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1895) embraced the concept of the predatory female and the plays of Strindberg and Ibsen emphasized the neurotic element inherent in woman's resistance to male authority. Similarly in *The Other House*, James compares Rose Armiger with the mythical figure, Medusa,¹¹⁶ and in this guise she literally paralyses Dennis Vidal, who, as a victim of his 'baser, obscurer part'¹¹⁷ is rendered helpless by Rose's seductive grasp:

...she had him now and ... she held him fast...
 He submitted, with no movement but to close
 his eyes before the new-born dread of her caress.
 Yet he took the caress when it came - the dire
 confession of her hard embrace, the long entreaty
 of her stony kiss. He might still have been a
 creature trapped in steel; after she had let him go
 he stood still at a loss how to turn.¹¹⁸

Rose Armiger embodies the lawless characteristics of the *femme fatale*, inspiring thereby both fear and fascination. Dennis Vidal and Paul Beever are hypnotized by her seductive power, toward which they are simultaneously attracted and repelled. Throughout *The Other House* the world of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

¹¹⁵ Gay, Peter. *The Bourgeois Experience: Education of the Senses*, Vol.1, Oxford, 1984, pp. 192-197.

¹¹⁶ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 182.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 199-200.

appearances - of fine surfaces - thinly disguises an underlying reality of human struggle and desire. Rose Armiger's neurotic personality is revelatory of this split between appearance and reality and her mask is Janus-faced. Portrayed as fundamentally deviant; the ego, or libido, is dominant in Rose and accordingly she refuses to renounce self-interest for altruism. Nevertheless Mrs. Beever can appreciate the fact that - like other characters - "She only needs to get what she wants."¹¹⁹

The *manner* in which Rose goes about getting what she wants, however, reveals her amorality and she is therefore repudiated because she threatens 'civilized' values - a condition made explicit by her destruction of the child. Within nineteenth century Capitalist-Patriarchal society sexual respectability 'depended on the victory of self-discipline over the baser instincts'¹²⁰ and, while women were identified with 'pleasure', the values of a puritan work ethic encouraged men to refrain from 'excess' in the interest of material gain.¹²¹ In *The Other House* Tony Bream is an 'uncalculating' banker, and while he greatly appreciates women, he remains seemingly unmoved by the importunities of Rose Armiger. He consistently evades her demands, fearing confrontation, but - as James indicates - the whole tenor of his relationship with women presents itself as highly provocative, inciting from them as it does, an intimate response. Only catastrophe can awaken Tony to his culpability, which, through the death of his child, he is finally made to express: "I'm infamous my silence is a part of the crime and the cruelty."¹²² However, self-incrimination is swiftly succeeded by mitigation and the burden of guilt is conveniently shifted onto the deviant female figure. Rose's 'love' thereby becomes a 'monstrous fact' for the bereaved father, who rationalizes: "It was her passion She loves me!"¹²³

Rose Armiger's anti-social behaviour culminates in a destructive act of apparent insanity, and within a patriarchal society her punishment is banishment. In this way she is effectively *silenced*, a fact which she recognizes and articulates: "I shall never speak again."¹²⁴ While Rose's murder of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

¹²⁰ Nead, Lynda. *op.cit.*, p. 55.

¹²¹ Figes, Eva. *op.cit.*, p. 79. The author notes that: '...woman, no longer being a breadwinner, represents sloth and pleasure, and the temptation to spend, which by the nineteenth century had actually become the vernacular word for ejaculation.'

¹²² James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 213.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 226.

Effie Bream constitutes a monstrous act, Tony Bream actively contributes toward the eruption of violence by the ambivalent nature of his relationship with this woman. Although Bream is also guilty, he is exonerated by others, and his position of power in the community is strengthened by his misfortune, owing to the sympathy it inspires. Conversely, like Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, Rose Armiger is destroyed by her unsuccessful bid to obtain fulfilment. Passion blinds her judgement, but her act is the expression of a desperate need, which she recognizes to have betrayed her: "I've failed, but I did what I could. It was all that I saw - it was all that was left me. It took hold of me, it possessed me: it was the last gleam of a chance."¹²⁵

Powerlessness in society renders Rose Armiger a rebellious figure who is driven to vent her frustration through negative action.¹²⁶ While James characterizes her as 'bad', she is also described as 'gifted', 'artful' and 'charming', and despite efforts to disguise the reality of her condition, Tony Bream is familiar with 'her strange alternative look - the look of being made by her passion so acquainted with pain.'¹²⁷ Banished from respectable society, Rose's vulnerability is extreme, and fear for her safety in a hostile world compels her once again to seek male patronage. Accordingly, as an impure thing, she is taken away 'into the night'¹²⁸ by Dennis Vidal and her passing thus into oblivion restores the 'natural' imbalance of Patriarchal order.

In *The Other House* and *The Spoils of Poynton* Rose Armiger and Fleda Vetch are socially displaced persons without permanent homes or respectable families and it is therefore inevitable that, within a bourgeois, materialist society, both women should fail to achieve the fulfilment of their desires. Conversely, Mona Brigstock and Jean Martle are securely placed within the social structure and it is *these* women who predictably succeed in consolidating and advancing their status through marriage to influential members of the establishment. In both novels, the heroes present

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

¹²⁶ Mitchell, Juliet. *Women: The Longest Revolution: Essays on Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis*. London, 1984, pp. 299-300. The author quotes from the diary of Alice James which describes the feelings of rage and impotence that women might suffer: 'As I used to sit immovable reading in the library with waves of violent inclination suddenly invading my muscles taking some one of their myriad forms such as throwing myself out of the window, or knocking off the head of the benignant pater as he sat ... writing at his table ... Conceive of never being without the sense that if you let yourself go for a moment you must abandon all, let the dykes break and the flood sweep in, acknowledging yourself abjectly impotent before immutable laws.'

¹²⁷ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 110.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

themselves as seemingly guileless, harmless and even helpless individuals who are subsequently reliant upon the emotional support of women. In reality, however, these men are never vulnerable in any real sense. Spoiled and indulged by social approbation, power acts as an aphrodisiac; attracting and attaching the devotion of women characters while, for Fleda Vetch and Rose Armiger, the strength of such attachment proves destructive of personal well being. Both Rose and Fleda are rendered emotionally bankrupt by their encounters with powerful male figures, although, as James's 'good' heroine and 'free spirit', Fleda is able to preserve individual integrity with which to console herself for the loss of emotional and material security. Rose's collision with power, however, renders her an outcast, whose intense need is denied because, essentially, it is not even understood by the male characters with whom she engages.

Of the four young women represented in these novels, only Mona Brigstock is 'successful' in achieving her personal ambition, even though James, at the last, reduces her material triumph to ashes. Nevertheless, Mona attains her original goals - the possession of Owen Gereth and the return of the spoils to Poynton - and their ultimate destruction cannot alter this fact. Accordingly, the girl presents herself as a triumphant rebel against conventional standards of morality and James significantly depicts her as a grossly deviant species of femininity. In his 'Preface' to the work James expresses open disapproval of Mona's type, whereas the deviancy of Rose Armiger is treated by him with a greater degree of sympathy. Rose's 'fall' results from her caring too much for her 'idea' - allowing it thereby to become a passion which passes beyond all bounds into obsession. Unlike the suffering nature of Rose, Mona Brigstock's 'crime' is her inability to care deeply for anything other than herself. She is, however, well able to simulate passion to achieve her aims and her lack of integrity is intended to reflect the increasing decline of 'virtue' (or self-sacrifice) among women in society.

In both novels male sexuality presents itself as problematic owing to the 'natural' susceptibility of the sex to indulge its weakness for sensual gratification. As Jeffrey Weeks observes, increasingly toward the end of the century - with the emergence of new freedoms for women - anxieties about moral standards arose that reflected 'a deep belief that the roots of social stability lay in individual

and public morality.’¹²⁹ Similarly, in James’s novels, his two heroes may be seen to fail in this respect because they do not maintain sufficiently high standards of conduct towards women. Tony Bream is severely punished for his ambivalence by the tragic death of his child - although it is significant that the child is female and therefore politically more expedient than the death of a male heir would otherwise have been. Tony’s character is tested and ultimately found to be ‘worthy’ however, because - despite ‘excessive’ tendencies - he is eventually able to repudiate sexuality (Rose) for morality (Jean). As a man of ‘conscience’ Bream draws back from the abyss represented by Rose’s lawless passion : “I liked it - while I was safe. Then I grew afraid,”¹³⁰ and his union with Jean Martle signifies a recovery of self-control that re-establishes order.

Unlike the reclaimed figure of Tony Bream, Owen Gereth fails to embrace the higher moral condition that is represented by the ‘selfless’ Fleda Vetch. While Owen clearly appreciates her quality, he is nevertheless a slave to his senses and therefore he succumbs to the seductive wiles of Mona Brigstock, with whom he continues to cohabit even after their obligatory marriage has satisfied the demands of ‘honour.’ Owen’s inability to rise above his sensual nature demonstrates a personal failure that is presumably symptomatic of a wider condition. However, the real ‘villain’ of this scenario is identified (by James) as the seductress Mona Brigstock who, as an unprincipled, ‘unwomanly’ woman, is willing to take ‘merciless’ advantage of man’s inherent weakness.

Like other conservatives of his era, James would appear to place responsibility for society’s morals primarily upon women, owing to the acknowledged ‘natural’ weakness of the male sex. The different attitudes adopted by women in these novels reflect changing perceptions among individuals within late nineteenth century society and show how values were undergoing transition. Fleda Vetch and Jean Martle are essentially traditional types, but each woman is ultimately forced to confront her sexual identity and therefore to arrive at condition of greater self-knowledge. While the subdued Jean Martle is found ‘worthy’ to be incorporated within the patriarchal system, Fleda Vetch fails to find acceptance, despite her adherence to ideological concepts of self-sacrifice. It is, ironically, Fleda’s fidelity to the concept of renunciation that effectively renders her redundant

¹²⁹ Weeks, Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

¹³⁰ James, Henry. *The Other House*, p. 219.

within a ruthless, competitive society. While James extols Fleda's 'moral superiority' and champions the heroic nature, 'always much tormented',¹³¹ she nevertheless appears perversely inadequate and out of step with the demands and needs of a modern world. Conversely, Mona Brigstock is able to utilize the liberal moral climate of the nineties to impose her will upon others, and consequently she does not become a victim of Capitalist-Patriarchy, but rather, she uses its basic tenets to ensure her own survival.

In these novels the *amorality* of Mona and the *anarchy* of Rose poses as a threat to male authority and demonstrates the possible consequences of 'unregulated' female sexuality. While Rose's defeat relegates her to the nightmare world of female vampire figures depicted by Symbolist painters, Mona Brigstock remains disturbingly in control. This woman is presented as a force to be reckoned with because she is not intimidated by conventional codes of morality. In *The Spoils of Poynton* the old-fashioned values of ethics and aesthetics (Fleda) suffer defeat at the hands of brash modernity (Mona) and James significantly sees Mona's 'success' as society's failure.

Fearing the effects of modernity, with its increasing emphasis upon materialism, conservatives in late-nineteenth century society endeavoured to uphold traditional values. However, *moral* debates failed to acknowledge that woman's sexual and economic independence was essentially a matter of *social justice* and related to an existing imbalance which resulted in inequality for one half of the human race. Refusing to contemplate a restructuring of power, the rights of women were vigorously resisted by authority figures¹³² and predictably, the 'modern' woman became the target of censure. In James's novels *The Other House* and *The Spoils of Poynton* women characters endeavour to assert themselves within the structures of Capitalist-Patriarchy and the struggle that James depicts highlights the relation between sexuality and power and expresses therein the tensions of a society in transit.

¹³¹ James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Spoils of Poynton"', *The Art of the Novel*, p. 129.

¹³² Morris, F.O. "The rights and wrongs of women", 1870, in Dennis, Barbara and David Skilton. (ed.) *op.cit.*, p. 136. The writer maintains that equal rights for women must inevitably result in a 'Peticoat Government.'