Chapter Five : AWAKENING

"We shall never be again as we were! " *

The Wings of the Dove (1902)
The Golden Bowl (1904)

* *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 403.

In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904) James continues to examine the nature of human relations as they manifested themselves at the turn of the century and the world that he depicts is one wherein elaborate appearances serve to disguise the reality of human motivations. During the nineteenth-century human knowledge was increasingly founded upon scientific explanation and behaviour in the predatory world that James's novels depict reflects the scientific philosophies of his day. Theories pertaining to 'self-help' and 'enlightened self-interest' were closely aligned with the principles of *laissez-faire* economics, while Darwinistic belief in the survival of the fittest established an aggressive agenda for human interaction that appeared to encourage ruthless ambition and justify the exploitation of individuals - both nationally and abroad.[1] The rise of Capitalism throughout the nineteenth century had promoted Materialism on a large scale and consequently, as one historian observes: 'the idea of money-making as a virtue had seeped into the general consciousness' [2] resulting in the conviction that 'man's prime duty was to help himself rather than his neighbour.' [3]

Progress through free competition was an idea that penetrated society at many levels and toward the end of the century the desire for individual supremacy had become a lust for power that dominated the consciousness of a fashionable elite. The infiltration of new wealth derived from policies of *laissez-faire* capitalism and from the effects of British Imperialism generated a milieu of nouveaux riches and, accordingly, fluctuations in social status came to resemble those of the stock exchange.[4] Wealth was the predominant factor that inevitably promoted personal prestige and provided opportunities of access to the upper echelons of the social strata.

---

[1] Figes, Eva. op.cit., p. 113.
[2] Ibid., p. 79.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Webb, Beatrice. *My Apprenticeship,* p. 74. The author notes: 'There seemed to be... a sort of invisible stock exchange in constant communication with the leading hostesses in London and in the country; the stock being social reputations and the reason for appreciation or depreciation being worldly success or failure however obtained.'

In *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* characters belong, or seek to belong to this world of power and prestige. In both novels James is primarily concerned with the domain of the rich - the upper middle class and the aristocracy, and also with the infiltration into English society of the American plutocrat. Competition for a place among the fashionable elite was intense and it resulted in displays of wealth so excessively opulent as to border upon vulgarity. [5] In the latter half of the nineteenth century consumerism escalated wildly and the 'coarsening scale of values' [6] identified within society was largely the result of British affluence. Expressing his feelings upon this subject James writes in 1886:

> The condition of that body [the English upper class] seems to me to be in many ways much the same rotten and collapsable one as that of the French aristocracy before the revolution - minus cleverness and conversation; or perhaps it's more like the heavy, congested and depraved Roman world upon which the barbarians came down ... At all events, much of English life is grossly materialistic and wants blood-letting. [7]

In James's novels of the late Victorian era the predatoriness attributed to individuals is linked to an insatiable appetite that evokes cannibalistic tendencies whereby : 'the more you gave yourself the less of you was left.' [8] In this highly artificial environment beauty and grace are commercialized. Women become *object d'art;* the 'leisured lady' a 'hallmark of conspicuous consumption' [9] - displaying personal magnificence while demonstrating simultaneously the

---

[5] Ibid. p. 74. Concerning this matter the author observes: 'It was this continuous uncertainty as to social status that led to all the ugly methods of entertaining practised by the crowd who wanted 'to get into society'.... the competition in conspicuous expenditure on clothes, food, wine and flowers; above all, the practice of inviting persons with whom you had nothing in common because they would attract desired guests to your house.'

[6] Ibid., p. 73.

[7] James, Henry. Quoted in Berland, Alwyn. *Culture and Conduct in the Novels of Henry James.* p. 140.

[8] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* New York, 1978, p. 39.

[9] Banks, J.A. and Olive Banks. op.cit., p. 126.

power and prestige of male associates. For all its apparent aimlessness, the ritual of the dinner party fulfilled a vital function by serving to articulate status and display wealth. [10] Invariably - in accordance with good business practices - everyone within such a world 'who had anything to give ... made the sharpest possible bargain for it (and) got at least its value in return." [11]

By the turn of the century it was the opinion of many conservatives that the 'tone' of society was undergoing decline.[12] Materialism offered increased opportunity for self-gratification and, by succumbing to its temptations, individuals were thought to become 'vulgarized' - acquiring thereby a brutal indifference to all considerations but to those of personal well being. In James's novels *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Awkward Age* (1899) bewilderment and confusion characterized many individuals who sought to orientate themselves within a highly sophisticated and avaricious society. Consequently women characters were depicted as adrift - as somehow 'lost' within the shifting perspectives of a changing social reality. Conversely, in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* some women characters are portrayed as actively engaged in 'finding' themselves - absorbed in a process of self-discovery that involves the personal acquisition of knowledge. In both novels, *knowledge* becomes imperative to survival, particularly for women, who need to assimilate experience in order to gain understanding of good and evil. Accordingly women display signs of increased self-awareness and they demonstrate a new determination to succeed that is characterized primarily by its aggressive self-interest.

In his earlier works, Jamesian women tended rather to resist the acquisition of knowledge and the confrontations that it necessarily provoked. In *The Portrait of a Lady* the Countess Gemini articulates a general anxiety: "'I don't want to know anything more - I know too much already.

---

[10] Lewis, Jane. op.cit., p. 114.

[11] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 116.

[12] Max Nordau maintained: 'The disposition of the times is curiously confused... The prevalent feeling is that of imminent perdition and extinction.' Quoted in Jackson, Holbrook. *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century,* 1976, pp. 18-19.

The more you know the more unhappy you are."' [13] Regardless of the truth or falsity of this belief, knowledge in the later novels becomes an indispensable weapon for survival, while in *The Golden Bowl* it is 'simply enough, a loaded gun.' [14] Knowledge of the self and of the social reality usually results from personal experience, and the changing conditions that allowed women greater freedom from the home also afforded them opportunities whereby individual understanding could be enlarged. By late nineteenth century, this sense of growing independence among women was accompanied by an increase in self-assertion that was, in turn, reflected in their response to sexuality.

In *The Awkward Age,* Mrs. Brook feels obliged to deny the existence of passion as a motivating force within the confines of her elegant coterie. For this woman 'intellectual dalliance' is a means of sublimating sexual desire, a fact she acknowledges somewhat uneasily: "'After all it has been mere talk ...we haven't had the excuse of passion."' [15] However this might be, Jamesian reticence on the subject of sex undergoes considerable transformation in the novels of the late period, particularly in those which follow *The Awkward Age,* wherein he exhibits an increasing awareness of, and interest in, the manifestation of passion between the sexes. [16] In *The Sacred Fount* (1901) the narrator captures the obsessive quality pertaining to human sexuality in an image that recalls Racine's tormented heroine, Phaedre: 'I saw as I had never seen before what consuming passion can make of the marked mortal on whom, with fixed beak and claws, it has settled, as on a prey.' [17]

Responding to contemporary conditions which saw new attitudes emerging, in *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age* James portrays relations between the sexes as predominantly

---

[13] James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady,* p. 220.
[14] Seltzer, Mark. *Henry James and The Art of Power,* London, 1984, p. 77.
[15] James, Henry. *The Awkward Age,* p. 277.
[16] Towards the end of the century the influence of European literature (French naturalism, Ibsen, Tolstoy, etc.) had resulted in censorship becoming slightly more relaxed in England - a circumstance which permitted James as an author to be somewhat more outspoken concerning the nature of relations between the sexes.
[17] James, Henry. *The Sacred Fount,* New York, 1901, p. 135.

illicit. In these works, however, promiscuity is viewed as a negative attribute, the moral consequences of which appear to be degeneration and spiritual death. Nevertheless, despite the condemnation that is given to illicit liaisons in these novels, later Jamesian works display a more relaxed and tolerant attitude toward sexual 'misconduct'.[18]

In *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* James displays a new sensitivity to the human condition - a change which Leon Edel attributes to a 'new openness to feeling' [19] within the author himself. In both novels 'the "sinful" relations ... (are) no longer the essence of the matter', [20] but rather, the focus of James's attention is now directed upon 'the process of living and the vulnerability of love - and of life itself.' [21] The sense of increased maturity that informs these works generates a concentrated atmosphere [22] within which characters explore greater emotional depths, demonstrating in themselves thereby new levels of maturity, while the quality of eroticism that pervades each novel shows women to be capable of strong physical passions.

At the turn of the century the desire for greater autonomy among women was the subject of fierce debate. Although fundamental changes had occurred, it was still apparent to many that women were disadvantaged economically and also, it was believed, biologically. As one historian notes: 'The assumption that women were dominated by their reproductive systems (women belonged to nature, while men belonged to culture) was implicit in all medical attitudes' [23] and among women themselves 'there was a deep belief .... that biology had incapacitated them'. [24] In *The Golden Bowl*, Prince Amerigo entertains the cynical conviction

---

[18] Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Master, 1901-1916,* New York, 1972, pp. 222-223. As Edel points out, the late novels are informed by a new 'quality of eroticism, an awareness of love absent in the earlier works.'.

[19] Edel, Leon. *Henry James:The Treacherous Years, 1895-1900.* p. 334.

[20] Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Master, 1901-1916.* p. 218.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Sears, Sallie. op.cit. The author notes with reference to *The Golden Bowl* that the 'context itself is narrower and deeper and more solitary than in the preceding works.' p. 156. Furthermore, she maintains that, in the later novels, James's 'concern is increasingly with interior landscapes and geographies.' p.159.

[23] Weeks, Jeffrey. op.cit., p. 43.

[24] Ibid., p. 42.

that woman is by nature a slave to her biological instincts. For him, this 'predestined phenomenon' [25] demonstrates her 'weakness' even as it constitutes 'her deep misfortune.' [26] By contriving to give herself away to the object of her desire woman inevitably betrays her abject condition, and accordingly the Prince believes that man's relation to her can only be one of 'pity and profit.' [27] In *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* women no longer view passion, like Mrs. Brook, as a form of intellectual dalliance. Conversely they desire commitment from their lovers, upon whom they impose demands that serve to demonstrate the strength of their attachment.

While scientific knowledge endeavoured to portray women as inferior to men, there was considerable disagreement concerning the nature of woman's sexuality. As Elaine Showalter observes: 'advanced late-nineteenth century thinkers acknowledged women's capacity for sexual pleasure' [28] but feminist reformers negated this viewpoint and supported ideas propounded by the 'purity campaign' which denied the existence of 'animal passions' in women, and extolled their 'moral superiority'. [29] Amidst the general contention surrounding the nature of woman and her role in society, Jamesian characters in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* provide examples of the different approaches that could be assumed by 'modern' womanhood at the turn of the century. Conservative opinion held that: 'woman could not possess the aggressive qualities needed to compete in the world and still retain moral superiority ... (and that therefore) without male protection she must be helpless.' [30] This belief was increasingly subject to modification, however, and women in James's late novels display evidence of an evolving consciousness whereby the emergence of a more assertive individual suggests a metamorphosis that signifies the creation of a new 'type'.

---

[25] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* London, 1959, p. 35.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Showalter, Elaine. op.cit., p. 21.
[29] As social reformers, these women believed it was only the demand for high moral standards from both sexes that would, eventually, lead to the establishment of social justice for women. See Murray , Janet H. op.cit., pp. 390-391.
[30] Mitchell, Sally. 'The Forgotten Woman of the Period', in Vicinus, Martha (ed.) *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women,* pp. 50-51.

In *The Wings of the Dove* Kate Croy's 'modernity' is her predominant characteristic. Described as a 'contemporary London female, highly modern, inevitably battered, honourably free', [31] Kate's London life allows her considerable freedom to engage in social encounters and to move about the city on her own. Consequently, (unlike earlier heroines), she entertains few illusions and sees herself pragmatically as 'a young person who wasn't really young, who didn't pretend to be a sheltered flower.' [32] Similarly, Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl* is characterized as a 'modern' type. Described as 'handsome, clever, odd,' [33] Charlotte is distinguished primarily by her intelligence and by the unconventionality that surrounds her straitened circumstances, which evoke for Prince Amerigo the suggestion : 'in all her person ... of winds and waves ... of far countries and long journeys, the knowledge of how and where and the habit, founded on experience, of not being afraid.' [34]

Impoverished but beautiful, both Charlotte and Kate are gifted with intelligence and charm - attributes that constitute for each their 'small social capital.' [35] Poverty is the underlying reality that determines their unsheltered condition, and the appearance of modernity that each woman assumes is based upon necessity which dictates self assertion in the interest of material well being. Kate Croy's dawning awareness of her disadvantaged state is communicated by the discovery that:

> The world was different ... from her rudimentary readings, and it gave her the feeling of a wasted past. If she had only known sooner she might have arranged herself more to meet it. [36]

---

[31] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 50.
[32] Ibid.
[33] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 30.
[34] Ibid., pp. 31-32.
[35] Ibid., p. 38.
[36] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 35.

Knowledge of an existing inequality between the sexes is implicit in Kate's appreciation of how 'she might still pull things round had she only been a man' [37] and the lack of financial means is a source of constant anxiety for James's two homeless heroines. Contrasting the vulnerable position of these women, Milly Theale and Maggie Verver - as young American heiresses - are surrounded by an admiring and an obsequious world. Within this sympathetic and protective environment both Milly and Maggie display characteristics traditionally associated with 'femininity.' Seemingly passive and receptive, the quality of innocence that distinguishes them both results from their lack of exposure to the demands of necessity, and accordingly, they are initially unable to differentiate between the world of appearances and its underlying reality. Against the mercenary background of British upperclass society, women characters in these novels strive to achieve the fulfilment of a felt potential. 'Success' in such a world largely depends upon the individual's ability to assimilate experience and acquire understanding. Knowledge of good and evil as it pertains to human nature becomes essential for survival, while the attainment of such knowledge confers a new level of sophistication that is indicative of expanded awareness - or consciousness.

In *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* social status for women hinges upon their ability to secure male patronage. A lust for power afflicts most individuals in these novels and it is accompanied, particularly in women, by the desire to obtain sexual satisfaction. Contrasting the new assertiveness of women, male characters are presented as deceptively passive prey; the object of women's desire, they become 'spoil' for appropriation. Like characters in earlier works, these Jamesian heroes are charming and seemingly ineffectual. However, appearances belie reality, and behind the forms that structure Patriarchy, male privilege ensures that they retain a position of supremacy that accords them power over women.

In *The Wings of the Dove* Kate Croy's father is universally acknowledged to be a blighting presence. Irresponsible and wholly negative in effect, it is Kate, however, who accepts the

---

[37] Ibid., p. 22.

burden of his amorality, and in James's Preface to the work, he indicates the propriety of her doing so:

> The image of her so compromised and
> comprising father was... to have pervaded
> her life ... to have tampered with her spring ...
> the shame and the irritation and the depression,
> the general poisonous influence of him. [38]

Lionel Croy's perversity is in fact a characteristic that will, in time, justify Kate's own capacity for 'brutality' - but the girl herself refuses to abandon family loyalty. Similarly, Croy's wife had demonstrated before her demise the 'traditional' attachment of women to men, declaring inconsequently (somewhat in the manner of Ida Farange): "'If you hear anything against your father - anything I mean except that he's odious and vile - remember it's perfectly false.'" [39] Maintaining the Croy family's conventional allegiance to men, Kate's sister, the widowed Marian Condrip, 'left crumpled and useless', [40] continues to idealize the 'saintly profile' [41] of her late spouse. Despite her precarious position as an impoverished mother of four, Marian remains sublimely uncritical of Mr. Condrip's feckless disposition. In *The Golden Bowl,* Maggie Verver's eminently successful father encourages her excessive devotion toward him as entirely appropriate and Maggie's high status in society results entirely from her father's fortune. In both novels, the fact that women are valued by their *relation to men* demonstrates their inferior position within the patriarchal order and highlights their need to acquire male patronage.

Money and status are primary concerns for members of James's fashionable world, and within this avaricious environment the lack of means condemns an individual to obscurity.[42] In *The*

---

[38] James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Golden Bowl"', in *The Art of the Novel,* p. 297.
[39] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 57.
[40] Ibid., p. 41.
[41] Ibid., p. 39.
[42] Webb, Beatrice. *My Apprenticeship,* pp.145-146. Webb describes the atmosphere pervading social interaction in late nineteenth century society: 'I recall that the special characteristic which most distressed me ... was the cynical effrontery with which that particular crowd courted those

Wings of the Dove, Marian Condrip's modest social status has deteriorated almost beyond the bounds of redemption. Impoverished, widowed, and burdened by offspring, a disadvantageous marriage has placed her, geographically, upon a different social map from that of her sister, and Milly Theale observes with wonder how: 'in England... the social situation of sisters could be opposed, how common ground for a place in the world could quite fail them... (owing to) an hierarchical, an aristocratic order.' [43] The 'social atlas' [44] that demarcates the position of individuals according to their material value discriminates conspicuously between a widowed Marian Condrip and the unmarried Kate Croy. As a creature endowed with beauty and 'charm', not to mention an influential aunt, Kate's shining presence manifests itself as an unknown quantity whose market value has yet to be determined. 'Success' for Kate represents Marian's only hope of rescue and, while the widow envies her sister's chances, Kate, in turn, envies the condition of Milly Theale, whose vast inherited wealth seemingly provides opportunity for unlimited freedom. Milly Theale personifies wealth, not only for Kate, but for everyone she encounters:

> ...the girl couldn't get away from her wealth ...
> it was in the fine folds of the helplessly expensive
> little black frock ... it was in the curious and splendid
> coils of hair ... She couldn't dress it away, nor walk
> it away ... She couldn't have lost it if she had tried -
> that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be *the*
> thing you were.[45]

In this novel wealth confers power upon individuals and elevates them far beyond the level of their peers. Similarly in *The Golden Bowl* Charlotte Stant's superior talents are deliberately obscured by the deferential attitude she necessarily adopts toward Maggie Verver. The Verver

---

who possessed, or were assumed to possess, personal power; and the cold swiftness with which the same individuals turned away from former favourites when these men or women passed out of the limelight.'

[43] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p.122.

[44] Ibid., p.123.

[45] Ibid., p. 86.

wealth mitigates personal mediocrity. Between Maggie and Charlotte the 'silver tissue of decorum' [46] serves to establish protocol and acts as a constant reminder to both 'that though the lady-in-waiting was an established favourite, safe in her position, a little queen, however good-natured, was always a little queen and might, with small warning, remember it.' [47]

Human interaction within the fashionable world is fraught with hidden tensions and behind the mask of flattery individuals harbour parasitical designs: "'Nobody here, you know, does anything for nothing"'.[48] Concern for money is basic to all, and the society James depicts is Janus-faced - the two sides of the coin being affluence and exploitation. In *The Golden Bowl* Prince Amerigo reflects that:

> The present order ... had somehow the ground under its feet, and a trumpet in its ears, and a bottomless bag of solid shining British sovereigns - which was much to the point - in its hand. [49]

Exploitation, barter and exchange are practices which characterize social intercourse. Executed in a manner that is simultaneously militant and diplomatic, these strategies mirror the methods of British Imperialism, wherein the colonization of a country (or an individual) results in the possession of increased wealth and power.

In *The Wings of the Dove* Kate Croy initially resists inducements to actively involve herself in the mire of the social market place. Perched aloft in 'airy altitudes' that are analogous with personal integrity and high ideals, Kate takes refuge upstairs at Lancaster Gate, understanding instinctively that: 'To go down ... was to meet some of her discoveries halfway, to have to face them or fly before them.' [50] A growing susceptibility for material goods is one 'discovery'

---

[46] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 313.
[47] Ibid., p. 314.
[48] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p.106.
[49] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* pp. 236-237.
[50] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 36.

that makes Kate wish to postpone surrender to the dictates of her aunt. Mrs. Lowder drives a hard bargain, and she only 'invests' in her niece in order to extract from the girl the full measure of her value. It is Necessity that compels Kate finally to meet the demands of others, and to engage in London life by embracing 'the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray.' [51] Like other 'battered' and 'bleeding participants' [52] she must inevitably exhibit herself within the social arena where survival of the fittest is common law.

In his Preface to *What Maisie Knew,* James observes how:

> No themes are so human as those that reflect for us, out of the confusion of life, the close connection of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt, so dangling before us for ever that bright hard medal, of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody's right and ease and the other somebody's pain and wrong. [53]

This fundamental paradox continues to fascinate James, and the close relationship between 'bliss and bale' remains a dominant theme in his late novels. Within the fashionable London society that he depicts individuals are driven by self-interest, and so long as people are thus motivated human casualties are bound to occur. In *The Wings of the Dove* it is Milly Theale's sustained *refusal* to engage in the 'fray of battle' that effectively assigns her doom. As a wealthy woman Milly is habitually cossetted and protected from harsh realities and consequently she conforms to traditional patterns of womanhood. Used to being 'taken care of' by others, she is hampered by passivity, and she lacks the tenacity required for survival in a predatory world. James's characterization of Milly Theale and Kate Croy serves to emphasize their fundamental differences, while these differences themselves demonstrate the evolving

---

[51] Ibid., p. 38.
[52] James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Golden Bowl"' , in *The Art of the Novel.* p. 328.
[53] James, Henry. 'Preface to "What Maisie Knew"', in *The Art of the Novel,* p. 143.

consciousness of individuals who must adapt in order to survive, and in doing so, comply with the demands of a changing social reality.

As the 'good' heroine, Milly Theale is an idealized character who is based upon James's own cousin Minnie Temple, and in his Preface to the work, the author confesses to a 'tenderness of imagination about her.' [54] Nevertheless, the 'goodness' that James wishes Milly to embody is essentially unconvincing owing to his method of treating her character indirectly - a treatment that he admits was fully intentional:

> I go but a little way with the direct - that is
> with the straight exhibition of Milly; it
> resorts for relief, this process, whenever
> it can, to some kinder, some merciful
> indirection: all as if to approach her circuitously,
> deal with her at second hand, as an unspotted
> princess is ever dealt with; the pressure all
> round her kept easy for her, the sounds, the
> movements regulated, the forms and ambiguities
> made charming. [55]

In his *Notebooks* James outlines his plan to incapacitate Milly by making her incapable of sustained physical passion. Referring to her desire for Merton Densher, he writes:

> ... the poor girl ... has no life to give him
> in return: no life and no personal, no physical
> surrender, for it seems to me that one must
> represent her as too ill for *that* particular case. [56]

---

[54] James, Henry. 'Preface to "The Wings of the Dove"', in *The Art of the Novel,* p. 306.
[55] Ibid.
[56] James, Henry. *The Notebooks of Henry James.* Ed. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, New York, 1961, p. 170.

Furthermore, he believes there is immense benefit to be had from: 'removing the poor creature's yearning from the class of egotistic pleasures, the dream of being possessed and possessing, etc., make it something fine and strange.' [57]

Accordingly, in his portrayal of womanly 'perfection' Milly is denied those aggressive qualities that are an intrinsic part of human vitality, and the credibility of her character is further weakened by her unwonted displays of misplaced 'generosity' and 'trust'. Surrounded by extravagant praise and exotic imagery that compares her with princesses, angels and doves, the 'egotistic pleasures' of a self-interested passion are forbidden to Milly. However, while James seeks to enclose his heroine within an ethereal glow (or halo), denying her mortal foibles, Milly in fact emerges as a character whose 'high restlessness' and dissatisfaction with earthly conditions reveals a underlying frustration with her captive, passive state of imposed 'goodness'. Throughout the novel a position of stalemate holds the girl in check making her aware of forces beyond her control: 'It pressed upon her ... that she was still in a current determined ... by others; that not she but the current acted, and that somebody else always was the keeper of the lock.' [58]

Milly Theale chaffs under her fate of predestined doom, and despite James's attempts to desexualize her nature, she manifests herself as one who *does* in fact experience passion, and who *does* desire Merton Densher in a physical sense. Fate and temperament, however, are finally wielded together to 'justify' Milly's demise. It is, we are told, her obscure illness that prevents personal fulfilment for this woman, but significantly her malaise is inextricably linked to her desperate need for love. The suggestion that Milly could *live,* if only she was *loved,* implies that her condition is essentially one of psychological dependence; a predicament that obliges her to obtain male recognition and approval in order to exist.

---

[57] Ibid., p. 172.
[58] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 166.

In his essay on Late-Victorian Respectability, Peter Cominos maintains that many Victorian women were severely retarded by restrictive ideologies:

> So deeply rooted was dependence in their character that it is no exaggeration to say that the 'womanly woman' was markedly masochistic in her character orientation ... (and) self-effacement ... prepared them for the role of submissive conformity to the pattern of immature love. [59]

Milly Theale largely conforms with notions pertaining to the 'womanly-woman' ideal, and it is her essential passivity which, in turn, provokes masochistic tendencies, a fact that is recognized by Sir Luke Strett, who tells the girl: "'Don't try to bear more things than you need.'" [60] Deprived of the power to act constructively, Milly becomes a victim of an antiquated ideology that is no longer appropriate to the needs of individuals situated within a highly competitive and aggressive society.

Beside the ineffectual attempts of Milly Theale to achieve personal fulfilment, Kate Croy's magnificent health manifests itself so blatantly as to appear, by contrast, almost 'vulgar.' Gifted with energy, and with a 'talent for life' that is demonstrated by her 'infinite variety', this 'handsome girl' possesses qualities that would make her indisputably, a great social 'success.' Abundant vitality - the source of Kate's physical attraction - is accompanied by the unconscious arrogance of youth and beauty and, while Milly senses the indifferent, defensive brutality that characterizes the nature of her friend, she also concedes how: 'there might be a wild beauty in that, and even a strange grace.' [61] Mentally and physically liberated, Kate is disadvantaged only by her poverty which manifests itself in 'the habit of a conscious dependence on others.'

---

[59] Cominos, Peter T. 'Late-Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System', op.cit., p. 245.
[60] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 149.
[61] Ibid., p. 117.

[62] Nevertheless financial insecurity is preferable to Milly's curious, languishing condition, and intuitively Kate understands that, despite her vast resources: "Mildred Theale was not, after all, a person to change places, to change even chances with.' [63]

The contrasting temperaments and conditions that differentiate between James's two heroines in *The Wings of the Dove* are aspects of the novel which are repeated in *The Golden Bowl* wherein Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant evince similar disparities of disposition and circumstance. In this novel Maggie Verver is characterized primarily by her unconscious self-complacency - a quality that directly relates to her condition as the daughter of a wealthy man. Colonel Assingham captures Maggie's effect upon others when he declares: "'She's very nice, but she always seems to me, more than anything else, the young woman who has a million a year.'" [64] Indulged by a doting parent, the American heiress is essentially parochial and, dimly aware of personal mediocrity, she is able to confess to a 'womanly' timidity: "'I live in terror... I'm a small creeping thing.'" [65] Despite an intuitive understanding of personal weakness, Maggie assumes a position of superiority over others and, in accordance with her role of 'little princess', she automatically expects people will 'obligingly' leave her 'more exalted by having, themselves, smaller ideas.' [66] Protected and cossetted from the harsh realities of human necessity, Maggie exists in a rose-coloured world of romantic illusions wherein everything appears uniformedly 'so nice'. While others perceive that: "'Maggie is, by her ignorance, in danger,'" [67] the girl herself appears impervious to 'evil' and, like Milly Theale, she is presented initially as a character who is virtually too 'good' to be 'true.'

Contrasting the virtuous and affluent Maggie, Charlotte Stant displays those assertive qualities that are embodied in the character of Kate Croy. Vitality and 'taste' distinguish Charlotte,

---

[62] Ibid., p. 114.
[63] Ibid.
[64] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 54.
[65] Ibid., p. 128.
[66] Ibid., p. 470.
[67] Ibid., p. 59.

whose 'superior' natural gifts are undervalued owing to her single, penniless condition. Necessarily aware of human duplicity and of the masks worn by others, Charlotte is obliged to ingratiate herself with the rich and powerful in order to promote her fragile social prestige and consequently, despite her almost friendless state, she is eternally 'staying with people'. For this woman social 'capital' resides wholly in her possession of beauty and wit - qualities which must be wisely 'invested' to secure maximum returns. In both novels the structures of patriarchy which comprise the social hierarchy ensure that women must obtain male patronage if social recognition is desired, and inevitably these demands result in predatory behaviour on the part of women, for whom 'suitable' male protectors become highly desirable prey.

In her essays on Marriage, the nineteenth century writer, Mona Caird, attacks the coercive element underlying women's desire to marry:

> Her capital (as so many men have naively pointed out, without the faintest suspicion of the terrible wrong implied by the fact) consists in her youth, beauty and attractions. She must invest it in marriage, and Society offers a guarantee for the payment of the interest. Such is the protection that marriage offers to women! [68]

Nevertheless, this writer also maintains that despite psychological and economic pressures brought to bear upon women by society: 'An increasing number ... are refusing a life of comparative ease in marriage, rather than enter upon it as a means of livelihood, for which their freedom has to be sacrificed.' [69]

While Mona Caird's opinions record women's increased resistance to marriage where it entails loss of individual freedom, it seems significant that in James's novels *The Wings of the Dove*

---

[68] Caird, Mona. op.cit., p.109.
[69] Ibid.

and *The Golden Bowl* all the women characters see marriage as a highly desirable goal - as one that provides the best option for material advancement. By reacting in this manner these women express their allegiance to conventional ideals and they display attitudes that uphold the values of the existing status quo. Within the fashionable world James's women are interested in achieving social visibility and with increasing personal prestige; accordingly they do not challenge existing conditions, but rather, they recognize and accept male supremacy as a fundamental condition of Patriarchy.

In both novels, marriage is the focus of female attention and it is, presumably, a fixation that reflects the pre-occupations of a great many women. Persistently throughout the nineteenth century the idea that Marriage was to Woman what Business was to Man pervaded the social consciousness. In 1859 the *Saturday Review* published an article that reflected public opinion; the fundamentals of which appear relevant to the concerns of James's late-Victorian heroines:

> It is not in the interest of the States, and it is not therefore, true social policy, to encourage the existence, as a rule, of women who are other than entirely dependent on man as well for subsistence as for protection and love ... Married life is a woman's profession; and to this life her training - that of dependence - is modelled. Of course by not getting a husband, or by losing him, she may find that she is without resources. All that can be said of her is, she has failed in business, and no social reform can prevent such failures. [70]

In *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver, as the daughter of an American millionaire, possesses considerable social status but, as American nouveaux riches, the Ververs themselves lack culture, connections and ancestry. Accordingly, Maggie sees marriage as providing an

---

[70] Quoted in Banks, J.A. and Olive Banks. op.cit., p. 43.

excellent opportunity to redress social 'disadvantages' and to establish indisputably thereby a position of dominance within the hierarchical elite. [71] Although captivated by the personal beauty and charm of her Italian Prince, Maggie is also aware that - while Amerigo lacks money - he possesses a wealth of ancestry and thus is able to confer upon his bride the impressive title of 'Princess.' The Ververs take immense pride in their 'power of purchase' and Amerigo is made aware of the high value placed upon his ancient lineage:

> "What was it else ... that made me originally think of you? It wasn't ... what you call your unknown quantity, your particular self. It was the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste - the wicked Pope ... Where, therefore ... without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?" [72]

As a 'womanly-woman', Maggie Verver sees Charlotte's unmarried condition as pitiable but James demonstrates his awareness of women's changing attitudes towards marriage when he makes Charlotte declare with bravado:

> "Existence... doesn't depend on that ... on having caught a husband ... There are things, of sorts, I should be able to have - things I should be able to be. The position of a single woman today is very favourable, you know." [73]

Nevertheless, in reality, Charlotte does not enjoy her single status because it is accompanied by financial hardship and social discrimination. Additionally, mere 'existence' seems inadequate

---

[71] Webb, Beatrice. *My Apprenticeship,* p. 68. The author notes that '..the new rich of the British Empire and the United States were assimilated by marriage.'
[72] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* pp. 5-6.
[73] Ibid., p. 40.

to the needs of this talented woman for whom the desire to fulfil a felt potential - to be 'magnificent' - motivates her to inform Adam Verver:

> "I want to be married. It's - well, it's the condition ... I don't like my own. 'Miss,' among us all, is too dreadful - except for a shopgirl. I don't want to be a horrible English old-maid." [74]

Like Kate Croy, Charlotte Stant is depicted as a gifted individual whose natural abilities - if suitably displayed and ratified by male authority - would ensure her social success, and it is generally agreed that marriage holds the key to uncover her potential for 'greatness.' In contriving to marry Adam Verver's millions Charlotte *does* achieve financial security and high social status. However, in a world wherein 'nothing is for nothing' union with Adam entails appropriation by both father and daughter, and accordingly Charlotte becomes a social 'asset' - an instrument whose specific function is to promote exclusively the Verver interests.

In *The Golden Bowl* there is irony in Charlotte's married condition wherein her vision of freedom is frustrated by the demands of others. Contracted by the Ververs to do the 'worldly', Charlotte performs with diligence and skill, acknowledging: "'I've got so much, by my marriage ... that I should deserve no charity if I stinted my return."' [75] However, the sense of having exchanged 'one set of restrictions for another' [76] becomes increasingly a part of her changing consciousness, whereby captivity to the rituals of public image-making begins to assume the appearance of exploitation at the hands of the unthinking Ververs.

Adam Verver interprets Charlotte's desire to marry as an expression of her need 'to be taken care of' [77] but ironically, it is Charlotte who does the caring in this relationship. Similarly in

---

[74] Ibid., p. 154.
[75] Ibid., p. 225.
[76] Caird, Mona. op.cit., p. 104. This is how the author saw women's predicament.
[77] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 154.

The Wings of the Dove Kate Croy must assume responsibility in her relationship with Merton Densher, while her instinctive desire to marry is frustrated by the young man's impecunious position - his inability to offer Kate anything other than his 'culture'. Fear of poverty and of the social alienation it imposes is very real for Kate Croy, whose impression of her widowed sister 'grown red and almost fat' [78] is one of horrified dismay. Accordingly, the narrator is able to observe:

> If that was what marriage necessarily did to
> you Kate Croy would have questioned marriage.
> It was at any rate a grave example of what a man ...
> might make of a woman. [79]

In the latter half of the century the standard and thus the cost of living had increased markedly, with the result that marriage had become a highly expensive undertaking. As early as 1875 the *Saturday Review* had drawn attention to this fact, pointing out that rising prices plus social expectations were placing marriage beyond the reach of many individuals:

> The same income which enabled a middle-class
> family to live in comfort twenty years ago will
> not do so now. This is partly because of the
> rise in prices, but chiefly because many things
> which used to come under the head of the luxuries
> of life have now become necessities ... Young
> men do not marry as early as they did fifty years
> ago. [80]

At the turn of the century Materialism appeared to be one major cause of declining moral standards. In *The Wings of the Dove* the desire for material 'success' is linked implicitly to the compromise of personal integrity, and it is Kate Croy's susceptibility to material well-being that gradually undermines her sincerity. Moral discrimination breaks down before expediency,

---

[78] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 41.
[79] Ibid.
[80] 'Saturday Review', 1875. Quoted in Banks, J.A. and Olive Banks, op.cit., p. 77.

while the struggle for survival seemingly justifies brutality. In both novels characters greedily and naively desire 'everything'; a viewpoint that is unashamedly articulated by Kate: "'I shall sacrifice nobody and nothing, and that's just my situation, that I want and that I shall try for everything.'" [81]

Similarly in *The Golden Bowl,* Maggie Verver congratulates herself on having gained a husband without forfeiting, in any way, her father. Furthermore, to Maggie's eyes:

> What had ... all the while enriched the whole aspect of success was that the latter's [Adam's] marriage had been no more measurably paid for than her own. His having taken the same great step in the same free way had not in the least involved the relegation of his daughter. [82]

Materialism and human passion merge in these novels and characters are seduced by their desires for luxury and sensual gratification, seeking to possess 'the kingdoms of the earth' [83] even as they simultaneously reject the idea of payment or of personal sacrifice. In both novels the unrealistic demands made by individuals are inevitably confronted by the conflicting desires of others, and characters must finally accept commitment to, and responsibility for, the consequences of their own actions - a process that involves the awakening of individual consciousness.

By consenting to play her aunt's game, Kate Croy enters into a contract from which she cannot emerge unscathed. Similarly Milly Theale must ultimately take responsibility for her own *refusal* to act: for chosing to disregard the warnings of Kate and those of her own conscience. Lack of sincerity characterizes social intercourse in the fashionable world that James depicts,

---

[81] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 60.
[82] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* pp. 290-291.
[83] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 87.

and within its artificial environs dangers abound. For Milly Theale, however, naivety ensures that she is slow to grasp the reality of her situation despite a growing suspicion of having encountered, at Lancaster Gate, 'the interesting phenomenon of complicated, of possibly sinister motive.' [84] Feted for her millions which seemingly guarantee unlimited freedom Milly, in reality, is 'starved for culture' [85] seeing herself beside the splendours of old-world tradition as 'a mere little American, a cheap exotic, imported almost wholesale.' [86] The display of 'culture' within fashionable London society dazzles the heiress and effectively blinds her to the hollow underside of social interaction while, like other women characters in these novels, she sees marriage as a goal that will justify her existence.

Wealth makes Milly Theale a favourite in society, but the girl is painfully aware of her inability to inspire passion. Lord Mark - as an acute social observer - is able to identify the source of her curious malaise: '"You want to be adored ... You're not loved enough."' [87] Similarly, Sir Luke's advice to the heiress is equally straightforward: '"simply ... do as you like."' [88] But, ironically, the conventional passivity that distinguishes Milly as a feminine, 'Womanly-Woman' makes it impossible for her to actively assert self-will. Subterfuge and self-deception accordingly become her chosen methods for coping with surrounding uncertainties, and the habit of evasion, of doing presumably 'nothing at all' [89] makes the girl an easy target for the predatory designs of others.

While James's 'heiress of all the ages' [90] is strickened by mysterious incapacities that render 'everything' 'nothing', other people in society rampage around rapaciously searching for 'something' - for 'anything' that might increase personal prestige. In *The Wings of the Dove*, Lord Mark describes Society as '"the groping and pawing ... of masses of bewildered people

---

[84] Ibid., p. 102.
[85] Ibid., p. 79.
[86] Ibid., p. 108.
[87] Ibid., p. 271.
[88] Ibid., p. 242.
[89] Ibid., p. 104.
[90] Ibid., p. 79.

trying to 'get' they didn't know what or where,"' [91] and throughout this novel James assumes a condemnatory attitude toward the materialist urge that drives the fashionable herd. Situated in a position of relative social prominence Kate's aunt, Maud Lowder, has used marriage to validate her ambitions. A widow, she sees her niece as a valuable social asset; a tool that will enable her to scale greater material heights, and the energetic nature of this uncompromising woman is compared by the Jamesian narrator to 'a projectile, of great size, loaded and ready for use.' [92] 'Menacing' and 'unscrupulous', Maud is a formidable figure who invariably perceives others in the light of the uses to which they might profitably be put. Kate Croy sees her aunt as a being who embodies the commercial spirit of free enterprise. She is 'Britannia of the Market Place;' [93] mistress of the ledger and the counting house, while her militant and diplomatic social strategies are identical with those of British Imperialism. In this novel James equates Maud's personal ambitions with the growth of philistinism. Merton Densher sees the display of power she is able to effect as both ugly and cruel, while 'the false gods of her taste and false notes of her talk' [94] are intended to illustrate the disintegration of moral values within the social fabric.

In *The Golden Bowl,* the American plutocrat Adam Verver provides another example of the individual's desire to appropriate the 'kingdoms of the earth.' However, James's attitude toward this despoiler of the 'golden isles' assumes a more ambiguous caste than was earlier discernible in his unmitigated condemnation of Maud Lowder and her set. Unlike the mistress of Lancaster Gate, Adam Verver has acquired impeccable 'taste' and for him, appropriation is complemented by appreciation - particularly when the splendours in question are validated by the authentic hallmarks of genius. For Adam Verver, the passion for fine arts extends to a passion for self-aggrandisement *through* fine arts, while the pursuit of perfection acts as a balm to conscience, justifying the 'devious' methods necessarily employed in the acquisition of great

---

[91] Ibid., p. 100.
[92] Ibid., p. 110.
[93] Ibid., p. 37.
[94] Ibid.

wealth. Imperialism is implicit in the millionaire's desire to conquer the European world and thereby to appropriate 'civilization.' However, James's criticism of the Ververs - self-confessed pirates though they be - is curiously suspended and muffled in obscurity, and this treatment suggests a degree of tolerance that is entirely absent from the earlier novel.

Adam Verver's inscrutability serves to conceal the extent of his power - a strategy that, in *The Golden Bowl,* illustrates Michel Foucault's belief that: 'Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself ... its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.' [95] In both novels men assume positions of dominance over women and egoism is a distinguishing characteristic of Jamesian males, who never doubt the validity of their superior status. Adam Verver's wealth allows him to assume 'god-like' powers over others and, while Prince Amerigo and Merton Densher lack money, this factor fails to diminish the complacent self-image of either man. Prince Amerigo understands that he has 'gained more from women than he had ever lost by them,' [96] and furthermore, that in the relation between the sexes there existed 'a balance in his favour that he could pretty well, as a rule, take for granted.' [97] Amerigo adroitly exploits his personal beauty and ancient lineage to achieve supremacy whereas Merton Densher contrives to impress by his aura of cultivation - a quality derived from an extensive education - 'his Swiss schools, his German university,' [98] and from his exposure, through travel, to the traditions of European culture.

While men in these novels are morally weak they are not required to suffer the consequences of their actions, and by calling upon the code of 'gentlemanly conduct' they are able to deflect incriminating revelations that might otherwise prove damaging to self-esteem. Conversely, it is

---

[95] Foucault, Michel. Quoted in Seltzer, Mark. *Henry James and the Art of Power,* London, 1984, p. 68.
[96] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 249.
[97] Ibid.
[98] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 70.

James's women characters who are punished for attempting to assert themselves and for seeking to abjure their traditional role as a civilizing force within the universe. [99]

Passion has a powerful effect upon women in these novels. In *The Wings of the Dove,* James's conventional, idealized heroine, Milly Theale, is unable to consciously confront the true nature of her feelings for Merton Densher. Self-deception buoys Milly's fluctuating spirits even as it simultaneously undermines her hopes for future happiness. However, when knowledge of reality is finally forced upon her resisting consciousness, she is unable to sustain the shock of its impact. Knowledge of betrayal - of good and evil manifesting itself within human nature overwhelms Milly Theale, who had never wanted to know that she was not loved as she desired. Throughout this novel James's conventional heroine demonstrates a divided consciousness; on the one hand professing to want 'abysses' [100] while admitting, on the other, that there are things she doesn't want to know. By rejecting a knowledge of life that encompasses all its aspects, Milly effectively embraces death and proves herself thereby to be incapable of surviving the ravages of a predatory society.

Contrasting the evasive strategies of Milly Theale, Kate Croy is a character who is able to confront unpleasant realities. More resilient than the heiress, she is able to adapt to the demands of necessity in order to ensure survival. Passion is also a motivating force for Kate, but despite the fact that she is able to physically demonstrate her desire for Merton Densher, it is significant that the girl refuses to abandon self-will. Densher is aware that Kate's passion is one with her intellect, and consequently his desire for mastery in their relationship is frustrated by 'her charming strong will' [101] - an aspect of her nature against which he struggles: 'He couldn't and he wouldn't ... have her inconvenient and elusive. He didn't want her deeper than himself .' [102]

---

[99] Bedarida, Francois. op.cit., p. 118.
[100] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove.* p. 120.
[101] Ibid., p. 195.
[102] Ibid., p. 196.

In both novels women are challenged by experiences which they must finally confront in order to acquire knowledge of the self and of the social reality. *Understanding* may result from such encounters, and it becomes increasingly evident that - within a predatory environment - the development of individual consciousness is fundamental to survival. In *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver's essential naivety is linked to her bland assumption that everything revolves around herself - an illusion that is dramatically shattered by dawning awareness of the relationship between her husband and Charlotte. James equates Maggie's sleeping consciousness with a locked chamber that is filled with 'accumulations of the unanswered ... like a roomful of confused objects, never as yet 'sorted', which ... she had been passing and re-passing, along the corridor of her life.' [103] Abruptly awakened by objectionable knowledge, [104] Maggie must investigate the hidden contents of her mind in order to restore thereby, consciousness of reality.

Although Maggie Verver and Milly Theale are portrayed as conventionally 'feminine' women, the Princess refuses to accept defeat at the hands of a rival and, unlike Milly, she fights to regain what she considers to be her rightful 'property.' Passion and possession are interlinked aspects of Maggie's love for Amerigo, and the sight of a rival serves to re-ignite her sexual awareness of the man, unleashing thereby a ferocity of feeling that overturns conventional passivity. Thus jealousy effects a transformation within Maggie Verver that results in her re-evaluation of 'reality'. Doubt 'of her wonderful little world' [105] is the factor that initially pitches Maggie into a feverish state of high anxiety, while the necessity of her suffering is a fact that is recognized by the Assinghams, who express the conviction that: '"Her sense will have to open ... to what's called Evil ... To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it."' [106]

---

[103] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 297.
[104] Isle, Walter. op.cit., p. 202. The critic uses the term 'objectionable knowledge' in discussing James's work.
[105] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 270.
[106] Ibid., p. 273.

Accordingly, in *The Golden Bowl* 'lamb-like' Maggie Verver becomes a furious force, who ultimately displaces her rival by the superior tactics of diplomacy that she employs. The Princess gains power through intimidation - by withholding the extent of her knowledge while simultaneously making it obvious to all that she 'sees.' [107] Although the Ververs are partly responsible for the adultery of their *sposi,* Maggie refuses either to accept blame or to renounce her claims to self-gratification - an attitude which marks a new phase, both in her marriage and also, more significantly, in the behaviour typical of a Jamesian 'good' heroine. For Maggie, giving up the *sposi* is 'not to be thought of' [108] and consequently she is forced to employ policies of discretion solely to preserve her vested interests when, in reality, she desires to wreck havoc. Maggie Verver's refusal to renounce self-interested desires dictates that she must abandon the position of 'moral superiority' and actively engage with other 'bleeding participants' within the social arena. The struggle for survival - indeed for supremacy, overtakes this woman who accordingly descends from the conventional 'womanly' pedestal to become a creature of flesh and blood, who is *imperfect* and driven by desire.

While Maggie descends from her 'airy altitude,' Charlotte also demonstrates unwillingness to renounce self-interested desires. The battle for supremacy that ensues between them is fought by employing the strategies of artifice and subterfuge - forms of 'civilized' behaviour that serve to disguise the existence of more primitive emotions. It is characteristic of the rivalry between women for possession of the male that Maggie blames only Charlotte, exonerating the Prince who, as the object of her desire, retains his personal 'superiority.'

As the pampered child of Adam Verver, Maggie's influence is all pervasive and through her use of calculated, but unspoken manipulation, she is able to effect Charlotte's demise. In reality, Maggie's power lies in her ability to influence her father - whose wealth, in turn, effectively

---

[107] Seltzer, Mark. op.cit., p. 77. As Seltzer remarks: 'Maggie achieves control simply by announcing *that* she 'knows' and by refusing to tell *what* she knows.'
[108] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 456.

controls them all. By making Adam act in her interests Maggie is able to paralyse her foe, while Charlotte - shackled by the demands of necessity - must comply with the unspoken desires of the Ververs. Adam and Maggie are therefore accomplices in effecting Charlotte's captivity, but each seeks to ignore the reality of her torment. Haunted by 'the shriek of a soul in pain' [109] Maggie nevertheless asserts that the punishment is 'deserved' and accordingly the 'silken halter' [110] of Adam Verver's authority becomes a noose that constricts Charlotte's freedom even as it leads her to her doom.

Although all the women in these novels display energy and exhibit commitment toward achieving self-fulfilment, it is significant that almost all are finally constrained or 'boxed' by uncontrollable circumstances. Unable to face the reality of her condition, Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* is literally 'boxed' when death presents itself as the most desirable way out of a painful predicament. However, Milly's failure to survive the ravages of experience suggests, not only the death of innocence in society, but it also recognizes that innocence alone is insufficient to withstand the pressures brought to bear upon individuals by a modern, predatory world. While James attempts to portray Milly Theale as an uncorrupted woman this interpretation of her character is not entirely successful. Renunciation is a familiar fate for 'good' Jamesian characters and it is one that is usually associated with moral superiority. In this novel Milly's final surrender may be interpreted as noble self-effacement (which seems to be the author's intention) or, more prosaically, 'surrender' may simply signify an acknowledgement of failure to achieve personal ambitions, in which case, the girl appears to be merely 'unsuccessful' rather than 'unselfish'. Similarly, Milly's bequest to Merton Densher is also questionable because - while it may be interpreted as a selfless act of 'divine' forgiveness - it is also possible to see the gesture as a final, triumphant assertion of will, which enables the girl to succeed in wresting Densher's affection from her rival.[111]

---

[109] Ibid., p. 495.
[110] Ibid., p. 492.
[111] Samuels, Charles Thomas. 'A Flawed Hymn to Renunciation' in *The Wings of the Dove,* ed.cit., p. 578. Samuels makes this point in his essay.

Throughout *The Wings of the Dove* Milly emerges as a character who resists her predestined canonization - as one who wishes rather to embrace the ephemeral pleasures of a material world, but who is *prevented* from doing so by a fate that is rigidly imposed upon her by authorial intention. Contrasting Milly's conventional responses, Kate Croy displays the assertive qualities of 'modern' womanhood, yet she also fails to achieve the realization of personal ambitions and additionally, she is punished for succumbing to self-interested desires. While Merton Densher technically honours the marriage agreement existing between them, he will do so only upon his own terms and, virtually rejected by Densher, Kate is alienated by the removal of male support. In *The Golden Bowl* Charlotte's vitality is similarly constrained by the 'silken halter' of economic necessity, while it is only Maggie Verver who is seemingly triumphant.

In *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver's refusal to renounce self interest ostensibly presents itself as a breakthrough in the behaviour of the conventionally 'good' Jamesian heroine. Willing and anxious to see Charlotte 'removed, transported, doomed,' [112] sexual jealousy makes Maggie act diabolically and passion renders her 'as hard... as a little pointed diamond.' [113] Unashamedly exploitative Maggie uses Charlotte's unhappiness to reconstruct her own flagging marriage and the cruelty inherent in her actions evokes the survival tactics of Darwinism. The heiress adapts her pre-conceived self-image of 'rarefied' 'gentle' Princess to that of a consciously manipulating woman; a 'mistress of shades,' [114] and consequently she survives her encounter with a dangerous opponent. Although Maggie survives she is not unscathed, and the penalty she incurs as a result of her actions is an irrevocably changed awareness that includes direct knowledge of evil - in others but also, more importantly, in herself.

---

[112] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 480.
[113] Ibid., p. 392.
[114] Ibid., p. 390.

In these novels Kate and Maggie emerge from the 'fray' of battle as survivors, and these two women are representative of different types of womanhood that could be observed within Victorian society at the turn of the century. Able to accept the reality of her condition and to adapt according to the demands of a changing social reality, Kate Croy is essentially alone. Nevertheless, Susan Stringham is instinctively convinced of 'the predominance of Kate's star,' [115] realizing instinctively that 'Kate Croy, whatever happened, would take care of Kate Croy.' [116] This woman stubbornly refuses to renounce her desire for wealth, and while James's treatment of her character suggests demoralization by a corrupt society, the reader can nevertheless admire her tenacity - her ability to see clearly without recourse to self-flattering evasions. Rather, one hopes that she *will* take the money that Densher offers because realistically, she sees that material independence depends upon having it.

Both Kate Croy and Maggie Verver are unrepentant and each is willing to pay the price of increased self-knowledge which a desire for supremacy imposes. However, Maggie differs from Kate considerably because the assertive quality that she displays is, in fact, not symptomatic of 'modernity', but rather it is an *adaptation* of the conventional 'womanly' ideal. Although Maggie Verver acts aggressively, it is significant that she does so in order to preserve the 'equilibrium' of an existing status quo. This woman upholds family values: father, husband and son justify her existence, and although she wins through to a new sense of identity that recognizes personal needs and desires, she remains essentially a 'womanly woman.'

Men in these novels, being 'morally weak', are characteristically anxious to be 'let off' the consequences of their actions. In *The Golden Bowl* it is vital to Maggie's success that she does not openly confront the status quo that accords dominance to men. Focusing upon this

---

[115] James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 249.
[116] Ibid.

aspect of the novel Allon White observes how Maggie's victory is achieved seemingly without recourse to fireworks :

> She, of all James's characters, has mastered
> his almost impossible demand that satisfaction
> be achieved passively, by using language
> which never makes overt mention of that
> which is most pressingly, achingly significant
> for the speaker. [117]

Furthermore White asserts that 'obscurity in James is thus a way of ensuring purity', [118] and in *The Golden Bowl* 'obscurity' serves as a device that disguises Maggie's passive aggression, enabling her - despite evidence to the contrary - to preserve a conventional image of 'goodness.' Traditionally regarded as a 'civilizing' agent within society, woman was generally perceived as 'a source of human warmth, tenderness, domestic peace', [119] and it is not surprising therefore that, in James's novels, the *appearance* of 'goodness' in women wins male approval and, more significantly, it also wins their support.

In *The Wings of the Dove,* Merton Densher ultimately prefers Milly's passive image to Kate's uncontrollable self-will. Practical rather than romantic, Kate's assertive nature strikes Densher as 'almost unfeminine', [120] while her ability to command situations is a form of 'expertness' that the young man finds 'irritating'. As Leon Edel observes, Densher 'chooses to live with a ghost rather than with the strong and living woman' [121] and by doing so he signifies his preference for the 'ideal' over the reality. In *The Golden Bowl,* Prince Amerigo sides with Maggie Verver. An opportunist by nature, the Prince is able to sacrifice Charlotte to the law of expediency; to his practical conviction that: "'it's always a question of doing the best for one's

---

117 White, Allon. *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism,* London, 1981. p. 159.
118 Ibid.
119 Bedarida, Francois. op.cit., p. 118.
120 James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 56.
121 Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Master,1901-1916,* p. 117.

self one can."' [122] According to the Prince, Charlotte "'asks too much,"' [123] and Merton Densher in *The Wings of the Dove* thinks the same of Kate.

Despite the changing perception of woman's role in society at the turn of the century, sexual aggression was a characteristic that most individuals viewed unfavourably. In *The Golden Bowl,* Fanny Assingham's sense of propriety is offended by Charlotte's 'unfeminine' moral licence, and she maintains that Amerigo doesn't really care for the girl: "'...men don't when it has all been too easy. That's how, in nine cases out of ten, a woman *is* treated who has risked her life."' [124] Fanny's conviction that 'easy' women are ultimately abandoned by their lovers is an opinion that conforms with the irate warnings of Eliza Lynn Linton, the Victorian conservative writer. Moreover, Sallie Sears has noticed the tendency of late Jamesian males to exploit the 'unconventional' woman. Referring to such instances in James's last three completed novels, she observes:

> Each of their lovers, having sown his wild oats,
> returns to the fold, the home, or the society he
> had left for the sake of the woman, who now
> becomes some sort of moral outlaw or scapegoat. [125]

In both novels, 'illicit' relations between the sexes fail to prosper : the pre-marital relationship of Kate and Densher, and the extra-marital affair of Charlotte and Amerigo prove equally unsuccessful, and 'morally weak' males escape the toils of 'temptresses' to be reclaimed by 'good' women who will, presumably, reactivate within them an 'appropriate' moral sense.

The use of multiple viewpoints in James's late novels makes it increasingly difficult for the reader to take sides with individuals, or to attribute such a practice to the author himself. As

---

[122] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 41.
[123] Ibid., p. 534.
[124] Ibid., p. 283.
[125] Sears, Sallie. op.cit., p. 209.

Maggie Verver asserts: "'One must always, whether or no, have some imagination of the states of others,'" [126] and accordingly, the significance of events and circumstances is essentially 'a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter.' [127] Nevertheless, in *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver emerges victorious from her struggle with Charlotte, and although James is highly ambiguous in his treatment of these characters, it would appear finally - by the mere fact of winning - that he does indeed 'side' with Maggie Verver.

Biological drives direct Maggie Verver's energies and she is willing therefore to concede superiority to the Prince, demanding only loyalty in return in the form of a monogamous marriage. Referring to *The Golden Bowl* and to the society it depicts, Leon Edel remarks: 'The flaws must be discovered, the correct values re-established,' [128] and by chosing to unite the legitimate Verver couples at the end of this novel James, in effect, restores the values of patriarchy - of the family and of 'civilization' in general. Although Maggie's cruelty toward Charlotte is extreme, the Princess justifies her actions in the name of 'love', while a dawning awareness of her own vulnerability - her biological enslavement to physical desire - enables her finally to empathize with Charlotte, seeing at last that: "'it's *always* terrible for women.'" [129]

Relations between the sexes in *The Golden Bowl* manifest themselves as a battle for supremacy but significantly, the 'unfailing magic' [130] of Amerigo's sexuality ensures his ascendancy over the Princess who, in fact, desires that he assume the position of authority. Safe in her uncontended possession of this man, Maggie Verver is able to do that which her happiness depends upon, and surrender herself wholly to him. The Princess abandons father fixation only to embrace her spouse, who becomes thereby the 'master of her fate.' [131] By exhibiting thus her capacity for 'endless surrender' Maggie demonstrates her 'womanly'

---

126 James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 470.
127 Ibid., p. 460.
128 Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Master,1901-1916,* p. 217.
129 James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 535.
130 Ibid., p. 327.
131 Ibid., p. 302.

disposition and she validates Amerigo's conviction that, with regard to women: 'he only had to wait, with a decent patience, to be placed, in spite of himself, it might really be said, in the right.' [132]

In discussing the nature of power in *The Golden Bowl,* Mark Seltzer observes how, in the final passage of the novel, Prince Amerigo takes up the position of power that is accorded to him by Maggie. In this passage the Prince physically 'encloses' his wife while appropriating and extending her terminology : '"See? I see nothing but you."' [133] As Seltzer explains:

> Seeing is never innocent in James's fiction, and to be seen and to be desired in *The Golden Bowl* is to be the object of power: the closing act of the novel is the Prince's own act of enclosure. Maggie's power is finally her 'endless power of surrender', and the 'pity and dread' of her tragedy is a surrender and giving herself away to the 'force' of the desire and the power that she has finally taught and transferred to the Prince. [134]

Although Maggie Verver proves herself stronger than Amerigo she seemingly abdicates from this position of dominance, and by acting in this manner the Princess adheres to contemporary 'scientific' ideas, which held that woman's biological nature 'foredoomed' her to accept a subordinate position in relation to man. Similarly Charlotte, despite her bravado, is also portrayed as another victim of passion while, in *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly Theale presumably dies because she is not 'loved enough.' Among these victims of biological desires only Kate Croy stands apart - a maverick, who is able by the strength of her intellect to distance herself from physical passion. 'Amoral' women like Kate are a minority among James's more

---

[132] Ibid., p. 35.
[133] Ibid., p. 548.
[134] Seltzer, Mark. op.cit., p. 93.

conventional heroines, but these contrasting 'types' of womanhood - conservative and unorthodox -provide examples of the different attitudes and behavioural practices that were beginning to manifest themselves within society by the turn of the century. While James appears to admire the Kate Croys of the world, he finally cannot approve of them. Conversely, he seemingly worships the redundant or 'doomed' Millys, and he endorses the Maggies who, although toughened by contact in the social arena, are still willing to adhere to the dictates of Patriarchy - to serve men and to work toward the preservation of traditional, 'civilized' values.

Lacking economic equality women in these novels emerge as rivals; locked in battle for appropriation of the male via marriage. Inevitably 'toughened' by experience of the social reality - from exposure to a material, commercial world - the acquisition of knowledge, (which includes knowledge of human duplicity) affects a change in the consciousness of women that is impossible to reverse. Thus a new sophistication (or maturity) informs the actions of Kate Croy and Maggie Verver, and James is aware that for these characters, as for women generally in society, there is no return to a former state of innocence.

Despite James's belief in the necessity for understanding, his women characters are distinguished primarily by their vulnerability - a condition which sees them so often isolated or 'caged.' As the traditional 'helpmate' of man, it is woman who must adapt in order to survive, while male characters are not subjected to similar pressures. Conversely, men escape punishment in these novels and thus the acquisitiveness of Adam, the smugness of Amerigo and the righteousness of Densher is never seriously called into question. Within the fashionable society that he depicts, women are required to disguise their desire for power; they must not *openly* rival men, and they are inevitably punished for 'unwomanly' behaviour. Nevertheless, woman's capacity for suffering is paradoxically both her weakness and also, James suggests, the source of her strength - because from such suffering comes increased understanding and by this process individual consciousness is gradually developed.

In his essay on the Russian writer, Turgenev, James expresses his belief in the necessity for individuals to acquire understanding through experience:

> But the world as it stands is no illusion, no phantasm, no evil dream of a night; we wake up to it again for ever and ever; we can neither forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it. We can welcome experience as it comes, and give it what it demands ... so long as it contributes to swell the volume of consciousness. In this there is mingled pain and delight, but over the mysterious mixture there hovers a visible rule, that bids us learn to will and seek to understand. [135]

Vulnerability and courage are dual attributes of 'modern' womanhood and James is acutely aware of the rise of self-will among women in society; of individuals pitted against each other in the competitive struggle for survival. In *The Golden Bowl,* he writes of: 'the element of staleness in all the freshness and of freshness in all the staleness, of innocence in the guilt and of guilt in the innocence' [136] and James's two survivors, Maggie Verver and Kate Croy, 'good' and 'bad' respectively, both refuse to renounce their desire for personal well being. Biologically bound, Maggie capitulates to the Prince while Kate remains conspicuously aloof, and it seems indicative of James's *own* response to these women, that Maggie Verver is received into the arms of Patriarchy while Kate Croy is firmly rejected.

At the turn of the century women were beginning to penetrate the mask of appearances that constituted social reality. Consequently they had begun to emerge from a condition of 'muddlement' and were entering upon a new stage of development that was characterized primarily by its awakening consciousness. For Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl,* awakening is a shattering experience which entails:

---

[135] James, Henry. Quoted in Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1883.* London, 1962, p. 168.
[136] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 252.

> ... the horror of finding evil seated, all at
> its ease, where she had only dreamed of good;
> the horror of the thing hideously *behind*, behind
> so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness,
> cleverness, tenderness. [137]

While vanished illusions may equate with a paradise lost, they also mark the beginning of maturity, and thus Fanny Assingham is able to assert with reference to the Princess: "'Ah no - don't pity her ... Now ... she has begun to live.'" [138] Leon Edel records that it was James's belief 'that each human consciousness carries its own reality', [139] and 'reality' in James's fiction is very much the result of an individual's experience. While access to experience may also effect the corruption of personal integrity, this is a risk which must be taken if life is *truly* to be lived. In *The Wings of the Dove,* Kate Croy is undoubtedly a product of her environment and, as such, she is acutely aware that individual consciousness is transformed by the effects of experience. Consequently Kate is able to assert: "'We shall never be again as we were '" [140] and while her words are prophetic of a new era, they also encapsulate the condition of women at the end of the nineteenth century.

---

137 James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl,* p. 455.
138 Ibid., p. 272.
139 Edel, Leon. *Henry James: The Conquest of London,1870-1883,* p. 169.
140 James, Henry, *The Wings of the Dove,* p. 403.