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Eventual Benefits: Kristevan Readings of Female Subjectivity in Henry James's Late Novels

par Viken Tufenkjian

Département des littératures et de langues du monde

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Résumé

"Eventual Benefits: Kristevan Readings of Female Subjectivity in Henry James's Late Novels" examine la construction de la subjectivité féminine dans les romans de la phase majeure de Henry James, notamment *What Maisie Knew*, *The Awkward Age*, *The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove* et *The Golden Bowl*. Les personnages féminins de James se trouvent souvent dans des circonstances sociales ou familiales qui défavorisent l'autonomie psychique, et ces subordinations sont surtout nuisibles pour les jeunes personnages de l'auteur. Quant aux femmes américaines expatriées de ces romans, elles éprouvent l'objectification sociale et pécuniaire des européens : en conséquence, elles déploient des tactiques contraires afin d'inverser leurs diminutions et instaurer leurs individualités. Ma recherche des protocoles qui subventionnent l'affranchissement de ces femmes procède dans le cadre des théories avancées par Julia Kristeva. En utilisant les postulats kristeviens d'abjection et de mélancolie, d'intertextualité, de maternité et de grossesse, du pardon et d'étrangeté, cette thèse explore les stratégies disparates et résistantes des femmes chez James et elle parvient à une conception de la subjectivité féminine comme un processus continuellement ajourné.

Mots clefs : Henry James, Julia Kristeva, subjectivité féminine, objectification, abjection, intertextualité, maternité, pardon, étrangeté

Abstract

"Eventual Benefits: Kristevan Readings of Female Subjectivity in Henry James's Late Novels" examines the constitution of female subjectivity in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, *The Awkward Age*, *The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*. In these five novels of James's major phase, female characters often find themselves in social or familial circumstances inimical to the autonomous psychic growth. Such subjections are particularly devastating for the children or adolescents of the first three novels. Likewise, James's expatriate American women negotiate social and pecuniary objectifications by the Europeans they encounter; consequently, they deploy counteractive tactics to surmount their diminution and install their selfhoods. My investigation of the protocols subsidizing the enfranchisement of these itinerant women proceeds in the framework of Julia Kristeva's theories. Recruiting her postulates of abjection and melancholia, intertextuality, motherhood and pregnancy, forgiveness and foreignness, this dissertation scrutinizes the disparate and resistant strategies of James's female characters and arrives at a conception of female subjectivity as a continually deferred process.

Keywords: Henry James, Julia Kristeva, female subjectivity, objectification, abjection, intertextuality, motherhood, forgiveness, foreignness

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Abbreviations of Works by Henry James

AA	*The Awkward Age*
AM	*The Ambassadors*
AN	*The Art of the Novel*
GB	*The Golden Bowl*
MK	*What Maisie Knew*
PL	*The Portrait of a Lady*
WD	*The Wings of the Dove*

For Garabed and Arpiné

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Introduction

Looking for Julia Kristeva in Henry James's novels

After his discouraging foray into the theatre in the mid-1890s, during the second half of the decade Henry James reverted to writing tales and novels, the forms that had afforded him a popular reputation prior to the public denigration of his play *Guy Domville*.[1] The return would become the marker of the transitional period in his career, presaging what F. O. Matthiessen termed his "major phase" (Matthiessen 1944), during which James penned the novels now widely held as his most accomplished. The crowning achievements of *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* were yet to come;[2] in the intervening years, James produced tales and novels in which he revisited subject matter and themes he had previously engaged, but now he deployed a fresh approach to their treatment. In the 1880s, James's fiction had featured expatriate Americans endeavouring to institute the processes of their individuation while confronting European values and culture; these negotiations did not always culminate in comfortable resolutions. In the novels of the transitional period, I see James reprising this blueprint with an important involution: the abstraction of dislocation. Simply put, the anxieties of his *fin-de siècle* characters spring not necessarily from geographic displacement, but from a malaise invoked by the impossibility to establish themselves with relative surety in native settings. This intellection amplifies the characters' isolation and interiority, which James conveys by dwelling longer in their consciousness, thereby underscoring their sense of disconnection. To complicate matters, James frequently renders them almost powerless to contend with their stultifying relations, due to their inexperience or very young age. In fact, several major characters in James's novels of this period are children

[1] At the premiere performance of *Guy Domville* on January 5, 1895, the audience expressed its vociferous disapproval of the play, producing in James profound disappointment (Martin and Ober 1). A week later, James wrote to his brother William that the play had become a "shipwreck" (Lubbock 233).

[2] *The Wings of the Dove* was first published in 1902, *The Ambassadors* in 1903, and *The Golden Bowl* in 1904. All three novels were revised when published in *The Novels and Tales of Henry James,* now commonly known as the New York Edition (1907-09). Citations of these novels in this dissertation are from the latter.

or adolescents.[3] James had previously both situated them at the forefront in his fiction, in such works as *Daisy Miller* (1878), and relegated them to the background in the function of a foil to the protagonist of the story, as is Pansy Osmond to Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*.[4] In the transitional novels, James no longer assigns his young female characters complementary roles but thrusts them into prominence, and he unfurls their psychic lives in the spotlight.[5] This is especially true of Maisie Farange in *What Maisie Knew* and Nanda Brookenham in *The Awkward Age*.[6]

The historical context of these novels is framed by the pressures the Woman Question exerted on Victorian socio-cultural and economic ideals, and by the consequent emergence of the New Woman in the last decade of the nineteenth century. These disputations aimed to overthrow institutionalized molds of femininity by offering women the alternate progressive model of a combative, stern identity they could embrace, if they were to achieve greater social justice. The New Woman debates inevitably found their way to the literature of the period. Marcia Jacobson submits, "One ... form in which the New Woman could be exhibited was the novel that contrasted the New Woman and her traditional sister" (107-08). James's engagement with these issues dates back to the 1880s, notably in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians* (1886), and it is carried forward to the novels of the transitional period, but

[3] Several children in James's tales and novels of the1890s suffer exploitation or neglect by their parents or parental figures in their lives. Morgan Moreen in "The Pupil" (1891), Effie Bream in *The Other House* (1896), and Miles in "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) all die in their respective stories.

[4] *The Portrait of a Lady* was first published in 1881. For the New York Edition, James revised the novel substantially. Unless otherwise specified, all citations of the novel in this dissertation are from the latter edition.

[5] Kaja Silverman suggests that James's interest in nascent subjectivities constitutes a major strain in his works: "It seems to me that subjectivity in James's corpus is bound up in some very fundamental way with the primal scene–that that scene indeed constitutes one of his authorial phantasmatics, if not indeed the primary one" ("Too Early/Too Late" 159).

[6] James published *What Maisie Knew* in 1897 and *The Awkward Age* in 1899. Both novels were included in the New York Edition. Citations of the two novels in this dissertation are from the first editions.

always without a militant subscription to the New Woman programme. In the novels of the 1890s, James continues to dissipate the polemics of the New Woman into the irresolution of his earlier works. As is widely noted, James was ambivalent towards women's assertiveness in their private and public lives.[7] Donatella Izzo goes so far as to claim James's depictions of women insist on making them casualties of the New Woman fracases: "His plots are fully consistent with the Victorian images of women who are submissive, silent, reified, victimized, sacrificed, and of girls who are punished for daring to assert their independence" (*Portraying the Lady* 27). In spite of these Jamesian subsumptive moves, Maisie Farange and Nanda Brookenham engross us by their intrepid enterprises to uphold their individualities in and against the tides of objectification, as Dana Luciano affirms: "[I]f [James] openly shrank from the figure of the self-authorized New Woman, [he] nevertheless provided a number of resourceful, dissident feminine figures and left open to his readers the possibility of imaginative exchange with his texts" (215).

James's return to his earlier themes persists in the novels of his major phase. *The Ambassadors* concerns itself with the American Lambert Strether's encounters with European mores, while *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* reveal James's continued preoccupation by female characters whose subjectivities are at least discomfited in transatlantic settings. At every turn, expatriate American female characters seek autonomous governance of the self in social circles disinclined to accommodate them. It is to be noted that

[7] Among those critics who have commented on James's ambivalence is Elizabeth Sabiston, who claims, "James's occasional ambivalence towards his heroine can be traced, at least in part, to his attraction-repulsion for Transcendentalism" (38). Sallie Sears states, "[T]here is scarcely a novel in which the extreme weight of possibility and responsibility is not placed on the women, for good or ill" (133), while Beth Sharon Ash extends James's ambivalence to his portrayals of mothers (123-24). See also Anny Brooksbank Jones "Strange Meetings" (66), and Sarah Wadsworth "Innocence Abroad" (121). On the other hand, Tessa Hadley finds James's later works imbued with greater ambivalence than the novels of the transitional period ("*What Maisie Knew*" 218).

James is not merely concerned with the inimicality proper to such settings: Catherine Wessel submits, "[A] close reading of *The Golden Bowl* … is not simply a moral criticism of a particular culture. The novel reveals its author's cynicism about human nature itself and his skepticism about how 'civilized' any civilization really is" (576). James is interested in troublesome diegetic configurations only insofar as they complicate his methodology of exposing a young woman to adversity. He alludes to this prioritization in the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*: "[A]s certain elements in any work are of the essence, so others are only of the form; that as this or that character, this or that disposition of the material, belongs to the subject directly, so to speak, so this or that other belongs to it but indirectly–belongs intimately to the treatment" (*AN* 53). In other words, James favours situating his female characters in defeatist compositions, but endows them with the volition to surmount their trivialization. Alfred Habegger affirms that James's works depict women's "struggle against patriarchy from within. If the heroine submits, she also defies" (*Woman Business* 26). This Jamesian gesture signals to an authorial near-voyeuristic impulse to observe the exercise of that volition: "Well, what will she *do*?" (*AN* 53).[8] James invites the reader to observe her tribulations, but also to ponder her self-assertive manoeuvres in the service of her subjectivity.

The intrigue of "what she will do" – launched collaboratively by James's arrangement of plot and his methodology, lends itself to a feminist interpretation. Within the body of Jamesian scholarship there is an abundance of feminist analyses, most notably those of

[8] Multiple critics attest to the Jamesian voyeuristic impulse pervading his works. Stougaard-Nielsen discusses "the artist's voyeuristic position" in the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (144); similarly, Bonnie L. Herron claims the narrator "creates for readers a distanced, voyeuristic vantage point" (133-34); see also Hinton (304). Matthew Guillen thinks voyeurism in the novel is not limited to the narrator: "the reader is sometimes lured into a sort of speculative voyeurism, watching furtively what in reality would be a 'private' event'" (115-16). Hugh Stevens speaks of "the fervid curiosity of the voyeur" in *The Golden Bowl* (56), and Patrick O'Donnell deems James's *In the Cage* a "deeply weird, voyeuristic novella" (44).

Elizabeth Allen (1984), Victoria Coulson (2007), and Priscilla Walton (1992).[9] Alongside these readings, a large number of critics have focused on James's handling of subjectivity in his works.[10] Of particular interest to this dissertation are those critics who, in the last fifteen years, have recruited specific moments of Julia Kristeva's theories in their studies of Jamesian discourses of subjectivity (Armstrong 2009; Bellonby 2013; Coulson 2004; Anny Jones 2000; Priest 1999, 2001). My dissertation takes its cue from these intersections and proposes to broaden the scope of such petitions. Its ambition is to map the interrelational topography of female selfhood in James's late novels. By summoning the components of Kristeva's theoretical corpus to Jamesian instances of female subjectivity, this investigation seeks to untangle the constitutive elements of the latter from their attendant deterrents, and by doing so, to call attention to their heterogeneity and itinerancy. Central to this conceit is a distinction it hopes to make: female subjectivity in James's late novels is always an adjourned process, or as Milly Theale puts it, it comes in the figural projection of "eventual benefits" (*WD* 270). James shapes this deferral in varied forms: for younger females – Maisie and Nanda, for example, it subsists in the banishment from the site of individuation. For Isabel, it entails the exercise of her choice to remain in her ill-advised marriage, and for Milly, it is relegated to posthumousness. Only Maggie Verver of *The Golden Bowl* succeeds at asserting her self in her relationships, but then again, her success is mitigated by insecurity with regard to the future. There are also the cases of Madame Merle and Kate Croy: after the failure of their respective plans, both are consigned to uncertainty, the former through a self-imposed exile to

[9] Jamesian criticism reveals a sometimes dialogic theoretical engagement of his work. His works have been studied in the contexts of history and biography (Ian Bell 1991; Habegger 1989), cultural studies and aestheticism (Freedman 1990), modernism and cosmopolitanism (Berman 2001; Richardson 2007), gender and sexuality (Boone 2009; Izzo 2001; Stevens 1998), and Foucauldian and Marxist theory (Seltzer 1984).

[10] For a sample of such readings see Silverman (1988); Foss (1995); Bollinger (2002); Warren (2002); Buelens (2002); Blackwood (2010); O'Donnell (2006); Lamm (2011).

America, and the latter by an enforced return to her earlier subjugated position. Subjectivity for James's females is never viable in the present tense. It is a tentative construction relying on vague potentialities, and that faith is frequently compromised by the lack of referential security in the novels' discourses.

Almost all current critical debates about subjectivity regard teleological propositions of a unified and stable subject impossible, and they refute the impermeability of the boundaries between the subject and the world it inhabits. Furthermore, they agree that models of subject formation hypothesized thus far will evolve continually (Mansfield 23-24). The fluctuations of the individual's consciousness, shifting power structures, and evolving gender roles qualify human subjectivity, which then becomes available to permeation by those very intersecting economies. The homogeneity of the Cartesian *cogito* thus yields to the emergence of a multivalent model of self-realization. Among those thinkers who challenge former conceptions of selfhood is Jacques Lacan, who combines Freud's postulates of self-knowledge with the Saussurean signifier/signified binary and outlines the orders of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, within which male subjectivity becomes accessible through its interactions with the world (Felluga n. pag.). In the last four decades, female subjectivity within the economy of gender has come under special scrutiny in France: for example, Luce Irigaray rejects the Lacanian argument that the laboratory of subjectivity is the Symbolic order, since that signifier relies heavily on a phallogocentric configuration of culture and charts subjectivity on a masculinist axis in tandem with Freud's theories (99).

Julia Kristeva's challenge to the unity of the subject retrieves the psychoanalytical and linguistic features of the Lacanian model and intersects them with feminism.[11] Her investigations of female subjectivity systematize the protocols of the conjunction. In her early work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva submits that when the physical energies and instinctual drives of the speaking subject fissure referential structures in organized language, innovative poetic signification emerges. Since the fissure is a continual process, the speaking subject is in constant reconstruction, and its subjectivity is always already unstable. Kristeva terms the manifestation of this condition "subject in process" (*sujet-en-procès*), where the second noun evinces in French both the ongoing transformation and the simultaneous probation of the subject:

> All identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning and, as a result, the identity of the speaker. And in order to take account of this destabilization of meaning and of subject I thought the term 'subject in process' would be appropriate. Process in the sense of process but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled ("A Question of Subjectivity," qtd. in Cavallaro 78).

The heterogeneous construct of subjectivity is committed to the transformative activity of Kristeva's *sujet-en-procès*. John Lechte explains, "For Kristeva, … the Cartesian, 'punctual' (already posited) subject of the *cogito* … is limited because the aspect of the subject-in-process – the subject coming into being – is missing" ("Violence" 112). In addition to articulating the motility of psychic life, Jamesian female subjectivity coalesces in the register of consciousness of a disconcerted woman, who yearns to attain/regain administration of her

[11] Kristeva's work draws from a number of theorists, including (but not limited to) Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Melanie Klein. This dissertation does not expound their postulates, for they lie beyond its scope.

self in her social relations. In James's fiction, the enterprise is fraught with encumbrances beyond her sway. As Laurel Bollinger affirms, "Jamesian subjectivity begins from an assumption that the self is not primarily autonomous" (142). Thus female subjectivity is foremost an itinerant process in James: it lurks at the perimeters of consciousness of the character in pursuit of it, at once compelling her to attain socio-economic independence from the patriarchal energies regulating her life and taunting her capacity to achieve the project.

Because my dissertation focuses on the individual subjectivities of women in James's late novels, it is not organized by the chronological order of the publication dates of the works; rather, I have paired or grouped James's female characters according to their shared predicaments, and the ways in which Kristevan interventions shed light on their anxieties. My methodology to engage frequently with James's texts through close reading offers valuable moments to gain insight into James's figurations of impaired subjectivity. Marcia Ian states, "Because each interpretive terminology describes, though in different terms, the same 'plot' or implied pattern – the negation by the self of some kind of opposition or otherness … [a]t the hypothetical center … is the close, careful reading of the text with which every critic begins" (108-09). In the opening chapter, titled "Debilitating Knowledge and Appropriative Doings in *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age,*" I study the proliferating objectifications Maisie Farange and Nanda Brookenham suffer respectively in the two novels. To deliberate Maisie's ineligibility to subjectivity, my discussion turns to her compromised relationship with her mother. The processes of her subject formation unfold in a vacuum, within which her assimilation of "knowledge" proves calamitous, for the mother's absence from her life impedes her access to the symbolic order. Geoffrey Smith affirms, "Ida never gratifies Maisie's real need for maternal love and proffers only a maternal appearance for the sake of

outside approbation. ... Ida acts affectionately only to assuage public opinion" (227). Kristeva shows that the mother's vigorous participation in the child's early years is pivotal to the attainment of the signifying system of language, realized in the imaginative space Kristeva calls the *chora*. Inger Birkeland specifies that the "[*c*]*hora* comes before symbolic language and refers to the mother's time and space instead of the father's time and place. *Chora* comes before topography, before linear time and abstract space, since it articulates the time and space of the mother" (136). Since Maisie cannot gain entry into the linguistic continuum of the symbolic order, she gradually becomes catatonic. The interiority of the wound she nurses is rooted in her inability to verbalize her deficiency, and it engenders in her the state of the narcissistic depressive. Kristeva reasons that when the child "has been irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, [the] loss … causes him to try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in the imagination, then in words" (*Black Sun* 6). During the course of the novel, Maisie vainly seeks the affections of her successive governesses and that of her mother's husband Sir Claude, as substitutes for the mother lost to her. The failure of her pursuit precipitates in her an attachment to the internalized sorrow she brooks. Kristeva elucidates,

> Such a person considers himself to be not injured but stricken by a fundamental lack. … [H]is sorrow could be the most archaic expression of a narcissistic wound, impossible to symbolize or name, and too precocious for any exterior agent (subject or object) to be correlated to it. For this type of narcissistic depressive, sorrow … constitutes a substitute object to which he clings, cultivating and cherishing it, for lack of any other. ("On the Melancholic Imaginary" 7).

Maisie's growing inadequacy to articulate her impressions and reactions is symptomatic of her narcissistic depression, sustained by her ineligibility for a viable subject position. "Sadness

stands in the place of the object and becomes the basis of a kind of survival strategy" (Lechte "Love and Death" 77). In the final account, Maisie's "knowledge" leads to her debilitation rather than empowerment. Likewise, the considerably older Nanda Brookenham of *The Awkward Age* becomes the site of the objectifying inscriptions of her parents and their social circle. Their unrelenting attempts to constrict Nanda into the binds of the virginal model of the Victorian marriageable girl commodify her. As she becomes aware of their mutually endorsed licentiousness, Nanda also realizes that she is being primed for the prefigured position of a married woman. James situates Nanda squarely (but without direct allusions) in the New Woman debates, as James Gargano confirms: "Examination of the book in its literary context reveals James's indebtedness to two enthusiasms of the nineties: the English dialogue novel and the New Woman novel" (101). Similar to Maisie's final banishment into incapacitation, at the end of *The Awkward Age* Nanda elects to exile herself from the "free circle" (*AN* 102) which attempts to impound her in a mold.

The last part of the first chapter is a comparative study of Nanda's and Little Aggie's trajectories in the novel. James contrasts Nanda's resistance to the inhibitive moves of her family and their friends with Aggie's meek submission to the same. Through the opposition of their temperaments, James demonstrates how Victorian constructions of young girls as "white sheets" facilitate appropriative masculinist inscriptions upon them. This is also the case of Pansy Osmond who endures her father's objectifications, for he has enforced upon her the properties of "a sheet of blank paper" (*PL* 238), as Isabel observes. My discussion uncovers the ruinous implications of such gestures, belying their seeming benignancy. While Maisie and Nanda evince that "identity or character … is not a single stable entity, not 'virginal,' but a contextual construction," Little Aggie and Pansy face the consequences of the self

homogenized into "a single stable entity" (Rivkin 175-76). At the end of their stories, they are defeated variously: like her peers, Aggie settles into the role of a promiscuous wife, and Pansy is sent by her father into seclusion at a convent from which her return remains doubtful.

The second chapter, entitled "Textual Subversions and Promissory Revisions in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of a Lady*," picks up the trope of textuality from the first chapter and posits its operations as an index to my reading of the two novels. Recruiting Kristeva's lens of intertextuality, I first establish its relevance to James's representations of women as texts in the two novels. Kristeva submits that beyond the usefulness of intertextuality for tracing the moments and ways in which an earlier text resurfaces later in another, intertextuality may, more significantly, alert the reader to the concomitance of the two. Similar to Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes, Kristeva maintains that intertextual writings (she calls them "sign-systems") engage in a non-temporal, mutually dialogic relation. She introduces Bakhtin's precepts as follows:

> What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of … a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context. … Hence horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) coincide: … each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. (Moi 36-37)

Thus, "linguistic units (and especially semantic units) will serve … as springboards in establishing different *kinds of novelistic utterances as functions*" (*Desire in Language* 37). In this view, it is possible to conceive of James's writing as "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text," where "several utterances … intersect and neutralize one another" (*Desire in Language* 36). Kate Croy's and Merton Densher's analogous conceptions of their lives as fragmented verbal units aspiring to completion prompt

this chapter's critical perspective, which probes the abundant textual metaphors of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of Lady*. In the former work, the characters chart their processes of subject formation on a representational grid, but simultaneously, they also assume authorial functions and create fictions in which they cast one another. As Marina Mackay observes, "In this novel about people pretending to be what they are not … the conspirators see each other as the reader sees them, as puzzles to be explained, texts to be deciphered" (71). Textual constructs promoting an autonomous self tangle intertextually with the characters' subversive reading or writing activities, particularly in the discursive and aesthetic impositions women exert on one another. Ann Rosalind Jones explains that Kristeva attributes such phenomena to "women['s] marginal position vis-à-vis masculine culture. Their semiotic style is likely to involve repetitive, spasmodic separations from the dominating discourse; which more often, they are forced to imitate" (363). Such unnerving moves are in evidence in Milly Theale's application of strictly textual contexts to Kate Croy, and reciprocally, Kate's maltreatment of Milly, following the template of Madame Merle's exploitation of Isabel's wealth in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Likewise, Lord Mark's aesthetic circumscription of Milly in the defunct Bronzino image mirrors Ralph Touchett's placement of Isabel within architectonic imaginary and Gilbert Osmond's reduction of her to an *objet d'art*. This traffic of textual and aesthetic diminutions situates the two novels in an intertextual relation. Subversive writing crests in *The Wings of the Dove* in Milly's final two texts, her letter to Merton Densher and the bequest of a portion of her wealth to him. While some critics read these texts as selfless, beneficent acts, or indications of her agency in the novel as Densher's redeemer, I submit that they point to Milly's intricate plan (elided by James) to derive "eventual benefits" from them; namely, the inauguration of her posthumous subjectivity and the branding of her subversive self onto Kate

and Densher's romance. Arguably, though her story ends with her death, Milly nevertheless succeeds in aborting the conspiring couple's ruse. James affords her a qualified accomplishment, in line with Kristeva's conception of the mutable subject-in-process. Her precursor, Isabel Archer of *The Portrait of Lady*, exits the novel in a similarly unsettled subject position. Her accumulation of experiences proves an ineffective means to warrant sovereignty, for they crumble when her subjectivity is detained by Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond. In this part of the chapter, I engage with a number of critics who have noted that the textual figurations of the novel offer clues to her attraction to Osmond and to her later deception. These figurations ramify particularly in the revisions James implemented in the novel in 1906, just ahead of its publication in Volumes III and IV of the New York Edition. James was "returning [to] his earlier work for the purpose of revision, and by so doing, creating the density of the major phase" (Cohen 249). My discussion begins with a sample of James's revisions in *The Portrait of Lady*, which corroborate his amplification of textual tropes; next, I revert to James's claim that *The Awkward Age* is the substantiation of an "unforeseen principle of growth" (*AN* 98). This "principle," well-hidden from view in the recesses of a text, signals to untapped resources that a writer can mine during the activity of revising. In this sense, the text is never carbonized; rather, it is an evolving construct. This Jamesian view coincides with Kristeva's conception of a text as "production," which in turn, ushers in her notion of subjectivity as an ever-morphing process. I argue that this framework is a propitious site where we may observe the unfolding of Isabel Archer's fluid subjectivity. As Jill Kress says, "[I]f there is one thing that emerges in the discourse of consciousness from this nineteenth century novel, it is the movement from the personal to the social, the rhetorical

gesture away from a self-enclosed consciousness and toward a fluid, interrelational consciousness" (88).

Given her enthusiastic investment in Romantic ideals, Isabel unwittingly succumbs to Madame Merle's and Osmond's project. She rejects Lord Warburton's and Caspar Goodwood's marriage proposals for fear of being absorbed into the dictates of their patriarchal imagination; instead, she favours the romantic disposition of the wanderer. Her marriage to Osmond is funded by her admiration of his alleged artistry and by the conviction he would embrace the independence of her spirit. Not surprisingly, Osmond's dissimulation bests her, for he soon reveals himself to be an inept reader of Isabel's character; worse yet, he coerces her into submission to his various authoring practices, the full realization of which comes to Isabel belatedly. My discussion of textuality in the novel is grounded in James's conception of the author's responsibility in revising his works, elaborated at some length in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*:

> The "old" matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and re-enjoyed. [There the writer] linger[s] … in a manner to retrace the whole growth of … his active sense of life: … to keep one's hand on it is to hold the silver clue to the whole labyrinth of his consciousness (*AN* 339-40).

I claim that Isabel's interior monologue in Chapter XLII, during which she revisits the circumstances of her disastrous marriage, can be seen as a revisory introspection, to identify her own contribution to her diminished state; more importantly, she undertakes the inventory of her life to discover in herself corrective resources by which she may regain her self-assertiveness. The focus in the last part of this chapter is the ambiguity of the novel's ending, which almost every critic has had to confront. After Countess Gemini discloses to Isabel Osmond's and Madame Merle's plot, she elects not to extricate her self from her marriage. For

certain critics, it is a curious decision that has the markings of her surrender to patriarchal energies, or even of a death drive in her. I submit that Isabel's return to her husband is spurred by a deep-seated urge in her to "know the things one shouldn't do … [s]o as to choose" (*PL* 67). Her return to Osmond is a conscious choice, just as her refusal to submit to Caspar Goodwood's desire is an expression of her resilience. Thus the ending of the novel instantiates the deferral of her subjectivity.

Kristeva's body of work coheres by the psychoanalytic, linguistic, and ontological paradigms suffusing her theories, and by the systematic interventions of motherhood in the overlapping circulations of her premises. For Kristeva, mothers are at the nexus of her theories of subjectivity. In the first chapter, I delve into the deficient maternal function in Maisie's and Nanda's emerging subject positions. If the mother's absence is injurious to the processes of the child's subject formation, as is the case for the two girls, then the obverse cancellation of motherhood can be equally deleterious for a woman. Chapter Three, "Silenced Motherhood and Calculated Forgiveness in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*," begins by tracing the vestiges of suppressed motherhood and pregnancy in *The Portrait of a Lady*. I attempt to gauge by Kristevan terms the impact of these curious elisions on Madame Merle and Isabel Archer.[12] In the investigation that is the bulk of the chapter, I first enlist Kristeva's theories with regard to the female child's identification with the mother, and the concomitant processes of the child's abjection of her. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva posits that abjection first appears in infancy: in order or actuate his or her "I," the child begins to expel

[12] Donatella Izzo confirms the absence of salutary mothers throughout James's works: "Examples range from Daisy Miller's absentee and placidly uncomprehending parent to Madame Merle's plotting, secret and rejected motherhood in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and from Maisie's divorced and careless mother in *What Maisie Knew* to ruthless Mrs Brookenham in *The Awkward Age*, including even some fairly extraordinary cases such as Beatrice Ambient in 'The Author of Beltraffio', suspected of having killed her own child." ("Women and Men" 379).

what is undesirable or unsafe for the constitution of subjectivity. Kristeva's definition of abjection is appropriately framed by negation:

> The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object–that of being opposed to I. (*Powers of Horror* 1)

Two points must be emphasized here: first, it is important to remember that the abjected maternal receptacle is a pre-Oedipal construct, as Tina Chanter explains: "Abjection is the initial and unstable site of differentiation for the infant, not yet of sexual differentiation, but in terms of separation from what comes to be designated, retrospectively, as the maternal body" ("Exoticization" 157). Secondly, abjection does not target virulent refuse exclusively. Abjection can also include the nurturing, seductive maternal receptacle, which can sometimes slip into an assimilatory point of origin. Moving from theory to application, I argue that the deaths of Isabel Archer's and Milly Theale's mothers have suspended for both the incidence of abjection. For a woman resolved to reprise that process, I posit two alternatives: installation of a substitute maternal figure in her life or her own pregnancy. The first allows the continuation of abjection, and the second ushers in her self-endorsement. James affords Isabel both successively. When she travels to England, she discovers in Madame Merle an ostensibly qualified candidate for exercising the maternal function in her life. Serena Merle's worldliness is attractive to Isabel, who is "always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress" (*PL* 56). However, the maternal bond she forges with Madame Merle is conditioned by the obscured motherhood of the latter, who subverts the friendship into a bait to channel Isabel's wealth to her own daughter. Isabel's marriage to Gilbert Osmond institutes

her as mother to Madame Merle's daughter Pansy, a function Isabel assumes actively, particularly in light of her own child's death early in her marriage. Kristeva theorizes that pregnancy and motherhood accord women opportunities for validation of the self: "The child can serve its mother as token of her own authentication" (*Powers of Horror* 13). In Isabel's case, Osmond's resolve to supervise Pansy's selfhood alone denies Isabel a conduit for motherhood. Rory Drummond attributes Osmond and Madame Merle's usurpation of Isabel's subject position to their attitudes toward work: "Gilbert Osmond's indolent leisure and Madame Merle's studied attainments eventually come to seem corrupt and destructive" ("Work" 393). Drummond correctly aligns Isabel's cousin Ralph Touchett also with the conspirators, for he, too, has no occupation but the intrusive surveying of Isabel's progress in the novel. Immediately before his father's death, Ralph asks Mr. Touchett to bestow half his inheritance upon Isabel, prompted by the desire to "see her going before the breeze" (*PL* 161). The selfishness of his motive does not escape Mr. Touchett's attention: "You speak as if it were for your mere amusement," and Ralph responds, "So it is, a good deal" (*PL* 161). All her European relations hamper Isabel's subjectivity.

In the body of scholarship of the novel, Isabel's decision to return to Osmond in the end without the compensatory prospect of exercising her maternal function has drawn much attention, but whether Isabel forgives Madame Merle has not been satisfactorily addressed. I believe Kristeva's subject-in-process is the relevant context to formulate an answer to the question, which hangs over the confrontation of the two women in the convent where Pansy is shut up. My close reading of the scene situates it in the framework of the operations of individual forgiveness. I conclude that Isabel's preoccupation at that moment is nestled in the privileging of her self over the perpetrator/victim binary, a course that Milly Theale's last acts

in *The Wings of the Dove* follow. Rather than upholding the view shared by multiple critics that Milly is the agent of Densher's redemption, my reading frames her testamentary act and the letter addressed to Densher by Kristeva's conceptualization of pardon and reconciliation. In an interview with Alison Rice, Kristeva insists that forgiveness is a "wager on rebirth," and she conditions it by love: "[It] cannot be granted unless it is in this relationship" ("Forgiveness" 286). This conjunction cannot operate effectively unless the forgiver first prioritizes the self, opening the gateway to evolving subjectivity: "[F]orgiveness entails understanding the human being as a subjectivity in permanent creation; we are never finished" (Kristeva, "Forgiveness" 284). Milly's self-imposed isolation toward the end of the novel is the space where we may conjecture her deployment of the subject-in-process. Milly surmounts her commodification by her generosity toward Densher, and by doing so, she abjects the degradation of her self. Her exoneration of Densher's collaboration with Kate services yet again her subjectivity. Milly's bequest of a large portion of her wealth to Densher forces him to come to terms with his complacent bending to Kate's scheme, but more significantly, the legacy inscribes her self onto Densher. Milly's nuanced strategy first comes to light in her projection of the "eventual benefits" Densher might gain by marrying a dying heiress, but when that romantic vision collapses, Milly cashes in early the postponed dividends of her beneficence.

The last chapter of the dissertation focuses on Jamesian figurations of otherness and representations of foreigners, presented as "Ambitious Foreigners and Refracting Acquisitions in *The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*." The chapter opens with Madame Merle's oft-quoted proposition "A woman has no natural place anywhere," which voices the entrenched longing for naturalization James's female characters manifest in

their respective stories. Serena Merle's assertion insinuates the paradigm of the foreigner into the context of gendered relations. My analysis of the otherness impacting her as well as other female characters in James's novels delineates the taxing geographic and figurative displacements they negotiate. This viewpoint posits female subjectivity as an itinerant energy on alien ground in search of connectivity by any means available. Obviously, the expatriated status of these women informs their dispositions in their adopted societies. Kristeva points out that the distinction of the foreigner can be empowering: "The foreigner feels strengthened by the distance that detaches him from the others as it does from himself and gives him the lofty sense not so much of holding the truth but of making it and himself relative while others fall victim to the ruts of monovalency" (*Strangers* 7). This newfound stimulation unleashes in the foreigner the capacity to dissimulate, seen in *The Portrait of Lady* in Gilbert Osmond's and Madame Merle's dexterous handling of the self's plasticity. Foreignness thus assumes the properties of the boomerang: if society views Madame Merle only as the other, then she redirects the course of that projection onto Isabel by viewing her as an exploitable foreigner.

James contrasts Madame Merle and Isabel through their responses to spaces. Whereas Madame Merle prefers the enclosures of the "great houses" she frequents (*PL* 169), Isabel values the uncommitted spatial openness her travels afford her. Madame Merle situates her self in the patrilineal economy of her social circle, while Isabel struggles to uncouple herself from the symbolic order. This juxtaposition is in line with their disparate conceptions of the self: Madame Merle shields hers behind a counterfeit façade; Isabel circulates from one space to another, convinced the accumulation of experiences will eventually coalesce into a unified self. In *The Wings of the Dove*, Kate Croy's entrapment in the closed circuit of the symbolic order is coerced by her familial binds and her past. Kristeva suggests that for the speaking

subject, the articulation of the self begins in the symbolic order, which is invariably tied up to chronological time. "If a woman cannot be part of the temporal symbolic order except by identifying with the father, it is clear that as soon as she shows any sign of that which, in herself, escapes such identification and acts differently, … she evolves into [a] curious truth [that] refuses, displaces and breaks the symbolic order before it can re-establish itself" ("About Chinese Women" 153-54). Kate overcomes her immobility by her romantic attachment to Densher, who may provide her the deliverance she desperately seeks, but their liaison unfolds in a continuum of power relations where Densher is subjugated by his desire. The move from otherness and the aspiration to a fulfilled "I" animates their relationship, just as Charlotte Stant and Prince Amerigo's clandestine romance signals their resistance to Adam and Maggie Ververs' refracting acquisitions of their selfhoods in *The Golden Bowl*.

James's final completed novel displays a hermetic circle under Adam Verver's patriarchal administration. The principal cast of characters is constantly preoccupied by positioning themselves vis-à-vis each other. In this tale of foreigners, James's depictions of them proceed from Kristeva's description of the foreigner's standpoint. For Adam Verver, the project of a museum bearing his name in American City bares his ambition to validate himself in his native country, but it is the impoverished Prince Amerigo who comes closest to the Kristevan foreigner:

> He readily bears a kind of admiration for those who have welcomed him, for he rates them more often than not above himself, be it financially, politically, or socially. At the same time he is quite ready to consider them somewhat narrow-minded, blind. For his scornful hosts lack the *perspective* he himself has in order to see himself and to see them. (*Strangers* 6-7)

Prince Amerigo's anxieties most certainly stem from his reduction to the status of a collectible *objet d'art* by Maggie and Adam Verver. Similarly, Charlotte's marriage to Adam and her subsequent reduction to a society hostess vitiate her. Their mutual resistance to these appropriations enables their adulterous relationship, in turn abetted by Maggie and her father's extraordinary devotion to each other. Thus Amerigo and Charlotte produce for the father and the daughter a spectacle of manufactured selves, in order to maintain the status quo of their marriages. When in Book Second Maggie alights upon the facts, Charlotte and Prince quietly recalibrate their relations with her by yielding obsequiously to her every wish. Maggie's awareness of this new "arrangement" and of the motive behind her unctuous "bath of benevolence" leads her to acknowledge retrospectively her objectification of Amerigo and Charlotte. *The Golden Bowl* then becomes a revision of those "arrangements," as Maggie impresses upon her father they should part ways. For the sake of Maggie's happiness, Adam complies and leaves for America with Charlotte. Virginia Llewellyn Smith states, "Maggie and her father … take a long time to see that their being so passionately in cahoots is no less dangerous than the lovers' liaison" (xxv). In the seemingly felicitous last scene of the novel, Maggie embraces Amerigo with the assurance of having recuperated her husband's affections, but in the last paragraph that surety is undermined by her dim realization that she may have appropriated her husband yet again. Once more, James defers the assurance of his heroine's subject position.

The displaced female characters of *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl* ardently strive to carve a stable niche for themselves within alternate value systems. As Tessa Hadley notes, "The women in these late novels are more likely to be committed, then, to 'seeing around', to the struggle with and the manipulation of

representations; the men are more likely to continue afloat upon the tradition of male worldliness, so richly developed in its aesthetic appeal, and *preventing* them so little" (*Imagination* 75). The principal objective of this dissertation is situating female subjectivity in the disparities to which Hadley alerts us, in order to tease out the relational complexities, as well as the fragility and tentativeness, of James's female characters. By examining the multiple layers of signification attached to the scrutiny of their psychic lives, I hope to offer a new perspective upon James's late novels.

Chapter One

Debilitating Knowledge and Appropriative Doings in

What Maisie Knew and *The Awkward Age*

The children and adolescents of Henry James's fiction often find themselves at the intersection of the competing preoccupations of adults in their respective families. They host an array of unwelcome ramifications issuing from polarized interests and anxieties to which they are involuntary participants. Their tribulations run the gamut from relatively benign interruptions of their lives to upheavals detrimental to their psychic growth. Michèle Mendelssohn argues that in Henry James's fiction, "As the subject of an adult's will to power, the child is often divested of agency, becoming a pawn whose value resides in its inherent potentiality" (82). This is not to say that they are coerced to assume helpless dispositions, as do their archetypal counterparts in many instances of late nineteenth-century fiction; on the contrary, faced with the contentions seeping into their lives, James's fictional children and adolescents sometimes thwart encroachments upon their welfare resolutely. However, their struggle to frustrate the invidious plans of their parents or guardians more often than not levies their subjectivities exorbitantly. In this chapter, I discuss the costly processes of subject formation for Maisie Farange in *What Maisie Knew* and for Nanda Brookenham in *The Awkward Age.* I also examine the congruous layers of signification affixed to the two girls' psychic lives and expose the correlations therein; and in the last part, I hold up their convergences with two other Jamesian minor characters, Aggie in *The Awkward Age* and Pansy in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

In the Preface to the 1908 edition of *What Maisie Knew*, Henry James relates the genesis of the novel and outlines his conception of its title character: an anecdote he had heard of "some luckless child of a divorced couple" became the "little acorn" that grew into the "great oak" of the novel (*AN* 140). Similarly, in the Preface of *The Awkward Age*, James deems the novel a "considerable … mass beside the germ sunk in it" and cites it as an

"example … of the incalculable tendency of a mere grain of subject matter to expand and develop and cover the ground". The use of the germination metaphor in both cases leaves little doubt that James ranked *What Maisie Knew* alongside *The Awkward Age* in "a group of productions, … which have … asserted in each case an unforeseen principle of growth" (*AN* 98).[13] In addition to its genealogical value, the metaphor also serves James to chart the trajectories of the female protagonists of the two novels. Maisie "could … strike one as the beginning of a story … commanding a great choice of developments" (*AN* 140). Of these, James's first was to represent the girl "as a register of impressions" of the acrimonious dealings of her parents (*AN* 142). Indeed, Maisie operates as an archive of consciousness, recording perceptions and interpretations of the reciprocal hostilities around her. Since casting her as a catalogue would objectify her and circumscribe her subjectivity in such a configuration, James compensates for the curtailment by endowing her with an "expanding consciousness" – the "little acorn" would develop into a "great oak" (*AN* 140). As for Nanda, James begins by situating her on the outskirts of a closed circle of family and intimate friends, who flaunt in it a highly questionable code of ethics. The group forms a "wide glow … favourable to 'real' talk, to play of mind, to an explicit interest in life," a "free circle." When at nineteen Nanda enters this hermetic world, its members find their "freedom menaced by the inevitable irruption of the ingenuous mind" (*AN* 102). The inauguration of Nanda's shielded selfhood then becomes a destabilizing agent for the people near to her. In both novels, James underwrites the processes of subject formation of the two girls by endowing them with

[13] In "The Self-Forming Subject: Henry James's Pragmatistic Revision," Dana J. Ringuette attests that the phrase "unforeseen principle of growth" is one that critics cite to establish a close connection between James and Coleridge (116). Ringuette recruits the phrase to advance his argument that the full impact of the "unforeseen growth" becomes available in James's habitual revisions of his "productions" (117). I return to Ringuette's latter argument in my investigation of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the next chapter.

perspicacity and acumen, but the gesture mediates an agency distinctly counter-productive to their nascent subjectivities.

I have just submitted that *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age* display homologous compositional designs, citing James's relevant remarks in the respective prefaces; yet the two novels are also substantially disparate, particularly with regard to the characters surrounding Maisie and Nanda: Maisie is the object of the callousness of her parents, but she does not pose a threat to them or to her guardians, as does Nanda by circulating in the sphere of her parents and their friends. Maisie is a spectator who braves the wrongs heaped upon her, but she cannot eradicate the misdeeds of the adults; she can only deflect them. On the other hand, Nanda's "ingenuous mind and … limpid searching eyes" disconcert her parents and their friends (*AN* 102). At nineteen, she is eligible for candidacy on the Victorian marriage circuit, but her access to the "free circle" handicaps her. She is infatuated by Vanderbank, the civil servant her mother also favours for a lover, a man who may reciprocate Nanda's feelings for him, but who is reluctant to do so; for in his view, her inclusion in her parents' circle and her subsequent apprehension of the questionable ethics by which the adults conduct themselves within it disqualify her from being an object of desire. In other words, insight taxes both girls heavily.

In James's design, both Maisie Farange and Nanda Brookenham evolve from a state of amorphous girlhood to the position of individuated female subjects. Such a transformation would obviously require the accumulation of observations and experiences, of alliances and rivalries, of intrigues and machinations around them. This is certainly true in Maisie's case, liberally stated in the novel's title. In the course of the narrative, Maisie's parents remarry;

whereupon, regularly and spitefully, each extends the time she spends with the other beyond the equitable six months decreed by the court. The tribulations issuing from the arrangement compound for the girl, so that "the wretched infant was thus to find itself practically disowned, rebounding from racquet to racquet like a tennis-ball" (*AN* 140). In James's imagination, she would then be "saved … by some enjoyed profit and some achieved confidence, rather than coarsened, blurred, sterilised, by ignorance and pain" (*AN* 142). James's Preface urges the reader to anticipate Maisie's redemption in spite of the improprieties and misdemeanours invading her world. Her "better state … would reside in the exercise of a function other than that of disconcerting the selfishness of its parents" (*AN* 142). In other words, though Maisie's parents objectify her into an encumbrance vexing their respective new conjugal relations, she would defeat her objectification by launching an altogether different function. As James conceives Maisie, her promotion notwithstanding the inimical circumstances of her life would suggest "the close connection of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt" (*AN* 143). In the course of the novel, Maisie would "mak[e] confusion worse confounded by drawing some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness, … sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life" (*AN* 143). In James's construct, Maisie occupies a site where the functions of a chronicler and of a moral agent intersect. Thus, while assimilating the iniquities undermining the prosperity of her childhood in her consciousness, she imparts probity to the very authors of her compromised welfare. The gesture is highly ironic, for the "seed of moral life" falls "on barren strands" and fails to yield the desired effect.[14] Indeed, by the end of the novel none of the adult characters

[14] J. Hillis Miller elaborates the implications of James's metaphor, borrowed from the Parable of the Sower in the New Testament. "The allusion to the parable of the sower gives the reader yet another formulation of the

attains redemption. At the same time, the extent to which Maisie's consciousness and moral ascendancy promote her subjectivity is questionable at the moment she exits from the novel, belying James's postulates in the Preface.

Admittedly, reliance on the author's preface for an interpretative discourse of any novel situates the reading in the tenuous context of authorial intention. With regard to Henry James, the practice is especially problematic, since his novels are often at variance with his prefaces, as various critics have shown. Christina Britzolakis, for example, identifies in the prefaces a "powerful drive to self-justification and autocanonization. … The preface to *What Maisie Knew* manifests a fundamental ambiguity concerning the function and significance of the novel's child-protagonist" (372).[15] Furthermore, as J. Hillis Miller observes, the Preface to *The Awkward Age* was composed nearly a decade after the first edition of the novel, thus allowing the possibility of "elisions and suppressions. There is no reason to suppose that what James says in the preface to Maisie is the last word about the novel" (*Versions* 24). My intention here is not to explore the different manifestations of that variance exhaustively; rather, I will argue that Maisie's consciousness debilitates her subjectivity and leads her into a state of narcissistic depression, as she traverses the precarious space between childhood and adolescence.

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inscrutable paradox of our ethical life, its deepest irony ... The bale that Maisie's bliss causes is a version of that terrifying paradox of the moral life as Jesus expresses it" (*Versions* 58-59).

[15] Kenneth Graham takes an even more dismissive view: "The Prefaces seem to me to be a unique and inestimable pot-pourri of misguided depreciation, over-honeyed complacency, and intermittent dazzling acuity, all of which can mislead just as easily as it can assist" (80-81). For a comprehensive discussion of James's Prefaces, see Sharon Cameron *Thinking in Henry James*; James W. Gargano *Critical Essays on Henry James: The Late Novels*; McWhirter *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship*; Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen "Frontispieces and Other Ruins: Portraits of the Author in Henry James's New York Edition," and Molly Vaux "Vindication against Misreading in *The Golden Bowl*, *The American Scene*, and The New York Edition."

From the outset, Maisie becomes for her parents and their new spouses the focalizing point of their mutual hostilities. The narrator renders this locus in the elaborate imagery of a container: in Chapter I, Maisie is "a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed" (*MK* 15). In Chapter II, "the evil they had the gift of thinking or pretending to think of each other they poured into her little gravely-gazing soul as into a boundless receptacle" (*MK* 22). In the process, the circle of adults in Maisie's world heaps upon her an array of aggressions. In Chapter I, after dangling the letters her mother has written to Maisie, Beale Farange "amus[ed] her by the way he chucked them, across the room, bang into the fire" (*MK* 18); her father's visiting friends have Maisie light their cigarettes and blow smoke into her face (*MK* 19): "others holding her on knees violently jolted, pinched the calves of her legs till she shrieked – her shriek was much admired – and reproached them with being toothpicks" (*MK* 19). Elsewhere, the abuse Maisie suffers assumes the form of ostensibly endearing but essentially denigrating appellations, mostly borrowed from the animal kingdom. Her father calls her "duck" and "donkey" (*MK* 34), "little ass" (*MK* 150), and "obstinate little pig" (*MK* 158); her no less creative mother Ida prefaces her remarks to her daughter with even more injurious adjectives: Maisie has a "horrid little mind" (*MK* 78); she is "a dreadful bouncing business" (*MK* 80), a "precious idiot" (*MK* 180), and a "little horror" (*MK* 182). Her father's second wife, Mrs. Beale contributes to the catalogue with "wretch," "hypocrite," "monster," and "fright" (*MK* 59-60).[16] Initially, hosting these assaults leads

[16] The second spouses of Maisie's parents both lack full names. When Beale Farange marries Maisie's governess Miss Overmore, she becomes "Mrs. Beale," with no mention of a first name; and James does not provide Ida's second husband, Sir Claude, with a surname. Miss Overmore's motives for marrying Maisie's father are financial security and an improved social standing; likewise, Sir Claude marries Ida Farange for material comfort. Although he enjoys the social position of a gentleman, Sir Claude lacks the financial resources he requires for the maintenance of his status. In both cases, the want for a full name points to the social position of each as an appendage to the spouse. Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude anticipate Charlotte Stant's and Prince

Maisie to feelings of inadequacy. She wonders whether "she is deficient in something that would meet the general desire" (*MK* 19). Maisie questions her nature and concludes that she is innately corrupt.

The callousness with which the parents affront their child unfolds according to the precepts of German child-rearing practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, aptly named by Katharina Rutschky *schwarze Pädagogie* – "black pedagogy" (Zornado 77). In the practice of "black pedagogy," the adult views the child as essentially corrupt, and their relationship as a conflict between good and evil. "Black pedagogy" aims at "reforming" the child through domination and control. As Zornado states,

> In the case of the black pedagogy, violence and love become fused and take on a particular cultural form in the child's mind: the child is encouraged to believe that the invasive cultural child-rearing practices of the adult are in fact the result of biological necessities brought on the child *as a result of her nature*. (83)

One memorable episode in Maisie's life illustrates this truth. Soon after Ida Farange remarries, Maisie's stepfather Sir Claude fosters a parental bond with her, while her mother's passion for the second husband wanes in favour of another gentleman. In Chapter XI, shrewdly calculating that she might exonerate herself by appearing to have been wronged, Ida turns on Sir Claude and accuses him of having alienated Maisie's affections from her. "Almost cradl[ing]" Maisie in her arms and seemingly addressing her, she berates Sir Claude. "'He has taken you *from* me,' she cried; 'he has set you *against* me, and you've been won away and your horrid little mind has been poisoned!'". She even goes as far as virtually accusing Sir Claude of pedophilia. "You hang about him in a way that's barely decent – he can do what he

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Amerigo's dispositions in James's *The Golden Bowl*. Charlotte's and Prince Amerigo's respective marriages to Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie also aim to secure for each relief from financial hardship. Furthermore, similar to Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude, Charlotte and the Prince also engage in an adulterous liaison.

likes with you" (*MK* 78). The insinuation may be lost upon Maisie, but its dark tone is not. Stunned by the charge, Maisie fails to respond and incurs the escalation of the mother's rage. "You've no more feeling for me than a clammy little fish!" cries Ida. "She suddenly thrust the child away and … sent her flying across the room" (*MK* 78). Ida's withering gaze at Sir Claude at her exit from the room is so puzzling to Maisie that in her effort to comprehend its import, the child worries less about her mother's accusation and its attendant rejection, than her own lack of sensitivity at being their target. "Her father had once called her a heartless little beast, and now, though decidedly scared, she was as stiff and cold as if the description had been just" (*MK* 78). When Maisie tries to elicit a motive for her mother's outburst from her governess Mrs. Wix, she learns that "it's her ladyship's game, and we must just hold on like grim death!" (*MK* 78-79). Maisie arrives at the bitter realization that she must suffer her mother's "games" and interiorize her distress. Zornado explains, "The child of the black pedagogy learns early and often that the only way to ameliorate his suffering is to pretend that he is not suffering and so avoid adult interventions that are frequently hostile or violent" (77-78). Paradoxically, Maisie's reluctance to express her thoughts sometimes becomes the very source of her mother's wrath. In Chapter III, Ida informs Maisie that her first governess, Miss Overmore, is not going to accompany her during her term with the father:

> Maisie turned quite faint. "Oh I thought she was."
>
> "It doesn't in the least matter, you know, what you think," Mrs. Farange loudly replied; "and you had better indeed for the future, miss, learn to keep your thoughts to yourself." This was exactly what Maisie had already learned, and the accomplishment was just the source of her mother's irritation. (*MK* 26)

Maisie learns to suppress pronouncements of desire for the simple joys that might assuage her dejection. Her containment confirms yet again the deleterious consequences of black

pedagogy. "The child is encouraged through numerous implicit and explicit child-rearing experiences to deny and repress her longing or risk invasive attacks from the adult. As a result she learns self-denial as a form of self-defense" (Zornado 82). Maisie's consciousness prompts her to conclude that her survival hinges on silence, particularly when each of the parents expects her to report the other's activities. Realizing that "she had been a centre of hatred and a messenger of insult, and that everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so," she effects "the theory of her stupidity … Her parted lips locked themselves with the determination to be employed no longer" (*MK* 23). The suppression of desire and the dissimulation of ignorance concurrently circumscribe the process of Maisie's subject formation in childhood.

The maltreatment Maisie endures in the novel includes her education, for she does not receive formal instruction at a school. The Elementary Education Acts of 1870 and 1880 had made institutional education available to children between the ages of five and thirteen,[17] but Maisie is left in the company of female attendants at home. At her father's residence, there is the nurse Moddle and the under-housemaid Susan Ash, in whose company she often roams the streets of London. Obviously, the household staff can hardly be expected to undertake Maisie's schooling, the task being entrusted to the governesses. Later, her mother hires the attractive Miss Overmore as her governess, and when Maisie's father marries her, Ida Farange replaces her with the decidedly unappealing elderly Mrs. Wix. John C. McCloskey aptly summarizes Maisie's predicament:

> Never sent to school, she grows to adolescence in a nursery and in a set of circumstances that, being of one kind, keep her apart from the formal education

[17] See John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* 308-12.

> of textbooks and schools and isolated in the cage of her own consciousness, insulated even from the companionship of other children. (485-86)

Maisie's father initially decides to send Maisie away to a boarding school at Brighton, chiefly motivated by his desire to enjoy the company of Miss Overmore alone, and by his wish to divest himself of his parental duties. The opportunistic governess who has encouraged him until then convinces him to abandon the idea. She submits to him that in the eyes of the law, once Maisie is removed from the household, there would be no justification for her continued presence; moreover, the former Mrs. Farange would discern the father's motives and counteract accordingly. Although Beale Farange is well aware of Miss Overmore's lack of qualifications as an instructor, he begrudgingly yields to her. When their subsequent marriage invalidates Miss Overmore's previous objections, she returns to the boarding school idea herself. "Her small companion was no longer required at home as – it was Mrs. Beale's own amusing word – a little duenna" (*MK* 52-53). Discussion of the project soon ends, for Maisie's father now cites its costliness and his inability to afford it. The stepmother's interactions with Maisie prolong the child's objectification by her parents.

In Chapters XIII to XV, as Maisie stays at her father's residence for an extended period of time, the arrangement assumes for her all the attributes of a foster family. Mrs. Beale and Sir Claude are now lovers, since Beale Farange spends increasingly longer intervals away from Mrs. Beale with presumably wealthy women, and Ida Farange has begun to seek the company of gentlemen other than Sir Claude. In the absence of her parents' concern for Maisie's education, and given the unsuitability of Mrs. Beale as a teacher, Sir Claude takes charge of Maisie's instruction by default. He proves to be the only character in the novel exhibiting an interest in the issue, but his plans for her almost never come to fruition. In

Chapter XV, he suggests that she must attend with her stepmother lectures at various institutions, but his lack of funds brings the project to an early end. The few lectures on subjects as varied as French literature and chemistry that he can finally afford prove of little value to Maisie, since both she and Mrs. Beale attend them at his behest, merely to please him. "When the subject was deepest and the lecture longest and the listeners ugliest, then it was they both felt their patron in the background would be most pleased with them" (*MK* 137). For both Maisie and Mrs. Beale, these outings are a tedious activity they must endure: Maisie to secure Sir Claude's approval, Mrs. Beale to ingratiate herself to him. When the lectures are discontinued, Sir Claude compensates by sending Maisie a number of books, from which Mrs. Beale reads to her passages he has recommended. At the same time, she imposes upon Maisie the extent to which the activity taxes her social life:

> It was for Maisie's education in short that, as she often repeated, she closed her door – closed it to the gentlemen who used to flock there in such numbers and whom her husband's practical desertion of her would have made it a course of the highest indelicacy to receive. (*MK* 135)

Although Sir Claude's involvement in Maisie's education is borne by his concern for her welfare, it is nevertheless misguided. For a child who has not had rudimentary instruction at a formal institution, lectures on French literature and chemistry or volumes of essays would produce little result. More importantly, Sir Claude's project for Maisie is a disguised male appropriation of innocent girlhood. By prescribing the content of her instruction, Sir Claude inscribes a patriarchal codification upon Maisie. As Chris Foss argues, "Sir Claude's relation to Maisie is in fact a classic case of masculinist creation of an idealized female innocence" (257). As he moves to edify Maisie, he objectifies her in the manner of Pygmalion's

construction of Galatea. Sir Claude's objectification may be less overt than that of Maisie's parents or Mrs. Beale's, but its impact is equally injurious.

Mrs. Wix does not fare any better at her duties than Miss Overmore. In spite of the many hours Maisie spends in the schoolroom at her mother's home, she learns very little from her. Instead, the child and the governess survey and evaluate the wrongful manner in which Maisie's parents conduct themselves, often sharing tears in each other's arms. Millicent Bell summarizes these sequences best: "Mrs. Wix's interpretations, however, are a pastiche of conventional formulas–melodramatic or sentimental. … Mrs. Wix's consciousness is stuffed with trite conceptions of literary plot and characterization. … These fictions fail, ultimately, to contain Maisie's experiences" (*Meaning* 246). Even though Mrs. Wix is fully aware of the extent to which the self-centredness of the adults impinges on the child's psychic life, her methodology to alleviate Maisie's distress approximates the same callousness:

> "It isn't as if you didn't already know everything, is it, love?" and "I can't make you any worse than you *are*, can I, darling?" – these were the terms in which the good lady justified to herself and her pupil her pleasant conversational ease. What the pupil already knew was indeed rather taken for granted than expressed, but it performed the useful function of transcending all textbooks and supplanting all studies. (*MK* 66-67)

Mrs. Wix's contribution to Maisie's knowledge is plainly unsound, for it impresses upon the child the notion that she has been impaired. More significantly, Mrs. Wix's remarks suggest to Maisie two other injudicious perceptions: first, that there is an adult in her world who acknowledges the impairment and lessens the affliction by sharing it; in the remark "her ladyship's game" cited above, the use of the pronoun "we" reinforces this notion. Secondly, her responses also hint at a private, subtle complicity between the governess and the child, of the order daughters enjoy with their mothers. In her work on the role of the governess in the

fictional Victorian home, Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros notes, "Since the roles of mother and governess are not truly separated, the presence of the latter reveals the flaws of the mother. In the novels, such incidents become all the more obvious as the governess never tries to challenge her mistress" (210). In Maisie's case, the confusion of the roles is amplified to the extent of their collapse. Ida Farange's complete absence from Maisie's life effectively enables the governess, prompting her to occupy the maternal site in the child's life. Mrs. Wix solidifies her binary position by affixing to Maisie the status of sibling to her dead daughter Clara Matilda:

> "She's your little dead sister," Mrs. Wix ended by saying, and Maisie, all in a tremor of curiosity and compassion, addressed from that moment a particular piety to the small accepted acquisition. Somehow she wasn't a real sister, but that only made her the more romantic. It contributed to this view of her that she was never to be spoken of in that character to any one else – least of all to Mrs. Farange, who wouldn't care for her nor recognise the relationship: it was to be just an unutterable and inexhaustible little secret with Mrs. Wix. (*MK* 30)

By assigning the role of a sibling to Maisie, Mrs. Wix attempts to re-enact her relationship with her own child and relive her motherhood vicariously. While the articulation of her gesture may be affectionate, it is no less objectifying than Maisie's abuse by her parents, her exploitation by Mrs. Beale, or the patriarchal appropriation by Sir Claude. In their relations with Maisie, the adults in her world infect her with "the scent of [their] selfishness."

The complicity with Mrs. Wix bifurcates Maisie's identity into realistic and fictitious components. In chronological order, she views herself as the biological daughter to parents who cannot suffer her presence, then as the constructed second child to her bereaved governess. Maisie welcomes Mrs. Wix's occupation of the maternal site in her life, believing that no harm or rejection could come to her from the lady, who in spite of "her ugliness and

her poverty … was peculiarly and soothingly safe … Mrs. Wix was as safe as Clara Matilda, who was in heaven and yet, embarrassingly also in Kensal Green, where they had been together to see her little huddled grave" (*MK* 31). At the same time, Maisie administers the two constituents of her identity by enacting the "theory of her stupidity, … the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment" (*MK* 23). The segregation of her muted inner self from her split external being becomes for Maisie an exercise of curious introspection. In Chapter XII, Maisie's consciousness registers the activity in optical terms, as she imagines herself observing her self: "The sharpened sense of spectatorship … gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass" (*MK* 91). Because she regularly demarcates her inner self from her external being, Maisie's consciousness gestures to a metatextual pressure on the novel: the reader observes Maisie observing herself.[18] Lee E. Heller affirms, "Maisie occupies a position analogous to our own as readers of the novel, trying to make sense of things: … [b]ecause she is in the story that she is also reading, that reading becomes a function of the story itself" (81). The conflation of spectator and actor in Maisie's consciousness recalls the famous passage concerning the novelist's point of view in the Preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*. James describes the "house of fiction" as a structure with an endless number of windows – "apertures, of dissimilar size and shape," at each of which stands a "figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass" looking at the "spreading field, the human scene" (*AN* 46). Each writer witnesses the same activity unfolding below, but

[18] The metatextual pressure of Maisie's observations on the novel is facilitated by the narrator; or as J. Hillis Miller puts it, "the novel registers not just the narrator's retrospective introspection of Maisie, but his introspection of Maisie's partial, intermittent, progressive, and problematic introspection of others" (*Versions* 43). At those junctures in the novel where the exertion of the pressure is evident, the narrator briefly abandons his task and cloaks himself with Maisie's consciousness.

the perception is unique and specific to the beholder. Nevertheless, the novelist's view is limited to the scope that the field of vision affords. The use of binoculars, which would otherwise enhance the view with precision and details, would truncate the scope even further by eliminating peripheral views. In *What Maisie Knew*, the protagonist levitates above the field to the window, almost sharing the novelist's point of view. The consciousness of the figure at the window becomes composite, a fusion of sorts of the author and of the main character. Maisie steps aside from the stage of activity to survey herself, and this enabling move contributes, at least temporarily, to the constitution of her subjectivity. Maisie's capacity to examine the self and its engagement with objective experiences shapes her negotiation with them. When she assesses her transactions with the world of adults, she can modulate her action interactions accordingly, challenging in the process her objectification by her parents, Mrs. Beale, Sir Claude, and Mrs. Wix.

The design above transforms *seeing* into *knowing*.[19] To know is "to have personal experience of (something) as affecting oneself; to have experienced, met with, felt, or undergone. Also fig[uratively] of inanimate things. Chiefly in negative forms of expression" (*OED*). In this sense, the *knowledge* of the novel's title is an amalgam of the troublesome experiences Maisie absorbs in the course of the novel. For Maisie, "knowledge" is less comprehension than observation. "Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them," writes James in the Preface (*AN* 145). By the end of the novel, Maisie's perceptions coalesce to produce in her a state of melancholia corresponding to Julia Kristeva's elaboration of narcissistic depression. The term of Maisie's empowerment through

[19] Diane F. Sadoff claims the same transmutation occurs in *The Golden Bowl* (39).

studying her engagement with the world comes to an end. James anticipates this abbreviation in the Preface but does not explore its ramifications:

> She wonders, in other words, to the end, to the death – the death of her childhood, properly speaking; after which (with the inevitable shift, sooner or later, of her point of view) her situation will change and become another affair, subject to other measurements and with a new centre altogether. (*AN* 147)

The "death of childhood" at the end of the novel revises for Maisie the enabling vantage she enjoyed previously. It will no longer be possible for her to survey "the sweet-shop of knowledge" by "flattening her nose upon the hard window-pane" (*MK* 114).

The frustration Maisie's subject formation endures stems from the compromised mother-daughter relationship James depicts in the novel. Maisie suffers the adverse consequences that black pedagogy effects in her life. Zornado notes that black pedagogy unravels the biological association between the child and the mother, and inserts in its stead cultural practices such as swaddling and bottle-feeding, or in Maisie's case, the employment of a governess. "Without a completed symbiotic relationship with the mother signalled by child-led separation from the mother's breast and body the child is forever decentered from his body and vulnerable to cultural substitutes to chronic emotional longing" (Zornado 82). More disastrously, severance of the mother-child bond contributes to the malfunction of subject formation with regard to her access to the system of signs in language. According to Julia Kristeva, the semiotic and the symbolic modes of language collaborate in the articulations of the signifying system. The semiotic – *le sémiotique,* as opposed to *la sémiotique*, the study of signs – precedes the verbal stage in the infant and manifests itself in the expression of bodily drives and affects. The semiotic is "a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the

protagonists of family structure" (*Revolution* 27). The symbolic, on the other hand, is a signifying operation dependent on language and the collectivity of its organized, complex structures, which facilitate signification through syntactical and grammatical constructs (*Revolution* 27). "The symbolic – and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories – is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures" (*Revolution* 29). The semiotic is a function of the unconscious, while the symbolic is a conscious operation. The semiotic cannot exist alone, for without the symbolic mode within which it emerges, it is a mass of incoherent energies, without any signifying attributes; similarly, without the semiotic drives, the symbolic loses relevance, for it exists in a vacuum if no agents enter it. Kristeva stipulates that the speaking subject is concurrently semiotic and symbolic; therefore, all signification produced by him can never exist alone in either mode (24). The site where the semiotic intervenes in the symbolic is the *chora*, (a term Kristeva borrows from Plato's *Timaeus*).[20] The *chora* is an undefined space in which the infant's nascent, as yet unshaped subjectivity affixes itself to the mother's body. Before delimiting the boundaries of his or her identity as a subject, the child negotiates an assortment of stimuli, for the regulation of which the infant turns to the mother. The *chora* is a maternal space, as Noëlle McAfee explains:

> In this early psychic space, the infant experiences a wealth of drives (feelings, instincts, etc.) that could be extremely disorienting and destructive were it not for the infant's relation with his or her mother's body. An infant's tactile relation with its mother's body provides an orientation for the infant's drives. (19)

[20] See *Revolution in Poetic Language* 25.

Initially, semiotic meaning in the *chora* assumes the form of the infant's attempts at communication through ululations and intonations, and of the child's endeavour in the verbalization phase later. In the pre-Oedipal stage of childhood, these articulations predicate on the infant's unconscious, close bond with mother. "The mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relationships and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic chora" (*Revolution* 27). The maternal bond predetermines the child's later access to the signifying process. In the event of an incomplete bond, the child's evolution into a speaking subject suffers in accordance. Without the semiotic *chora*, the child cannot find the context within which the subject may initiate its formation. In *What Maisie Knew*, James does not specify or even allude to Maisie's experiences in infancy. Her story begins when she is six years old. However, the reader can safely surmise that Maisie's formation as subject has been at risk since her birth, given the deficiency of her bond with her mother.

Subjectivity necessitates the severance of the maternal bond as insistently as it requisitions that bond for its sound growth. "For man and woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous," writes Kristeva. "Matricide is our vital necessity, the *sine qua non* of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances" (*Black Sun* 27-28). The objective of individuation requires the complete but not a definitive separation from the mother, whereupon the desired maternal object yields its value to another as an object of erotic desire. For Maisie, the process of individuation verges on completion in a telling moment toward the end of the novel. In the garden of a hotel in Folkestone, Ida informs Maisie that she has followed her from London to inform her that she is leaving for South Africa, presumably with yet another lover. The scene is for Maisie a *déjà-vu*, since her father had earlier abandoned her to go to America with the

Countess. In both scenes, Maisie's parents manipulate the conversation to obtain Maisie's refusal to accompany each. When Ida Farange leaves Maisie for the last time, the child reflects on her abandonment by her parents:

> After she had disappeared Maisie … sat and stared at the image her flight had still left standing. It had ceased to be her mother only, in the strangest way, that it might become her father, the father of whose wish that she were dead the announcement still lingered in the air … But what reality that she need reckon with did it represent if Mr. Farange were, on his side, also going off – going off to America with the Countess, or even only to Spa? (*MK* 182)

Maisie acknowledges in that moment that the maternal bond has ceased to operate in her life. That termination would contribute positively to the process of her individuation, were it not for the fact that Maisie is not the agent initiating the cessation. Nonetheless, Maisie negotiates the severance with relatively little distress, especially since in the next instant Sir Claude comes looking for her. After the confirmation of the mother's departure, Sir Claude "indulged in one of those sudden pleasantries with which, to the delight of his stepdaughter, his native animation overflowed. 'Will Miss Farange do me the honour to accept my arm?'" (*MK* 183). The moment is rife with sensuality. Sir Claude has addressed her as "Miss Farange" in the past; but he has never assumed the airs of a gentleman escorting a lady during their previous excursions. To Maisie, the loss of the mother soon disappears in the haze of the erotic value attached to Sir Claude. The narrator's rhetoric confirms the sensuality of the moment: "There was nothing in all her days that Miss Farange had accepted with such bliss, a bright rich element that floated them together to their feast" (*MK* 183). Once again, Maisie's subjectivity appears to surface, as it did when she resorted to "the theory of her stupidity" earlier. Now, however, the administration of her inner self and physical being cannot be so easily performed, for she has absorbed the immeasurable loss of a mother.

After her abandonment by her parents, Maisie enters a state of melancholia. According to Kristeva, melancholia or depression can manifest itself in twin modes of the objectal and the narcissistic. Borrowing from Freud and Melanie Klein, Kristeva confirms that a loss of the maternal object is at the root of both and posits the composite depressive/melancholic subject in a state of mourning for that loss (*Black Sun* 9). Objectal depression is hostile, exteriorized, and suicidal, while narcissistic depression is sorrowful, interiorized, and continual. The former "conceals an aggressiveness, toward the lost object, thus revealing the ambivalence of the depressed person with respect to the object of mourning" (*Black Sun* 11). Objectal depression occurs only when the loss of the maternal object follows the child's passage through the Oedipal stage and the capacity to enter the signifying system of language. However, if that loss takes place in the pre-Oedipal phase of childhood, when the infant has not yet developed the skills to regulate the semiotic drives and rupture the symbolic order of language, the loss constitutes for the child an "unsymbolizable, unnamable, narcissistic wound, so precocious that no outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as a referent" (*Black Sun* 12). The narcissistic depressive is a subject who has endured the severance of the maternal bond in less than favourable circumstances:

> If the [narcissistic] structure works successfully, the child will complete its separation from its mother while at the same time learning to use words to name what it has lost – which will allow him to call out to her when he needs her. If this process is not successful, the child will be caught in limbo between loss and identification. (McAfee 67)

Maisie's predicament stems from the ruinous operation of the narcissistic structure in her young life. Even though she is not an infant in the pre-Oedipal stage, Maisie is as vulnerable to narcissistic depression as the Kristevan postulate suggests. For her, the structure has failed

since its inception. Maisie has not enjoyed a constructive maternal bond in her early childhood, resulting in the gradual retraction and interiorization of her subjectivity.

Compounding Maisie's want of a constructive relationship with her mother, her abrupt uncoupling from both her parents leads to her catatonic silence at the end the novel. That Maisie cannot name her loss is also clear to James. In the preface to the novel, he writes, "figures that are not yet at her command and … aspects about her and … parts of her experience that she understands darken off into others that she rather tormentedly misses" (*AN* 146). Perhaps no moment in the novel ironically and poignantly exemplifies Maisie's incomprehension as that of her claim to ignorance in the concluding chapter. After Sir Claude hesitates to leave Mrs. Beale and travel to Paris alone with Maisie, her governess Mrs. Wix senses Maisie's reluctance to denounce Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale's illicit liaison and demands to know whether she has lost her "moral sense" (*MK* 279). Beset by the three adults, Maisie feels "Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale stood there like visitors at an 'exam,'" and she responds in the manner of "her old flat shameful schoolroom plea. 'I don't know – I don't know'" (*MK* 280). Maisie's response is ironic, given the magnitude of knowledge the reader expects her to have attained in the title and through the events of the novel. The object of Maisie's ignorance is not Mrs. Wix's "moral sense," but the loss of the primal object of desire. One by one, her father, her mother, her stepfather have abandoned Maisie to the objectification of two adult females: Mrs. Beale – an opportunistic pale facsimile of her mother, and Mrs. Wix, the appropriating, unsophisticated governess. Lee Heller refers to this impossibility of Maisie's alternatives: "Maisie is given a choice between being swallowed up by the politics of life in the family … and 'triumphing' over family politics by refusing to be utilized, thereby disappearing into the void of obscurity that James imagines to lie outside the

family's framework. Either way, she loses" (77). Since the alternative of living with her biological family is no longer available to her, she must elect to settle with adults who are even less desirable candidates for parenthood. Sir Claude has indicated to her his unwillingness to establish a parental bond with her without Mrs. Beale; and Maisie refuses to allow her stepmother to assume authority in her life. In the end, Maisie does not choose: she simply accepts Mrs. Wix as her guardian, the governess being the only available accommodating adult.[21]

In her melancholic state, Maisie's subjectivity slowly recedes into silence. She has no words to verbalize her distress because her loss of the maternal object has pre-empted her entry into the symbolic order. In the final scene of the novel, as the boat takes Maisie and Mrs. Wix away, the governess asks her if she has looked back to see whether Sir Claude was on the balcony of the hotel. Maisie confirms that she did, but that "he wasn't there." Mrs. Wix ponders this fact, and in the next moment seizes the opportunity to drive home to Maisie her complete authority over the child:

> "He went to *her*," she finally observed.
>
> "Oh I know!" the child replied.
>
> Mrs. Wix gave a sidelong look. She still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew. (*MK* 287)

Maisie's laconic retort and Mrs. Wix's puzzlement usher the child's complete withdrawal and the interiorization of her wound. Deanna K. Kreisel is also of this view: "The sparseness of the

[21] Tessa Hadley reads Maisie's withdrawal from the scene with Mrs. Wix in a more positive light: "[T]he book ends with the little girl's first *choice*: it does represent a growth, a significant transition from her simply taking on board any and every explanation she's been offered, to a first resistance" ("*What Maisie Knew*" 218). While it is true that Maisie chooses Mrs. Wix's guardianship over Sir Claude's or Mrs. Beale's, she does so out of necessity, rather than the exercising of her unrestricted volition.

language seems to signal the unsymbolizable nature of her loss. She is left to inhabit the feminine melancholic position, to orient her future libidinal attachments in relation to a lost object that simply 'wasn't there'" (15). In the end, Maisie's loss of the maternal object becomes a paradoxical, levelling silencer. Instead of enabling the little girl to attain subjectivity by entering the symbolic order of language, it divests Maisie of that eligibility.

Insofar as subject formation is concerned, knowledge functions equivocally in *The Awkward Age*. Soon after Nanda emerges from her schoolroom on the upper floor of the Brookenham home on Buckingham Crescent and joins the social circle of her family in the drawing room downstairs, she becomes an unwilling witness to their reprehensible dealings. Her feckless and indolent brother Harold steals money from his mother or quietly solicits funds from Mr. Cashmore, whose wife Fanny is Nanda's friend; Mrs. Brookenham eyes Vanderbank for a lover, even though she is fully aware the young man admires her daughter Nanda; Mr. Brookenham's cousin, Duchess Jane, has formed a romantic attachment with Lord Petherton, the shiftless brother of Nanda's friend Tishy Grendon and dependent for his livelihood upon Mr. Mitchett. The latter does not quite have the upper-class breeding members of this social circle share, but they consider his substantial annual income as his credentials to receive him.[22]

In Victorian social politics, a young woman's position as a desirable, chaste *jeune fille* in the marriage circuit was contingent on her being completely unaware of any shady

[22] It is noteworthy that members of this tightly-knit group all have nicknames, while those on the periphery do not. Mrs. Brookenham is Mrs. Brook; Gustavus Vanderbank, "Van," Mr. Mitchett, "Mitchy." The Duchess is addressed by her first name, Jane, and Agnesina, her husband's niece in her care, is Little Aggie. On the other hand, Mr. Longdon, the family friend visiting London, remains throughout as such; and we never find out Lord Petherton's and Mr. Cashmore's first names. Mrs. Brook and her friends' practice of assigning nicknames to one another reinforces their already hermetic circle.

transactions or adulterous liaisons around her, and on retaining her ingenuousness intact. Such a profile would greatly enhance her cachet as a potential spouse. As she ventures into the family circle, Nanda's family and friends conclude that Nanda's disposition is yet indeterminate with regard to the unsavoury actions she encounters. Van points this out to Mr. Longdon at the outset of the novel:

> Therefore, you see, it's all as yet rather a dark question for poor Nanda – a question that, in a way, quite occupies the foreground of her mother's earnest little life. How will she look, what will be thought of her and what will she be able to do for herself? She's at the age when the whole thing – speaking of her appearance, her possible share of good looks – is still to a degree in a fog. But everything depends on it. (*AA* 32)

When Mr. Longdon asks for an elaboration of "everything," Van reduces the expansiveness of the word to the niche Nanda is to occupy as a married woman in the novel's effete social circle. J. Hillis Miller writes,

> When a British maiden has reached marriageable age, she is the focus of anxious and absorbed attention by her parents and siblings, her friends, the whole circle of her 'community.' Whom will she marry? Until she marries, her selfhood, insofar as it depends on her subject position as the wife of so-and-so, has not yet been settled. ("Literature and a Woman's Right to Choose" 45)

To a large extent, Nanda's matrimonial prospects will depend on her negotiation of their unethical behaviour, and the process of her subjectivity, or as Van puts it, "what she [will] be able to do for herself." From the moment Nanda steps into Van's drawing room at her first appearance in the novel, she impresses the reader as an unaffected but assertive girl. The narrator goes to great lengths to buttress this impression and adds an element of unpredictability to it:

> Nanda … was a Northern savage, and the reason was partly that the elements of that young lady's nature were already, were publicly, were almost indecorously active. They were practically there for good or for ill; experience was still to come and what they might work out to still a mystery; but the sum would get itself done with the figures now on the slate. (*AA* 145-46)

The narrator's characterization of Nanda stands in stark contrast to that of Duchess Jane's step-niece and ward Little Aggie, who responds to her aunt's "attention with the sweetness of consenting dependence" and "impartial politeness" (*AA* 69-70).

Although considerably older than Maisie, Nanda embarks on the same trajectory as her younger counterpart in *What Maisie Knew*. Both girls are viewed as intruders who might unravel the precariously balanced relations of their respective worlds. Julie Rivkin sums up their positions succinctly: "Like Maisie in *What Maisie Knew,* Nanda is the wild card, the one whose value is not fixed, whose face could be any face–yet whose position best exposes the workings of the game" (*False Positions* 164). The two girls diverge, however, in the administration of their respective subjectivities: while Maisie enacts the "theory of stupidity," Nanda's temperament leads her to reject being cast in the rigid role of a married woman, opting instead the discovery of her self. "The thing that's important to one is the thing one sees one's self," she declares to Mitchy (*AA* 208). Nanda is sufficiently perceptive, too, of the uncertain, even dangerous implications of that course: "[She] struggled with instincts and forebodings, with the suspicion of its doom and the far-borne scent, in the flowery fields, of blood" (*AA* 146). Despite the inherent risks of self-discovery, Nanda embarks upon it with zeal and resolve.

Having spent her childhood and adolescence in sequestered quarters, and consequently bereft of benefits issuing from a sound maternal bond (shades of Maisie's childhood), Nanda

seemingly has ample opportunities upon her admittance into the adult world to launch the process of her individuation and to compensate for her deficiencies. Ostensibly, Mrs. Brook fully endorses her opportunities: "She wants me not, any more, to see only with her eyes. She's throwing me into the world," Nanda informs Mitchy (*AA* 93). Mrs. Brook's enthusiasm may be genuine, but Nanda's description of it – "throwing me into the world" – denotes an ejection by her mother, who is unwilling to forge any manner of maternal attachment with her. Mrs. Brook has subscribed to the policy of non-interference: "Why *should* I ask any [questions] – when I want her life to be as much as possible like my own? It's simply that the hour has struck, as you know. From the moment she *is* down the only thing for us is to live as friends" (*AA* 112). Nanda must fend for herself. Marcia Jacobson writes, "Mrs. Brook has virtually abandoned [Nanda] by treating her as a friend with whom one does not interfere" (105). Furthermore, precisely because Nanda's subjectivity is unsettled, Mrs. Brook expects her daughter to become eventually indistinguishable from her, as well as the many young wives they both know – women who engage in extramarital relations, as does Little Aggie near the end of the novel. The husbands of such women, when aware, either overlook their wives' wrongdoing or indulge into like relations of their own.

Nanda's ethics, however, disallows her transformation from a girl into a woman in her mother's image. She is all too conscious of Mrs. Brook's intentions with regard to Van – whom she appears to love, too. She also discovers her friend Carrie Donner is in a relationship with the married Mr. Cashmore, and later in the novel, that Mitchy's wife Aggie has taken Lord Petherton for a lover. The awareness of these relations does not come to Nanda without peril to her subjectivity. Dorothea Krook affirms, "Nanda, we are repeatedly told, comes to know 'everything'. This fine large vague word is constantly used by her mother and her

mother's friends to signify the alarming, the terrifying, indeed the sinister depths of Nanda's 'knowledge'" (153). Nanda alludes to the threat her newly acquired sordid knowledge entails during a conversation with Van:

> "Don't I know everything?"
>
> "*Do* you? I should rather ask," the young man gaily enough replied.
>
> "Why should I not? How should I not? You know what I know." Then as to explain herself and attenuate a little the sudden emphasis with which she had spoken: "I remember your once telling me that I must take in things at my pores." (*AA* 200)

The citation encapsulates the central problematic of *The Awkward Age*: how will Nanda assimilate "everything" and what will her subsequent comportment be? The answers to these questions define the contours of her subjectivity.

Nanda's reluctant assimilation of the tawdriness around her does not distend in her life unilaterally: as I argue below, it both empowers and vitiates her. That she is aware of this duality is abundantly clear in the above exchange. Her reminders to Van – "You know what I know" and "I remember your once telling me that I must take in things at my pores" are redolent with mutually counteractive implications: on the one hand, these pronouncements place her on a defiant footing with her family and friends and signal her disinclination to defer to their plans for her; on the other, her phrase "take in things at my pores" insinuates that the knowledge has been unsalutary, even usurpatory, invading her being as some contaminating atmospheric element would. During another conversation with Mitchy in Chapter XXXVII, she admits, "I get the benefit of the fact that there was never a time when I didn't know *something* or other, and that I became more and more aware, as I grew older, of a hundred little chinks of daylight" (*AA* 302). That she realizes her discovery of the reprehensible acts

around her has been relatively advantageous to her for standing her ground is plainly evident here, from "the *benefit* of the fact" (emphasis added). More significantly, her being "more and more aware, as I grew older of a hundred little chinks of daylight" implies that access to the "free circle" (so qualified by James in the Preface) has enabled her to identify the tacit motives behind her family and their friends' actions, particularly with regard to her candidacy in the marriage circuit. This gained insight, in turn, feeds her resolve to rebuff the course they have charted for her, and devise one of her own.

Still, as Nanda's attraction to Van grows steadily, and as she realizes Mrs. Brook is competing with her for his affections, she feels the weight of these and other realities pressing upon her. To eliminate Nanda as a competitor, Mrs. Brook sponsors Mitchy's attentions to her daughter and ardently encourages her to accept him as a suitor. Buckingham Crescent may find Mitchy's lack of breeding (he is a shoemaker's son) objectionable, but they deem his income of £40,000 p.a. a bright compensation for his social failings. If he were to marry Nanda, the union not only would make her unavailable for Van, but it would also channel the flow of Mitchy's fortune to the less wealthy Brookenhams. In spite of Mrs. Brook's wishes, Nanda is disinclined to marry Mitchy. Abetting her resistance is the support she receives from Mr. Longdon, an old family friend and erstwhile admirer of Mrs. Brook's mother Lady Julia, whose *doppelgänger* Mr. Longdon imagines Nanda to be. Moreover, Mr. Longdon further complicates matters by announcing he will settle on Nanda a sizeable income, if she agrees to marry Van. The inspiration for Mr. Longdon's decision comes from the Duchess, who wishes Aggie to marry Mitchy, a union Nanda supports wholeheartedly. Hence, Mrs. Brook resorts to drastic measures to sabotage Nanda's attachment to Van. In what would seem an inadvertent slip, she reveals to her friends that Nanda has read a salacious French novel, thus

compromising her in Van's view. Jeremy Tambling affirms, "[T]he ideology of bourgeois society depends on … its fetishising of sexual ignorance, called innocence, not to protect women, but to protect ideology" (132). Mrs. Brook's scheme succeeds: Van no longer thinks Nanda is an "innocent lamb" (*AA* 27), as he once described her, for her knowledge has now tainted her.

One of the novel's dialogic tropes for the various connivances through which the characters construct one another's persona or yield to that contrivance is that of "doing/being done." They manipulate one another unscrupulously, with a view to reap a private or trivial gain. In their conversations, "doing" and "being done" ostensibly refer to attending to someone's needs or having one's own gratified, but the two mutually counteractive terms also contain a more unsettling shade of meaning: i.e., the curbing intervention by someone in the process of another's subject formation, or acquiescing to such an intervention without protest, so long as one can compensate for it by securing a profit in the end. The lewd Mr. Cashmore who covets Nanda asks Mrs. Brook not "to 'arrange' [Nanda] in any such manner without also arranging *me*" (*AA* 121).[23] Everyone is in tune: Mrs. Brook admires the "wonderful sincerity with which the Duchess feels that one's girl may so perfectly and consistently be hedged in without one's really ever … depriving one's own self" (*AA* 123-24). Typically, Van characterizes the social protocols of being a guest at a friend's residence thus: "[I]t's a charming sign of London relations … that one *can* come down to people this way and be awfully well 'done for' and all that, and then go away and lose the whole thing, quite forget to whom one has been beholden" (*AA* 127). The observation discloses the extent to which self-

[23] "Arrangement" figures prominently in Book Two of *The Golden Bowl*, where James elaborates the sinister nuances of that word. I undertake that discussion in the fourth chapter.

interest and lack of reciprocal consideration govern the social relations of the group. Upon joining it at the outset of the novel, the astute Mr. Longdon senses the ruthlessness that is the norm within the tightly-knit circle and solicits Van's help to avert it: "[I]f you'll be so good as to let me, for the help of a hint or two: as to how to do, don't you know? and not to – what do you fellows call it? – *be* done" (*AA* 20). Reciprocally, Van asks Mr. Longdon "See what can be done with me" (*AA* 36).[24] Finally, Mrs. Brook's following remark attests to the corruption of "to do" into an act of constructing a false identity: reflecting upon Nanda's recent emergence from her schoolroom, Mrs. Brook informs Mr. Cashmore she and her daughter have been collaborating to cast Nanda in the fashionable role of a woman of the age: "It *is* the modern daughter – we're really 'doing' her, the child and I" (*AA* 106).[25] Keeping in mind the date of novel's publication, it is possible to regard the "modern daughter" as another term for the New Woman, arguably the most contentious issue in contemporaneous discussions of the social identity of women. Its proponents defined this emerging figure in very rigid terms: the New Woman had both education and career, which enabled her economic independence from men; she actively promoted social equality for women; in sexual matters, she advocated women's prerogative to an identity; and finally, she resisted marriage as a social imperative. *The Awkward Age* ends with Nanda's decision to forego marriage and withdraw from social relations. It is a decision the premonition of which comes to her midway through the novel, in

[24] For a discussion of the sexual implications of "doing" and "being done" and the homosociality of the novel's male characters, see Michael Trask, "Getting into It with James: Substitution and Erotic Reversal in *The Awkward Age*."

[25] In the Preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James presents an authorial speaker who provides a retrospective account of Isabel Archer's provenance. The account includes the author's detailed methodology of "doing her" (*AN* 52). In an illuminating article tracing the simultaneous sympathy and sadomasochism of the authorial speaker with regard to Isabel, Laura Hinton has unveiled the "sadistic and commercial motives" the speaker harbours behind "doing her" (321). In the next chapter, I address subversive functions of writing fictions in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Chapter XVII: "I shall be one of those people who don't [marry]. I shall be in the end … one of those who haven't" (142). This choice is not due to her assumption of the New Woman identity; rather, it stems from the debilitating impediments she encounters in administrating the process of her subject formation. In *The Awkward Age*, Nanda negotiates the unfamiliar terrain of female selfhood and she bears the cost to attain a psychic life.

As is often the case in James's novels, the narrative discourse of *The Awkward Age* elaborates the trope of "doing" to reveal other imports it harbours. In Chapter XVI, there is a curious substitution of "to do" by "to feel" in the following exchange between Van and Nanda:

> "I want you to do with me exactly as you do with [Mr. Longdon]."
>
> "Ah that's soon said!" the girl replied in a peculiar tone. "How do you mean, to 'do'?"
>
> "Well then to *be*. What shall I say?" Vanderbank pleasantly wondered while his foot kept up its motion. 'To feel.' (*AA* 129)

In addition to replacing the proactivity of "doing" by the reactivity of "being", Van also transforms the latter into a euphemism for the former verb and erases the disparity between them. Van is fully aware that Nanda evokes for Mr. Longdon her grandmother Lady Julia, to the point that the older gentleman thinks "[s]he's much more like the dead than like the living" (*AA* 31).[26] What both Van and Mr. Longdon fail to realize is that their identification of Nanda with Lady Julia does not go beyond physical appearance. Mr. Longdon wishes to reincarnate in Nanda her grandmother, in order to revisit his past romance with Lady Julia; Van's reasons for wishing the same proceed from his reluctance to accept Nanda's distinctiveness, and his

[26] In *The Wings of the Dove*, Lord Mark shows Milly Theale the Bronzino painting at Matcham and avers to her resemblance to the portrait. I discuss the appropriative implications of that male gesture in the next chapter.

efforts to bend her to espouse her grandmother's value system. In the citation above, Van is asking Nanda to conduct herself (smoke a cigarette in his presence) with the same ease as she does with Mr. Longdon, but the subtext of his remarks is telling. He believes Nanda is "doing" for Mr. Longdon a version of herself in her grandmother's image, and he wants her to do the same for him, too; i.e., if he is to marry her, she must relinquish the process of her subject formation in favour of a more conventionally defined selfhood, one that is in line with his conception of a marriageable virgin. Van's substitution of "doing" by "being" is symptomatic of the inability of Mrs. Brook's circle to distinguish between the social articulation of individuality and its application to one's interior life. Most of the novel's characters "do" and "feel" interchangeably. When Aggie takes Lord Petherton as a lover after her marriage to Mitchy, Mrs. Brook thinks the latter will turn to Nanda for guidance:

> "He *may* not become unhappy – God grant *not!*" she developed. "But if he does, he'll take it out of Nanda."
>
> Van appeared to challenge this. "'Take it out' of her?"
>
> "Well, want to know, as some American asked me the other day of somebody, what she's 'going to do' about it." (*AA* 256)

In her work on Jamesian female characters resisting the functions of imposed cultural signs, Elizabeth Allen writes, "Asserting a personal vision, the young girl attempts to signify *herself* to the world, and not a range of cultural meanings" (*A Woman's Place* 118). The gradual surfacing of Nanda's ethical code, as well as her disinclination to indulge the prescribed mores of her family and friends, trouble Mrs. Brook, for they usher in the daughter's unpredictable independence.

In the social traffic of *The Awkward Age*, everyone but Nanda props the other, thereby safeguarding the interlocking binds of the group. James illustrates this interdependence in the dialogue of the novel throughout. The characters exhibit the objectionable habit of completing one another's sentences, which at once tightens bonds and restricts free expression of thought. Case in point: while visiting Mrs. Brook in Chapter XXII, Mitchy and Van attempt to bolster the justification of their general conduct both to themselves and for one another:

> "But people who don't like us," Mitchy broke in, "don't matter. Besides, how can we be properly conscious of each other – ?"
>
> "That's it!" – Vanderbank completed his idea: "without my finding myself for instance in you and Mrs. Brook? We see ourselves reflected – we're conscious of the charming whole." (*AA* 180)

Van and Mitchy's version of identity formation detains the subject in a hall of mirrors and dissipates its genealogy into a narcissistic series of reflected images. It coerces the subject to bend to the will of a hegemonic community, whose intransigent social code does not permit individuation. By contrast, Nanda is of the conviction that "one's just what one *is* … as in one's mind and what one sees and feels and the sort of thing one notices" (*AA* 141). Her view of identity as an inclusionary, multilateral construct is obviously at variance with that of the group. When Mr. Longdon questions whether her statement above entails dependency upon others where formulation of identity is concerned, she responds:

> I can't ask you to tell me the things Granny *would* have said, because that's simply arranging to keep myself back from you, and so being nasty and underhand, which you naturally don't want, nor I either. Nevertheless when I say the things she wouldn't, then I put before you too much – too much for your liking it – what I know and see and feel. If we're both partly the result of other people, *her* other people were so different. (*AA* 141)

As Julie Rivkin asserts, "Nanda's conception of identity not as an independent entity but as a form of social interdependence is clearly at odds with the concept of identity intrinsic to the figure of the virgin" (*False Positions* 175). Nanda does not reject social interdependence; she merely does not allow it to subsume her subjectivity.

The Brookenhams and their friends are not alone in subverting Nanda's subjectivity. Even the otherwise sympathetic Mr. Longdon undermines Nanda's enterprise in his own way. Like her, he abhors the transparent deceptions and machinations he witnesses in the "free circle," but his instincts to shield Nanda from their specious relations unfold along Sir Claude's trajectory in *What Maisie Knew*. Just as Maisie's stepfather attempts to commandeer the girl's subjectivity through patriarchal appropriation, Mr. Longdon requisitions Nanda's when he invites her to leave the city and join him at his country estate alone, allegedly to offer her a respite from the London scene:

> "Of peace," said Mr. Longdon. "Oh you don't know – you haven't the least idea. That's just why I want to show you."
>
> Nanda looked as if already she saw it in the distance. "But will it be peace if I'm there? I mean for *you*," she added.
>
> "It isn't a question of 'me.' Everybody's omelet is made of somebody's eggs. Besides, I think that when we're alone together – !"
>
> He had dropped for so long that she wondered. "Well, when we are – ?"
>
> "Why, it will be all right," he simply concluded. "Temples of peace, the ancients used to call them. We'll set up one, and I shall be at least doorkeeper. You'll come down whenever you like." (*AA* 137)

Mr. Longdon's metaphor of the temple and its doorkeeper is yet another version of "doing/being done." Its religious property and intimation of confinement brim with suggestions that he seeks to sever Nanda's social bonds and abstract her into an object of

adulation. Of the novel's equivocal rhetorical devices engaging identity formation vis-à-vis social interdependence, this metaphor is perhaps the most distressing for Nanda (or at least should be): it renders Mr. Longdon as her buffer – albeit platonic – against the iniquities she must suffer should she remain within the family order. It also casts him in the protective role of the Father. This self-aggrandizement expands in the above exchange with the aphorism "everybody's omelet is made of somebody's eggs," by which he affects readiness to bear sacrifices for her benefit: i.e., for Nanda to enjoy autonomy in the governance of her self, he is willing to forfeit a certain number of his freedoms. Clearly, Mr. Longdon's motives for attending to Nanda's psychic welfare spring from his nostalgic affections for her grandmother, whom he has commodified, as Nanda observes in an earlier conversation: "You feel as if my grandmother were quite *your* property!" (*AA* 100). Susan L. Mizruchi, who traces in the society of *The Awkward Age* "certain features of a primitive matriarchy," nevertheless also finds that "the novel's circle … predicts the ultimate subordination of female license and power" (116). I submit that Mr. Longdon's present offer gestures to a seemingly self-effacing paternalism, designed to effect his arrogation of Nanda's selfhood.

I have demonstrated above how each of the novel's male characters objectifies Nanda: Van through his desire to incarnate in her his ideal of female innocence, Mitchy through his ambition to embellish his social position by marrying her, Mr. Cashmore by his lust, and Mr. Longdon by his fetishization of her. The androcentric economy of the novel does not afford Nanda reprieve from these perversions of her selfhood; nor would she fare any better if she were to enlist her family's succour, especially that of her mother, who is "throwing [her] into the world." Maternal intervention in *The Awkward Age* engenders equally deleterious results as the subsumptive projects of the males, as seen in Duchess Jane's autocratic administration

of Aggie's subjectivity. According to Mrs. Brook, the Duchess dissembles morality and incorporates in her step-niece Aggie the virtues she lacks in herself, shaping the girl into a seamlessly pliable person; while she, not so much a dissimulator as the Duchess, has allowed Nanda free reign of her own affairs, which has led Nanda to pre-empt her mother's authority over her:

> "So that her daughter," Mitchy sympathized, "can only, by the arrangement, hope to become at the best her immorality and her vice?"
>
> But Mrs. Brook, without an answer for the question, appeared suddenly to have plunged into a sea of thought. "The only way for Nanda to have been *really* nice – "
>
> "Would have been for *you* to be like Jane?"
>
> Mitchy and his hostess seemed for a minute, on this, to gaze together at the tragic truth. Then she shook her head. "We see our mistakes too late." (*AA* 184-85)

In view of Nanda's aspirations to independence, Mrs. Brook imputes herself for her *laissez-faire* attitude with regard to Nanda, and regrets not having adopted the Duchess's course. Mrs. Brook recognizes that Aggie is an appendage of the Duchess's subjectivity, while Nanda may emerge from it as an independent woman. She implies that had she dealt with Nanda as the Duchess did with Aggie, Nanda would have grown into a truly "nice" young woman. That Nanda has succeeded to abort her designs is a frightening prospect for the mother: "Mrs. Brook spoke as with a small sharpness – just softened indeed in time – produced by the sight of a freedom in her daughter's life that suddenly loomed larger than any freedom of her own" (*AA* 194).

The above exchange ushers in Nanda's uncoupling from her mother. Mrs. Brook's reflection is one of the rare instances in the novel where she speaks truthfully, and her

acknowledgement of her failure to check Nanda's subjectivity is coloured with a tinge of sadness. Her despondency is amplified by the collapse around her of the social conventions regulating the upbringing of children. Rivkin shares this view: "The social law that kept single girls upstairs in the schoolroom and married women downstairs in the drawing room is vanishing, with the result that the highly contingent nature of other forms of identity and self-definition is being exposed" (*False Positions* 163). The novel's narratorial discourse, too, registers Nanda's separation from her mother and her tentatively emerging subjectivity: when Mrs. Brook challenges Nanda in Chapter XXIII, the narrator refers to her as Nanda's "companion," instead of "mother" (*AA* 191).

Mrs. Brook's self-marginalization in Nanda's life produces an ironic turn of events. Marcia Jacobson states, "As a result of her mother's denial of responsibility, Nanda herself takes on the abdicated maternal role" (106). The irony is not lost upon Mrs. Brook, who remarks to Mr. Cashmore, "She won't have a difference in my freedom. It's as if the dear thing *knew,* don't you see? What we must keep back. She wants us not to have to think. It's quite maternal!" (*AA* 106). Nanda's maternal instincts also come into play in her relations with her unhappily married friend Tishy Grendon, whom she counsels and offers guidance. Her sway is evident as well in the scene where she outlines to Mr. Longdon the differences that set her apart from Lady Julia. The body language of both suggest her influence: "[H]e had uncrossed his fidgety legs and, thrusting them out with the feet together, sat looking very hard before him, his chin sunk on his breast," while she, "obeying some impulse that had gathered in her while they sat mute, she put out to him the tender hand she might have offered to a sick child" (*AA* 141-42). I would also submit that Nanda's persuasive appeal to Van during their last meeting to resume his relationship with Mrs. Brook is another eloquent maternal gesture,

one that does not escape his notice: "You're indeed, as she herself used to say, the modern daughter! It takes that type to wish to make a career for her parents" (*AA* 289).

By the end of the novel, Nanda's attainment of Mrs. Brook's pre-eminence at Buckingham Crescent and the promotion of her subjectivity are well underway. She takes leave of Van and Mitchy in her old schoolroom, where she also receives later Mr. Longdon, to announce her decision to live with him at his country estate. The three interviews mirror Mrs. Brook's receiving her male friends in her *salon*. James's choice of Nanda's schoolroom as the site for her stated intentions with regard to the three men points to the institution of her subjectivity. "You're up here yourself like a heroine; you're perched in your tower or what do you call it? – your bower. You quite hang over the place, you know," admits Van (*AA* 283), while Mitchy declares, "You're complete!" (*AA* 297). The schoolroom may be a fitting site for the endorsement of Nanda's autonomous selfhood, yet bookending Nanda's trajectory in the novel by that site complicates her autonomy. At the outset, she emerges from her schoolroom to join the "free circle" downstairs, but her retreat to it at the end of the novel may signal to an inhibitive value. Nanda's resistance to the enforced subscription to social protocols prevalent in that circle necessitates her complete withdrawal from all social relations. Dorothea Krook writes, "Nanda does not wholly break down; but she also does not wholly survive; and this is what now remains to be briefly examined–the manner of her destruction and survival" (153). That she cannot reboot her enterprise is also patent in one of her final remarks, "Everything's

different from what it used to be" (*AA* 310).[27] The process of subject formation entails a costly premium for Nanda, as it does for Maisie.

I have argued above that for both Maisie and Nanda, the project to launch a self is fraught with deterrents issuing from the knowledge they acquire in their respective worlds. Their transactions of that knowledge within the masculinist economies they inhabit lead each to capitulating from otherwise estimable bids for subjectivity. The harshness of this reality is somewhat attenuated, for in both novels, knowledge proves a divided signifier: it privileges even as it defeats Maisie and Nanda, as I have shown. Conversely, deficit of knowledge also nets dire results for Aggie in *The Awkward Age*. When Mr. Longdon observes her at close quarters in Chapter XVIII, she strikes him as a figure who "with its neck in a pink ribbon, had no consciousness but that of being fed from the hand with the small sweet biscuit of unobjectionable knowledge" (*AA* 146). The discourse of Mr. Longdon's impression references a domesticated lapdog; the wholesomeness of permitted "knowledge," normative subjectivity. The Duchess hems Aggie in a "consenting dependence" and "impartial politeness" so hermetically that the girl appears to Mr. Longdon different "from any young person he had ever met in that she had been deliberately prepared for consumption and … the gentleness of her spirit had immensely helped the preparation" (*AA* 145). Mr. Longdon's impression of Aggie gauges her commodification on the Victorian marriage market. The Duchess screens Aggie's exposure to social consciousness because she believes,

> It's not [men's] idea that the girls they marry shall already have been pitchforked – by talk and contacts and visits and newspapers and by the way

[27] Kate Croy echoes that observation in the last line of *The Wings of the Dave*: "We shall never be again as we were!" (*WD* 407). Premiums levied upon female characters who venture subjectivity also constitute the great spectacle of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove.*

> the poor creatures rush about and all the extraordinary things they do – quite into *everything*. A girl's most intelligent friend is her Mother – or the relative acting as such. (*AA* 48)

The Duchess's "pitchforked" leaves little doubt that the "free circle" deems the exposure of children to social relations invasive and manipulative. Hence, Duchess Jane takes Mrs. Brook to task for Nanda's socialization, while she oversees Aggie's privation from it in order to sequester her adopted daughter in the maternal fold for as long as possible. The Duchess thus services the entrenchment of masculine appropriation of female subjectivity doubly: first by Aggie's commodification into an object of desire for the male gaze. "Female sexual innocence is a product, created for consumers, its value measured in the appetites it exists both to arouse and to satisfy" (*False Positions* 166). Secondly, as Maeve Pearson suggests,"[Aggie's] childish innocence and her vacuity have been carefully cultivated in order to create a publicly deceptive *trompe l'oeil* of her aunt's virtuous interiority" (113).[28] Mrs. Brook perceptively notes, "the child has been for Jane, I admit, a capital little subject, but Jane has kept her on hand and finished her like some wonderful piece of stitching. Oh, as work, it's of a *soigné*!" (*AA* 184-85). By monitoring Aggie's individuation, the Duchess projects herself as a paragon of virtue in the novel's masculinist economy.

Knowledge circulates in *The Awkward Age* quite differently for Aggie than it does for Nanda or even for Maisie, for that matter. Maisie's knowledge is not so much "propositional knowledge (effable or ineffable) but know-how: a set of skills that is the condition for the

[28] In her study juxtaposing children's initiation into private and public spaces on both sides of the Atlantic in James's works, Pearson has also adroitly exposed in James's fiction the fallacious integrity of nurseries. They "harbor ... domestic and private dangers, ones that erupt from within the family ... The resultant vortices of adult passions that James's children get caught up in transform the sanctuary of the nursery into a claustrophobic and imprisoning space" (107-8). Pearson offers the omission of Nanda's two younger siblings from the novel's narrative thread as evidence of this confinement.

possibility of becoming an adult" (Boyce 2). For Nanda and Aggie, knowledge comprises sexual identity: awareness of it for the former, and ignorance for the latter. Aggie's insulation from it is founded on the Duchess's belief, shared by the "free circle," that its deployment would contaminate her. Mrs. Brook, the vortex of the novel, proves her right: by allowing, even encouraging Nanda's exposure to the circle's prurience, she virtually precludes Nanda from marriage. Consequently, Nanda achieves an appreciation of her self, but she pays dearly for it. Ronald Blythe argues

> Self-knowledge can be obtained only at a cost, at being defiled by 'knowing'. A conventional marriage alone permits a young woman to know, and thus proceed to self-knowledge. Aggie is thrust through the convention by her old-fashioned aunt so that she can break out, not settle down. Nanda, self-aware, dismisses marriage. (xix)

Once Aggie leaves the maternal fold, she bolts headlong onto the Duchess's libidinous course. Having been denied her adolescent sexuality, now she overcompensates for the deprivation. As Harold remarks, "She *has* gone at a pace … But then don't they always – I mean when they're like Aggie and they once get loose – go at a pace?" (*AA* 248). Soon after Mitchy heeds Nanda's counsel and marries Aggie, she takes Petherton for a lover. Nanda correctly identifies Aggie's course as one of self-discovery: when Mitchy visits her for the last time, she elucidates him upon it:

> "Aggie's only trying to find out – "
>
> "Yes – what?" he asked, waiting.
>
> "Why what sort of a person she is. How can she ever have known? It was carefully, elaborately hidden from her – kept so obscure that she could make out nothing. She isn't now like *me*." (*AA* 302)

The two mothers of the novel aim at replicating themselves in their daughters, but they follow different tactical routes. By virtue of her "modernity," Mrs. Brook flouts the social prescription of a mother's censorial role in rearing her children and fails at the objective; Duchess Jane succeeds at hers by embracing that prescription fully.

Precisely because Mrs. Brook's failure yields for Nanda a propitious context to flesh out her subjectivity, her mother, who cannot dismantle that context, elects instead to complete her abandonment of Nanda. She manoeuvres Nanda's acknowledgement of having read the French novel Van had lent to her. The calculated revelation renders Nanda unmarriageable, leaving no other option but to accept Mr. Longdon's offer to become his companion. The same book also has contrary repercussions for Aggie, who, in the same scene, is playing with Lord Petherton offstage a game of hiding the novel. Aggie's integration in the "free circle" is well underway.

I have already shown that Mrs. Brook and her male friends' principal anxieties swell from Nanda's incipient selfhood. To quell their solicitude, Mrs. Brook resorts to destabilizing Nanda's individuality and to replicating herself in her daughter. Mrs. Brook's venture is not altogether different from the Duchess's project to sublimate Aggie's sexuality. The endeavours of the two mothers, I submit, are social responses to the New Woman programme, designed to steer females toward normative and reproductive sexuality. I will next examine two literary figurations James recruits to give those endeavours dramatic form in the novel.

For the first of these representations, James turns to a ritualistic staple of British social life, tea drinking, of which there is an inordinate amount in *The Awkward Age*. Nanda's first public appearance alone in the story is in Van's rooms, where she comes at her mother's

behest. Also visiting her host are Mitchy and Mr. Longdon, whom she meets for the first time. The general conversation is punctuated by Nanda's tea preparation for the three men. She announces her mother has instructed her in the formalities of the tea ceremony, for until that morning, she had taken her tea in her room. Nanda's present tea offering ostensibly signifies her conformity to social conventions and denotes the public display of her marriageability. Victoria Coulson states,

> The tea ceremony has to do with feminine service: a daughter advertises herself as available for domestic appropriation. The problem, though, is that through this act of subtle self-advertisement, the Jamesian tea-maker risks being taken for an object in the ceremony – as with the Dresden Pansy, she becomes a container, a vessel: a teacup. (*Henry James* 114-15)

In this scene, Nanda's immunity to her objectification neutralizes the inherent risk of tea service for her. She partakes in it, but her demeanour throughout the conversation discloses the independence of her mind. When Van and Mitchy press upon the advisability of her friendship with Tishy Grendon, she retorts, "I don't think it's any one's business. I shouldn't have a very high opinion of a person who would give up a friend" (*AA* 90). The tea ceremony for Nanda is not in the service of a delicate announcement of her marriageability. She defies the signifying gesture of the activity, for she privileges the articulation of her selfhood above her matrimonial hopes and expectations. On the other hand, Coulson's proposition is most apt for Aggie. On her first visit to Mrs. Brook in the novel, the Duchess informs her hostess Little Aggie is "at Mr. Garlick's class in Modern Light Literature," but she is "a little nervous about the subjects." She will collect her Aggie at five and will take her "home to her tea" (*AA* 44). The timing of "her tea," particularly in light of the parent's avowed concern regarding Aggie's

education, betrays the Duchess's effort to swathe Aggie's subjectivity by the regime of social conventions.

James affixes other values to the tea ritual: serving and drinking tea are activities that simultaneously regulate sexuality and reinforce or undermine the bond between the participants. After Nanda returns home from an outing with Mr. Longdon in Chapter XXIII, her wary mother "confronted [her] as closely as persons may be when it is only one of them who looks at the other. … [H]er mother's sad eyes considered her from top to toe. 'Tea's gone,' Mrs. Brook then said as if there were something in the loss peculiarly irretrievable" (*AA* 187). Mrs. Brook's close examination of her daughter and her "sad eyes" intimate her deeper realization that Nanda will not acquiesce to her mother's designs for her. That realization leads to her pronouncement of the "peculiarly irretrievable loss" of the bond the two might have enjoyed over tea. Mrs. Brook's withholding of tea is a code of her aversion to reinforcing the maternal bond for Nanda; the Duchess's punctual sharing of it with Aggie is the currency with which she purchases Aggie's commodification.

Tea service resurfaces in the final chapters of the novel, in approximate duplication of the scene in which Nanda makes her first appearance. The visits she receives from Van, Mitchy, and Mr. Longdon are once again punctuated by her tea offering. Van arrives first but declines to wait for Nanda's tea, despite his former claim downstairs to Mrs. Brook that he would. In that interview, "he first pour[ed] in milk to cool it," implicitly signalling to Mrs. Brook his unwillingness to enter into a liaison with her. His refusal of tea in Nanda's room similarly indicates his imminent withdrawal from her future. Mitchy arrives next: he accepts Nanda's tea twice, and in the ensuing conversation, she secures from him a promise to

maintain their friendship: "what does stretch before me is the happy prospect of my feeling that I've found in you a friend with whom, so utterly and unreservedly, I can always go to the bottom of things" (*AA* 297). Their regard for one another strengthens around the tea table. After his departure, Mr. Longdon comes, but the hour is too late for tea. The ritual is superfluous at this juncture of the narrative, because Nanda's final decision to leave her home and go to Beccles with Mr. Longdon is not conditioned by the consolidation of their friendship. Theirs is an unusual attachment which she has little choice but to accommodate.

The second figuration James employs to communicate destabilization of individuality and its accompanying sublimation of sexuality in *The Awkward Age* is the metaphor of young girls as writing surfaces. Pondering the differences between Nanda and Aggie, Mr. Longdon concludes, "the sum [of experience] would get itself done with the figures now on the slate. On little Aggie's slate the figures were yet to be written; which sufficiently accounted for the difference of the two surfaces" (AA146). Mitchy is also convinced Aggie is a "young thing … whose classic identity with a sheet of white paper has been … dropped" (*AA* 185). Rivkin finds that the blank surface as figuration of young girls (or of women, generally) is a constant in James's fiction (*False Positions* 164). Her claim is supported by not only Mr. Longdon's and Mitchy's constructions of Aggie above, but also by comparable male constructions of Pansy in *The Portrait of a Lady*, as I will show below.

In the androcentric economy of *The Awkward Age*, the metaphor of the "blank sheet" ascribes to the young female the properties of an uncharted territory that beckons the male to explore. More importantly, Mr. Longdon's figuration of "figures on the slate" organizes a young girl's experience in neat mathematical terms, and it disregards the interiority of

experience altogether. In the masculinist configurations of female subjectivity in this novel, the locus of a young girl's experience is her virginity. Rivkin writes, "The 'sheet of white paper' links female sexual innocence to the apparent conditions of representation: if experience is inscription or writing, then virginity is that receptive blankness upon which figures are inscribed" (*False Positions* 164). Coulson also points to the invasive properties of the figuration for Nanda, Aggie, and Maisie:

> Both *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age* insistently associate women and signs, suggesting that both (feminine) subjectivity and realist representation are generated by a kind of inevitable contamination. Mitchy refers explicitly to the trope of the girl as virginal writing surface, in order to reject the idea of femininity as inviolate innocence. (*Henry James* 92)

Van's earlier recommendation to Nanda to "take things in [her] pores" underpins Coulson's view. Van, too, is an active participant in the violence masculinist constructions inflict upon female innocence in the novel.

Just as Aggie functions as a foil to Nanda, so, too, Pansy Osmond operates as Isabel Archer's "docile alter ego" in *The Portrait of a Lady* (Coulson *Henry James* 114). Aggie and Pansy both inspire their observers to imagine them in like terms. Gazing upon Pansy, her suitor Ned Rosier concludes, "She was admirably finished; she had had the last touch; she was really a consummate piece. He thought of her in amorous meditation a good deal as he might have thought of a Dresden-china shepherdess" (*PL* 301). Rosier echoes Mr. Longdon's mental note that Aggie "had been deliberately prepared for consumption." Pansy's congruence with Aggie can also be traced in the narrator's description of the latter:

> Little Aggie presented, up and down, an arrangement of dress exactly in the key of her age, her complexion, her emphasised virginity. She might have been

> prepared for her visit by a cluster of doting nuns, cloistered daughters of ancient houses and educators of similar products" (*AA* 68).

On her first appearance in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Pansy returns home from a convent where her father has placed her accompanied by two nuns. Aggie's and Pansy's insulation hinges on their parents' overriding aim to prime their daughters for consumption by the highest bidder on the marriage market.

Another parallel between Pansy and Aggie is the figuration of both as a "blank sheet". In Pansy's case, the agents of representation also include females. During Isabel's first attempts to decipher Pansy, the construction of the girl's selfhood by her father after an idealized model is readily legible, though Isabel cannot as yet perceive its ominous import. She even solidifies that construction by imagining Pansy as "a sheet of blank paper–the ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction. Isabel hoped that so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text" (*PL* 238). The insidious properties of Mr. Longdon's and Mitchy's renderings of Aggie above return here more succinctly: Isabel views Pansy as a empty space pending signification by only a male agent. In Chapter XXX, Isabel again sees Pansy as "really a blank page, a pure white surface, successfully kept so" (*PL* 268). Contrasted to the little girl, Pansy's aunt, the Countess Gemini seems "by no means a blank sheet; she had been written over by a variety of hands, and Mrs. Touchett … pronounced that a number of unmistakeable blots were to be seen upon her surface" (*PL* 238). The sardonic shade of the latter figuration invariably alludes to the Countess's unrestrained sexuality, contrasted with Pansy's chastity.

Although she is not the main character of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Pansy Osmond suffers an objectification similar to Aggie's. Upon reuniting with her after her term at an Italian convent to which he had entrusted her education, Gilbert Osmond expresses his satisfaction at the limited rate of her physical growth: "I prefer women like books–very good and not too long" (*PL* 198). His choice of the adjective to describe her height is curious but indicative of his conception of women: he prefers "long" to "tall," thereby tellingly, and not altogether unconsciously, revealing his conception of women. Gilbert Osmond's construction of his daughter as an idealized form of femininity borders on a masculinist abstraction of her gender, one that receives its fuller treatment during his marriage to Isabel Archer.[29]

The diminution of Pansy Osmond's selfhood is clearly established in the above scene not only in her interactions with her father and the nuns, but also during Madame Merle's immediately following visit. When Pansy expresses her wish to take leave of the sisters by embracing them, Madame Merle intervenes and asks her to remain at her side, a request to which Pansy yields, albeit disappointedly. "She was evidently impregnated with the idea of submission, which was due to any one who took the tone of authority; and she was a passive spectator of the operation of her fate" (*PL* 202).[30] The narrator's last statement reiterates Maisie's introverted surveillance of the dealings of the adults, now with a significant distinction: whereas Maisie contemplates the variously damaging actions of her parents and step-parents and charts her course of survival accordingly, Pansy does not disclose, at least at

[29] Several critics of the novel have widely established Gilbert Osmond's objectifying moves toward appropriating Isabel Archer's selfhood. I undertake the exploration of those gestures in my next chapter.

[30] Kristin Sanner calls attention to the analogy between Pansy's relationship with Osmond and Isabel's with Mr. Archer. Sanner writes, "Posited against Isabel's relationship with her own father, the relationship between Osmond and Pansy offers an ironic perspective on Isabel's character" (156). I return to Sanner's assertion in my discussion of motherhood in *The Portrait of a Lady* in the third chapter.

this phase of her life, a similar capacity. She is unreservedly deferential to her father's demands and satisfies them enthusiastically. In Chapter XXX, when Isabel visits her and takes her by the arm to the courtyard for a stroll, Pansy stops short: "I may go no further. I've promised papa not to pass this door" (*PL* 270).

Pansy's obsequious temperament proceeds along the Romantic notions of idealized girlhood in Victorian fiction, according to which a young female is perceived as an innocent and untainted being, to be appreciated by an eventual male suitor. Such reductive views of adolescent girls convert them into desirable objects, waiting for the deserving connoisseur to acquire the *objet d'art*. Not coincidentally, both Gilbert Osmond and Ned Rosier are collectors of beautiful ornamental objects and works of art. Osmond's passion for copying drawings of ancient coins or other bric-a-brac would seemingly endow him with an artistic temperament, but his aestheticism proves detrimental to the process of Pansy's subject formation, since it divests her of any volition and arrests it into the mold he has forged. As Michèle Mendelssohn suggests, "In *The Portrait of a Lady* … Pansy Osmond embodies her father's morbid aesthetic preoccupations" (81). Muriel G. Shine concurs: "For Osmond, his daughter's innocence has merely aesthetic worth; it completes the picture of the perfect *jeune fille*, preserves the compositional arrangement of his domestic work of art" (104-5). The exposition of this corruption of Pansy's individuality also recalls Sir Claude's construction of Maisie.

I have demonstrated in this chapter the inexorable levies James's young females confront in the course of propelling themselves as subjects in social politics disposed unfavourably for their psychic growth. Lee Heller says,

> The lesson so often taught in nineteenth-century novels, that the individual must break away from familial constraints in order to assert a coherent self, is

> complicated when placed in the context of Jamesian epistemology … The family cannot provide a genuine, stable identity because its function as the source of relationships is to instrumentalize its individual members. (77)

That complication proceeds from Maisie's and Nanda's several enterprises of self-discovery and enlightenment, which *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age* thwart even as they sanction the two girls' projects. Kaja Silverman confirms that the two novels "similarly focus on girls who are 'exposed' to adult sexuality, and in each case the interrogation of that personage's knowledge forms the central drama of the book. … [K]nowledge leads not to power and social integration, but to loss and isolation" (162). For Maisie and Nanda, the desire to acquire a self proves ultimately discouraging. For Aggie and Pansy, who comply with their parents' commandeering of their selfhoods, not even the tiniest particle of self-discovery illuminates their psychic lives.

Chapter Two

Textual Subversions and Promissory Revisions in

The Wings of the Dove and *The Portrait of a Lady*

For the young female protagonists of *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*, subjectivity unfurls within two contending spaces. Epistemological operations endorse Maisie's and Nanda's respective assertions of emerging selfhood, but at the same time, patriarchal energies arrogate their processes of individuation and inscribe masculinist commodifications upon their "blank sheets" of innocence. These competing practices undercut for Maisie, Nanda, and Pansy the assurance of subjectivity – or defer it, at best. In these novels, the first of the two spaces where subjectivity is denied prosperity is diegetic, and the second, tropological. In the space of the narrative, the young girls witness the reprehensible behaviour of the adults around them, and become unwilling participants to their actions by virtue of their awareness; within the discourse of the narration, the male characters brand them with inscriptive and appropriative metaphors. These two spaces collaboratively abate the processes of subject formation of the girls.

The figuration of female characters as sites of imprint ramifies even more insidiously in James's *The Wings of the Dove* and in *The Portrait of a Lady*. In both novels, James complicates the trope of "writing" and expands it to include "reading." Merton Densher, a journalist, asks, "The women one meets–what are they but books one has already read?" (*WD* 222); and Gilbert Osmond tells Madame Merle she "express[es]" herself "like a sentence in a copy-book" (*PL* 436). Moreover, the sites of inscription now comprise of adult females as well as young girls. Isabel Archer joins Pansy Osmond at the receiving end of Gilbert Osmond's erasures of the self, but she also suffers the divestiture of her agency by Caspar Goodwood, Madame Merle, and even Ralph Touchett. The circulation of textual metaphors is particularly more copious and more problematic in *The Wings of the Dove* than in *The Awkward Age* or *What Maisie Knew*, for females as well as males actively engage in constrictive "writing".

Merton Densher and Lord Mark "read" and "write" Milly Theale and Kate Croy, but the latter two also script narratives for one another; and Milly's companion Susie Stringham, another writer by profession, proves equally adept at the same activity. Milly's position as the wealthy American foreigner facilitates her diminution by nearly everyone: Kate pins the epithet "dove" to her; Lord Mark identifies her with the Bronzino portrait, and so on. For Kate, the checks of her individuality originate at home: her father, her sister, and her Aunt Maud jointly confine her within textual spaces – the first two out of pecuniary want, and the latter motivated by her resolve to elevate Kate's social stature.

The conflation of "writing" and "reading" in *The Wings of the Dove* also manifests when a character frames another in literary or aesthetic parameters. I will return to this point below, to establish that these gestures impound the object in the rigid prescripts of existing literary texts or fine art and circumscribe her identity. I submit that authoring and reading activities are perversely ironic in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. James supplants the immanent creativity of the written word by assigning to it a subversive function; reading and writing become ominous signifiers, and their consequent disruptions complicate the subjectivities of the female characters in especial, who, in turn, offset these tensions by inhabiting the interstices of these disruptions and collating in them fragments of their selfhood.

The collaboration between the synchronous discursive forces I have just identified communicates the multi-dimensional functions of intertextuality, a term first coined and defined by Julia Kristeva in "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1966). She bases her theories on the theoretical work of the Russian Formalist thinker Mikhail Bakhtin, who "was one of the

first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure" (35).[31] Kristeva identifies

> three dimensions of textual space where various semic sets and poetic sequences function. These three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue are writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus). (35, 36-37)

Since the addressee is always already "included within a book's discursive universe only as discourse itself," he merges with the external text shadowing the writer's text. The horizontal coordinates of the "subject-addressee" coincide with the vertically aligned "text-context."[32] "[T]he 'literary word' [is] an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings. … [A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (36-37). It follows that intertextuality does not consist only of the "linguistic dialogue" between independent texts but occurs also in the cohabitation of "textual surfaces" within the same text.

The figurative referents of "writing" James affixes to various characters of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of a Lady* open up the possibility of identifying agencies of authorship in the two novels. Barbara Hochman sees indicators of that possibility in James's earlier works:

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[31] Kristeva borrows from two of Bakhtin's works, *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, those notions which she can use conjunctively with Ferdinand de Saussure's posthumously published theories of the anagrammatical features of poetry, elaborated in Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots: les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure*.

[32] In her insightful work *Meaning in Henry James*, Millicent Bell shows the verticality of Jamesian fiction: "At one time or another, *Washington Square* invokes a reminiscence of Balzac or of Hawthorne; *The Portrait of a Lady* is meant to remind one of Jane Austen or George Eliot; *The Bostonians* is sometimes reminiscent of Hawthorne and sometimes of Daudet" (*Meaning* 23).

> James's fiction of the 80's and 90's reflects the tensions that inform the early stages of the process by which uncertainty about the nature of writer/reader relations becomes inscribed in fictional texts. Gradually displaced from the narrating center, the figure of the author reappears in various guises throughout fiction of the period. (182)

If Hochman is right, then this recuperation shatters unitary codes of signification, and what we witness in these novels is the proliferation of "writer/reader relations." In *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age* James posits young female innocence as a "blank page," able to resist to a certain degree masculinist inscription but lacking authorial properties. The considerably older female characters of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of a Lady* are still vulnerable to male appropriations, but now they propose their own textual surfaces and vie for ascendancy. The texts male "authors" inscribe onto them continue to pulverize the projects of female subjectivity, but these eroding operations meet with the resistance of female characters, who either occupy the meagre spaces of self-assertion available to them (*The Wings of the Dove*), or modulate their a priori conceptions of subjectivity as an accumulative position (*The Portrait of a Lady*).

Remarkably, authoring and reading activities as identifiable tropes are not only available to the reader, but they are also easily accessible to the characters of *The Wings of the Dove*. On the day Merton Densher renews his acquaintance with Milly Theale at the National Gallery, he contemplates his social position upon his return from New York, where he had met the American "heir of all ages" (*WD* 6). Densher finds that "His full parenthesis was closed, and he was once more but a sentence, of a sort, in the general text" (*WD* 194). In this subsumptive metaphor, Densher views himself as a contingent fragment lacking the resources to instantiate an independent whole. Similarly, as Kate Croy examines her reflection in her

father's mirror in the opening chapter of the novel, she determines vehemently that "the broken sentence, if she was the last word, *would* end with a sort of meaning" (*WD* 23).[33] The two lovers of the novel select lexical imagery to articulate their anxieties of trivialization: fragmentation stumps the constitution of a valorized self for each, and objectifying appropriations beset their respective identities. The written word thus becomes a site of disenfranchisement for both. Significantly, while Densher's social status in the metaphor above is a "sentence" tentatively integrated into an indistinct "text", Kate's is only the "last word" of a shattered syntactic unit.[34] The two intersecting constructs of signification move in opposite directions: for Densher, the process yields a qualified consolidation, but for Kate it produces definite fragmentation. The juxtaposition of the metaphors – his "sentence" and her "word" – privileges him and depreciates her. Densher's "sentence" enjoys more properties and renders him as a more unified subject than Kate's "word" does. The magnitude of his predicament is less onerous than Kate's, since his trivialization is faceless and universal: it proceeds from a generic social malaise he ostensibly shares with many young men of his age. "He brushed shoulders with brown men whose hats askew, and the loose sleeves of whose pendent jackets, made them resemble melancholy maskers" (*WD* 329-30).[35] Kate's plight is

[33] James also figures the Croy family background in syntactical incoherence: "Her father's life, her sister's, her own, that of her two lost brothers–the whole history of their house had the effect of some fine florid voluminous *phrase*, say even a musical, that dropped first into *words* and notes without sense and then, hanging unfinished, into no words nor any notes at all" (*WD* 22, emphasis added).

[34] Kate's "last word of the broken sentence" correlates with her gendered position within her family. Having no siblings to carry on the family name, Kate is literally the last of her lineage and thus deprived of the protection of the patrilineal system. See also Julie Rivkin, *False Positions* 93-94.

[35] In "'A Circle of Petticoats': The Feminization of Merton Densher," Julie Olin-Ammentorp finds that despite James's general observance of "the convention of normative gender roles … the action of the novel consistently undermines such a distinction" and feminizes Merton Densher. For a Bakhtinian reading of gendered power relations in the novel, see Sean Palmer, "Political Context Re-Considered: Henry James and Marriage Reform in *The Wings of the Dove*."

appreciably more deleterious: she finds her current stature reduced (a mere "word"), and her nearest accessible approximation fractured (a "broken sentence").[36]

The immobilization of Kate's agency by the members of her family becomes immediately evident in the very first sentence of the novel: "She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in, but he kept her unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale" (*WD* 21). As John Carlos Rowe notes, "The very syntax of the sentence imprisons her, parenthetically naming and defining her: 'Kate Croy' and 'a face positively pale'" ("Symbolization" 147).[37] Later in the novel, a similar process unfolds for Densher at a dinner party, when he must field questions about Milly: "*He met, poor Densher*, these enquiries as he could, listening with interest, yet with discomfort" (*WD* 208, emphasis added). Syntactic confinement is the common ground on which Kate and Densher find one another detained, and this shared awareness animates their romance.

Kate Croy suffers manifold incursions by her family into her existence. She endures submission to her father and her sister's plans for her, and in her social relations, she complies with her aunt Maud Lowder's wishes. "Possessed by everyone, she has nothing of her own, and a future which promises no escape, no relief, only a draining of her vitality and life" (Rowe "Symbolization"147). An unnameable (and undisclosed) wrongdoing in her father's past vitiates her. "The image of her so compromised and compromising father was all effectively to have pervaded her life, was in a certain particular way to have tampered with her

[36] In James's references to the lovers, Merton Densher's family name appears more often than his first, while the reverse is true for Kate. Extrapolating the "word" and "the sentence" respectively to the individual and the family, the above narrative patterns further solidify the subsumptiveness of the metaphors.

[37] For a Bergsonian reading of Kate's waiting in her father's rooms, see Harold Schweizer, "On Waiting."

spring," James affirms in the Preface to the novel (*AN* 297). That "tampering" is voiced by Lionel Croy, when he suggests to his daughter that she submit herself to Aunt Maud's plans for her: "It's my conception, in short, of your duty," he inflicts on her, and "the girl's tired smile watched the *word* as if it had taken on a small grotesque visibility" (*WD* 30, emphasis added). The conventional value of "duty" impinges on Kate and "word" assumes a repulsive quality in that sentence. When she visits her sister the next day, she finds the same dilemma waiting for her there. Marian Condrip presses her to maintain her current living conditions at Lancaster Gate with their aunt: "I don't see why, conveniently, I shouldn't insist to you once for all on the plain truth of the whole matter. The truth, my dear, of your duty. Do you ever think about *that*? It's the greatest duty of all" (*WD* 44). Marian's motives are the same as those of their father. She wants Kate "to 'work' Lancaster Gate as she "believe[s] that scene of abundance could be worked" (*WD* 44). Kate's immediate family exploits her unscrupulously, in order to ensure the uninterrupted flow of financial support from Aunt Maud.

Aunt Maud's metonymic representation by her address launches the formidable energies that circulate in the life of her niece. Kate views her living quarters as the site of her reduction into a feeble proposition:

> It was by her personality that Aunt Maud was prodigious, and the great mass of it loomed because, in the thick, the foglike air of her arranged existence, there were parts doubtless magnified and parts certainly vague. They represented at all events alike, the dim and the distinct, a strong will and a high hand. It was perfectly present to Kate that she might be devoured, and she compared herself to a trembling kid, kept apart a day or two till her turn should come, but sure sooner or later to be introduced into the cage of the lioness. (*WD* 37)

The three sentences above brim with images of animalistic force, the conjunction of which diminishes Kate's agency. The "great mass" that "loom[s]" implies a coalition of

insurmountable hindrances; "lioness" installs the aunt as a preying hunter; the "cage" restricts Kate's freedom of choice, and the passive verb "might be devoured" ushers annihilation into her life. Aunt Maud's residence becomes the site of Kate's disappearance.

Mrs. Lowder's home delivers forceful intimations to Densher as well. As he waits for his first interview with her in her *salon*, the spectacle of her rooms articulates her sway: "It was the *language* of the house itself that *spoke* to him, *writing* out for him with surpassing breadth and freedom the associations and conceptions, the ideals and possibilities of the mistress" (*WD* 63, emphasis added). Later in the novel, when he reflects upon another visit to Lancaster Gate, "He … took in the scene again at moments as from the page of a book. He saw a young man far off and in a relation inconceivable, saw him hushed, passive, staying his breath (*WD* 373). For Densher, as for Kate, the "word" – oral and written – assumes properties of domination.

Moreover, the appointments of Mrs. Lowder's house transform it into a theatre of cruelty for Densher: "Never, he felt sure, had he seen so many things so unanimously ugly– operatively, ominously so cruel" (*WD* 63). Interestingly, the latter quality inspires Densher to write a piece for his newspaper, so he may dispute her dominion on the very terms it challenges him. "Cruel somehow played into the subject for an article–an article that his impression put straight into his mind. He would write about the heavy horrors that could still flourish, that lifted their undiminished heads" (*WD* 63). The written text thus becomes an arena of contention where he may challenge her, but he immediately foresees his probable defeat:

> He desired to be perfectly simple, yet in the midst of that effort a deeper apprehension throbbed. Aunt Maud clearly conveyed it, though he couldn't later on have said how. "You don't really matter, I believe, so much as you think … I can bite your head off any day, any day I really open my mouth; and I'm dealing with you now, see–and successfully judge–without opening it." (*WD* 66-67)

In this silent onslaught, the cannibalistic imagery that visited Kate earlier resurfaces now for Densher. In fact, this shared powerlessness forms the basis of Kate's attraction to him. Elizabeth Allen observes, "Her relationship with Densher appears to be the one area in which she can communicate herself" (*A Woman's Place* 156). Their relationship hinges on their joint consciousness. In Chapter III of Book Six, Kate's enactment of an "arranged existence" at Lancaster Gate occurs to Densher in the guise of a theatrical metaphor:

> Mrs. Lowder had attached to her something like the artistic idea, … imposed by tradition … on a distinguished actress. As such a person was to dress the part, to walk, to look, to speak, in every way to express, the part, so all this was what Kate was to do for the character she had undertaken, under her aunt's roof, to represent. It was made up, the character, of definite elements and touches … and the way for her to meet criticism was … to be sure her make-up had had the last touch and that she looked at least no worse than usual. Aunt Maud's appreciation of that to-night was indeed managerial, and the performer's own contribution fairly that of the faultless soldier on parade. Densher saw himself for the moment as in his purchased stall at the play; the watchful manager was in the depths of a box and the poor actress in the glare of the footlights. (*WD* 206)

The imagery posits the realm of public display as the site of Kate's objectification, and there she must endure her aunt's dictation of the script that replaces her own.

Kate regards her attachment to Densher as her only recourse to evade compartmentalization within the space of the "word." Yet for all his empathy for Kate's predicament, Densher also detains her in textual spaces. "You're a whole library of the

unknown, the uncut," he suggests to her (*WD* 222). In comparison to the exorbitant levy with which Lionel Croy and Marian Condrip encumber Kate, the cost of Densher's pronouncement is considerably less steep. In fact, it is arguably enhancive, since it endows Kate with variables of subjectivity. This is precisely the meaning of his exclamation "Upon my word I've a subscription!" (*WD* 222). Still, Densher's metaphor of Kate as text is only seemingly beneficent: a closer examination compromises its grace, for the reader suspects that Kate's "script" may be inaccessible to Densher. Ironically, that mystery propels his infatuation with her. Later in the novel, the narrator reminds us of his tendency to decipher her: "He had compared her once, we know, to a 'new book,' an uncut volume of the highest, the rarest quality; and his emotion (to justify that) was again and again like the thrill of turning the page" (*WD* 309). Densher is bent on infusing his life with verve, so he may satisfy his romantic notion of "living handsomely, … not at all events reading the romance of his existence in a cheap edition" (*WD* 283).

The reduction of Kate's subjectivity does not proceed only from within her family. Her diminution gains momentum within the narratives Milly Theale creates around her. These fictions impose upon her a context of identity shaped by the values of the creator. "[Milly] placed this striking young person from the first in a story, saw her, by a necessity of the imagination, for a heroine" (*WD* 113). When their intimacy permits Kate to disclose her situation and circumstances, Milly formulates the "story" she has imagined in distinctly literary terms:

> What she already knew moreover was full, to her vision, of English, of eccentric, of Thackerayan character–Kate Croy having gradually become not a little explicit on the subject of her situation, her past, her present, her general

> predicament, her small success, up to the present hour, in contenting at the same time her father, her sister, her aunt and herself. (*WD* 114)

Alternatively, Milly also sketches a "story" in which Kate figures as a masculine archetype: her "heroine's pleasant abruptness, her forbearance from gush, her umbrellas and jackets and shoes … these things sketched themselves to Milly … something rather of a breezy boy in the carriage of her arms and the occasional freedom of her slang" (*WD* 113). Milly's masculinization of Kate deprives her of the conventional disposition of her gender; and her framework of an ambitious "Thackerayan character" is as deterministic as the exhibitive function Mrs. Lowder imputes to her niece.[38] Moreover, it exposes a reciprocal circulation in the novel: Milly devises a narrative in which Kate corresponds to a set model, and Kate composes the "text" in which Milly is predominant.[39] Richard Henke suggests that in Victorian literature, situating women in a story is a subversive act:

> At least in the nineteenth century, the idea of a woman having any experience at all was dangerous, which we can see suggested by the salacious connotations of the expression "an *experienced* woman." Almost by definition, a woman placed under the scrutinizing gaze of the novelist became a disreputable figure. (235)[40]

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[38] Milly's American imagination reveals a predilection to cast her new English experiences and acquaintances in the plots of British authors she has read. When she and Kate go to Chelsea, the squalid neighbourhood where Kate's sister Marian lives, the area evokes for Milly a "mixed wandering echo of Trollope, of Thackeray, perhaps mostly of Dickens. … [T]he adored author of 'The Newcomes,'in fine, had been on the whole the note: … Mrs. Condrip hadn't altogether proved another Mrs. Nickleby, nor even … a widowed and aggravated Mrs. Micawber" (*WD* 124-25). As I will show later, in *The Portrait of a Lady* Isabel Archer displays a similar inclination upon her arrival in England.

[39] In James's next novel *The Ambassadors* (1903), there are also two competing female "authors," Mrs. Newsome and Madame de Vionnet. "James establishes [a] subtle equation between the a priori rationalism of Woollett's Mrs. Newsome and the semiotically sensuous skepticism of Paris's Madame de Vionnet" (Kevin Kohan "Rereading" 375).

[40] Henke's assertion also comes to light in *The Ambassadors*, when Lambert Strether notices in a chapel he is visiting the "lurking figure" of a woman, who "reminded our friend … of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story . . . He … was trying with head thrown back and eyes aloft, to reconstitute a past, to reduce it in fact

In this scenario, it is possible to view the two principal female characters of *The Wings of the Dove* as "authors" of mutual encroachments, each destabilizing the conventional dynamics of the written word.

From the moment the inordinately wealthy Milly enters fashionable London society, its denizens revere her as a quantified commodity. As John Carlos Rowe states, "In the society of Lancaster Gate, 'manners' are simply appropriated to mask a primitive rapacity, not the graceful expression of an internally ordered system of relationships" ("Symbolization"144). At Mrs. Lowder's dinner party, Lord Mark tells her, "You've been shown … To be seen, you must recognise, *is* for you to be jumped at; … Look round the table, and you'll make out, I think, that you're being, from top to bottom, jumped at" (*WD* 103-04). Milly discovers that the organizing principle of their social dealings is mercantilism. "Nobody here, you know, does anything for nothing," Lord Mark tells her, offering that observation as the motive behind Mrs. Lowder's kindness toward her and her companion Susan Stringham (*WD* 107).

Lord Mark is amenable to Mrs. Lowder's project of his union with her niece, but when Kate thwarts it, he turns to the next candidate, Milly. Their conversation during dinner at Lancaster Gate establishes him as a man who clearly perceives the inherent advantages the principle of mercantilism would afford him. When Milly asks him to surmise the motivation behind Kate's warmth toward her, he offers readily, "Why your acquaintance!" (*WD* 109). Though Kate has no ulterior design in befriending Milly at that moment, Lord Mark is sufficiently astute to realize the eventual benefits friendship with an American heiress may provide to Kate: "There were more things in this than one that Lord Mark might have taken

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to the convenient terms of Victor Hugo" (*AM* 174). When he comes face to face with her later, he realizes she is Madame de Vionnet, whom he had offered "to save" (*AM* 152).

up" (*WD* 109). Maud Lowder, her niece Kate Croy, Lord Mark, Mrs. Lowder's candidate for a husband to the impoverished Kate, even her companion Susan Stringham, all assign Milly roles in their covert scripts that are plotted to realize their sometimes intersecting objectives. Each in his or her way objectifies Milly for private gains, thereby dehumanizing her.

Susan Stringham's objectification of Milly follows the route of Kate's textual immurement. Her short stories are to her the execution of her "literary mission," which consists of her depiction of "masters, models, celebrities, mainly foreign, whom she finally accounted so and in whose light she ingeniously laboured" (*WD* 78). Initially, she excepts Milly from them. Her younger friend is a "wandering princess" (*WD* 112-13), to whom Susan Stringham ascribes "the real thing, the romantic life itself, [which] positively made her hand a while tremble too much for the pen" (*WD* 78). Nonetheless, Susan Stringham almost immediately classifies Milly as the "girl with a background, [who] had been starved for culture. Culture was what she herself represented for her, and it was living up to that principle that would surely prove the great business" (*WD* 79). She undertakes the "business" by settling first upon intellectual pursuits. She reads Maeterlinck, Pater, Marbot, and Gregorovius to Milly. The instructional function she fulfills soon ceases to operate, when charting the future course of the "business" proves more perilous than she had forecast it: "All her scruples and hesitations, all her anxious enthusiasms, had reduced themselves to a single alarm–the fear that she really might act on her companion clumsily and coarsely" (*WD* 81). Therefore, she begins to encase Milly in the aesthetics of her literary productions: she is "one of her own New England heroines" (*WD* 130), and for the rest of the novel, Susan never stops romanticizing Milly. As Duco van Oostrum remarks, "[A]s an attendant, Susan will perpetuate

that image" (131). She views her ensuing relationship with Milly in terms of overwhelming fluidity, of delicate sensibilities that might crumble by some inexorable force:

> The sense was constant for her that their relation might have been afloat, like some island of the south, in a great warm sea that represented, for every conceivable chance, a margin, an outer sphere, of general emotion; and the effect of the occurrence of anything in particular was to make the sea submerge the island, the margin flood the text. (*WD* 128)

Mrs. Stringham's "text" establishes Milly at her most vulnerable. "You're not as sound and strong as I insist on having you," she claims to her young friend (*WD* 129). Her endeavour to restore to Milly the full extent of subjectivity (as she defines it) springs from her self-designated task of "taking care" of Milly. Nor is Susan Stringham's "great business" exclusively salubrious; it includes the administration of Milly's romantic involvement with Densher. "After Milly refuses to see Merton, Susan embarks on a mission to reconstitute the old romance plot. In spite of his actions, Susan upholds her idea of the idyllic yet tragic young lovers" (Van Oostrum 131). In *The Wings of the Dove*, Susan Stringham is a counterpart to Henrietta Stackpole from *The Portrait of a Lady*. Both writers adopt the project of their respective friends' happiness: Henrietta urges Caspar Goodwood to pursue Isabel Archer repeatedly, and Mrs. Stringham visits Densher in Venice to convey to him the pressing need of his visit to her.[41]

For Mrs. Lowder, Kate's marriage to Lord Mark requires first the disqualification of Merton Densher as a contending suitor to her niece. To that end, Mrs. Lowder determines to effect a romantic link between Densher and Milly, a plan for the execution of which she

[41] Christopher Nash correctly notes the principal difference setting Henrietta and Mrs. Stringham apart in their respective relations with Isabel and Milly: "Susan can never succeed … in tearing her way through the veil that separates her from the innermost action of the novel in which she appears, whereas her counterpart Henrietta unmistakably does manage to do so" (304).

conspires with Mrs. Stringham. The script they jointly write for Milly would produce contiguous results for the two collaborating women: Mrs. Lowder would continue to administer her niece's life, and Mrs. Stringham would complete her self-appointed task of Milly's transformation – her "great business" (*WD* 80). The alliance of the two women does not take into account Milly's disposition in their collaborative project at all.

The most memorable instance of Milly's objectification occurs of course at Matcham, when Lord Mark invites Milly to observe the resemblance she bears to the Bronzino portrait in his collection. "Have you seen the picture in the house, the beautiful one that's so like you?" (*WD* 137). His seemingly aesthetic association of Milly to the painting is tantamount to foisting upon her an expired self. As J. Hillis Miller states, "Milly is, in a manner of speaking, killed by a portrait" (*Literature as Conduct* 221). Nor is Lord Mark alone in subsuming Milly's identity at that moment: another guest at Lord Mark's estate, Lady Aldershaw "looked at Milly quite as if Milly had been the Bronzino and the Bronzino only Milly" (*WD* 141). Lord Mark's remark intertextually echoes the metaphor of the stage that Densher imagines as the site of Kate's submission to Mrs. Lowder. Both the painting and the theatrical performance are spectacles intended for public display and consumption; in both instances, the circulation of dramatic function promotes the exposition of a manufactured identity; and finally, the dramatic role and the portrait are permanent inscriptions in which the individual disappears.

Lord Mark's aesthetic erasure of Milly tallies with Kate Croy's scheme to usurp Milly's wealth. Kate concludes that to shirk the roles prescribed to her by her family, she must sabotage her aunt's governance of her romantic life by improving Densher's economic status. In a circular movement, she replicates her aunt's commodification of her and exploits Milly's

financial value. Laurel Bollinger posits that this circularity is central to James's vision of subjectivity: "Whether one begins as subject or as object, James imagines that the identity's trajectory circles into its opposite. This vision renders subjectivity itself unstable, vulnerable to slippage–so that being a subject is always equally an invitation to objectification" (143). During the group's stay in Venice, Kate casts Densher in the part of a young romantic suitor, a performance he must deliver regularly at Milly's Venetian residence. Paradoxically, she "manages" Densher's performance at Palazzo Leporelli, Milly's Venetian residence, [42] just as he imagined Mrs. Lowder doing the same at Lancaster Gate. In this state of affairs, the reader encounters a *mise-en-abyme*: Kate's performance as dictated by her aunt houses within it another performance for Milly, with the distinction of publicity for the first and of privacy for the latter. Even Densher does not enjoy a complete view of the mathematical workings of Kate's performance. Ironically, he can write for a living, but he is least apt among the characters of the novel to write a "text" as they all do. Priscilla L. Walton astutely observes, "Where in *The Ambassadors*, the female characters teach Strether how to read, in *The Wings of the Dove*, the female characters teach Densher, who is a reader, to write. All the characters in the novel continually compose their own fictions" (*Disruption* 124).

In *The Wings of the Dove*, characters mimic one another independently. Densher's "library of the unknown" and his theatrical metaphor endorse Kate's consumption, just as Lord Mark's Bronzino portrait engulfs Milly. In her study of the relations between absence

[42] Barry Maine identifies Palazzo Leporelli as Palazzo Barbaro in Venice, "where [James] had resided as a frequent guest of the Daniel Curtis family, a fact James helped to confirm by selecting a photograph of the Palazzo Barbaro for the frontispiece of the novel's second volume" (151). See also Lubbock, *The Letters of Henry James* 1: 87. James's renaming the palace Leporelli recalls Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, in which the title character's servant is Leporello. For a comprehensive discussion of the intertextual reverberations of that opera and its protagonist in *The Wings of the Dove,* see Alide Cagidemetrio, "*The Wings of the Dove*: Tracing the Phantom of the Palace."

and femininity in James's works, Walton postulates that they share a plurality of meaning in the economy of unknowability. "Neither can be made known, for neither has a single presence … and both elude the imposition of any final meaning. … [A]bsent presences perform an important function within James's narratives" (*Disruption* 11-12). Walton cites the second dinner party at Lancaster Gate that Milly does not attend as evidence of her proposition: "Milly's absence allows the other characters to reflect on her and to write their own texts. She is stuff for fiction because she is unknowable – she is plural" (*Disruption* 131). Hence, absence engenders a multiplicity of equally valid "texts," making it impossible to settle upon a unique signification. In Walton's view, unknowability privileges the elisions of the novel. "The absences which structure [it] are suggestive, since they assume more importance than what is 'present' within it. Hence, if the text relies on absence to induce linguistic presence, then language cannot be said to be semantically fixed" (*Disruption* 124). The unknowability of signification thus enables the written word's subversive properties that the metaphors of the novel betray. These disruptive operations do not accrue into a harmonized import; rather, they fuse into a digest of itinerant semantic constructs.[43] Walton's notion of textual plurality is a corollary of Kristeva's premise of decentralized signification:

> If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence–an adherence to different sign-systems. (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 60)

[43] It should be noted that this amorphousness of language is not applicable to the larger framework of *The Wings of the Dove*, but to the mechanics of its narrative. As Kevin Kohan affirms, "Kate's writing of her text is not to be folded into James's writing of his, for these two 'writers' speak from fundamentally different perspectives; James's narration of Kate's text supersedes it" ("Victims" 138).

Nowhere is the rapport between absence and subversive writing more manifest than in the "presence" of Milly Theale in the novel. She is the only individual whom every other character attempts to "rewrite". Kate and Densher are the most obvious candidates for that task among the cast, but Aunt Maud, Susie Stringham, and Lord Mark are as adept at composing fictions that shroud her. While viewing the Bronzino portrait at Matcham, Milly becomes conscious of their tactics. "Do let a fellow who isn't a fool take care of you a little," Lord Mark tells her, and the dire portent of his words is not lost upon Milly:

> The thing somehow, with the aid of the Bronzino, was done; … and it was all moreover none the worse for coming back to something of the same sound as Mrs. Lowder's so recent reminder. She too wished to take care of her–and wasn't it, *à peu près*, what all the people with the kind eyes were wishing? (*WD* 139)

Lord Mark's offer to "take care" of her entails injurious repercussions. In the literal sense, the remark is an allusion to her illness, the certain outcome of which she is determined to resist, or at least postpone; in the figurative sense, the verb is a euphemism for his neutralization of her. Lord Mark's proposition is a bid to impound Milly's subjectivity and shrink it to the commodity he wants to add to his social status. Kevin Kohan attests, "The reduction of Milly to a kind of image-magnet … subjects her … to the operation of a kind of metaphorization available at the paradoxical limit of the absolute" ("Victims" 140). Associating Milly with the Bronzino portrait aborts Milly's subjectivity by transforming her into an iconic object.[44]

The most subversive instances of writing in *The Wings of the Dove* are by Milly. Two pivotal samples come to light posthumously: her letter to Densher and her bequest of a

[44] For an extensive discussion of James's engagement with the iconography of British aestheticism in *The Wings of the Dove*, see Chapter 4 in Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* (202-60).

substantial portion of her fortune to him. In the case of the first, James denies the reader knowledge of its contents, eliding in this suppression Milly's intentions while composing the document. Once again, absence generates nebulous signification: does Milly charge Merton and Kate with causality? Does she express a willingness to overlook the wrongdoings of the couple? Alternatively, does she voice her gratitude to Densher for having provided to her a reason to "turn her face [from] the wall" (*WD* 336)? The reader will never obtain a definitive answer, since Kate destroys the letter in the fireplace. Yet the document establishes for the reader the unequivocal fact that its receipt cracks the collusion of the lovers. Merton will not read it, for he prefers, I suspect, to cling to his notion of having been "forgiven, dedicated, blessed" by Milly (*WD* 373), the impression he received from her during his last visit in Venice. He continues to adhere to his romantic view of her largesse, even after she had all the facts of his attachment to Kate and their plans for her. Ignorance of the contents of the letter would also service him to keep his memories of Milly from his last visit to her (undisclosed to the reader) intact. Kate's refusal is more sinister: by destroying the letter, she can maintain her distance from her actions; more importantly, as Kate has begun to divine Densher's infatuation with Milly, she hopes burning the letter will remove Milly's last memento from their lives.

The second of Milly's subversive texts is similar to but much more consequential than the first. Its authorial intention is of the same order as the first – unknowable. Once again, the effect the testamentary text produces is devastating for the lovers. Unable to accord his assent to its contents, Merton refuses to accept Milly's gesture, stipulating to Kate that their union must exclude it; Kate cannot imagine a future for her with Densher without it, and so she relinquishes both her lover and the inheritance. "We shall never be again as we were!" she acknowledges to him in the last line of the novel (*WD* 407). Gert Buelens reads in this

pronouncement the divergence of the couple's associative constructions of identity: "Kate and Densher will never again be as they were because their identities have come to rest on syntagmatic contexts that are wholly at odds with one another" (424). In any case, Milly's documents frustrate the couple's enterprise, but ironically, they also enable Mrs. Lowder's project.

In his 1909 Preface to the novel, James relates Milly's disposition toward her illness, as well as the functions of the other characters in her life:

> If her impulse to wrest from her shrinking hour still as much of the fruit of life as possible, if this longing can take effect only by the aid of others, their participation (appealed to, entangled and coerced as they find themselves) becomes their drama too–that of their promoting her illusion, under her importunity, for reasons, for interests and advantages, from motives and points of view, of their own. (*AN* 291)

These remarks concern of course the alignment of the characters vis-à-vis Milly in the novel. With the exception of her physician Sir Luke Strett, who counsels her "to take the trouble 'to live'" (*WD* 153), few characters are privy to the tumults of Milly's psychic life; even her companion Susan Stringham has limited access to it. Milly's "drama" consists of unpacking her selfhood and inserting it into the lives of those who seek to appropriate her value. Her "drama" becomes partially visible to the protagonist couple very late in the novel. Densher gains a view of it only toward the end, and Kate only prior to her exit from his rooms on the last page. Paradoxically, Milly's death intersects the emergence of her subjectivity. She becomes the woman who enacts Kate's perception of herself at the outset of the novel: the "last word of [Milly's] broken sentence" does indeed end with "some sort of meaning." Critics have regarded Milly's signifying herself through her last testament as an ambivalent gesture, invested with either vengeful or redemptive implications. J. Hillis Miller suggests that Milly is

unable to attune herself to the materialistic economy of the circle into which she stumbles; hence, "her innocence and betrothal to death are dovelike weapons that allow her to defeat all the others and bring their projects to shipwreck, including Densher's desire to marry Kate" (*Literature as Conduct* 221-22). Likewise, Julie Olin-Ammentorp affirms that in a perverse mode, Milly's beneficence precipitates retribution in the end:

> Indeed, her final bequest to Densher can be seen not as beneficent and forgiving, thus manifesting the supposedly feminine power of grace, but as profoundly manipulative. If she understands Densher as well as we assume she must in order to divine his motives, yet covers for him with Lord Mark, then is it not just possible that she is wreaking her revenge upon both him and Kate? (50)

Other critics have interpreted Milly's benefaction to Densher in the economy of Christian ethics, whereby Milly is Densher's Christ-like redeemer. Edith Wyschogrod, for example, writes, "Millie's vast fortune empowers her moral actions so that Densher's transfiguration can be consummated" (45).[45] I will address both of these analytical strands in the next chapter, where I explore the inadequacies of such teleological readings.

The Wings of the Dove offers a beguiling view of women. Their mutual objectification prompts them to defy it by any available strategy. It would be facile to derogate Kate by laying the onus of Milly's commodification on her, or to stigmatize Milly for the devastation she inflicts upon Kate's romance with Densher. Each contends with inimical circumstances in her life; each is compelled to resist the agencies seeking to thwart her selfhood. To do so, Kate and Milly devise subversive texts designed to underpin their subject positions, and the

[45] See also Eben E. Bass, "Henry James and the Venetian Voice;" Jeanette Amestoy Flood, "Henry James and the Grace to Forgive;" Kristin King, "Ethereal Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove*: The Transparent Heart of James's Opaque Style;" Jeff Staiger, "The Fall as Conversion: Catholicism and the American Girl in James's 'Travelling Companions;'" and Christopher Stuart, "*The Wings of the Dove*: 'Across Wide Spaces and Bristling Barriers.'"

decipherment of those texts yields multivalent readings for the reader. This is also Ali Taghizadeh's view: "*The Wings of the Dove* grounds metaphorical signification in a number of ways. The application of these ways of metaphorical signification … render it a de-centered verbal structure where experience is not already stored in the word but is the product of the free play of the sign" (1169). Every one of these readings is cogent, yet each is also intriguingly resistant to a final, definitive, and above all, unique signification.

More importantly, this paradox coincides with postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, in which the subject is also neither finite nor definitive. Kristeva tells us, "the unitary subject discovered by psychoanalysis is only one moment, a time of arrest, a stasis" ("The Subject in Process" 134). The postmodern subject rejects monolithic organization and favours instead a fluctuating configuration, whose morphing agency is determined by both human relationships and language operations. The heterogeneity of that agency closely mimics the continual dialogue between discursive sets at the intersection of textual spaces, and the resulting confluence of de-centred subjectivity and writing produces the multifunctional writing subject. As Janet M. Ellerby elegantly states,

> Kristeva helps us recognize the subject who writes, who produces text, not only as a social agent and a social product, but also as a psychologically complex subject with rebellious impulses–a *writing subject* who consciously and unconsciously evades rubrics, intentionally and unintentionally disrupts and destroys them. (33)

In this light, the inherent relativism of the intertextual significations of Kate Croy's and Milly Theale's "texts" subsidizes their resistance to the branding categorizations they confront in *The Wings of the Dove*. As we shall see next, that relativism becomes equally serviceable to

Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, specifically in the framework of the revisions James implemented in the novel for its 1908 edition.

In the fall of 1905, James undertook preparations for the New York Edition of his complete works. He was to select from his novels and tales those he wanted included in the "Collective and Definitive Edition," and to write fifteen new Prefaces (Lubbock, *Vol. II* 70).[46] James began rereading and editing his earlier works scrupulously, approaching his task with a rigorously critical eye.[47] The years 1905-1907 were "the most difficult phase of James's work on the New York Edition, the period when he was 'retouching' the first three novels in the series, *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*" (Parker 495). In a letter to Mrs. Dew-Smith dated November 12, 1906, James outlined his work on *Roderick Hudson* as follows:

> to attempt to retouch the *substance* of the thing would be as foolish as it would be … impracticable. What I have tried for is a mere revision of surface and expression, as the thing is positively in many places quite *vilely* written! The essence of the matter is wholly unaltered–save for seeming in places, I think, a little better brought out. (Lubbock, *Vol. II* 55)

James's preoccupation to "bring out better the essence of the matter" in *Roderick Hudson* entailed his exploiting the capital of implications the earlier edition adumbrated, a methodology he also undoubtedly exercised when working on *The Portrait of a Lady* as well.

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[46] James chose to exclude seven titles from the New York Edition: *Watch and Ward* (1871), *The Europeans* (1878), *Confidence* (1879), *Washington Square* (1880), *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Other House* (1896), and *The Sacred Fount* (1901). Of these, *The Europeans* and *Washington Square* were two early short novels that had enjoyed critical and commercial success. See Michael Anesko, "Ambiguous Alliances: Conflicts of Culture and Ideology in the Making of the New York Edition;" Martha Banta, "The Excluded Seven: Practice of Omission, Aesthetics of Refusal;" and Ira B. Nadel, "Visual Culture: The Photo Frontispieces to the New York Edition."

[47] James's last secretary Theodora Bosanquet recounted in her memoir *Henry James at Work* (1924) that James found rereading his earlier works difficult. On one occasion he reportedly told her, "They seem … so bad until I *have* read them that I can't force myself to go through them except with a pen in my hand, altering as I go the crudities and ineptitudes that to my sense deform each page" (39). See also Lubbock (*The Letters of Henry James* 1: 4).

His secretary Theodora Bosanquet claimed, "[T]he real business of revision was, for Henry James, neither substitution nor rearrangement. It was the demonstration of values implicit in his early works, the retrieval of countless lost opportunities for adequately rendering" ("The Revised Version" 58). James termed such emendations as "illuminatory classification, collocation, [and] juxtaposition" of discursive components.[48] Through his stringent editorial work, he unearthed previously underdeveloped nuances in *The Portrait of a Lady*, a vertical movement to which he alludes in the 1909 Preface to *The Golden Bowl*:

> What it would be really interesting … would be … the history … of the growth of the immense array of terms, perceptional and expressional, that, … in sentence, passage and page, simply looked *over the heads of the standing terms* – or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and *aspired to a clearer air*. (*AN* 339, emphasis added)

James's figuration here dovetails with the "unforeseen principle of growth" he attached to *The Awkward Age* in the Preface of that novel, "the quite incalculable tendency of a mere grain of subject-matter to expand and develop and cover the ground when conditions happen to favour it" (*AN* 98). In other words, "The artist … must be able to bring out the 'promise' of a situation, 'any situation, that appeals,' but must also recognize the situation's 'reserves,' that which he cannot predict or entirely determine" (Ringuette 117).[49] As I will show later, James's conception of revision as the unfurling of signifying kernels strewn in an earlier text correlates to the progression of Isabel Archer's psychic growth.

The "unforeseen principle of growth" also coincides with Kristeva's deflation of the essentialist concept of a literary text as the centripetal organization of homogeneous textual elements, and her privileging instead their ongoing operations in a polyvalent production.

[48] From a letter to Miss Grace Norton, dated March 5, 1907 (Lubbock 2: 67).
[49] Ringuette is quoting James from the Preface of *The Awkward Age*.

"Any 'literary' text may be envisaged as productivity. Literary history since the end of the nineteenth century has given us modern texts which, even structurally, perceive themselves as a production that cannot be reduced to representation" ("Semiotics" 86).[50] Interestingly, "production" is a term James repeatedly applies to his works: in the 1908 Preface of *The Ambassadors*, he writes: "the moral involved … [was] not that the particular production … exhausts the interesting questions it raises, but that the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms" (15). Maria Margaroni sees larger, associative values in the generic application of the term to literary texts:

> Thinking of art or literature in terms of production might help us reconceptualize meaning as the contingent, unstable outcome of a series of relations: i.e. the relations between discrete elements *within* the work and the relations between (social, economic, political or aesthetic) structures forming the 'outside' of the work. ("Lost Causes" Lechte 9)

In addition to literature, Margaroni's view is especially relevant to the processes of constituting subjectivity, since the subject, much like signifying practices, cannot be detached from the historical moment in which it attempts to substantiate itself; neither can it function outside the continuum of discourse, the very space of its incorporation. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth defines postmodern subjectivity as "the moving nexus or intersection at which a unique and unrepeatable sequence is constantly being specified from the potentials available in the discursive condition" (412). Little is stationary in Ermarth's formulation: postmodern subjectivity is a "moving nexus," and its specifications are contingent on the "available

[50] Kristeva's postulates adhere closely to Roland Barthes's distinctions of "work" from "Text." Barthes argues that "the Text is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed. The difference is this: the work is a fragment of a substance, occupying a part of the space of books … the Text is a methodological field … the work can be seen, … the text is a process of demonstration" ("From Work to Text" Leitch 1471).

potentials" in the interstices between language functions contemporaneous to it. I suggest that this relativism is the foundation upon which rests Isabel Archer's "production" of her position as subject.

Returning to James's revisions for the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, we find that his preoccupation to "bring out better the essence of the matter" of the novel included embellishments of the characters' associations with textuality, as evinced by comparing each of the following two instances of emendation:

> [Miss Stackpole] was very well dressed, in fresh, dove-coloured draperies, and Ralph saw at a glance that she was scrupulously, fastidiously neat. (*PL* 1881: 86)
>
> [Miss Stackpole] rustled, she shimmered, in fresh, dove-coloured draperies, and Ralph saw at a glance that she was as crisp and new and comprehensive as a first issue before the folding. (*PL* 79-80)

By elaborating Ralph Touchett's perception of Henrietta Stackpole, James situates her description in a markedly textual frame. A similar focalization occurs in a later characterization of Madame Merle:

> She was always plain Madame Merle, the widow of a Swiss *négociant*, with a small income and a large acquaintance, who stayed with people a great deal, and was universally liked. (*PL* 1881: 264)
>
> She was always plain Madame Merle, the widow of a Swiss *négociant*, with a small income and a large acquaintance, who stayed with people a great deal and was almost as universally 'liked' as some new volume of smooth twaddle. (*PL* 217)

In the 1881 edition Henrietta Stackpole is a correspondent journalist for the American periodical "The Interviewer;" and Madame Merle's regular morning activity is writing letters, as "something was always turning up to be written about" (*PL* 1881: 199). The appended

figurations cited above enlarge the scope of Henrietta's and Madame Merle's respective attributes of textuality present in the 1881 edition.[51] In each of the instances above, James's revisions bring the parsing of the two women in line with Kate Croy's figuration of her existence as a syntactic unit. The addenda render both Henrietta Stackpole and Madame Merle as independent texts: the former is now "a first issue before the folding," and the latter, "some new volume of smooth twaddle." Laurel Bollinger submits that James's revision of *The Portrait of Lady*

> consistently accentuates references to women as text, even replacing key passages of description with references to books and writings. James thus underscores the novel's depiction of subjectivity, bringing the 1908 version of the novel into line with the theory of subjectivity that had increasingly come to dominate his later works but that was clearly present even in the 1881 version. (142)

Whereas in *The Wings of the Dove* James recruits mostly the subversive register of textual figurations, he complicates their circulation in *The Portrait of a Lady* by allowing the paradigm to contribute to both the impairment and constitution of subjectivity.

In both editions of this novel, James renders the self-perceptions of the male characters or his depictions of them by textual associations. Ralph Touchett thinks his frail health makes living "like reading a good book in a poor translation–a meagre entertainment for a young man who felt that he might have been an excellent linguist" (*PL* 1881: 39; 1908: 45). In the case of the ambitious Caspar Goodwood, the 1881 edition reads, "his friends took for granted that he would not always content himself" with owning the patent of a cotton-spinning process (*PL*

[51] Critics who have investigated the textual history and thematic entailments of James's revisions of *The Portrait of a Lady* include Nina Baym, "Revision and Thematic Change in *The Portrait of a Lady,*" F. O. Matthiessen, "The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle," Anthony Mazella, "The New Isabel," Michael Millgate, *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy,* and Hershel Parker, "Henry James 'In the Wood': Sequence and Significances of His Literary Labors, 1905-1907."

1881: 120). In the New York Edition, the sentence becomes "his friends took for granted that he would somehow and somewhere *write himself in bigger letters*" (*PL* 106, emphasis added). Finally, Gilbert Osmond's former remark "I like little women" (*PL* 1881: 241) expands to "I prefer women like books–very good and not too long" (*PL* 198).

In both editions, James links Isabel, too, with books and texts, particularly in the early parts of the narrative. In her adolescence, she prefers "la[ying] the foundation of her knowledge in the idleness of her grandmother's house" to attending school; and as "she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books," she devotes large portions of her time to reading in a little-used room (*PL* 33).[52] Isabel is mostly self-taught; her choice of reading materials includes "the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot", and in music, Gounod (*PL* 42).[53] When Mrs. Touchett meets her for the first time in Albany, she finds Isabel sitting solitary in that room, reading a book on "German thought" (*PL* 34). In this eclectic selection, there is a particular bent on Romanticism, which tints Isabel's self-perception: "She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world" (*PL* 41). Several critics have deliberated the ways in which Isabel's romantic disposition informs her outlook

[52] In her early childhood abroad, Isabel and her two sisters had "no regular education and no permanent home; they had been at once spoiled and neglected; they had lived with nursemaids and governesses (usually very bad ones) or had been sent to superficial schools, kept by the French, from which, at the end of a month, they had been removed in tears" (*PL* 40). Upon her return to America, Isabel spent only one day at the school across from her grandmother's home (*PL* 32).

[53] "The music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, [and] the prose of Eliot" are specified only in the 1908 edition. They replace the more generic "a glimpse of contemporary aesthetics" component of Isabel's self-designed curriculum in the 1881 edition (29). Evidently, James was striving to complicate Isabel's education by colouring it with both the Romanticism of the former two and the realism of the latter. Another revision that supports this view is Isabel's perception of her grandmother's house: the "picturesque dwelling" (*PL*1881: 21) becomes a "romantic home" (*PL* 32). For a discussion of James's uses of music in the novel, see Laura Hodges, "Recognizing 'False Notes,'" throughout.

(Bollinger 145; Sabiston 29). For Mary K. Ventura, James "made the romance/novel duality an integral part of his craft, the heart of his dialectic" in *The Portrait of a Lady* (37). We can find that duality in James's specification of Browning and Eliot among the authors Isabel reads. What I want to emphasize here is Isabel's Romanticism. James places Isabel's vision of her ambitions in a pointedly Romantic context: her project would be to

> move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic … She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action. (*PL* 54)

Isabel consistently reverts to a Romantic lexicon to express herself. Finding Lord Warburton a guest at her aunt's home in England, she exclaims, "Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" (*PL* 27), a remark that reveals her predisposition to shaping her imagination by the stories she has read, like Don Quixote (Sabiston 33). Ventura confirms, "Isabel often perceives objects and experiences as though they are in a book that she is becoming a part of" (40-41). "Do you know where you're drifting?" asks her friend Henrietta. "No, I haven't the least idea," Isabel answers, "and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see–that's my idea of happiness." (*PL* 146). Adeline R. Tintner has identified Isabel's source for this image: it is Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (218).[54] Similar to Milly Theale's musings during her visit to Chelsea, Isabel surveys her new experiences through a literary lens. This predilection, coupled with her position as the central figure on the diegetic grid of the novel, enables characters to entangle her in their narrative webs. Millicent Bell writes, "Isabel is the object of observation by the other

[54] See also Sabiston 30, 45*n*25.

characters as well–who either try to understand or to manipulate her, like generous or tyrannic novelists" (*Meaning* 85).

Isabel's Romanticism also underpins her initial perception of Gilbert Osmond. At the conclusion of her visit to his Florentine hilltop residence,

> She had carried away an image … of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arno … It spoke of … a rich association; of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land; … of a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated together that the career appeared to stretch beneath it in the disposed vistas and with the ranges of steps and terraces and fountains of a formal Italian garden–allowing only for arid places freshened by the natural dews of a quaint half-anxious, half-helpless fatherhood. (237) [55]

Isabel's portrait of Osmond, of his talent to "cultivate beauty and perfection together," places him in a horticultural setting imbued by the intellectual pursuits of a male who animates his property. Laurel Bollinger states, "[B]y equating her lived experiences with the novels she has read, Isabel permits her limited ability to read texts to govern her capacity to interpret and to experience real situations" (147). Bollinger's assertion is demonstrable in Isabel's study of Osmond with her daughter Pansy:

> He presently sat down on the other side of his daughter, who had shyly brushed Isabel's fingers with her own; but he ended by drawing her out of her chair and making her stand between his knees, leaning against him while he passed his arm round her slimness. The child fixed her eyes on Isabel with a still,

[55] Alfred Habegger has traced the inspiration for Gilbert Osmond and Pansy to Francis Boott and his daughter Lizzie, Americans James had met during his travels in Italy years before (*Woman Business* 153). James relates Boott's circumstances in *Notes of a Son and a Brother*: "A not other than lonely and bereft American, addicted to the arts and endowed for them, housed to an effect of long expatriation in a massive old Florentine villa with a treasured and tended little daughter by his side, *that* was the germ which for reasons beyond my sounding the case of Frank Boott had been appointed to plant deep down in my vision of things" (*Notes of a Son and a Brother* 379).

> disinterested gaze which seemed void of an intention, yet conscious of an attraction. (*PL* 220-21).

The scene is rife with suggestions of Osmond's quasi-incestuous appropriation of Pansy and her acquiescence to it, but Osmond has other motives for the risky display of his attachment to the girl. Alfred Habegger asks, "Could Osmond be using Pansy to reach Isabel in some sinister fashion?" (*Woman Business* 151). Habegger believes so, for he interprets Isabel's wish a little later in the scene "to have her movements directed" (*PL* 223) as her desire to "mimic the feelings that presumably possess the serene daughter" (*Woman Business* 151). I am not entirely convinced by Habegger's linkage: for to identify in Isabel the desire to submit to Osmond at this time would entail the hasty attribution of Svengaliesque dominance to Osmond; rather, I believe Osmond's body language is a somatic index of his colonization of the female mind. Isabel is not equipped to decipher Osmond's coded demeanour, for she is too focused on classifying him in one of the "groups of half a dozen specimens" of people she has met, "individuals [who] belonged to types already present to her mind. Her mind contained no class offering a natural place to Mr. Osmond–he was a specimen apart" (*PL* 224). She is endeavouring to find for Osmond a category in the catalogue of texts with which she is familiar. For Habegger, Isabel's fascination by Osmond's uniqueness stems from her troubled relationship with her father:

> A choice dream has magically come to life before the eyes of the free American girl. She is not in the dream, of course, for the simple reason that she is not distinguished. She is not like the refined man and the docile girl. *He* would never abandon her in her eleventh year. *She* would never be restless. They do not change their plans every day. How comforting just to finger the quiet picture they make. (*Woman Business* 152)

Habegger grounds Isabel's projected self-annexing to Osmond above in the psychological residue of her abandonment by her father in childhood, "when her father had left his daughters for three months at Neufchatel with a French *bonne*" (*PL* 40). I believe this argument is a convenient substantiation of Habegger's theory of paternal authority in James's fiction, and as such, it is not as compelling a contention as the attribution of Isabel's fascination by Osmond to her Romanticism.

Isabel's scant social interactions in America and her travel to England approximate Nanda's position at the beginning of *The Awkward Age*. Both emerge from a cloistered state to fashion their respective selfhoods. Isabel's resolve to construct a self monitors all her dealings. The enterprise is paramount to the point of being deterministic: "I can't escape my fate … I should try to escape it if I were to marry you," she tells Lord Warburton (*PL* 118). To Isabel, the breakthrough of her self is feasible through the assimilation of lived experiences in her imagination, which "was by habit ridiculously active; when the door was not open it jumped out of the window" (*PL* 39). Shot through this lens, Isabel Archer's subjectivity project may be described as "the history of the growth of one's imagination," James's phrase in the Preface for describing his methodology in the novel (*AN* 47). How does one undertake the enhancement of imagination? Stephen Koch avers that "for James, imagination is, among other things, what turns observed experience into understanding" (524). To Isabel Archer's astute mind, experience is a divided signifier: it represents the prescriptive societal conventions permeating her world, yet it can also be a private digest of empirical discernments of import. She deems the first objectionable, not only because it stomps on the individual by setting rigid expectations, but, more importantly, also because it stifles one's originality. When Ralph Touchett describes her desire to survey the world as wanting "to drain the cup of

experience," Isabel retorts, "No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself" (*PL* 134). She seeks to consolidate her perceptions into a coherent outlook, but her Romanticism circumscribes the ambition. "Isabel has only been faithful to the illusions of freedom and felicity she has nourished all along her adult life" (Maini 85). Even critics who do not agree with Isabel's representation as a flawed romantic character find there is something lacking in her judgment: "[T]hrough a series of clear and conscious choices [Isabel] treads a path toward great and unnecessary personal unhappiness. That she does so is not a simple mistake, though there is some element of misjudgment" (Seabright 314).

Precisely because Isabel is vulnerable to associations with textuality, the male characters of the novel exercise upon her their authoring interventions, which run the gamut from utter dismissal of her individuality to its complete appropriation. For her brother-in-law Edmund Ludlow, Isabel is an other who must be banished from their midst. When Isabel's sister Lilian asks him, "I don't see what you've against her except that she's so original," he responds, "Well, I don't like originals; I like translations … Isabel's written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out. She ought to marry an Armenian or a Portuguese" (*PL* 38).[56] When her inheritance proves detrimental to her happiness, Isabel thinks Mr. Touchett, who has bequeathed a sizeable portion of his fortune to her, is "the beneficent author of infinite woe" (*PL* 358). Bollinger submits that such male interventions fuse into "a recurrent pattern in James's *The Portrait of a Lady:* women figured in terms of written language, but bound to

[56] In *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, Nancy F. Cott specifies the consequences of a woman's marriage to a foreign-born man in 19th century America: "The woman and her future children were ejected from the national community for her foreign marriage, and could rejoin only if her husband decided to be naturalized" (144).

men unable–or unwilling–to 'read' them" (139).[57] The metaphor denies agency to its female subject and reassigns her creative energies to the male imagination. The figuration of young females as sites of male imprint is a persistent trope in 19th century fiction. In her study of masculine constructions of female identity, Susan Gubar writes:

> Th[e] model of the pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation–a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality. Clearly this tradition excludes woman from the creation of culture, even as it reifies her as an artifact within culture (247).

James provides several instances of such reification in the novel. Osmond reduces Isabel to an *objet d'art* he would own by marrying her: "he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects" (*PL* 258). Similarly, Ned Rosier looks at Pansy Osmond and sees the "Infanta of Velasquez" (*PL* 311), an intertextual anticipation of Milly's collapse onto the Bronzino portrait. Millicent Bell posits that the stimulus to collect art often sublimates the sterility of Jamesian aesthetes:

> The lust for beautiful objects can be read … as a representation of psychological displacement, that 'fetishism' which substitutes inanimate objects for the bodily zones as a source of satisfaction. In this last connection it becomes plain why sexual blockage or deflection is involved in James's stories of aesthetic collectors. Of course, the morally perverse Osmond is a collector of *beautiful* objects, his wife being one of them. But so is the innocuous but ineffectual Rosier, who fetishizes his adored Pansy as a Dresden shepherdess; so is even the noble but invalid Ralph, who seems to have had a 'considerable collection' of bric-a-brac. (*Meaning* 205)

[57] Other female characters who share Isabel's predicament in the novel are Mrs. Touchett, whose husband and son find her telegrams "rather inscrutable" (*PL* 24); Henrietta Stackpole, who reminds Osmond "of a new steel pen–the most odious thing in nature" (*PL* 409); and Countess Gemini, who "needs a grammar, but unfortunately [is] not grammatical," according to her brother Osmond (*PL* 224).

For his part, Ralph Touchett constructs an architectonic narrative around Isabel. Soon after her arrival at the Touchett estate, Ralph questions "whether he were harbouring 'love' for this spontaneous young woman from Albany; but he judged that on the whole he was not." He concludes "If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him … [then] she was … finer than the finest work of art–than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral" (*PL* 63). Ralph's contemplations not only replicate Lord Mark's abbreviation of Milly Theale to a cultural artifact, but also point to the decidedly sexual fund of his desire:

> He surveyed the edifice from the outside and admired it greatly; he looked in at the windows and received an impression of proportions equally fair. But he felt that he saw it only by glimpses and that he had not yet stood under the roof. The door was fastened, and though he had keys in his pocket he had a conviction that none of them would fit. (*PL* 64)

By ascribing aesthetic merit to Isabel, Ralph transmutes her individuality into an object of desire he wishes to obtain but cannot. As an acquisitive move, his gesture is almost as devastating to Isabel as Osmond's tethering her with his own proprietary entitlement. Chris Foss concurs: "[I]t is precisely through his aesthetic appreciation of her that he effects his more subtle appropriation of her as feminine Other. If Osmond relates to Isabel as art collector, Ralph relates to her as art critic, … a relation nonetheless objectifying if ultimately less disabling" (255). Through Lord Warburton's marriage proposal and Caspar Goodwood's persistence as a contending suitor, Isabel becomes a prize the men covet. In his work on theories of subjectivity, Nick Mansfield states that when in literature

> erotic rivalry progresses, the female love-object is often depersonalized and set aside … as a token romantic discourse gives way to the intensity of a male protagonists confrontation with a male rival. Woman becomes not an equal

> partner in an open-ended human relationship, but a mere prize in the struggle for dramatic triumph and resolution between the hero and his nemesis. (98)

Isabel declines Lord Warburton's and Caspar Goodwood's matrimonial offers, for she regards both men as conventional representatives of the patriarchal regime she is intent to ward off. "I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs," she tells Goodwood (*PL* 143). She justifies her refusal of Warburton's marriage proposal by suggesting to her cousin Ralph Touchett, "There are other things a woman can do … I want to look about me" (*PL* 133-34). James tells us at the outset of the novel, "She had a desire to leave the past behind her, and … to begin afresh. This desire indeed … had led to her beginning afresh a great many times" (*PL* 39). Mobility thus becomes for her a defiant mode of negotiating with the societal pressures exerted upon her. Isabel rebuffs the traditional role in conjugal relations that both Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood chart for her, but her injudicious marriage to Gilbert Osmond reinstalls her in the symbolic order of patriarchy, and the very roles she rejects ironically infest her life.

Before their marriage, Osmond presents himself to her as a man who thought himself self-sufficient, but who nevertheless experienced unsatisfied desires that made him irritable. He claims knowing Isabel has improved his outlook upon life:

> Now I'm really satisfied, because I can't think of anything better. It's just as when one has been trying to spell out a book in the twilight and suddenly the lamp comes in. I had been putting out my eyes over the book of life and finding nothing to reward me for my pains; but now that I can read it properly I see it's a delightful story. (*PL* 297)

Osmond's dissimulation constructs Isabel as a salubrious textual stimulus in his dejected life, yet his deception makes no effort to appear attentive to her textuality. Worse yet, Isabel is a *tabula rasa* for Osmond. As Laurel Bollinger puts it, "Gilbert Osmond, presenting himself as

interested in textuality, proves uninterested in Isabel's; he has interpreted her not as text but as an object, rendering her incapable of control over her own textuality" (155).

Isabel's diminution by Mrs. Touchett springs from purely self-serving motives. She tells her son Ralph when she met Isabel "in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary room on a rainy day, reading a heavy book, [she] was boring herself to death. She didn't know she was bored, but when I left her no doubt of it she seemed very grateful for the service" (*PL* 47). Lydia Touchett claims to have "acted conscientiously" in asking her niece to accompany her to England, thinking Isabel "was meant for something better. It occurred to me that it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world" (*PL* 47). In fact, Ralph's "gubernatorial" (*PL* 43) mother recruits her niece to suit her own social needs. Free from marital obligations, Mrs. Touchett lives mostly abroad and moves in social circles of her own. When Ralph questions her intentions for Isabel, Mrs. Touchett's answer is, "My duty … I thought she would do me credit. I like to be well thought of, and for a woman of my age there's no greater convenience, in some ways, than an attractive niece" (*PL* 46, 47). Lydia Touchett blurs the line between her self-involved plans and Isabel's individuality. In this, she anticipates Maud Lowder's manipulative relationship with her niece Kate. Still, though Mrs. Touchett insists on being practical to the point of appearing eccentric, she is not cunning. We cannot accuse her with casuistry or deception. She freely admits to harbouring ulterior motives behind her patronage of Isabel, because she believes her generosity compensates for her solicitation of Isabel's companionship. As in *The Wings of the Dove*, mercantilism administers the social functions of the individual.

Mrs. Touchett's pivotal status as the point of origin in Isabel's story and Serena Merle's plotting the subsequent course of that narrative lead Juliet McMaster to state, "Mrs. Touchett and Madame Merle, fairy godmother and sorceress, have similarly imposed their magic–though Isabel's vulnerability to it has been of her own making–to freeze her life into material for use" (62).[58] Madame Merle's relationship with Isabel hinges on the "poisoned drink" of experience Isabel vehemently rejects. Isabel believes by wandering from one unique experience to the other, she will eventually convene an equally original identity. "Isabel Archer mistakes dynamism for stasis" (Warren 124-25). On the first day of their acquaintance, Madame Merle's seductive worldliness intrigues Isabel, who cannot determine whether she is of French, German, or Austrian descent (*PL* 154). The narrator solidifies this opacity by affirming she has a "world-wide smile [that] over-reached frontiers" (*PL* 153); later, Madame Merle informs Isabel she is travelling to Norway and Malta (*PL* 169). Her indeterminate past and her constant mobility encourage Isabel to credit Madame Merle with having incarnated her own concept of identity. As Isabel sips tea with her on that first afternoon, she concludes, "[H]er manner expressed the repose and confidence which come from a large experience … She was in a word a woman of strong impulses kept in admirable order. This commended itself to Isabel as an ideal combination" (*PL* 154). Thus germinates Isabel's high esteem of Madame Merle, who strikes her as "round and replete, though without those accumulations

[58] Several critics have commented on James's selection of Merle as the name of this memorable character. Heffernan thinks "[h]er name … evokes the magic, enchanting powers of the legendary Merlin, counselor to King Arthur" (371*n*54). Oscar Cargill offers an extended intertextual proposition regarding the origin of the name. He purports the name recalls Alfred de Musset's 1842 story "Histoire d'un merle blanc" (The Story of a White Blackbird) (91). Diana Bellonby agrees with Cargill and further claims that "*merle*, or blackbird, was one of James's favorite metaphors for describing Sand's literary capacity" (216). Bellonby employs these associations to advance her argument that "Madame Merle [is] a rhetorical proxy through which [James] works out his fascination with Sand and his evolving definition of literary mastery. Madame Merle functions as a surrogate author" (204).

which suggest heaviness" (*PL* 153). Isabel, who had once thought "If one's two-sided it's enough," now thinks Madame Merle is the "polygon" her cousin Ralph finds "charming" in a woman (*PL* 133). Though Isabel realizes her new friendship is incommensurate with her idealistic appreciation of it, she reasons the inadequacy is not in Madame Merle, but in the very nature of any ideal: "It was a thing to believe in, not to see–a matter of faith, not of experience. Experience, however, might supply us with very creditable imitations of it, and the part of wisdom was to make the best of these" (*PL* 163). Isabel's "experiences," consisting of those observations actions often follow, lead her to settle for Madame Merle's approximation of her ideal: "She often reminded herself that there were essential reasons why one's ideal could never become concrete" (*PL* 163). Suspended between the "ideal" and the "concrete," between her Romanticism and the realism of the observed world, Isabel reasons the semblance of the latter sufficient. She shies away from prodding Serena Merle further: "With all her love of knowledge she had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance" (*PL* 173). She decides to reconcile the abstract to the tangible and traverse the ground that divides them. Since Isabel "would be what she appeared and she would appear what she was" (*PL* 54), it does not occur to her that Madame Merle may be projecting a well-rounded dissimulation of herself. Isabel's identity is in the making; the process is a rounded forgery in Serena Merle.

When Isabel inherits her fortune, the opportunity to shape an identity by amassing experiences presents itself to her. At that crucial moment, Isabel's friend Henrietta voices her concern about the impact of her wealth upon her life: "I hope it won't ruin you; but it will certainly confirm your dangerous tendencies" (*PL* 187). When pressed to name those

propensities, Henrietta alleges Isabel has a myopic relation with the world and projects a grim perspective for her:

> The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality–with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people who will be interested in keeping them up. … [Y]ou think you can lead a romantic life … by pleasing yourself and pleasing others … You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views–that's your great illusion, my dear. (*PL* 188)

Henrietta's admonition rings true to Isabel, who looks "troubled and frightened" for an instant (*PL* 187-88). Henrietta is certain Isabel will inevitably compromise herself by privileging European morals over their shared American values: "Isabel's changing every day; she's drifting away–right out to sea … She's not the bright American girl she was. She's taking different views, a different colour, and turning away from her old ideals. I want to save those ideals" (*PL* 109). Henrietta's nationalistic aversion to the "arbitrary standards" of Europeans impels her to intervene; she will extricate Isabel from her "graceful illusions" and prevent a marriage to "one of these fell Europeans" (*PL* 108-09). Elizabeth Sabiston regards Henrietta's (and Goodwood's) fervent nationalism as a prophylactic screen making them impervious to the perceived decadence of Europeans: "They are the active, bustling Americans not really open to the European experience, and Isabel is caught in the middle between them and the Europeanized conspirators" (41).[59] Henrietta composes her own script for Isabel when she

[59] Critics generally agree that Henrietta is the representative of the liberated New Woman figure in the novel: Kumkum Sangari, for example, writes, "Henrietta is partly modeled on the popular caricature image of the New Woman–bluff, hearty, androgynous–which dominated the 1880s" (721). See also Mathews (193), Peiffer (98), and Sabiston (38). Despite her advocacy of women's self-reliance, Henrietta eventually marries Mr. Bantling. Millicent Bell reads her marriage as evidence of James's disparagement of the values Henrietta promotes: "In the

encourages Caspar Goodwood to pursue his transatlantic romance (*PL* 109). Even after Isabel's marriage to Osmond, Henrietta never loses sight of her objective, all the way to the very end of the novel.

Isabel may be aware she occupies the position Sabiston plots for her (Henrietta and Goodwood insist on the point sufficiently), but she fails to discern that Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond are dictating to her a script she is to perform. Completely absorbed by her wish to disengage herself from American values, Isabel finds in her inheritance the opportune means for realizing her project of accumulating experiences by roaming. Richard Adams submits that Isabel emulates Madame Merle, whose "practice of letter writing is the sort of discipline with which Isabel readily identifies, given her similar urge to discover and experience a far-reaching continuity … Isabel … aspires to experience a form of subjective affect that agrees with the economy of Merle's epistolary practice" (217). Indeed, Isabel thinks "The best way to profit by her friend … was to imitate her, to be as firm and bright as she" (*PL* 338). She decides to travel with Madame Merle to the East, for an extended stay in Greece, Turkey, and Egypt. Prior to her departure, Osmond artfully expresses his concern that their acquaintance may come to an end:

> "You're under no obligation to come back; you can do exactly what you choose; you can roam through space."
>
> "Well, Italy's a part of space," Isabel answered. "I can take it on the way."
>
> "No, don't do that. Don't put us in a parenthesis–give us a chapter to ourselves." (261)

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end [James] collapses Henrietta as the representative of independence by marrying her off to a member of the species Isabel rejected–a rich Englishman" (*Meaning* 88).

Osmond's duplicitous textual figuration at the end of the exchange is noteworthy for its dual implications. He flatters Isabel by conferring authorship upon her, and, more importantly, he communicates to her the concordance of molding a self and producing a text. The subterfuge confirms for Isabel the notion that like a text, the self can be attained by collating jumbled clusters of experience into a conclusive and harmonious arrangement that reflects an identity. Because Isabel is receptive to the ostensible soundness of Osmond's proposition, his appeal proves efficacious. Osmond has read Isabel thoroughly. He compliments her for what she prizes most: "You have an imagination that startles one!" (*PL* 263), and immediately stages his declaration of love in a calculatedly unassuming pose, "a hand on each knee, his eyes [bent] on the floor," with "a tone of almost impersonal discretion, like a man who expected very little … but who spoke for his own needed relief" (*PL* 263). The performance of meekness is further sustained by his unflinching self-deprecation and deference to her:

> "I've too little to offer you. … I've neither fortune, nor fame, nor extrinsic advantages of any kind. So I offer nothing."… [H]e went on, standing there before her, considerately inclined to her, turning his hat … slowly round with a movement which had all the decent tremor of awkwardness and none of its oddity, and presenting to her his firm, refined, slightly ravaged face. … "For me you'll always be the most important woman in the world." (263-64)

Osmond's stark declaration of his dispossessed state is as chillingly frank as Madame Merle's earlier pronouncement "[W]hen I've to come out and into a strong light–then, my dear, I'm a horror! … *Cartes sur table*" (*PL* 168, 173). In *The Wings of the Dove*, Kate Croy announces her reprehensible intentions to Milly in like terms: "We're of no use to you–it's decent to tell you. You'd be of use to us, but that's a different matter. My honest advice to you would be … to drop us while you can" (*WD* 172).

Once married, Osmond nullifies Isabel's aspiration to marshal her romantic ideals into a cohesive text: "[H]e adjusted, regulated, animated their manner of life" (*PL* 331). He becomes not an author who creates, but an agent who expunges, as Diana Bellonby suggests: "As the objet d'art passes from Merle's hands into Osmond's, Osmond begins to assume authorial control. His style as surrogate author is to inscribe himself upon Isabel, to make her … a copy of himself (223). The Osmonds live with "a certain magnificence," but Ralph Touchett correctly notes that the splendour is a facade, "a mask [that] completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it; this was not an expression, Ralph said–it was a representation, it was even an advertisement" (*PL* 330). In an ironic subversion, Isabel enacts for her husband a position she knows too well, having presumably read Robert Browning's poetry: the memorable "last duchess painted on the wall" (Browning 158).[60] Isabel's portrait by Osmond becomes nearly complete:

> The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent? Ralph asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond. "Good heavens, what a function!" he then woefully exclaimed. (*PL* 331)

While Ralph laments Isabel's transformation from a "free, keen girl" to a "function," he fails to recognize his unwitting collaboration with Osmond and Madame Merle in effecting the alteration. Ian F. A. Bell is also of this view: "The representation which Ralph decries in

[60] Douglas Buchanan also notes the intertextual intervention of Browning's poem in the novel. Buchanan writes, "The Duke of Ferrara, in Browning's 'My Last Duchess,' bears more than a passing resemblance to Osmond's self-creation. We know that James had read and admired Browning and there are similarities between the Duke and Osmond that are fundamental to this discussion" (127-28).

Isabel is … is also the representation of Ralph's money, the money which had created that social possibility in the first place" (181).[61]

Why does Isabel marry Osmond? Patrick Fessenbecker enumerates three critical responses to the question. The first is Nina Baym's view that the marriage to Osmond is an error in judgment (190), a view Paul B. Armstrong shares: "Isabel is "trapped by circumstances she has helped to create in a misguided attempt to ground her freedom in a meaningful situation" (*Phenomenology* 103). Fessenbecker's next two propositions are transpositions of the defensibility and reasonableness of Isabel's decision: "[W]hile Isabel's actions are not justifiable, they are at least explainable," and they "are not simply explainable but are in fact justifiable" (71-72).[62] Contemplating Lord Warburton's offer, Isabel had thought "a girl might do much worse than trust herself to such a man … it would be very interesting to see something of his system from his own point of view" (*PL* 95). Yet she balked at the idea when she remembered how that very system would prove "a complication of every hour … there was something stiff and stupid which would make it a burden." Goodwood, despite having "no system at all," presses vigorously on her mind (*PL* 95). Osmond, on the other hand, neither displays a "system" nor looms before her. Marriage to Osmond would be for Isabel a wholly original aesthetic undertaking, a creation of sorts, along the lines of his counsel to her: "[O]ne ought to make one's life a work of art … I told you that it was exactly what you seemed to me to be trying to do with your own" (*PL* 261).

[61] Bell studies Isabel's conversion in the historical moment of shifting Emersonian ideals "of the valorisation of sincerity and singleness of self during the 1840s to the acceptance of performance and variousness of self during the 1870s" (179). For other investigations of Emersonian ideals as they pertain to James's representation of Isabel, see Hinton (308-11), Niemtzow (387, 395), Porte ("Introduction" 23-24), and Sabiston throughout.

[62] Fessenbecker also notes that there is yet an additional view, according to which "Isabel's actions as in some sense lacking an explanation," as J. Hillis Miller advances (Miller, *Literature as Conduct* 30-83; Fessenbecker 72).

The creative impulse overlaps with the will to defy conventions; and Isabel prides herself on her aptitude to contest fixed roles and anticipated behaviour. Ralph confirms this capacity in his reflections: "Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own" (*PL* 64). When Henrietta reproaches Isabel for having "changed; you've got new ideas over here," Isabel answers spiritedly, "I hope so … one should get as many new ideas as possible" (*PL* 91). Isabel holds Madame Merle as the exemplar of an unconventional woman, and she attempts to achieve her polished suavity by revising her own outlook on life, as she believes Madame Merle has done. Madame Merle, however, tells her otherwise: "I was born before the French Revolution. Ah, my dear, *je viens de loin*; I belong to the old, old world" (*PL* 170). So does Osmond, who takes his claim to the absolute degree: "I'm not conventional: I'm convention itself" (*PL* 265). In his essay exploring the uneasy relations between conventionality and theatricality in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Andrew Eastham contends James "achieved a dialectical sense of conventionality: both as the basis of an ideal mode of civility and as a dangerous ossification of expressive life into the mask of form" (270). Both Osmond and Madame Merle bare their *cartes sur table* but Isabel misreads them deplorably. Both are glib illusionists whose performances reshape conventions into their most inhibitive forms.

Isabel's disillusionment with Madame Merle evolves as she wonders what her friend's mores conceal behind her theatricality. "She liked her as much as ever, but there was a corner of the curtain that never was lifted; it was as if she had remained after all something of a public performer, condemned to emerge only in character and in costume" (*PL* 274-75). Madame Merle's definition of the self is wholly incongruent with Isabel's notion of shaping identity through a multiplicity of perceptions. While both are creations, Madame Merle's

histrionic self operates subversively, shifting the position of the spectator from participant to casualty; or as Lydia Touchett says to Isabel, "She can do anything … I knew she could play any part; but I understood that she played them one by one. I didn't understand that she would play two at the same time … While I waited for her to interfere you were marching away, and she was really beating the drum" (*PL* 283-84). Madame Merle exerts her authorship by associating herself with materiality and inhabiting the objective world of surfaces:

> When you've lived as long as I you'll see that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us–and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for *things*! One's self–for other people–is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps–these things are all expressive. (*PL* 175)

Of course, the upshot of Madame Merle's doctrine of the self is that by associating with materiality, she risks being reduced to an object herself, or worse yet, she may disappear inside the performance. For Diana Bellonby, she "represents the paradox of authorship: she functions at once as the most prolific creator in the novel and the character most aggressively rendered invisible by the social relations she helps produce" (203). Madame Merle succeeds in her plan to have Isabel marry Osmond, so she can procure Isabel's wealth for her daughter Pansy; but by installing Isabel as a mother, she also forfeits her maternal rights.

The exorbitant cost Madame Merle must assume for having exploited Isabel becomes measureable for her after Isabel's marriage: "It appears that I'm to be severely taught the disadvantages of a false position," she admits to Osmond (*PL* 436). She now finds herself on the margins of her former lover's and her daughter's lives. "Serena Merle … has so fashioned

her own life that polished manner and cultivated performance are almost all there is of her or at least all that is visible" (McMaster 61). In the scene of her confrontation with Osmond, she reveals to him she has recently gained full awareness of his objectifying tactics, particularly in relation to herself. She privately entertains the hope she may recoup her former partnership with him, for she discovers her sway diminished now: Osmond has tasked Isabel with arranging Pansy's marriage to Lord Warburton, and Madame Merle is relegated to the sidelines. She articulates her frustration and petitions to regain her former position: "There's something after all that holds us together," she tells him. "[I]t's the idea of the good I may do for you. It's that … that made me so jealous of Isabel. I want it to be *my* work." (*PL* 436). Osmond, the consummate practitioner of objectification, reminds her of her place by pointing out to her a crack on one of her *bibelots*. After his departure, James affords us a rare access to her thoughts: "She went, the first thing, and lifted from the mantel-shelf the attenuated coffee-cup in which he had mentioned the existence of a crack; but she looked at it rather abstractedly. 'Have I been so vile all for nothing?' she vaguely wailed" (*PL* 437). Madame Merle now has to bear the expressiveness of her "things." Victoria Coulson rightly observes, "The integrity of the feminine subject is jeopardized by her implication in the manipulable object-world: as Madame Merle remarks, teacups that are 'used' 'get broken'. She has been sampled and used, particularly by Osmond" (*Henry James* 115).

Despite Osmond's commission to Isabel, his antagonism to her is unrelenting. As she takes inventory of her married life in Chapter XLII, she attempts to divine why Osmond has turned against her after their marriage. She realizes he has abridged her subjectivity by inscribing onto it the essentialist maternal function. Isabel's acknowledgement that he envisions her as a white sheet comes to her through a negation. First, she ponders, "What did

he think of her–that she was base, vulgar, ignoble? He at least knew now that she had no traditions!" (*PL* 362); then she considers the possibility that her husband's displeasure with her may have stemmed from his perceived "flatness" of her mind:

> [H]e expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour, and so far from desiring her mind to be a blank he had flattered himself that it would be richly receptive. He had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences. (*PL* 362)

Having alighted inadvertently upon Osmond's perception of her, Isabel's pride does not allow admission of it. Therefore, she immediately compensates for her alleged deficiency by surmising

> The real offence … was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his–attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching. (*PL* 362)

Though Isabel's metaphor is not strictly textual, it suggests she is a site of inscription for Osmond by way of his colonizing disposition toward her. The figuration of her mind as a horticultural matrix neatly fits the trope of gendering nature as female, consistently present in the nineteenth-century masculinist imagination (Kolodny 5, 115; Dubinsky n. pag., par. 67). Moreover, with its sexual overtones, the metaphor of the garden also intimates Osmond's misogyny: he coerces Isabel's mind into submission and predicates its generativity upon his exclusive intervention. Here, Isabel is returning to her first image of Osmond standing over the landscape of his Florentine residence, only to realize how erroneous her initial impression of him had then been; and her realization is tinged with a note of self-recriminating bitterness:

> She had not been mistaken about the beauty of his mind; she knew that organ perfectly now. She had lived with it, she had lived in it almost–it appeared to have become her habitation. If she had been captured it had taken a firm hand to seize her. (*PL* 358)

It is not surprising that Isabel arrives at her realization via a retrospective thought process. The men in her life sometimes reveal their patriarchal standpoints inversely. Exasperated by Caspar Goodwood's unremitting proposals – "the spirit that sat in his clear-burning eyes [was] like some tireless watcher at a window" (*PL* 105), she tells him the motives of her refusal are her taste for "personal independence" and freedom. He retorts, "It's to make you independent that I want to marry you … An unmarried woman–a girl of your age–isn't independent. There are all sorts of things she can't do. She's hampered at every step" (*PL* 142-43). Goodwood voices the Victorian notion that a young unmarried woman has no access to the autonomous governance of her life, and she can gain valuation of it only through marriage. When Isabel tells him she plans to go abroad with her aunt for two years, his response is, "I'm quite willing to wait two years, and you may do what you like in the interval … I don't want you to be conventional; do I strike you as conventional myself? Do you want to improve your mind? Your mind's quite good enough for me" (*PL* 143). Goodwood is simply echoing here what Lord Warburton has told her earlier in similar circumstances: "You can't improve your mind, Miss Archer … It's already a most formidable instrument" (*PL* 77).

Isabel regards Goodwood's preclusion of her prerogative to choose her future intrusive, but she finds his erotic charge even more intimidating: "[I]t was part of the influence he had upon her that he seemed to deprive her of the sense of freedom. There was a disagreeably strong push, a kind of hardness of presence, in his way of rising before her" (*PL* 104-05). The second sentence in Isabel's cogitation is packed with a sexual subtext that Isabel

finds unappealing. The standard reading of her distaste attributes it to her sexual frigidity or her fear of sexual activity (Appignanesi 45; Bersani 130; Fischer 48). Other critics maintain Isabel is not unresponsive to sexual stimulation (Herron 133-34; Lamm 256). In view of James's revisions of the novel, the latter gain more credibility over the former, as Bonnie L. Herron demonstrates in the following comparison:

> [Warburton's] words were uttered with a tender eagerness which went to Isabel's heart. (*PL* 1881: 112)
>
> [Warburton's] words were uttered with a breadth of candour that was like the embrace of strong arms–that was like the fragrance straight in her face, and by his clean, breathing lips, of she knew not what strange gardens, what charged airs. (*PL* 99-100)

Herron notes, "Isabel's conscious thoughts in response to Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood are clearly more body-centered and sexual in nature in the 1908 novel" (135). This assertion invalidates the theory of Isabel's frigidity, for Isabel indeed responds warmly to Warburton's aura of sexuality. Likewise, in her final scene in the novel, Goodwood's embrace manifestly stirs her:

> His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So had she heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. (*PL* 489)

The "white lightning" and the "flash" bring to mind the narrator's attestation in Chapter VI that "[d]eep in her soul–it was the deepest thing there–lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive" (*PL* 56). True to form, when the "darkness return[s]," her earlier sense of

Goodwood's desire as a "hot wind of the desert … [that] wrapped her about … lifted her off her feet, while the very taste of it, as of something potent, acrid and strange, forced open her set teeth" revisits her (*PL* 488). Isabel flees straight to the house, presumably to return to her husband in Rome. Her resistance to Goodwood's advances is spurred by her aversion to the proprietary inflections of masculinity articulated through his sexuality. Isabel's dramatic exit from the novel brings no closure to her story; and we have no indication that she may have achieved restitution of her so desired "personal independence." At the same time, her decision makes available to her new potentialities, new "reserves" and "promises," which, as I shall argue below, present themselves as tentative avenues leading to her position as subject.

The open-endedness of Isabel's decision has generated much deliberation in the scholarship of the novel. Habegger situates it within the framework of James's "betrayal" of his cousin Minny Temple:[63]

> To make Isabel marry Osmond, and then go back to him once she knows better, was to be unfair and illiberal to the memory of a free spirit. It was to insist that even the American girl, the freest woman of all, finds freedom too much of a burden, and it was to forget that any heroine worth making an ado about can be defeated only against her will. (*Woman Business* 26)

Habegger argues that despite James's deep affection and high regard for his cousin, he also refused "to imagine that [she] could have survived on her own terms" (*Woman Business* 181).[64] Moreover, according to Habegger, James held a dismissive view of the female writers

[63] Mary (Minny) Temple was the daughter of Henry James, Sr.'s sister Catherine Margaret. She was orphaned at age nine, and died of tuberculosis at the age of 24, on March 8, 1870 (Richardson 117).

[64] Habegger supports this view by citing from a letter James wrote to his friend Grace Norton in December 1880. In response to her query whether Minny Temple was the inspiration for Isabel, James wrote: "[T]here is in the heroine a considerable infusion of my impression of her remarkable nature. But the thing is not a portrait. Poor Minny was essentially *incomplete* & I have attempted to make my young woman more rounded, more finished" (qtd. in *Woman Business* 160). Joseph L. Tribble submits that the source for Isabel's characterization

he had read in his youth, a view that informs his own female characters by the "ancient theory that women are weaker than men" (*Woman Business* 12, 26).[65] Habegger supports this claim by citing James's upbringing and his relationship with his father, Henry Senior: "James had been vigorously instructed by his father not to believe in Minny's or anyone else's free intrepidity" (*Woman Business* 180). Habegger also posits that in *The Portrait of a Lady* James reworked the orphaned girl and her much older guardian/lover narrative from 1860's women's fiction. As persuasive as Habegger's multi-sourced genealogy of the novel is, I am not entirely convinced by his historicized contentions, for his investment in authorial intentions does not take into account the dialectical aspects of Isabel's decision.

Other critics have interpreted Isabel's final decision as her capitulation to the patriarchal energies in her life (Ash 156; Fabi 7), her death drive (Slyck "Isabel Archer's Delicious Pain" 635), a yearning to achieve transcendence through suffering (White 69) or through a mystic "self-emptying" and renunciation (Priest 164; Miller *Versions* 24). While these are all largely valid socio-historical and philosophical arguments, I am inclined to agree with Donatella Izzo, who argues that Isabel's return to Osmond is a decision made not by choice but by urgency. Isabel rejects Goodwood's petition "to consider nothing … to save what [she] can of her life … [not] lose it all simply because [she has] lost a part" (*PL* 488), because his offer collapses him onto Osmond. "Goodwood's love–a deceptive promise of redemption and happy ending–is actually presented as a continuation of Osmond's

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and the plot of *The Portrait of a Lady* is *Le Roman d'une Honnête Femme*, a novel by the Swiss writer Cherbuliez, whose heroine is also named Isabel.

[65] John Carlos Rowe traces James's censure of female writers to the prominent authors who preceded him: "Henry James began his literary career by repeating, and in some cases extending, the anti-feminist views of his most important New England predecessors, notably Emerson, Henry James Sr., and Hawthorne" ("Hawthorne's Ghost" 107).

institutional domination, since it is premised on an identical arrangement of man-woman relations" (Izzo, "Setting a Free Woman Free" 116). Moments before Goodwood's plea, "with a motion that looked like violence … he grasped her by the wrist and made her sink again into the seat" (*PL* 486). Goodwood's physical force is analogous to Osmond's misogynistic interventions. As Nancy Morrow suggests,

> Isabel … successfully resists what might be called her ultimate revenge, leaving Osmond forever. She forsakes this mode of vengeance not despite Caspar Goodwood's offer but because of it. He offers her not freedom but merely a different form of bondage to the kind of compromised life lived by other wives who have chosen the same means of exacting vengeance from their unsatisfactory husbands. (80)

Isabel flees from Goodwood at that moment because she feels choosing Goodwood over her husband would entail for her an unending contest between her individuality and his "intense identity" (*PL* 489). "Goodwood represents a particularly moral understanding of sex, shot through with an imperializing arrogance" (Lamm 256). According to Leo Bersani, Isabel's return to Osmond is an inexorable ending, given James's use of narrational strategies of realism in the novel (67). I argue that the return to Osmond is not due to a paucity of options for Isabel; in her words, "there are other things a woman can do." Isabel's return ramifies from her aspiration to consistency. Before she goes to her dying cousin's bedside, Osmond tells her their marriage may have placed them in a

> "disagreeable proximity; it's one, at any rate, of our own deliberate making. You don't like to be reminded of that, I know; but I'm perfectly willing, because –because–"And he paused a moment, looking as if he had something to say which would be very much to the point. "Because I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!" (*PL* 446).

Two points can be made here: first, Osmond reveals his capacity for sharing with Isabel the responsibility for her misfortune; and near the end, he stresses to her the merit of upholding integrity in one's life. Admittedly, Osmond does not qualify as mentor to Isabel, at this or at any other point in the novel; and given his propensity to articulate falsehoods skilfully, Isabel has no reason to trust his words. At the same time, the deliberate manner in which he speaks attests to some measure of honesty in his speech; and his behest "to accept the consequences of our actions" resonates with Isabel, since she had used virtually the same phrase in defending her marriage to Henrietta earlier: "One must accept one's deeds" (PL 407). Osmond's words now furnish Isabel the motive for her decision later. That motive, I argue, is Isabel's determination to meet her husband on his terms. By accepting "the consequences of [her] actions," however masochistic her remaining in the marriage may be, she defeats Osmond by taking charge of herself, of her future. Her choice is a creative one: "[S]anctioning her first act, in turning it, retroactively, into a free act, Isabel finally creates (or invents?) her real freedom, the liberty of fully expanded consciousness, backwards and forwards, in complete, calculating control of itself" (Ramalho 125). Kimberly Lamm offers yet another credible motive for Isabel's return: "While it might be easy to see Isabel's return to Rome as a final capitulation to patriarchal authority and a renunciation of her feminist identification with independence, the possibility that she turns back to Rome for Pansy could be considered an expression of her feminism as well" (256). Indeed, Isabel may well want to do for Pansy what she was unable to do for herself, i.e., secure the girl's independence from the father, and vicariously, her own, too.

Before Isabel Archer is allowed to form her subjectivity, James subjects her to the indignities of "being written" like Milly Theale; but in her struggle to assert her individuality

and freedom he also correlates Isabel with Kate Croy, who seeks to end her "broken sentence … with a sort of meaning." Despite Isabel's initial incompetence to peer into her new friends' texts for her, she eventually launches a capacity to forge her subjectivity at her exit from the novel. This process begins with her late-night self-inspection in Chapter XLII, when the disparity between the projected self and the inflicted function is laid out in its amplitude. She embarks upon a new exploratory passage as it were, at the end of which she may find a tentative redemption. Isabel prevents her consumption into the parts of the disillusioned romantic girl or the victimized wife or the divorcée, and elects to roam instead on alternative avenues, along which she can fuse her different selves by realigning them. "Subjectivity … is constructed in the interplay between selves, an interplay that may be morally neutral or actively destructive" (Bollinger 158). We can find this position in the Kristevan conjunction of negativity and subjectivity. Kristeva submits that

> negativity is the concept which represents the irreducible relation of an 'ineffable' moment and its 'singular determination': … [it] dissolves and binds, the *static* terms of pure abstraction in a law of mobility. It therefore re-situates … all the categories of the contemplative system: the universal and the singular, the indeterminate and the determinate, quantity and quality, negation and affirmation, etc… A subject immersed in negativity ceases to be an entity exterior to objective negativity, a transcendent unity, a specifically regimented monad, but is situated as 'the most interior and the most objective moment of life and of spirit.' ("The Subject in Process" 137)[66]

Kristeva's blueprint of a subject "immersed in negativity" is brilliantly limned by James in Chapter LIII, in a paragraph describing Isabel's second retrospective study of her life. As she rushes across Italy to go to her dying cousin, she sees with "sightless eyes," travelling

[66] Kristeva specifies she is deriving the notion of negativity from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of *Negativität*, which is "distinct from Nothingness (*Nichts*), as well as from negation (*Negation*). She is demonstrating in this selection "the logic of the process which the texts of Artaud, for example, put into practice" ("The Subject in Process" 137).

mentally to “dimly-lighted, pathless lands,” where “a perpetual dreariness of winter” reigns; her mind is filled with “neither reflexion nor conscious purpose” but with “disconnected visions [and] dull gleams,” and the past and the future intermingle in “fitful images.” She thinks of Ralph, who seems to her in the enviable state of forthcoming eternal rest. James recruits here Hamlet’s idiom: “To cease utterly, to give it all up and not know anything more–this idea was as sweet as the vision of a cool bath in a marble tank, in a darkened chamber, in a hot land” (*PL* 464-65). These saturnine longings soon give way to the realization that she must continue to live. Ned Rosier had once asked, “[H]ow can you penetrate futurity?” (*PL* 186); Isabel demonstrates that she can:

> Deep in her soul–deeper than any appetite for renunciation–was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come. And at moments there was something inspiring, almost enlivening, in the conviction. It was a proof of strength–it was a proof she should some day be happy again. It couldn’t be she was to live only to suffer; she was still young, after all, and a great many things might happen to her yet. To live only to suffer–only to feel the injury of life repeated and enlarged–it seemed to her she was too valuable, too capable, for that. Then she wondered if it were vain and stupid to think so well of herself. When had it even been a guarantee to be valuable? Wasn’t all history full of the destruction of precious things? Wasn’t it much more probable that if one were fine one would suffer? It involved then perhaps an admission that one had a certain grossness; but Isabel recognised, as it passed before her eyes, the quick vague shadow of a long future. She should never escape; she should last to the end. (*PL* 466)

Isabel is enacting here a revision of her self by re-perusing her lived experiences. She has been subjected to textual destabilizations thus far, but those subversions liberate for her alternate possibilities of development. Dana J. Ringuette says, the novel’s subject “is the intervening ground between the heroine’s consciousness and community; the subject is the formation–that is, revision–of self” (125). In these parameters, it is possible to see Isabel’s recapitulations in

Chapters XLII and LIII as acts of revision, which facilitate the emergence of her roaming subjectivity by the "unforeseen principle of growth."

My preoccupation in this chapter has been to manifest the relational nature of subjectivity as it enters into dialogue with textuality. As Laurel Bollinger says, "the motif of textuality suggests a basic human vulnerability; like texts, indeed like James's own texts, we are never impervious to revision." (158). Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, and Kate Croy become aware of the fragility of subjectivity, of its capacity to reverse polarities and entrap the individual between them. Deliverance from this debilitation is problematized by the necessary act of relinquishing a former exuberance. At the same time, the female subject can discover new spaces where the self imprints itself still. In the next chapter, I explore Isabel Archer's and Milly Theale's accessions to those spaces, within the paradigms of motherhood and forgiveness.

Chapter Three

Silenced Motherhood and Calculated Forgiveness in

The Portrait of a Lady and *The Wings of the Dove*

On the morning of Ralph Touchett's death, Isabel goes to his room and finds Lydia Touchett seated at his bedside, holding his lifeless hand in hers. As Isabel embraces her, Mrs. Touchett, "stiff and dry-eyed, her acute white face terrible," deflects Isabel's commiseration by the unseemly exhortation, "Go and thank God you've no child" (*PL* 480). Mrs. Touchett's rejoinder does not signal to self-pity for having witnessed her son's death. Three days earlier, she had told Isabel his demise had long been anticipated: "There never has been [hope]. It has not been a successful life" (*PL* 473). The pragmatist Mrs. Touchett is not susceptible to wallowing in grief, for she "manage[s] to extract a certain utility" from Ralph's death (*PL* 481); namely, "She was better off than poor Ralph … since the worst of dying was … that it exposed one to be taken advantage of. For herself she was on the spot; there was nothing so good as that" (*PL* 482). Mrs. Touchett's allusion to Isabel's childlessness is at least inopportune and tactless, for it reminds both the reader and Isabel of her own son's death one year into her marriage. More importantly, Mrs. Touchett's remark is the only time in the novel Isabel's dead child is mentioned (to her).[67] This obfuscation participates in the narrational gag placed on the death of children in the novel. Countess Gemini's loss of her three children in their first year is also mentioned incidentally and only once (*PL* 239). In addition to childless mothers, there is a proliferation of motherless characters in the novel: Isabel, Pansy, Edward Rosier, Lord Warburton, and Gilbert Osmond all have dead mothers. Apart from Mrs. Touchett (whose motherly instincts are not exactly reliable), *The Portrait of a Lady* occludes representations of active biological motherhood and elects to consign the maternal function to surrogacy instead. The delegation surfaces in Isabel's evolving positions, first as a daughter

[67] Andrew Cutting rejects the notion that the failure of Isabel's marriage can be traced to the death of her child. Instead, Cutting proposes that the novel's marginalization of the first two years of Isabel's marital life and the birth of her child are instrumental to "the narrative's resistance to normative designations of Isabel as a failed, morbid woman" (*Death in Henry James* 157).

first to Lydia Touchett, later to Madame Merle, and finally as a stepmother to Pansy. Osmond, too, is part of this design: his single-parent status necessitates his donning the roles of both father and mother to Pansy, but he places his daughter in a convent, under the maternal supervision of Catholic nuns.[68] Though unarticulated, the ramifications of these moves nevertheless persist in the novel. The conspicuous stoppage of biological motherhood and the marked relegation of the maternal function to the narrative periphery cannot impede the impact of both in the life of the offspring. Beth Sharon Ash states that *The Portrait of the Lady* observes "the occultation of the mother," a psychological staple of nineteenth-century fiction (123). In fact, absent mothers abound throughout James's fiction, from *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age* to *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*, to name but only those titles I study in the present dissertation.[69]

Interestingly, the reader first learns of both Isabel's and the Countess's dead children from Madame Merle, when she mentions Isabel's loss to Ned Rosier (*PL* 305), and the Countess's to Isabel (*PL* 239). James's delegation of these diegetic reports to Madame Merle is ironically significant, because she is a childless mother herself, having surrendered Pansy to Osmond's care. Although James obscures the articulations of motherhood in the novel, childlessness quietly groups these women, in spite of their disparities. Ash argues, "Since the development of female subjectivity depends, first of all, on a maternal identification, the feminist reader is compelled to ask what James has done with Isabel's mother and how this maternal absence shapes Isabel's dream of self-fashioning" (123). Ash even submits that

[68] Osmond's and Isabel's parental functions are also on display in *The Golden Bowl*, where Adam Verver is a single parent to Maggie, whose friend Charlotte Stant becomes also her stepmother.

[69] The main character in James's 1878 short novel *Watch and Ward* is Nora Lambert, a twelve-year old orphaned girl; Miles and Flora in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) are similarly parentless. Daisy Miller in the eponymous novella has an absent father, as does Madame de Vionnet's daughter Jeanne in *The Ambassadors*.

"[P]erhaps the mother's absence serves as the submerged organizing principle of the text" (123). If Ash is right, then her speculation invokes James's much quoted definition of experience in *The Art of Fiction*: "The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, … this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience" (11). Isabel's dead child and Madame Merle's silenced motherhood bankrupt their experiences of pregnancy, the unique biological function by which they can be integrated into the symbolic order; or as Julia Kristeva puts it, "The child [is the] sole evidence, for the symbolic order, of *jouissance*, and pregnancy, thanks to who, the woman will be coded in the chain of production and thus perceived as a temporalized parent" ("About Chinese Women" 154). In this chapter, I want to isolate the ways in which the elision of the maternal function bears on female subjectivity in *The Portrait of a Lady*. To do so, I will recruit Kristeva's views of motherhood and pregnancy, insofar as they ramify in the novel. I will also turn to Kristeva to examine the ways in which her theories on forgiveness elucidate the final decisions of Isabel Archer and Milly Theale.

Motherhood figures centrally in Kristeva's theories. For her, it is the exclusive constituent of the female subject that cannot be sidestepped: "If it is not possible to say of a *woman* what she *is* (without running the risk of abolishing her difference), would it perhaps be different concerning the *mother,* since that is the only function of the 'other sex' to which we can definitely attribute existence?" ("Stabat Mater" 161).[70] Throughout her work, Kristeva systematizes the interventions of motherhood in the subject formation processes of the offspring. As I have noted in the first chapter, Kristeva submits that the child's access to signification – the symbolic order, occurs through the maternal body and its conjunct

[70] The "other sex" is of course a reference to Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1952).

amorphous space, the *chora*. Megan Becker-Lecrone explains, the *chora* is "[i]ntimately tied to Kristeva's notion of the body as a language-driven and language-driving process … a drive-determined and determining locus of what is itself unrepresentable to and by language" (154). For Kristeva, "the mother's body acts with the child's as a sort of socio-natural continuum." In the Oedipal phase, the child's acquisition of language also institutes for him "the symbolic agency, the prohibition of auto-eroticism and the recognition of the paternal function," deployments that lead the child to confront two alternatives: either to "renounce his or her own pleasure in order to find an object of the opposite sex, or renounce his or her own sex in order to find a homogeneous pleasure that has no *other* as its object" ("About Chinese Women" 148). These substitutions begin with the child's identification with the mother or the father. According to Kristeva, a daughter who identifies with the mother invests her desire in a male object, and, by doing so, "appropriates him for herself through that which her mother has bequeathed her during the 'female' pre-Oedipal phase". Through the recognition of a maternal disposition in herself, a woman "imagines she is the sublime, repressed forces which return through the fissures of the [symbolic] order" ("About Chinese Women" 150). Conversely, the girl who identifies with the father

> represses the vagina and the possibility of someone else as her partner … In her imagination, the girl obtains a real or imaginary penis for herself; the imaginary acquisition of the male organ seems here to be less important than the access she gains to the symbolic mastery which is necessary to censor the pre-Oedipal stage and wipe out all trace of dependence on the mother's body. ("About Chinese Women" 149)

For Maisie and Nanda, the inchoate bonds with their respective mothers compromise the remunerative closure of the identification phase. In *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*, we witness not the formative stages of Isabel Archer's and Milly Theale's parental

identifications, but the fallout of the unavailability of serviceable maternal attachments. Isabel's mother died in her childhood (*PL* 29), leaving her in the father's care; and Milly Theale's parents and three siblings all perished around her eleventh year (*WD* 151). For Isabel, the mother's absence channels her filial association to her father, who supplies her with "pride in her parentage" and a "great felicity to have been his daughter," despite his "occasional incoherence of conduct" (*PL* 39-40). Kristeva exposes the precariousness of the symbolic order for a daughter bereft of a sound identification with the mother: "[W]hen the symbolic order collapses … she can … die from this upheaval … if she has been deprived of a successful maternal identification and has found in the symbolic paternal order her one superficial, belated and easily severed link with life" ("About Chinese Women" 150). As I have shown in the previous chapter, when Isabel rejects marriage proposals from the gentlemanly Lord Warburton and the brash Caspar Goodwood, she boldly thwarts the agency of the "symbolic paternal order," for they are its representatives to her; but Gilbert Osmond, the third avatar of patrilineal signification, charms Isabel by cloaking that office in himself. Alongside these voluble embodiments of the paternal function, *The Portrait of a Lady*'s veil on motherhood is all the more striking. Ash notes that mothers are represented only abstrusely: "[T]he mother is hidden from view … Like Isabel, Pansy is made the daughter of a dead mother whose absence is preserved; a mother, moreover, who is replaced by a father – one who is himself idealized by his daughter" (130). In what follows, I want to untangle the novel's imbrications of suppressed motherhood, as they distend in Isabel's aspiration to an autonomous self.

Isabel's premature loss of her mother has denied her the benefits of a sustained identification with the maternal function. Kristeva has shown that individuation surfaces first

through the child's recognition of corporeal perimeters, and by the expulsion beyond them of what is detrimental to the self, including (but not limited to) unclean organic bodily functions. "[F]ilth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a *boundary* and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin" (*Powers of Horror* 69).[71] The expulsion, which Kristeva calls abjection, allows the young subject to demarcate the contours of individuality. "During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit," she writes (*Powers of Horror* 3). "The silent protest of the symptom, the noisy violence of a convulsion, immediately inscribed in the symbolic system of the family triangle, but in which, not wanting or being able to be integrated and respond, it reacts, it abreacts: it abjects" (*Hatred and Forgiveness* 185). The abjecting subject discovers later that the process is never complete and definitive, since one must be ever watchful of maintaining the borders of individuation. Abjection is a continual process, forever repeating itself outwards from the subject in a loop, because "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. … [I]t beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out" (*Powers of Horror* 2). This aggressive repulsion is the expression of a will to keep the threats to one's orderly being at bay: "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers of Horror* 4). As Nick Mansfield explains, "To Kristeva, this desperate pushing away of what the body produces, the gag reflex with which we turn on our own bodily refuse, is evidence of our violent attempts to strengthen the subjectivity–or, more accurately, the defensive position, which is all we have of subjectivity" (83). Since the child's initial access to signification is through the mother, this discharge requires that the mother's body, which housed the child earlier, now be propelled to

[71] To elaborate the relations of the body to filth, Kristeva follows and expounds the work Mary Douglas had done earlier on defilement in *Purity and Danger*.

the perimeter: “In order to become autonomous, the child must break out of this identification with the breast by abjecting its mother” (Oliver “Imaginary Father” 47). It is important to note here that this rejection is not that of the mother and her body, but of that psychic space which shelters the child:

> [W]hat the child must abject is the “maternal container.” It does not need to abject the mother’s body as the body of a woman. It does not need to abject its mother herself as a person. Rather, it needs to abject the “maternal container” upon which it has been dependent in order to be weaned from the mother. (Oliver “Feminist Revolutions” 104)

The above processes all hinge on the uninterrupted presence of a mother in her child’s life. At the same time, it should be noted that these processes do not cease to operate at the end of early childhood, as they relentlessly persist in its various subsequent stages. “The Cartesian ‘I’ becomes destabilized to the extent that the humanist emphasis on the mind/body split has been sufficiently troubled with regard to how we construct or acquire a sense of self” (Harold 869). But how does a child dispossessed of maternal involvement in her life negotiate the complexities of the stable installation of the symbolic order? When motherhood is defunct, what repercussions of the privation does the offspring confront? Kelly Oliver postulates that “[I]f we don’t have some imaginary construct that enables us both to separate from her and to separate the maternal function from her, then we misplace abjection.” According to Oliver, abjection in these cases is directed to all women, since in “our culture … the maternal function is not separated from our representations of women or the feminine” (“Feminist Revolutions” 104).

Yet there are alternatives accessible to women divested of a reliable identification with the mother, as we shall see. If, according to Kristeva, abjection is integral to subject formation,

it seems to me there are two options available to a woman who has no maternal container to abject. First, she can revivify the disengaged maternal bond in a stand-in mother, in order to recover the object of her severed abjection process, and through this retrieval overcome death. In "Stabat Mater" (1977), Kristeva suggests that human beings sometimes prevail over death through the substitution of mortality by maternal love. Kristeva cites the case of the tubercular Italian composer Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, who composed his best remembered work (from which Kristeva borrows the title of her essay) just before his death at the age of 26 (Sadie 289). Kristeva surmises, "His musical inventiveness … probably constitutes his one and only claim to immortality" and asks whether Pergolesi's "cry … referring to Mary facing her son's death, '*Eia Mater, fons amoris*' (Hail mother, source of love!) was … merely a remnant of the period." Kristeva goes on to suggest

> Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place – in the place and stead of death and thought. This love, of which divine love is merely a not always convincing derivation, psychologically is perhaps a recall, on the near side of early identifications, of the primal shelter that ensured the survival of the newborn. (176) [72]

Isabel's attachment to Madame Merle is an ardent attempt of this order; and a similar shade colours Milly's invitation to Susan Stringham to be her travelling companion. Both women have endured the deaths of their parents. Like Nanda in *The Awkward Age*, they leave behind their childhood homes, to insert themselves into the unfamiliar but enticing social circles of

[72] Linda M. G. Zerilli claims, "While Kristeva has done much to advance this critique of the mother, we ought to acknowledge that key elements of it can be found in *The Second Sex*" (129). Zerilli traces in Kristeva's work – specifically in "Women's Time," the precursory theories on maternity Simone de Beauvoir advanced in *The Second Sex* (1952). She finds in Kristeva's essay "the great divide" that sets the two authors apart:

> Whereas … Kristeva's maternal is a state beyond representation, an unsignifiable space in which the mother-to-be may trouble the word but at the unspeakable price of losing her own relation to language, Beauvoir's maternal is situated within the symbolic, a political space in which woman's relation to meaning, albeit tenuous, is the relation to be claimed by the feminist author. (113-14)

Europe. Isabel and Milly are propped as royalty by the maternal figures accompanying them during their travels. "Madame Merle … as lady-in-waiting to a princess … panted a little in her rear" (*PL* 274); and Milly is Mrs. Stringham's "wandering princess" (*WD* 112-13).

Isabel's loss of her mother in her childhood has deprived her from the benefit of identification with the maternal life-sustaining force, for which her two married sisters and her grandmother have been poor substitutes. Though her sister Lilian exhibits some concern over Isabel's future, she is not willing to be preoccupied by it. She often tells her husband, "I've never kept up with Isabel–it would have taken *all* my time … I want to see her safely married–that's what I want to see" (*PL* 37). Lilian Ludlow's "safely married" suggests that for a motherless woman like Isabel, matrimony is the ultimate wholesome state which would warrant her welfare. Mrs. Ludlow thinks should Isabel choose to forego marriage, she would potentially place herself in endangerment.

When Isabel travels to England with Mrs. Touchett, her companions there are incapacitated males, the invalid Mr. Touchett and her frail cousin Ralph. The first viable candidate to undertake a maternal disposition toward her is her aunt, who initially appears inclined to do so and even assumes maternal authority in addressing her niece: "Well, if you'll be very good, and do everything I tell you I'll take you [to Florence]" (*PL* 36). Ralph openly mentions the possibility that in bringing Isabel to England, Mrs. Touchett may have intended to adopt Isabel (*PL* 24). This scenario is soon dispelled by both the niece and the aunt, due to the incompatibility of Isabel's independent and Mrs. Touchett's unaccommodating personalities. Isabel excludes the likelihood of being adopted, declaring to Ralph and Lord Warburton "with a certain visible eagerness of desire to be explicit … 'I'm not a candidate for

adoption … I'm very fond of my liberty" (*PL* 30); and when Ralph asks his mother about her plans for Isabel, Mrs. Touchett quickly withdraws her maternal bid, having by that time had a glimpse of Isabel's aspirations to autonomy: "I shall do absolutely nothing with her, and she herself will do everything she chooses" (*PL* 49). Isabel's diegetic circumstances thus situate her in a position open to attachment to anyone of her own choosing. More importantly, such an arrangement of the plot lays all future responsibility for Isabel's tribulations squarely on her.

Mrs. Touchett's unavailability for donning a maternal role and Isabel's lack of affinities with her aunt leave no alternative for Isabel but to turn to Serena Merle, the unwed mother who has had to abnegate her parental status. Isabel's attraction to Madame Merle is in line with Kristeva's assertion "Toward the mother there is a convergence not only of survival needs but of the first mimetic yearnings. She is the other subject, an object that guarantees my being as subject. The mother is my first object–both desiring and signifiable" (*Powers of Horror* 32). Madame Merle's magnetism promises to Isabel all the properties of "an eternal friendship" (*PL* 163). Despite their substantial age difference, she is drawn to Madame Merle "not so much because she desired herself to shine as because she wished to hold up the lamp for Madame Merle" (*PL* 165). Isabel's subordinate position in the friendship is shored up by the authoritative statements of her new friend: "I often think that after forty one can't really feel. The freshness, the quickness have certainly gone. You'll keep them longer than most people; it will be a great satisfaction to me to see you some years hence. I want to see what life makes of you" (*PL* 164). A muted bitterness tinges Madame Merle's anticipation here, an unsettled frustration at having been bereft in her youth of the opportunity to shape a creditable life. A few pages later, she furthers this view by pronouncing "[I]f we can't have youth within

us we can have it outside, and I really think we see it and feel it better that way" (*PL* 170). The statement leads Isabel (and the reader) to surmise that Madame Merle sees in her a younger version of herself, luxuriating in auspicious potentialities. She certainly encourages Isabel to believe so, especially when relating her circumstances: "I haven't always been happy," said Madame Merle, smiling still, but with a mock gravity, as if she were *telling a child* a secret." (*PL* 168, emphasis added). Their friendship might also permit Madame Merle to live vicariously through Isabel, particularly since Isabel makes of Madame Merle her confidante:

> The gates of the girl's confidence were opened wider than they had ever been; she said things to this amiable auditress that she had not yet said to any one. Sometimes she took alarm at her candour: it was as if she had given to a comparative stranger the key to her cabinet of jewels. These spiritual gems were the only ones of any magnitude that Isabel possessed, but there was all the greater reason for their being carefully guarded. (*PL* 163)

The spate of confidences Isabel volunteers is the collateral she invests in her friendship with Madame Merle. Her desire to cultivate a secure bond with her new friend is not as consciously calculated as the claim I have just made implies: rather, it conveys the persistence of primal energies in her, urging cathexis in motherhood. Stephanie A. Smith argues, "Isabel finds in Serena Merle a classic mother-figure to adopt as her own pattern–for it is a mother who is supposed to be particularly 'abject' with the young, a mother who is known primarily by her relational status within the familial/social circle" (591). Isabel's introduction to Madame Merle affords her the opportunity to form cohesive relations with her adopted milieu via a maternal figure. Ash upholds this view: "For Isabel to renew herself, to be born into adulthood, she must also make peace with the sorrows of her childhood, which include the absent mother" (129). She goes further to assert that "Osmond is "both idealized father and bad mother" (145), a claim also made by Habegger, at least partially, as I have reported in the

previous chapter. From the outset of her acquaintance with Madame Merle, Isabel is fascinated by her formidable presence and wishes "to emulate [the] talents, accomplishments, aptitudes of Madame Merle, … and in twenty such ways this lady presented herself as a model" (*PL* 165). The ensuing friendship between the two women has all the markings of a mother-daughter relation. "It took no great time indeed for her to feel herself, as the phrase is, under an influence" (*PL* 165). Kristeva explains that in the patrilineal economy, the female child finds that her liaison to the mother does not progress unperturbedly, for it is fraught with inherent hurdles: a young girl may "connive[e] … with her mother, [but she has] greater difficulty than the boy in detaching herself from the mother in order to accede to the order of signs as invested by the absence and separation constitutive of the paternal function" ("Women's Time" 29). Though Isabel may be wholly unaware of the drive animating her enthrallment by Madame Merle, it permeates the dramatic prospects of their relations. As Diana Bellonby says, "Isabel's attraction to Merle … persists only in the condition of Merle's maternal secrecy, and Isabel's attraction to Osmond develops primarily according to her inclination to imitate her mentor" (223). From that juncture in the novel, James's narrative follows the model Kristeva delineates:

> [H]er eternal debt to the woman-mother – make[s] a woman more vulnerable within the symbolic order … A girl will never be able to re-establish this contact with her mother … except by becoming a mother herself, through a child or through a homosexuality which is in itself extremely difficult and judged as suspect by society. ("Women's Time" 29) [73]

[73] Melissa Solomon has advanced a persuasive argument for the homoeroticism informing Isabel's attraction to Madame Merle. She writes, "Isabel's own queer desire, which no one but Madame Merle can read and which may in part be the necessity of resisting "all that" coming from Ralph, Warburton, Touchett, et al. as 'not me,' ... certainly fuels the passion with which Isabel discovers and submits to Madame Merle" (397). While Solomon's reading is thoroughly validated by her teasing out a queer subtext throughout the novel, it is outside the scope of my concerns in this chapter.

Recall now that in her childhood Isabel travelled to Europe three times, accompanied by her sisters and father, who "wished his daughters, even as children, to see as much of the world as possible, … giving them on each occasion … but a few months' view of the subject proposed: a course which had whetted our heroine's curiosity without enabling her to satisfy it" (*PL* 40). Isabel's sizeable inheritance allows her to reprise her unexhausted European acculturation, this time in the company of a potential maternal figure. Her travels to several Mediterranean countries with Madame Merle bind the two women closer, but at the end of their three-month stay abroad, Isabel finds Madame Merle is somewhat "professional" and "slightly mechanical" (*PL* 274). She "detect[s] an occasional flash of cruelty, an occasional lapse from candour, in the conversation of a person who had raised delicate kindness to an art and whose pride was too high for the narrow ways of deception" (*PL* 275). This awareness subverts for Isabel the maternal role she intuitively projects onto Madame Merle. It is a function the latter is increasingly indisposed to assume, especially since she has laid out another utility for her younger friend's recently acquired wealth.

After her "pilgrimage to the East" (*PL* 274), Isabel feels "[s]he had ranged … through space and surveyed much of mankind. … She flattered herself she had harvested wisdom and learned a great deal more of life" (*PL* 270). The gained self-confidence inspires her to believe she can now enact the life she forecast earlier for herself: "I can do what I choose … I've neither father nor mother … I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me" (*PL* 143). To the dismay of almost every character but Madame Merle in the novel, she chooses to end her

wandering career by her injudicious marriage to Gilbert Osmond.[74] Deliberating the manifestations of agency and free will in the novel, Nancy Bentley succinctly formulates the paradox of Isabel's choice: "[Her] sudden wealth gives her a field for independent action that is rare for a woman, but it is precisely her status as a woman of means that brings on her unforeseen 'fate'" (178).

The marriage to Osmond diverts the novel's diegetic progression from Isabel-the-daughter toward Isabel-the-mother. M. Giulia Fabi is also convinced that a "'maternal strain' … informs her attraction to Osmond … a complex mixture of desires to nurture and to control him and Pansy" (5). For a motherless woman, the second of the substitutions to compensate for an aborted maternal bond is her own pregnancy. "[T]he mother's oscillating union/disunion with her child recalls her own union with her mother" (Oliver "Imaginary Father" 58). Through her body's organic experience of bearing a child, a woman can offset the lack a maternal bond:

> Recovered childhood, dreamed peace restored, in sparks, flash of cells, instant of laughter, smiles in the blackness of dreams, at night, opaque joy that roots me in her bed, my mother's, and projects him, a son, a butterfly soaking up dew from her hand, there, nearby, in the night. Alone: she, I, and he (Kristeva "Stabat Mater" 172).

According to Kristeva, "pregnancy [is] the threshold of culture and nature and the child's arrival [. . .] extracts woman out of her oneness and gives her the possibility [. . .] of reaching out to the other" ("About Chinese Women" 182). It is a "reconquest" or a "passion" that

[74] As I have indicated in the previous chapter, Isabel's decision figures centrally in the scholarship of the novel. Critics who have examined the reasoning behind Isabel's decision to marry Osmond include Dorothy Berkson (68-69), Patrick Fessenbecker (72), Laurence Bedwell Holland (51-52), Sigi Jöttkandt (70), Annette Niemtzow (386), Kumkum Sangari (721-22), Paul Seabright (319), and Phyllis van Slyck ("Isabel Archer's Delicious Pain" 644).

engenders an unwarrantable meaning and opens the floodgates of love in the mother-to-be. "[E]motions turn into love (idealization**,** planning for the child's future, dedication) with its *hate* correlative more or less reduced. The mother is at the crossroads of biology and meaning as early on as the pregnancy" ("Motherhood Today" n. pag.). In this framework, Isabel's pregnancy delivers to her the prospective closure to negotiating her motherlessness. It is here that James's narrative glosses over Isabel's pregnancy and the death of her child, effectively silencing not only Isabel's reconciliation with her mother but also her grief. The suppression does not go unnoticed by Ralph, who sees on his cousin's face "a sorrow she scarcely spoke of" (*PL* 330). Sarah Blackwood believes "[t]he unnarrated pregnancy and subsequent loss of the child is a particularly bodily caesura in the middle of the novel. … Unable to speak of or externally exhibit the sorrow she feels, Isabel's 'fixed and mechanical' aspect signals a breakdown of the organic relationship between body and mind" (276). It becomes evident that Madame Merle's and Osmond's complicit narrative has completely engulfed Isabel. Although their collusion nets for them the usurpation of Isabel's subjectivity, she redeems this depletion of selfhood to a large measure by acquiescing wholeheartedly to her maternal function as regards their daughter Pansy. "She had said to herself that we must take our duty where we find it … here was an opportunity, not eminent perhaps, but unmistakeable … to be more for the child than the child was able to be for herself" (*PL* 341). Isabel's position as stepmother to Pansy refracts her into *becoming* Madame Merle. Thus Isabel enacts the trope of the wandering American female who fails to integrate the asset of a maternal identification into her life and who resettles from her solitary life at home to one of confinement abroad.[75]

[75] This narrative design has led Stephanie A. Smith to submit that "traces of Gothicism can be found … in *The Portrait of a Lady*" (584). Smith believes Isabel's marriage renders her the incarcerated heroine of Gothic fiction,

Isabel's earnest attempt at undertaking a maternal role in Pansy's life is funded by the affinities of the two. Both have spent their motherless childhoods in seclusion – Isabel at her grandmother's house, Pansy in a convent. In fact, Pansy is a younger version of Isabel, for she believes her mother dead. Additionally, Isabel's view of Pansy has evolved from "a sheet of blank paper [to] be covered with an edifying text" (*PL* 238) to a girl whose "care … to please … was a sort of genius," and whose "soft presence [was] like a small hand in her own" (*PL* 341). Kristin Sanner correctly terms the rapport of the two as "a relationship [that] shifts back and forth from a sisterly friendship of equals to a mother/daughter association of imbalanced power but also of concerned direction" (161).[76] This characterization is particularly observable in Isabel's involvement in Pansy's romance with Ned Rosier, to which her husband is adamantly opposed. Osmond demands of Isabel that she encourage Lord Warburton to produce a marriage proposal to Pansy. By offering her cautious assistance to Rosier, Isabel tries to prevent Pansy from repeating her error, ultimately to rectify the lapse in her own judgment. Paradoxically, Isabel's attempt at abetting the union of the young couple bonds her closer to Madame Merle, for Isabel's intentions now cast her in the role Madame Merle plays in her life. "Tension arises out of precisely this type of position in *Portrait* when Isabel realizes that in order to become a 'social self,' she must model herself after the mother, while also despising her" (Sanner 157). Isabel-the-mother then splits the unilateral righteousness of motherhood, for she discovers that she must now be duplicitous to her husband and

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and she "is doubly immured by her author's description of her" (588). In other words, the novel plots the axis of Isabel's subjectivity both horizontally and vertically.

[76] Sanner focuses in her essay on the novel's observance of the American Civil War, particularly in light of the contemporaneity of the novel's plot with that historical event. She highlights the military diction in James's description of Isabel's motives, the refracted representations of mothers and fathers, and the underlying theme of independence in the novel, to conclude that "memories of the Civil War seem to permeate James's novel, resulting in characters who challenge popular assumptions regarding maternity and paternity and who question the meaning of freedom" (165).

acknowledge that "there's a quiet menace to every tender act" (Revely-Calder 327). This slippage confirms the postmodern notion of the non-unitary subject elaborated in Kristeva's work: "For Kristeva, mothers epitomize the 'questionable subject-in-process'–a subject that is responsive to the encroachments of heterogeneous unconscious material into conscious life and hence a subject that lacks a fixed or unitary identity and that regards coherent subjectivity as a provisional illusion" (Meyers 95).

Still, we must be careful not to read Isabel's defiant motherhood as an aggrieved response to her exploitation. Rather, it is a generative position she assumes to assert her selfhood, however covert her contention may be. Elizabeth Allen is of this opinion: "At an internal level, she refuses to become totally a victim of the structure which makes her object, neither is she prepared to try and exploit it. She insists on her consciousness as an independent subject" ("Object of Value" 94). Even after she learns from the Countess Gemini that Pansy's biological parents had objectified her into a profitable commodity, Isabel does not relinquish her maternal role. Before she rushes to her dying cousin's bedside against her husband's wishes, she visits Pansy in Sister Catherine's convent and asks the girl to accompany her. The invitation supersedes her future plans: Isabel means to retain her maternal function in Pansy's life, regardless of whether she intends to return to Osmond or part ways with him. Dana Luciano interprets Isabel's offer as furtherance of her submission to the patriarchal economy: "Isabel may appear, in returning to Pansy, to take up the position that Merle has created for her, as substitute mother to her own alienated child; such a move would seem to uphold the sentimental attractions of maternity as a natural refuge for women from the mechanisms of the patriarchy" (214). Sigi Jöttkandt takes the opposite view: "[I]n returning to Osmond, Isabel is not returning out of any conventional idea of a woman's duty toward her husband. Rather,

Isabel acts out of duty toward the moral law itself" (82). I subscribe to Jöttkandt's line of reasoning, for I find that by embracing Pansy as a mother, Isabel inaugurates a reconceptualized subject position for herself. "Philosophers have taught us that the logic of freedom does not reside in transgression as one might readily suppose, but precisely in the capacity to begin. … The mother's time is brought into contact with this opening, with this beginning" (Kristeva, "Motherhood Today" n. pag.).

Isabel's visit to Pansy at the convent is a fortuitous occasion for James to stage the "great scene" of confrontation between Isabel and Madame Merle, "in whose breast the suppressed feeling of maternity has long been rankling" (*The Notebooks of Henry James*, qtd. in Horne 209-10). In the scene, both women are on trial: Madame Merle by Isabel, and Isabel by the reader. But James, who consistently obviates simplistic binaries, complicates the scene by Isabel's silence: [S]he had absolutely nothing to say to Madame Merle. … She wished never to look at [her] again" (*PL* 457). Though she is "far afloat on a sea of wonder and pain," Isabel must, nevertheless, in the presence of Madame Merle in the room, come to terms with "the ugly evidence" of the perfidy she has borne (*PL* 456-57). While Madame Merle tries to engage her in a conversation about Pansy's stay at the institution, Isabel notices "a sudden break in her voice [and] a lapse in her continuity" (*PL* 458):

> Isabel saw it all as distinctly as if it had been reflected in a large clear glass. … Madame Merle had lost her pluck and saw before her the phantom of exposure–this in itself was a revenge, … almost the promise of a brighter day. … She saw, in the crude light of that revelation … that she had been an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron. … There was a moment during which, if she had turned and spoken, she would have said something that would hiss like a lash. But she closed her eyes, and then the hideous vision dropped. … Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still–to leave Madame Merle in this unprecedented situation. (*PL* 458-59)

The simile in the first line above leads Ash to claim there exists in the novel "an interplay of reflection and absence, parodic of the mirroring of mother and child in pre-Oedipal life … In the glass, Isabel and Merle double one another – specular partners, but also mere reflections" (157). Ash upholds the erasure of Isabel's self to the point that "Isabel becomes herself a phantom, a harbinger of the emptiness she glimpses in Merle, both as an agent and a victim of what is for the moment their shared insubstantiality. …" (157). According to Ash, "the hideous vision drop[s]" because Isabel is incapacitated in that moment. Thus Isabel and Madame Merle "establish between them a strange alienating misalliance: their dissociation serves only to expose a deeper involution, an incongruous congruity of identity" (157). Yet a careful reading of the passage suggests otherwise. I believe the mirror image serves another purpose altogether. True enough, seeing herself reduced to "an applied handled hung-up tool" reflected in Madame Merle as a version of her entails the obliteration of Isabel's selfhood; yet the likeness is sufficiently repellent to Isabel as to turn from it, and so the "hideous vision" subsides. Since her marriage, Isabel's choices have been determined by her diligent adherence to the position of Mrs. Gilbert Osmond, wife and stepmother; now her consciousness has the rare opportunity to choose for her self, and it elects to shun the turmoil a retaliatory move such as "hiss[ing] like a lash" would produce in her. As Marcia Ian points out, "[C]oherence is itself James's urgent and constant need; that the purpose of his coherence is to establish, protect, and conceal what he calls the 'solitude and security,' the 'safety and sanctity,' of the self" (111). I hold that the "hideous vision" is a Kristevan moment of abjection. In the last essay of *Strangers to Ourselves*, she explains the Freudian concept of "uncanny strangeness" found in the adjectives *heimlich* (the home-like) and its counterpart *unheimlich* (the uncanny, literally the un-homelike). Since the *heimlich* is always already assimilated in the *unheimlich*,

its positive meaning withdraws: "the familiar and the intimate are reversed into their opposites, brought together with the contrary meaning of 'uncanny strangeness' harbored in *unheimlich*" (182). Insofar as it pertains to one's relationship with the mother, the womb would constitute the most homelike of all loci for the individual. Simultaneously, it is the most *unheimlich* of sites, since a retreat into it is the ultimate anxiety of the offspring, ushering one's complete appropriation. Isabel's turn away from the mirror Madame Merle holds up to her above conveys her determination not to be absorbed by her mother-figure and former friend.

A little later in the same scene, when Madame Merle informs her that Mr. Touchett's bequest was made at Ralph's insistence, implicating her cousin as the instigator of her misfortune and thereby absolving herself, Isabel has "her only revenge: "I believed it was you I had to thank!" (*PL* 464). Isabel's refusal to avenge herself begs the question whether she forgives Madame Merle at all. Since she makes no reconciliatory gesture, it is difficult to detect forgiveness either in her actions or her words. Justified as her grievance may be, I believe Isabel refuses to permit the plotting of her subjecthood on the victim/perpetrator grid and pursue a measure of indemnity by a vengeful reaction. Paul Armstrong writes, "Forgiveness may be an impossible, contradictory project, but the futility of reprisal and retribution suggests the need for some mode of repair that does not merely repeat endlessly the tit-for-tat of conflict" ("Repairing Injustice" 50). She simply transcends the binarism above by privileging her self and enacts Kristeva's subject-in-process. It is from this stance that in the end, "She goes back to Europe, back to the field of experience, resistance and continuing life" (Allen, "Objects of Value" 97). As I will show next, Isabel's self-focused response to Madame Merle is the template of Milly Theale's final acts in *The Wings of the Dove*.

The parallel trajectories of James's two female protagonists are well-documented. Both Isabel and Milly are orphaned and enormously rich young American women seeking connectivity abroad. During their survey of European culture, both run into men and women who covet their wealth for their own projects. As Sheila Teahan notes, "*The Wings of the Dove* reactivates the Gilbert Osmond plot of *The Portrait of a Lady*, with Milly as a conflation of Ralph and Isabel, both dying heiress and marriageable heroine" (205). The two novels are also often mentioned together as regards the woman who inspired James as the model for Isabel Archer and Milly Theale, his cousin Minny Temple.[77] In 1870, during his first trip alone to Europe, James learned of her death. In a letter to his brother William dated March 29, 1870, James reflected on his cousin's life in the following terms:

> Her character may be almost literally said to have been without practical application to life. … She was at any rate the helpless victim & toy of her own intelligence–so that there is positive relief in thinking of her being removed from her own heroic treatment & placed in kinder hands. … [B]ut what strikes me above all is how great & rare a benefit her life has been to those with whom she was associated. (*Complete Letters* 341-42)

James's laudatory rhetoric of Minny Temple's legacy resonates with charity and selflessness, qualities decidedly tinged by Christian ethics. This reverberation also surfaces in the body of scholarship on *The Wings of the Dove* with regard to Minny Temple's fictional counterpart. Taking their cue from Milly Theale's death on Christmas Eve, critics have traced in the novel her characterization as a Christ-like redeemer. They submit for evidence her forbearance of the great transgression committed against her – Kate Croy's collusion with Merton Densher to

[77] Leon Edel was among the first to comment on James's relationship with Minny Temple and her figuration as a prototype for Isabel Archer and Milly Theale (*The Untried Years* 331-32). For a sample of other critics who have also adhered to this view, see Millicent Bell "'Type'" (97), Fowler (59), Kristin King (3), Krook (220), Poole (87), Rowe "Symbolization" (133), and Tursi (185). On the other hand, David H. Hirsch speculates whether the inspiration for Milly Theale was James's sister Alice (48).

acquire Milly's fortune and marry him after her death. Jeanette Amestoy Flood, for example, believes, "The forgiveness she extends to Merton Densher–manifested in bequeathing him a fortune despite discovering that while he was courting her he had been secretly engaged to her 'friend' Kate–is not only magnanimous, but indeed Christlike" (13); Christopher Stuart asserts that "Her death is her final gift to [Densher] and Kate; Milly absents herself in order to make their happiness possible. Here again, as he does throughout the novel, James uses Christian symbolism" (18); and Jeff Staiger suggests, "*The Wings of the Dove* … elaborate[s] a core fantasy of the American girl as suffering redeemer" (137). Still others, though less adamantly convinced of the success of Densher's redemption, confer upon Milly her even loftier attributes: Kristin King argues that "In her likeness to the wings of the dove with their capacity for flying, settling, or covering, Milly suggests the Holy Spirit settling on Christ's shoulder when he is baptized in the Jordan river" (11). These reductive identifications overlook other analytical perspectives and create new difficulties. As Sarah B. Daugherty affirms, "[T]hose who exaggerate Milly's redemptive role run into … interpretive problems, evident in their own discussions as well as in the rejoinders of skeptics" (178). Recent criticism of the novel's thematic operations, grounded in secularity and cultural materialism, has divested Milly's disposition of its religious aura and has attempted to be apologetic for Kate Croy. I propose to contribute an alternate reading of Milly Theale's munificence. Her grand gesture of bequeathing a substantial part of her fortune to Densher can be read as a multivalent signifier: while bestowing magnanimity upon her, it promotes her selfhood, curbs the maltreatment she has suffered, and leads to the definitive estrangement of the collaborating couple. James collapses the ultimate failure of Kate's project and Merton Densher's transformation onto the

emergence of Milly's subjectivity. I submit that *The Wings of the Dove* recruits the functions of forgiveness and reconciliation in the service of subject formation.

Throughout the novel, Milly contends with the fatality encroaching upon her and endeavours tenaciously to keep it at bay. Her wish to imprint her self upon the world is a bid to counterbalance the inexorability of her demise. "She had long been conscious with shame for her thin blood, or at least for her poor economy, of her unused margin as an American girl– closely indeed as in English air the text might appear to cover the page" (*WD* 181). James's reticence around Milly's illness has led critics to ground it in her Americanness. Virginia C. Fowler, for example, detects in Milly a "spiritual deficiency that unfits [her] for life … James suggests that Milly's illness is rooted in some way in her cultural identity" (58). Conversely, Jeff Staiger finds a "connection between the American girl's suffering and her power" (137); Staiger goes on to develop from this link a reading of American girls in James's fiction as "bear[ers of] the sin perpetrated against them, assuming it as a burden so as to save the sinners … from their own lower natures" (137).[78] Fowler and Staiger contextualize Milly's story by the straightjackets of culture and religion, thereby pre-empting any articulation of volition on Milly's part. Following James's tracks I outlined in the previous chapter, I hope to tease out the novel's "reserves" of signification to the contrary.

[78] Staiger's starting point is James's early short story "Travelling Companions" (1870), written almost immediately after Minny Temple's death. Staiger juxtaposes the story to "Daisy Miller," *The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove,* and *The Golden Bowl*, to conclude that "the general story of the American girl's education in James's fiction, from Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer to Milly Theale and Maggie Verver, [is] a 'suspended fall'" (128).

In spite of her awareness of her impending death – or because of it, Milly's rhetoric assumes a combative diction after her visit to Sir Luke Strett. Spurred by his exhortation to "be as active as you can and as you like," Milly resolves to fend off her debilitation:

> It was as if she had had to pluck off her breast, to throw away, some friendly ornament, a familiar flower, a little old jewel, that was part of her daily dress; and to take up and shoulder as a substitute some queer defensive weapon, a musket, a spear, a battle-axe-conducive possibly in a higher degree to a striking appearance, but demanding all the effort of the military posture" (*WD* 154).

Milly's thoughts intimate that she is indeed heeding her physician's counsel. From this point forward, she vacates the vantage point where we came upon her first in the novel, the "gulfs of air" from which she surveyed the "the kingdoms of the earth … in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession" (*WD* 88). From this point forward, Milly's transcendence yields its predominant position in her to practicality. She decides "it was more appealing, insinuating, irresistible in short, that one would live if one could" (*WD* 157), and accordingly, to maximize the dividends this imperative affords her. She charts a strategy for realizing this ambition: she communicates her thoughts both to Mrs. Stringham and to Kate less frequently, and when she does, she resorts to glossing them. At the same time, while ostensibly accommodating the glib labels affixed to her – "the princess, the angel, the star" (*WD* 282), she inwardly rejects their compartmentalizations, particularly when she finds the terms impossible to inhabit. When Kate tells her she is a "dove,"

> she found herself accepting as the right one … the name so given to her. She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. *That* was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. Oh *wasn't* she? (*WD* 173)

To Milly, the "dove" is an equivocal signifier that invokes docility, but which may turn implosive if its tractability is not turned outward. As Michael R. Martin observes, "Her resemblance to a dove is, then, a pretense, a mask donned to manipulate others" (103). It approximates Madame Merle's "firm surface, a sort of corselet of silver" Isabel observes to full advantage in *The Portrait of a Lady* (*PL* 337). Milly's smokescreen becomes visible to Densher in all its glory at the grand reception she hosts in Venice:

> She was acquitting herself to-night as hostess, he could see, under some supreme idea, an inspiration which was half her nerves and half an inevitable harmony; but what he especially recognised was the character that had already several times broken out in her and that she so oddly appeared able, by choice or by instinctive affinity, to keep down or to display… he wouldn't have known whether to see it in an extension or a contraction of 'personality,' taking it as he did most directly for a confounding extension of surface. (*WD* 305)

Though he is a witness to the exercise of Milly's "supreme idea," it remains inscrutable to Densher, for he cannot decipher whether its manifestation is "by choice or by instinctive affinity" on her part. Marcia Ian describes the contribution such a strategy makes to the shaping of one's subjectivity: "Selfhood flowers inward from the discovery that one is the agent of one's own representation in the world and therefore potentially in control of what others see. The self can create a surface, as gorgeous as one pleases, but the more impenetrable the better, behind which it can remain intact, unrevealed, and, ultimately, unrepresented" (112).

Despite her fast-approaching end, Milly strives to achieve relative agency. This impulse is most pointedly articulated in her reflections during Lord Mark's visit to her in Venice, immediately prior to his callous revelation of Kate's attachment to Densher:

> For what value did she now have? It throbbed within her … that she had none at all; … With that there came to her a light: wouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely in the ravage of her disease? *She* mightn't last, but her money would. Such a man … would make the best of her, ill, damaged, disagreeable though she might be, *for the sake of eventual benefits*: she being clearly a person of the sort esteemed likely *to do the handsome thing by a stricken and sorrowing husband*. (*WD* 270, emphasis added)

Milly is still unaware at that moment of the conspiracy against her, but the certainty of her imminent death prompts her to devise a retaliatory method to make her mark upon the world as best she can. Her phrase "for the sake of eventual benefits" signals to her appropriation of the mercantilism principle for her purposes. She envisions the enjoyment of a short-lived, fleeting happiness with Densher, by offering her wealth to him as an incentive; but this vision falls apart in the next moment, when Lord Mark states Kate reciprocates Densher's love and destroys any hope Milly entertains. Thereafter, her final gesture in the novel, "turn[ing] her face to the wall," is seemingly an expression of self-absorbed sullenness; but that reading is eventually invalidated by her will, as she bequeaths a large portion of her wealth to Densher. Milly's decision is puzzling: exactly why does she forgive Densher? Does she forgive both lovers? "Can a past transgression be remembered but also forgiven, or does the act of forgiveness imply a forgetting that replicates the erasure and denial that reparative justice must overcome?" (Armstrong "Repairing Injustice" 46). James does not peer into Milly's subsequent thoughts, for she becomes uncommunicative; nor is the reader made privy to Densher's final interview with Milly at the behest of Mrs. Stringham.

Forgiveness has garnered much philosophical debate in recent history, particularly when nations acknowledge their or previous governments' transgressions and embark upon restitutive action. In such cases, the aggrieved face the complexities of forgiveness more

pointedly than those who seek it. Jesse Couenhoven reminds us, "[F]orgiveness presupposes culpable evil, assessed and rejected as such, to which it seeks to respond in a manner that is not unjust" (151). Couenhoven cites the example of "Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whose personal example is justly celebrated but whose account of forgiveness is too rarely analyzed. Tutu claims that forgiveness is waiving one's right to revenge" (152). In her work on personal forgiveness, Julia Kristeva has stipulated that it is on ongoing process, stemming from an outlook upon life as a continually renewing practice.[79] Furthermore, forgiveness neither expunges the wrongdoing nor delivers the transgressor from accountability, but "[i]t takes into account and comprehends both the act in its horror and the guilt. But since it does not constitute an erasure, forgiveness is a question of hearing the request of the subject who desires forgiveness and, once this request has been heard, of allowing renewal, rebirth" ("Forgiveness" 281). Couenhoven's view that "[f]orgiveness is not so much a matter of how one feels about offenders as of how one treats them" (152) coincides with Kristeva's stipulation above that the contrite transgressor be accorded the attention of the wronged. Kristeva conditions her conception of individual forgiveness by the objective it seeks to achieve:

> [F]orgiveness … is nothing other than interpretation. Let's call it *pardon* to (*par*, through, *don*, a gift) highlight the giving of a sense to the senselessness of unconscious hate. Interpretation is a pardon: a rebirth of the psychical apparatus, with and beyond the hatred that bears desire. … Interpretation is a pardon whose ambition, through the refinement of its models and formulations, is to make psychical rebirth possible. (*Hatred and Forgiveness* 193-94).

[79] Kristeva discriminates forgiveness from judgment: the former can be exercised in the "private sphere" and the latter in the "social arena" ("Forgiveness" 282, 285). For a discussion of forgiveness/judgment in the public sphere, see Peter Brooks, "Kristeva's Separation of Spheres;" Cary Nelson, "Forgiveness and the Social Psyche;" and Kathryn J. Norlock and Jean Rumsey, "The Limits of Forgiveness."

In confronting the deception she has sustained, Milly surmounts her exploitation. She converts the Biblical call to "[l]ove your neighbour as yourself … [to] the legitimation of egotism and individualism" (Pollock 10). In *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva theorizes that the expression of altruism, forgiveness, and other forms of love predicate on the prioritization of one's self. She affixes a utilitarian value to narcissism and converts its self-serving function from egoism to beneficence. When one is absorbed in self-love via an inclination to privilege the self, love of humanity becomes enactable: "[T]hat moment will allow one to settle within oneself, in other words to be within the ontological good that is accessible in the first place as one's own–to be good. Indeed, how can one convey such goodness to others unless it be firmly established in oneself?" (173). The application of Kristeva's precept to Milly's forgiveness renders it as an act of her self-enfranchisement, stemming from the irrepressible drive to deploy her subjectivity. Milly's narcissistic moment occurs *in camera*, when she "turn[s] her face to the wall." It is not a petulant gesture, as it might initially be perceived: "Within its purposive self-concealment the Jamesian consciousness is free to contemplate in private the only possible object of its undivided attention: itself" (Ian 112). Milly's move is an introspective, exclusionary gaze that pivots outward again, but now enhanced by a proportion of love that enables the emergence of her forgiveness of Densher: "[F]orgiving can be seen as a continuum, ranging from the first doubt about justified revenge to neutral acceptance to exuberant love for the wrongdoer" (Scott 199). Moreover, her narcissistic moment concatenates her abjection of the duplicity that seeped into her life with her forgiveness. Ann-Marie Priest concurs, "When]Milly] can no longer avoid 'knowing,' her response is to intensify her abjection, 'turning her face to the wall' and, ultimately, doing exactly what Kate had all along planned she should do: dying and leaving her money to Merton" (173). Although

abjection is instantiated in Kristeva's account in the infant's relation to the mother, it can also be usefully traced beyond early childhood. Tina Chanter sees "abjection as inherently mobile, and as descriptive of a mechanism by which various others are stipulated as excluded, in particular, raced, classed, and sexually deviant others" (158). Chanter's view that abjection may be applied to social tensions in adult life is shared by Victoria Coulson, who insists on the ambiguity of abjection:

> Kristeva's 'abjection' is a state of limbo that blurs the dichotomy of subject and object, insisting on the original formlessness of both self and thing. In this view, subjectivity is more than simply dependent *on* psychosocial structure. This form of subjectivity, we might say, takes place as a process and configuration *of* structuring" ("Sticky Realism" 120).

By abjecting the deceit Kate and Densher activated in her life, Milly is infusing form and meaning into it. Yet this restorative process is not exclusionary, for its flip side proves detrimental to Kate and Densher's romance, as J. Hillis Miller notes: "Milly is like James's other heroines, for example, Isabel Archer or Maggie Verver. Their cruelty lies in their goodness and self-sacrificing generosity" (*Literature as Conduct* 222).[80]

Let me return now to Milly's phrase "for the sake of eventual benefits." While it was formulated as a plausible rationale by which Densher might marry her, it cannot be dismissed after that event is no longer possible. Arguably, Milly revisits the phrase, only now in relation to herself and to the "benefits" she may reap from the magnanimity of forgiveness. Her letter to Densher and her bequest pan out by the metronome of Lancaster Gate where "nobody does anything for nothing," but at the same time, they ensure her subsistence, propped up jointly by James's foreclosure of her state of mind in Book X of the novel and Kate's burning of her

[80] See my discussion of Milly's subversive texts in the previous chapter.

letter to Densher. As Sheila Teahan notes, "[The] destruction of the unread letter ironically empowers it and actualizes Milly's absent mediation" (208). In the Bronzino episode, Milly declared to Lord Mark "I shall never be better than this" (*WD* 139), as though in anticipation of her state at the end of the novel: she would persist as a perfectly lifeless image in Densher's mind and intervene between him and Kate. To that end, she bequeaths him a portion of her wealth.

In this view, Densher's reception of Milly forgiveness is intriguing. Alfred Habegger has suggested he is almost completely reformed by it: "In the end Densher, like Milly, joins the unworldly side, largely because of the impression wrought on him by her giving and forgiving. The tenth and last book tells of Densher's confused and hesitant rebound from Kate and the Market Place to Milly and 'straightness'" ("Reciprocity" 461). The foundation of Habegger's view is of course Densher's refusal to accept the inheritance. Conversely, I want to underscore the lack of closure Milly's legacy triggers for Densher. Even Habegger observes a "confused and hesitant" note in his conduct. Densher convinces himself that by ceding his material gains he absolves himself measurably, but the inheritance proves to be more than a pecuniary gift. The impermeability of Milly's motives ushers in lingering uncertainties for him, especially since he knows Milly became aware of his collusion with Kate. "[W]hen the judging eyes are lifted off this earth and out of sight, it's hard to tell what kind of gaze they're sending back" (Revely-Calder 326). In the final scene of the novel, when Densher informs Kate he wishes to remain ignorant of the details of Milly's will, he also suggests to her their complicity has not expired but is protracted into new terms that bind them further, even in the act of refusal: "There's something you forget in it. … My asking you to join with me in doing so. I can[not] renounce it except through you" (*WD* 404), but Kate abstains:

> "There's nothing," she explained, "in my power."
>
> "I'm in your power," Merton Densher said.
>
> "In what way?"
>
> "In the way I show–and the way I've always shown. When have I shown," he asked as with a sudden cold impatience, "anything else? You surely must feel–so that you needn't wish to appear to spare me in it–how you 'have' me." (*WD* 405)

Densher's condition signals to self-immolation by a containment he is willing to accommodate. It also points to the absence of release, the impossibility of deliverance for him and for Kate. Milly's implications arrest them for an instant. "[A]ll the unspoken between them looked out of their eyes in a dim terror of their further conflict. Something even rose between them in one of their short silences–something that was like an appeal from each to the other not to be too true" (*WD* 405). In the next moment, the astute Kate soon retrieves from the "dim terror" that Densher is bound to Milly by a loyalty that jeopardizes their happiness. "Your change came … the day you last saw her; she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you *did* [love her]. … [S]he stretched out her wings, and it was to *that* they reached. They cover us." (*WD* 406). Though Milly's legacy is "the echo of an act, shorn of the nuances of body and voice which gave it a sharper roundness, colour, figure of intention" (Revely-Calder 326), it proves a loudly resounding insinuation of her self into the lives of Kate and Densher.

In the wake of Ralph's funeral, Isabel silently observes Mrs. Touchett and wonders if her aunt "would have found a blessing … to be able to feel a defeat, a mistake, even a shame or two." Isabel questions whether "she were not even missing those enrichments of consciousness and privately trying – reaching out for some aftertaste of life, *dregs of the*

banquet" (*PL* 473, emphasis added). Isabel's contemplation of drawing a truncated but still practicable volition from the diminution of selfhood aptly summarizes Milly's valiant attempt to persevere despite the finality of her death. Victoria Coulson eloquently suggests, "James's more experienced women understand, subjectivity relies on the object-world for a kind of mutual reinforcement. The ideal … proposes a harmonious relationship of mastery and service" ("Sticky Realism"120). In the next chapter, I explore the registers of dependence and of connectional manoeuvres of foreigners in *The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove,* and *The Golden Bowl*.

Chapter Four

Ambitious Foreigners and Refracting Acquisitions in

The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and *The Golden Bowl*

"A woman," remarks Serena Merle to Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady*, "has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl" (*PL* 171). Madame Merle's much-quoted spatial disentitlement compromises James's expatriate American women doubly: not only they cannot install themselves with relative permanence anywhere, but they must also occupy a subjugated position everywhere they go. In Madame Merle's terms, a "natural place" would signify an enfranchising site where she might "have [her] feet in the soil" and cease being a "mere parasite crawling over the surface" (*PL* 171). However, the autonomy of self promised by such a site is problematized by conceptions of gender roles on both sides of the Atlantic basin, because contemporaneous discourses in social relations stipulate the separation of men's and women's provinces: "[E]veryone in the Victorian family was thought to have his or her special place in the family circle as well as in the larger society. Husband and wife occupied 'separate spheres,' and each had distinct, but complementary, functions to perform" (Shanley 5).[81] This partitioning commits a woman's agency to the private space of the home, as Danaya Wright affirms: "The defining aspect of separate spheres is that women act in and are influenced by the values of a domestic space focused on the needs of family, while men act in a public space focused on the needs of civil society" (45). Arguably, Madame Merle's social station contributes substantially to her comprehensive disqualification of her gender. She lacks the stature enjoyed by married genteel women of her time, and the scant details she relates of her past depict her as a disillusioned woman who has borne many tribulations. "[Y]ou sometimes say things that I think people who have always been happy wouldn't have found out," Isabel

[81] Linda K. Kerber attributes the first demarcation of "separate spheres" to the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, who in 1840 published *Democracy in America*, a record of his impressions of the United States. Tocqueville wrote, "[I]n the United States the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes woman within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it" (qtd. in Kerber 9).

Archer tells her (*PL* 168). In addition to the pressures her social circumstances exert upon her viewpoint, Madame Merle's ulterior marriage plot for Isabel taints the legitimacy of her outlook and undercuts her authority where female entitlement is concerned. Nonetheless, as is often the case in James, such pronouncements cannot be easily dismissed, since they are neither assured nor unequivocal. Madame Merle's formulation warrants further enquiry, for it advances fundamental queries: can James's female characters gain a "natural place" at all? If they do, how do they recover from former circumscriptions of the self? Buried in Madame Merle's contention are two confounding deterrents – the paradigm of the foreigner and the straits of gendered power relations. Martha Banta has said "There is little or nothing going on in Henry James's mind that is not about social relations between men and women; every issue is ultimately gendered" ("Men" 21). In this chapter, I investigate the programmatical valences of foreignness and of power relations in *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*.

The distress of an unanchored life is not exclusive to Madame Merle. Other female characters – even those *ficelles* in James's late novels are also germane for deliberating the naturalization of uprooted women.[82] Henrietta Stackpole and Maria Gostrey, for example, contend as much with displacement and flux as Madame Merle and Isabel. They aspire to a retroactive subjectivity to be deployed in their native land, through resources available to them in their newly adopted social milieus. Henrietta realizes literary practice is a readily expedient niche for sanctioning her self in America: she writes articles for an American periodical from

[82] In the 1908 Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady,* James claims Henrietta Stackpole and Maria Gostrey are not "true agents" but "light *ficelle*[s]" in their respective stories (*AN* 55). Blackmur explains, "Taking the French theatrical term, James so labeled those characters who belong less to the subject than to the treatment of it. The invention and disposition of *ficelle* is one of the difficulties swept away by the first person narrative" (*AN* xxx). See also Christopher Nash, "Henry James, Puppetmaster," throughout.

a European perspective. *Contra* the widely held critical view of her as an essentially dismissive figuration of the New Woman, Henrietta's eventual subjectivity installs her as a qualified subject in the patriarchal economy. When she agrees to marry Mr. Bantling, Henrietta forsakes her non-conformist, confrontational ways and yields to the institutional constraints she so ardently resists.[83] Though less vociferous than Henrietta in her opposition to social prescriptions of female agency, Maria Gostrey of *The Ambassadors* "serves as a transitional figure between America and Europe" (Garcia 159). Her self-appointed function as "an agent for repatriation" (*AM* 35) leads Garcia to claim, "She ironically sees herself as a secret worker for the project of keeping the American bourgeois culture strong and untainted by its contact with Europe" (163). Yet when Lambert Strether returns to Woollett at the end of the novel, Maria Gostrey has not succeeded in her mission; on the contrary, by being Strether's compass during his Parisian sojourn, she has abetted his transformation from "the figure who set out on his ambassadorship. … [H]is dormant potential for a vital interior life has been regenerated, and he feels himself a new man" (Pizer 50). Thus Henrietta Stackpole and Maria Gostrey are depictions of women whose subjectivity ventures are fraught by the strains of Victorian gender relations and transatlantic cultural values.

Want of subjectivity is not necessarily related to financial hardship. Fiscally independent female characters are driven by the impulse of self-assertion as well. The affluent Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, and Maggie Verver are at large on unfamiliar or disquieting terrains, a trope that grafts onto them the ambition to self-governance. Even when they

[83] Carolyn Mathews is one of the few critics who diverge from the general view accorded to Henrietta: "The Stackpole-Bantling relationship … obviously highlights the possible consequences to marriage of specific gender role reversals implicit in the New Womanhood and the entry of women into professions … [even as] James' choice to invent a marriage between Henrietta and Mr. Bantling significantly undercuts her independence" (Mathews 200, 202).

succeed at instituting themselves, a sense of discomfiture still looms large. They all nearly always evoke the impression of being unsettled, or at least of being disoriented, due to their figurative displacements. Victoria Coulson characterizes James's peripatetic female characters as

> [h]omeless and seeking, … circulat[ing] through the world of the text; they are travellers, wanderers, signs trying to free themselves from the authority of the past, of familial and semantic origins. They have a burden of (social) representation imposed upon them, but they crave the distance from their origins that this capacity for symbolism implies. (*Henry James* 56)

Kate Croy's and Maggie Verver's respective ambitions to an autonomous self are tangled in familial binds. Kate endeavours to extricate herself from them, and Maggie comes to feel the constrictions enforced by their false security. On the other hand, Isabel Archer's and Serena Merle's aspirations distend outside the family; they strive to shed their otherness in the social networks in which they circulate. For Isabel and Madame Merle, the Jamesian discourse of the anxieties attendant to displaced lives delivers female subjectivity as an itinerant energy struggling to acclimate herself on alien ground.

James was an expatriate himself, a "faux 'British' novelist" (Sadoff 42).[84] In the Preface to the New York Edition of his short novel *The Reverberator*, he relates the impact his multiple exposures to European culture in early childhood had on his adult life:

> The nostalgic poison had been distilled for him, the future presented to him but as a single intense question: was he to spend it in brooding exile, or might he somehow come into his 'own'? as I liked betimes to put it for a romantic analogy with the state of dispossessed princes and wandering heirs. (*AN* 195)

[84] Kristin Sanner reads Madame Merle's assertion at the beginning of this chapter as "an echo of James's own expatriate status" (163), but she does not take into account the critical factor Victorian gender roles insert in Madame Merle's view.

John H. Pearson explicates the import of such Jamesian locutions in the prefaces: they "transform … the work into a signifying artifact of the historical discourses of James's autobiography and of the literary history that the prefaces relate" (47). That James refers to himself above in the third-person is telling. He invokes, it seems to me, an objective distance from his own work, in order to launch a seemingly independent assessment that is in keeping with the general tone of the prefaces. More pertinently to my purposes in this chapter, James supplies in the last line the metaphor of the "dispossessed princes … brooding [in] exile," which I draw upon below to discuss Prince Amerigo's character in *The Golden Bowl*.

Like James the American-*cum*-British author activating the experience of the foreigner in his works, Julia Kristeva is a Bulgarian-*cum*-French philosopher who summons her own expatriation to the advancement of her theories. As I have indicated in the second chapter, Kristeva relates the notion of a text as a "production" to the act of structuring the self. Dawne McCance tells us that for Kristeva, "The text conceived as ['a performance'] is what gives the writer identity, *graphs* the *auto*" (145).[85] McCance reports that Kristeva's theorization of the self as a continually morphing construct "made of [her], on her arrival in Paris, what Roland Barthes called *l'étrangère*, not just a 'foreigner' from Bulgaria, and not just an outsider to the standard theoretical scene," but a philosopher "whose writing … exiles the unified subject" (145).[86] In 1988, Kristeva published *Strangers to Ourselves,* an historical survey of

[85] McCance is referencing Kristeva's essay "My Memory's Hyperbole" (1984), "written in the first person plural, … [that] traces … the evolution of the so-called *Tel Quel* group in Paris, from the time of Kristeva's arrival late in 1965 until 1974. …The essay … provide[s] ... an outline of intellectual and political developments, but written as the auto(bio)graphy of a 'we' that remains hyperbolic" (144-45).

[86] On October 1, 2014, Kristeva delivered at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris a lecture entitled "Réflexions sur l'étranger," which she began by alluding to Barthes's appellation: "C'est une étrangère qui vous parle: 'L'étrangère' est en effet le titre de l'article que me consacre Roland Barthes dans la Quinzaine Littéraire en

representations of foreignness in France and elsewhere, as well as a contemporary delineation of the foreigner's borders of selfhood. Once again, Kristeva's first-hand experience of foreignness shades her treatise, as John Lechte remarks: "It is almost as though the approach here were governed by a personal motive, a feeling generated by being a foreigner oneself" (*Julia Kristeva* 81). She writes,

> In crossing a border … the foreigner has changed his discomforts into a base of resistance, a citadel of life. ... Without a home, he disseminates … the actor's paradox: multiplying masks and "false selves" he is never completely true nor completely false, as he is able to tune in to loves and aversions the superficial antennae of a basaltic heart. … [S]ettled within himself, the foreigner has no self. Barely an empty confidence, valueless, which focuses his possibilities of being constantly other, according to others' wishes and to circumstances. (8)

Isabel's detractors in *The Portrait of a Lady* enact this Kristevan account of the foreigner's ethos. Gilbert Osmond "lives *tout bêtement* in Italy. No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" (*PL* 171-72). His masquerade even extends to his residence, a "rather *blank-looking structure*, … [whose] imposing front had a somewhat *incommunicative character*. It was the *mask*, not the face of the house. It had *heavy lids, but no eyes*" (*PL* 195, emphases added). Madame Merle projects the Kristevan "multiplying masks and 'fake selves'" so perfectly that Mrs. Touchett thinks she is "incapable of a mistake" (*PL* 169), and Osmond tells his former lover, "yourself includes so many other selves–so much of every one else and of everything" (*PL* 205). The success of Serena Merle's dexterous projections is measurable by her achievement of what few women of her status have – social integration. She stays with acquaintances during her "visits [to] great houses. … She has her pick of places; she's not in want of a shelter" (*PL* 169). Toward the end of the novel, when

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1970, à l'occasion de la publication de mon premier livre en français après mon arrivée à Paris en décembre 1965" ("Réflexions sur l'étranger," n. pag.)

Isabel informs her she is travelling to Gardencourt to be with her dying cousin, Madame Merle says, "[O]f all the houses I know, and I know many, [it is] the one I should have liked best to live in. I don't venture to send a message to the people, … but I should like to give my love to the place" (*PL* 459). Thus Madame Merle reveals a proclivity for concrete spaces in line with her famous elaboration of the self via material objects, cited earlier in this dissertation.

In the Kristevan parameters of foreignness, Madame Merle's engenders paradoxical drives in her. On the one hand, while maintaining the impermeability of her self, she is taunted by the compulsion to achieve connectivity in her adopted social relations:

> [T]he foreigner wishes to be alone but with partners, and yet none is willing to join him in the torrid space of his uniqueness. … The foreigner's friends … could only be those who feel foreign to themselves. Other than that, there are of course paternalists, paranoid and perverse people, who each have the foreigner of their choice, to the extent that they would invent him if he did not exist. (*Strangers* 12, 23)

In the scene of Pansy's introduction in Chapter XXII, Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, foreigners and partners, mutually ascribe otherness to each other. "[I]t's not the first time I've acted in defiance of your calculations," says Osmond to her, and she retorts, "Yes … I think you very perverse" (*PL* 203). That other foreigner of the novel, Isabel Archer, finds in Madame Merle just such a "perverse" befriending female, whose "jouissance is secret and shameful, and, hidden in [her] shell, [she] would gladly put up a foreigner within it, who presumably would be happy thus to have a home, even though it might be at the cost of sexual or moral slavery" (*Strangers* 23-24).

Foreignness ricochets; the foreigner propels its abject otherness onto his or her counterpart. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva alerts us to our internalization of the

foreigner. As we have seen in the third chapter, Freud suggested through a semantic analysis of *unheimliche* that it assimilates *heimliche*, and this integration deprives the latter adjective of its positive value. Thus the "uncanny strangeness" of the foreigner is neither unfamiliar nor external to the individual. Kristeva adds, "[T]hat which *is* strangely uncanny would be that which *was* (the past tense is important) familiar and, under certain conditions (which ones?), emerges" (*Strangers* 183). The gesture is a token of investment in the host country: to assimilate better in it, the foreigner targets another foreigner, all the while nurturing an innermost self. Kristeva reminds us, "As enclave of the other within the other, otherness becomes crystallized as pure ostracism: the foreigner excludes before being excluded, even more than he is being excluded" (*Strangers* 24). In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Kristeva's "certain conditions" are in evidence in Isabel's dealings. To her detriment, the "simultaneously American and something other than American" (Sanner 163) Madame Merle participates to the above scheme of foreignness.

On the other hand, the desire for inclusion breeds in the foreigner anxieties deployed by safeguarding of the self. Madame Merle is animated by "strong impulses," but she keeps them "in admirable order" (*PL* 154). Otherness intensifies the disquietude of a marginal position, the primary manifestation of which is a constant self-examination that taxes the enterprise of subjectivity exorbitantly. The impetus to evade her foreignness cautions Madame Merle to be wary of exhibiting any deviant behaviour and insists upon the projection of an unassuming, inconspicuous self. Isabel thinks Madame Merle "has the good taste not to pretend … to express herself by original signs" (*PL* 167). During their travels, Madame Merle "circulat[es] *incognita*" with her younger friend (*PL* 274). Isabel, who does not subscribe to Madame Merle's views of the constitution of the self, is affined more closely with open spaces

than her friend. Her propensity for expanses is discernible in her reticent affiliation of her self with her new social circle. In an early conversation with her aunt, when she asks Mrs. Touchett whether her "success" in England will make her "feel at home," Mrs. Touchett predicts,

> "I should think it very probable, and you certainly will be successful. They like American young ladies very much over here; they show them a great deal of kindness. But you mustn't feel too much at home, you know."
>
> "Oh, I'm by no means sure it will satisfy me," Isabel judicially emphasised. "I like the place very much, but I'm not sure I shall like the people." (*PL* 58).

When Caspar Goodwood presses her to surrender to him in the final scene of the novel, she feels "the world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out all around her, to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters" (*PL* 489). Hence, Isabel's construction of the self, which until then has been supervised by Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, now disentangles itself on an exploratory path toward subjectivity. James's paradoxical correlation of Isabel's reclusive individuality with openness and Madame Merle's gregarious personality with containment spotlight the dichotomous complexities of the female foreigner in the novel.

I have been arguing that in *The Portrait of a Lady* foreignness operates between the poles of concealment and transparency. As I will argue next, in *The Wings of the Dove* foreignness is inextricably bound to desire and power relations. Lord Mark's pithy encapsulation of the novel's "London set" establishes for Milly the ever-shifting playing field of rootlessness and yearnings:

> [T]here was no such thing to-day in London as saying where any one was. Every one was everywhere–nobody was anywhere. … [W]as there anything but

> the groping and pawing … of masses of bewildered people trying to "get" they didn't know what or where? (*WD* 101)

In this ethical landscape, Kate Croy and Merton Densher occupy fluctuating matrices: Kate's gambit casts her as a scheming woman, yet her plan enables Milly by offering her the single (and final) opportunity to experience love. "Kate's double wager–that Milly will die *and* Densher will be the recipient of her large bequest–is a high-risk venture that, although partially motivated by a palliative desire 'to make things pleasant for [Milly]', nevertheless exploits her desires" (Spunt 171). Similarly, Merton Densher's docile involvement in Kate's plan renders his acquiescence reprehensible, but his final firm dissociation from Milly's bequest mitigates his complicity. As Donatella Izzo observes in relation to *The Portrait of Lady*, "the empowerment of self has its counterpart in the reification of the other, and reversal of roles is constantly possible: nothing but a potentially shifting power relation positions the individual within this dialectics" ("Setting a Free Woman Free" 108). In *The Wings of the Dove*, the charges one might levy on Kate and Densher and factors attenuating their inculpation circulate within the continuum of otherness and power relations.

Although Kate Croy is not an expatriate, her otherness originates in her abundance of temporal associations and her deficiency of spatial mastery. The narrator's exposition of her early in the novel is a case in point:

> [L]ife at present turned to *her view from week to week* more and more the face of a striking and distinguished stranger. … [H]er most general sense was a shade of regret that she hadn't *known earlier*. 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. … She saw as *she had never seen before* how material things spoke to her. … [I]f in contrast *with some of its old aspects* life now affected her as a dress successfully "done up," this was exactly by reason of the trimmings and lace, was a matter of ribbons and silk and velvet. She had a dire accessibility to

> pleasure from such sources. … [T]he blighted home in Lexham Gardens had haunted *her nights and her days*. … She knew herself now, the sensitive niece, as having been marked *from far back*. (*WD* 35-36, emphases added)

The compounding markers of time solicit the flow of her past circumstances into her current state, holding her agency captive in between. Moments later, the unavailability of an exit becomes apparent to her: "She knew so much that her knowledge was what fairly kept her there, making her at times circulate more endlessly between the small silk-covered sofa that stood for her in the firelight and the great grey map of Middlesex spread beneath her lookout" (*WD* 36). Gary Kuchar writes, "For Kate, the visitable past … is a very real and entirely present weight that leaves her with a sense of being suspended between an unpleasantly proximal past and an imposing and narrowly outlined future" (171-72). Kate's position follows Kristeva's itinerary of the speaking subject's predicament. Its departure point is within the symbolic order, that "clock of objective time: it provides the reference point, and, consequently, all possibilities of measurement, by distinguishing between a before, a now and an after" ("About Chinese Women" 152-53). The speaking subject discovers the "I" exists only in the moment of speech in the symbolic order, and one's "presence" is invariably bound to "that which precedes and that which follows. My family lineage will also be placed in this before and after: the number of ancestors and future generations" ("About Chinese Women" 153). Arguably, Kate's quandary is more devastating than Madame Merle's lack of space: whereas the latter might enjoy a deceptive minimal freedom of movement by frequent relocations, Kate is arrested in immobility between her rigorous past and a bleak future. Kate's "faith in the future … is … troubled by [her] faith's attachment to the contingencies of the past. … Kate Croy confuses the past with the future because they each bear the same name" (Warren 125). In one of her candid moments, she tells Milly, "You're an outsider, independent

and standing by yourself; you're not hideously relative to tiers and tiers of others" (*WD* 172). Perversely, Kate's deficiency of spatial mastery generates in her a fondness for her confining site: "She liked the charming quarters her aunt had assigned her–liked them literally more than she had in all her other days liked anything" (*WD* 36). For what lies beyond the borders of that site is even more disconcerting than her present detainment: "To go down, to forsake her refuge, was to meet some of her discoveries halfway, to have to face them or fly before them; whereas they were at such a height only like the rumble of a far-off siege heard in the provisioned citadel" (*WD* 36). At the core of Kate's otherness lie the egregious pull of the past and the consequent magnetism of despondency. Kate "held that she had a right to sadness and stillness; she nursed for their postponing power. What they mainly postponed was the question of a … general surrender to everything" (*WD* 37). Her "sadness and stillness" pin her in the marginality of the Kristevan foreigner:

> Even though [origin] keeps pestering, enriching, hindering, exciting him, or giving him pain, and often all of it at once, the foreigner is its courageous and melancholy player. His origin certainly haunts him, for better and for worse, but it is indeed elsewhere … that his struggles take place, that his life holds together today. (*Strangers* 29)

To recover the lost integrity of her self, Kate has no alternative but to steer her otherness outward. Kristeva elucidates, "An ego, wounded to the point of annulment, barricaded and untouchable, cowers somewhere. … Where objects are concerned he delegates phantoms, ghosts, 'false cards': a stream of spurious egos" (*Powers of Horror* 47). This traffic of the selves leads inevitably to desire, "the substitute for adaptation to a social norm (is desire ever anything else but desire for an idealized norm, the norm of the Other?)" (*Powers of Horror* 47).

Kate Croy and Merton Densher's conjoined desire for individuation subsidizes their relationship. As we shall see below, a similar longing animates Charlotte Stant's and Prince Amerigo's adulterous liaison in *The Golden Bowl*. In Book Second, Chapter I of *The Wings of the Dove*, when Kate and Merton first become acquainted, her imagination articulates the figuration of that tension:

> She had observed a ladder against a garden-wall and had trusted herself so to climb it as to be able to see over into the probable garden on the other side. On reaching the top she had found herself face to face with a gentleman engaged in a like calculation at the same moment, and the two enquirers had remained confronted on their ladders. (*WD* 49)

The "probable garden" paraphrases the constituents of desire for each. To Kate, an attachment to the young man underwrites her deliverance from the exigencies her family imposes on her. However substantial Kate's attraction to Merton Densher's intellect may be – "It was on the side of the mind that Densher was rich for her and mysterious and strong" (*WD* 48), her desire springs essentially from his potential agency to free her from the incarcerating otherness with which her family saddles her. "He represented what her life had never given her and certainly, without some such aid as his, never would give her" (*WD* 48). There is in Kate an urgency to "recreate herself, to rid herself of her felt stigmatization of being a Croy" (Wakana 55). For his part, Densher finds "his strength [is] merely for thought" and his "weakness, … for life", and he intuits Kate might furnish him compensation for his lack:

> Life, he logically opined, was what he must somehow arrange to annex and possess. This was so much a necessity that thought by itself only went on in the void; it was from the immediate air of life that it must draw its breath. So the young man … made out both his case and Kate Croy's. (*WD* 48) [87]

[87] In his illuminating article "Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Constitution of Identity in *The Wings of the Dove*," Gert Buelens posits that in *The Wings of the Dove,* as elsewhere in James's novels, characters achieve

Mutual desire is contingent on the perceived benefits reciprocally derivable from the relation; complementarity invigorates the couple's respective enterprises to become effectual subjects.

Kate's voyeuristic image above initially posits the lovers on equal footing; however, in the evolution of their attachment, she destabilizes that symmetry by affixing her terms to the affection she accords to Densher. Kate will assent to their union only when he traverses the socio-economic space between them. To abbreviate the divide and to institute him as her liberator, Kate must embellish his pecuniary attributes. The change she strives to achieve in him informs her with power, thereby realigning their parity and subordinating him to her. In Venice, the belated consciousness of this imbalance distresses Densher:

> As soon as Kate appeared again the difference came up–the oddity, as he then instantly felt it, of his having sunk so deep. It was sinking because it was all doing what Kate had conceived for him; it wasn't in the least doing–and that had been his notion of his life–anything he himself had conceived. (*WD* 283)

Densher's sensation of "sinking" is produced by his commitment to Kate's project, the obscurity of which is alien to his background in the newspaper business. As a journalist, he regularly investigates facts and reports concrete findings, yet his dealings with Kate are largely unintelligible to him, undermining his surety of stature. His dramatic visualization of his subservience to Kate as a downward spiral confirms for him her spatial reconfiguration of their relation. "He was walking in short on a high ridge, steep down on either side … It was Kate who had so perched him" (*WD* 283). The image reactivates Kate's earlier private figuration of their first aerial confrontation, but in a vertical realignment that is bi-directional now: simultaneous to his "sinking," he exerts a corresponding force to resist his defeat. These

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identity formation mostly through alternating metaphorical and metonymic associations. "Densher … is one of these Jamesian protagonists in search of an overwhelming something or someone to which they may submit and from which they may derive a metonymical identity" (415).

contending energies frame their alliance and hold Densher in a state of indeterminacy. His outlook at this juncture operates within the economy of power relations. "There glowed for him in fact a kind of rage at what he wasn't having; an exasperation, a resentment, begotten truly by the very impatience of desire, in respect to his postponed and relegated, his so extremely manipulated state" (*WD* 283). The sentence verbalizes the conflation of desire and power in the three participles Densher selects to qualify his condition: "postponed," "relegated," and "manipulated" objectify him in the most disconcerting manner. The first frustrates his desire, the second displaces it, and the last modifies it. What is particularly disturbing to him is that the woman he loves is also the mediator of his enfeeblement and the subordination of his desire. "It was beautifully done of her, but what was the real meaning of it unless that he was perpetually bent to her will?" (*WD* 283). As Frederick Olafson affirms, "[Kate] is … inside the circle of implicitly moral relationships … only for the purpose of being able to turn them to her private advantage" (303). Densher's self-assessment of his conduct thus far is a naive vision of faultlessness. He believes he has exhibited attentiveness to "good humour and generosity" and an aversion to "small outlays and small savings" (*WD* 283). In light of his self-ascribed largesse and his avowed distaste for dissolution, his earlier observation regarding Kate's apportionment of herself to him is pointedly relevant to his present circumstances. "You keep the key of the cupboard, and I foresee that when we're married you'll dole me out my sugar by lumps'" (*WD* 196).[88] James's positioning of Densher

[88] The immanent relations of power to desire are, of course, most famously elaborated by Michel Foucault, who shows there is a non-linear correlation between the two: desire, says Foucault, is not "a primitive, natural, and living energy welling up from below," and power does not issue from "a higher order seeking to stand in its way." Rather, desire and power intersect "for the simple reason that the law is what constitutes both desire and the lack on which it is predicated. Where there is desire, the power relation is always present" (81).

in these debilitating terms installs him in Kate's retrospective account at the outset of the novel. Now he finds himself mirroring Kate's otherness:

> All he had originally felt in her came back to him, was indeed actually as present as ever–how he had admired and envied what he called to himself her pure talent for life, as distinguished from his own, a poor weak thing of the occasion, amateurishly patched up; only it irritated him the more that this was exactly what was now, ever so characteristically, standing out in her. (*WD* 283-84)

In this summative reflection, Densher's disenfranchisement and Kate's prosperity converge, impressing her inaccessibility and their incompatibility upon him. "The darkness she embodies will gradually reveal the true nature of desire to Densher, its connection to his lack, his incompletion" (Van Slyck, "Charting" 308). Kate Croy's desire for him is the "queer fabric that built him in;" should he resolve to distance himself from her, "[it] would fall away in a minute and admit the light" (*WD* 283). Having invested in her, he chooses to abide by the impulse "to make the best of everything, … the instinct of a man somehow aware that if he let go at one place he should let go everywhere" (*WD* 283). In that instant germinates his later stipulation that his continued commitment hinges on her physical surrender to him, as a compensatory valorizing gesture of his unwitting devotion to her.

Foreigners populate James's final completed novel, *The Golden Bowl*. Its principal cast, consisting of uprooted "American upwardly mobile usurpers, an impoverished Italian prince, and a social-climbing but shabby ex-New York yentl" (Sadoff 38), [89] must assume the

[89] In "'Under the Lids of Jerusalem,'" Liesl M. Olson juxtaposes the manifestation of Jewishness in *The Golden Bowl* with representations of ethnicity and stereotypical Jewishness in contemporaneous popular culture. Similarly, in "'Like a Dazzling Curtain of Light,'" Nevena Stojanovic intersects *The Golden Bowl* with James's *The American Scene* (1907) and argues that Jewishness is a porous figuration in the novel. Stojanovic submits that James relates Jewishness not to identity but to character, as Fanny Assingham and other characters exhibit its

costs levied by the politics of naturalization and power relations, in an unfamiliar setting hampered further by their problematic contiguity. In the maze of the claustrophobic bonds circulating in the novel, the four main characters continually engage "a readjustment of relations" (*GB* 2: 38).[90] James metaphorizes these shifts by the tropes of "collecting" and "arranging," the multiple valences of which demarcate the two main couples of the novel and afford them strategic and adaptive stances. Maggie, her father, Prince Amerigo and Charlotte individually situate themselves vis-à-vis the other three; consequently, the mutable positions assigned both to one's self and to one another necessitate the continual assessment of the others' corresponding fresh postures. Jonathan Freedman demonstrates that these intricate moves operate by the strategical logic of game theory: Freedman writes, "Enabled by the knowledge of what he or she has already done, the first player can easily make a move designed to lure his or her opponent into making a suboptimal move in response – leading the second player to form a false impression about the first player's strategy which causes him or her to blunder and lose the game" ("What Maggie Knew" 103). "Collecting" and "arranging" thus articulate the implicit violence of the communally destabilizing agencies operating at the diegetic level of the novel.

Freedman's contention is substantiated by James in the Preface to the New York edition of *The Golden Bowl*: the novel is an "arena," where "the deeply involved and immersed and more or less bleeding participants [are] engaged in the struggle that provides for the others in the circling tiers the entertainment of the great game" (*AN* 328). As Fanny and

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positive features in their conduct. For a discussion of representations of caricaturist ethnicity and assimilation in *The Golden Bowl*, see Henry B. Wonham, "Amerigo's Miraculous Metamorphosis."

[90] All citations of *The Golden Bowl* are from the New York edition, published in Volumes XXIII and XXIV of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*. The citations are presented here in the volume/page number format.

Bob Assingham note, any contemplation of the relational complexities of the four main characters in James's "arena" requires the vertiginous enumeration of their ties: "There's Maggie's and the Prince's, and there's the Prince's and Charlotte's. … [T]here's Charlotte's and the Prince's. … [Then] there's Maggie's and Charlotte's," not to mention Fanny Assingham's "Maggie's and mine, [and] I think too that there's Charlotte's and mine" (*GB* 1: 75). One might add to the Assinghams' catalogue Maggie's filial bond with her father and Charlotte's marital relation to him. Anat Pick describes these relations as polygamous: "[T]he four main characters are simultaneously *multiply* attached to one another in a manner that resists the formation of monogamous or exclusive couples" (116). If the individual is to prosper severally in these close quarters, he or she must inevitably resort to self-serving ploys that may prove inimical to the other players' ripostes.

Adam Verver's American wealth endows him with great control over the circles he presides. His preoccupation with collecting works of art contributes to this view substantially, rendering him as a daunting Administrator in a land of which he is not native. To Maggie, he appears as "the 'successful' beneficent person, the beautiful bountiful original dauntlessly willful great citizen, the consummate collector and infallible high authority" (*GB* 2: 273). Nor does the cultural heritage of Europe remain indifferent to his transatlantic pull, as John Carlos Rowe notes: "The Renaissance aristocracy represented by Bronzino has been replaced by American power and wealth" ("Globalization" 210).[91] In addition to galvanizing his self

[91] For a colonialist reading of *The Golden Bowl*, see Stuart Burrows, "The Golden Fruit: Innocence and Imperialism in *The Golden Bowl*." Burrows contends that "A succession of elaborate images–figures that echo sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts of the 'discovery' of America–chart the relationship between the imperialism of language and the language of imperialism in *The Golden Bowl*" (96). Guy Davidson complicates Adam's imperialistic disposition by homoeroticism: "Adam's purchase of Amerigo is a sort of eroticized imperialist appropriation [that] finds a tropological parallel in James's choice of the names of the two men.

abroad, his museum project destined to become his legacy in American City discloses his aspiration to an ennobled stature at his point of origin. Adam Verver's ambition inheres in Kristeva's account of the foreigner's relation to his native land: "On the one hand it is pleasant and interesting to leave one's homeland in order to enter other climes, mentalities, and governments; but on the other hand and particularly, this move is undertaken only to return to oneself and one's home, to judge or laugh at one's limitations" (*Strangers* 133). Adam Verver is animated by his dual desires to obtain power through an aesthetic enterprise and to establish his eminence upon his subsequent return to America.

To Adam, Maggie's marriage to Prince Amerigo tallies gainfully with his plans. A titled son-in-law would dignify his social status in no small measure: "[T]he particular sharpened appetite of the collector had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit" (*GB* 1: 140). Maggie states this import to the Prince unabashedly:

> You're at any rate a part of his collection, … one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you–you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a *morceau de musée*. (*GB* 1: 12)

In the wake of her marriage to Prince Amerigo, Maggie persists in the enjoyment of her hermetic relationship with her father, heedless of the Prince's figural position of a prestigious accessory. "[N]either father nor daughter is prepared to admit Amerigo's strangeness, his uniqueness, into the well-ordered little world they inhabit. … [T]hey create around it a prohibitive and prohibiting fence" (Irena Smith 182-83). The Ververs' predominance in the

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Adam, the biblical first man, economically and sexually dominates Amerigo, whose name, of course, recalls Amerigo Vespucci, the fifteenth-century navigator who provided the appellation for the nation from which Adam comes" ("Ornamental Identity" 31).

marriage and their status quo initially cohere, abetted by the Prince's compliance with their exploitation of his stature. In some ways, the Ververs' collaboration in objectifying the Prince iterates Madame Merle's and Osmond's plot for Isabel, as Millicent Bell observes: "[T]he millionaire Ververs … may be, no less than Osmond, mistaking persons for objects when they regard Prince Amerigo as the most exquisite of their finds; the regressive incestuous attachment of Maggie and her father … is related to this fetishism" (*Meaning* 205).

That his marriage to Charlotte insinuates the diminution of his dominance becomes evident to Adam in the scene of his proposal in Brighton. His imagination intimates to him that the marriage would jeopardize his hold over his dominion by creating an imbalance. "He had put the question on which there was no going back and which represented thereby the sacrifice of his vessels, and what he further said was to stand for the redoubled thrust of flame that would make combustion sure" (*GB* 1: 218). The image of burning one's ships signals the severance of the past from the present, which, in turn, ushers in the anxiety of rootlessness. More significantly, the metaphor invokes an image of war, the novel's leitmotif for the contending energies in James's "arena". Burning one's ships can be a tactical manoeuvre of willful incapacitation, thereby depriving an adversary of the capacity to effect further damage, but all the while bolstering one's defensive position. Adam's motive for marrying Charlotte is to maintain his and Maggie's sycophantic attachment to one another. "[T]he whole call of his future to him, as a father, would be in his so managing that Maggie would less and less appear to have forsaken him" (*GB* 1: 207). The rhetoric of his rationale points to his determination to retain the controlling agency he has enjoyed until then.

Charlotte Stant has pragmatic motives of her own for consenting to Adam's proposal, which conveniently arrives at a juncture in her life when her alternative is economic hardship and spinsterhood. Her uncertain prospects for the future slip into the social anxieties of the foreigner: "I won't pretend I don't think it would be good for me to marry. Good for me, I mean, … because I'm so awfully *unattached*. I should like to be a little *less adrift*. I should like *to have a home*. I should like to have an existence. … I don't want to be a horrible English old-maid" (*GB* 1: 219, emphases added). Likewise, Prince Amerigo, that acquired *objet d'art*, marries Maggie due to his own lack of financial prosperity, at the cost of absorbing the double-edged otherness the Ververs project onto him: he is a foreigner living in England, and he is commodified into, to borrow from James's diction, a "quantity." In turn, he devises his own strategy to counter his diminution; "[H]e was to constitute a possession, yet was to escape being reduced to his component parts" (*GB* 1: 23). The Prince incarnates the Kristevan stranger's innermost self: "I do what *they* want me to, but it is not 'me' – 'me is elsewhere, 'me' belongs to no one" (*Strangers* 8); or as Guy Davidson puts it, "[His] alienation from the upper middle-class 'English way' is deployed by James as a means of elaborating upon the division in the Prince's character between the privatized space of interiority and the self he is obliged to present to the world" (31). Amerigo resolves to conceal his cloistered self from the Ververs, but this self-protective gesture houses an aggressive edge, which surfaces in the implied forewarning at the end of his account of himself below:

> There are two parts of me. … One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless *bêtises* of other people. … Those things are written – literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've both of you wonderfully looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown,

> unimportant – unimportant save to *you* – personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing. (*GB* 1: 9)

Amerigo's contiguity to the Anglo-Saxon Ververs and their circle amplifies in him his foreignness: reflecting on Maggie's and Charlotte's friendship, he decides "he probably wouldn't have trusted here a young person of his own race" (*GB* 1: 53). This inhibitive closeness stimulates his impulse to shed his otherness. In fact, his illicit relationship with Charlotte rests upon their shared sense of trivialization. Outside the antiquarian's shop where Charlotte is browsing for a wedding gift to Maggie, she detects in him a "funny Italian taste for London street-life" (*GB* 1: 114). In Chapter V of Book First, when she expresses her desire for him during one of their early assignations in the park, he imagines

> It was as if [the day] had been waiting for her, as if she knew it, placed it, loved it, as if it were in fact a part of what she had come back for. So far as this was the case the impression of course could only be lost on a mere vague Italian; it was one of those for which you had to be blessedly an American–as indeed you had to be blessedly an American for all sorts of things: so long as you hadn't, blessedly or not, to remain in America. (GB 1: 90)

The repeated "as if(s)" of the first sentence tentatively collapse Charlotte's consciousness onto the Prince's; the unpacking that follows is in the comparative frame of their national identities, leading to the Prince's self-congratulatory note for his capacity to exchange his Italian "vagueness" for alleged American surety. In France today says Kristeva, the foreigner embraces one of

> two opposite attitudes. … Either he attempts at all costs to merge into that homogeneous mixture that knows no other, to identify with it, to vanish into it, to become assimilated; the process is flattering, for the exile valorizes as much as–if not more than–the French themselves the blessings of the civilization where he seeks shelter. Or else he withdraws into his isolation, humiliated and offended, conscious of the handicap of never being able to become a Frenchman (*Strangers* 39).

Clearly the Prince's choice above is of the first order Kristeva defines, but it is less a surrender of his self to the Ververs than an osmotic incorporation of their appropriative values, for Amerigo reveals an adeptness for the collector's *métier*. His observations of Charlotte's circumstances and her deportment congeal into a mystified appraisal: "Nothing in her definitely placed her; she was a rare, a special product. Her singleness, her solitude, her want of means, that is her want of ramifications and other advantages, contributed to enrich her somehow with an odd precious neutrality" (*GB* 1: 53-54). Stephen D. Arata writes, "Amerigo's extraordinarily cold-blooded inventory … objectifies Charlotte, reducing her to her physical attributes. Just as, moreover, museum objects were valued not only for themselves but for the culture they contained, so too are Charlotte's parts attractive to the Prince for the intangible qualities they represent" (207). If in *The Wings of the Dove* Kate's desire for Densher is fuelled by his potential function as her liberator, in this novel Amerigo's adulterous relationship with Charlotte takes its cue from his longing for self-valorization.

In the circuitous binds of the novel, Amerigo sanitizes his infidelity by reminding himself that "after all, as an outsider, a foreigner, and even as a mere representative husband and son-in-law, he was so irrelevant to the working of affairs that he could be bent on occasion to uses comparatively trivial" (*GB* 1: 352). Similarly, Charlotte exonerates herself and Amerigo by declaring,

> Isn't the immense, the really quite matchless beauty of our position that we have to 'do' nothing in life at all? – nothing except the usual necessary everyday thing which consists in one's not being more of a fool than one can help. … There has been plenty of 'doing,' and there will doubtless be plenty still; but it's all theirs, every inch of it; it's all a matter of what they've done *to* us." (*GB* 1: 289)

Ann-Marie Priest suggests, "The hidden sexual relationship between Amerigo and Charlotte undermines the attempts of both Maggie and her father to deal with each as an 'individual unit of value,' and to dispose of each as an object of art" ("Risking the Cracks" 219). Simply put, Charlotte's and Amerigo's adultery is enabled by the Ververs themselves. Thus it will require the entire first half of the novel for Maggie to realize that the lovers' liaison is a response to her almost incestuous relationship with her father.[92]

The mutual admiration and preference of the Ververs for each other's company leave their spouses free to imagine them as a blissfully inseparable couple who lack sophistication gravely. Charlotte describes Adam and Maggie to Fanny Assingham as "children playing at paying visits, playing at 'Mr. Thompson' and 'Mrs. Fane,' each hoping that the other would really stay to tea" (*GB* 1: 252). Similarly, in a private reflection, the Prince muses, "They were good children, bless their hearts, and the children of good children; so that verily, the Principino himself, as less consistently of that descent, might figure to the fancy as the ripest genius of the trio" (*GB* 1: 334). Notwithstanding the dismissive infantilization of their spouses, Charlotte and Prince Amerigo fault the father and the daughter for their objectifications. An irony of proportions colours their depictions of the Ververs as children, for they posit Adam and Maggie as fatuous agents regulating the dynamics of adult relationships. The irony gathers momentum through Charlotte and the Prince's supervision of the unperturbed continuance of their romantic attachment and their comfortable new

[92] Priscilla Walton is among those critics who regard Book Second, "The Princess," as fundamentally Maggie's revision of the First. Walton argues that "these revisions constitute her means of opening the closed text of Book I. Indeed, her methodology is in accord with the tenets of post-structuralist feminism since her revisions disrupt the masculine referentiality of Book I by privileging the pluralizing nature of the feminine Other in Book II" ("'A Mistress of Shades" 144). Other critics who hold similar views include Leo Bersani (*A Future for Astyanax* 150-51), and Mark Seltzer (*Henry James & the Art of Power* 95).

"arrangement." By seemingly acquiescing to Adam and Maggie's self-absorbed capricious management of their lives, Charlotte and the Prince reconfigure their joint objectification to their purposes, nullifying the abatement of selfhood the Ververs launched by marrying them.

In Book Second of the novel, when Maggie has a provisional inkling that her husband and her father's spouse are in an adulterous relationship, the tenuous concord of the quartet disintegrates through a reversal of power relations. Mark Seltzer confirms this discontinuity: "Every attempt to redress the balance of relations initially disrupted by Maggie's alliance with the Prince entails resistances and reverse effects that threaten the Ververs' conjugal accumulations and arrangements" (69).[93] Importantly, in the second half of the novel, Maggie begins to perceive her own role in triggering the reversal: "[S]he had made at a particular hour, made by the mere touch of her hand, a difference in the situation so long present to her as practically unattackable" (*GB* 2: 3). After the Prince and Charlotte's return from a romantic interlude at Gloucester, Maggie modulates her dealings with both, addressing her affections to Amerigo more overtly than before; simultaneously, she attempts to restore her friendship to Charlotte to its former degree of intimacy. At the first signal of Maggie's disruption of their revised configuration of agencies, Charlotte and Amerigo retaliate. Maggie's recalibrations alarm the lovers, who now determine to pre-empt the destabilization she intends to produce. Her two initiatives precipitate a reciprocal modulation of attitudes by Charlotte and the Prince, who now begin to attend to her in a correspondently ostentatious affection, thereby counterbalancing the effectiveness of her tactics. In turn, Maggie quickly recognizes the corrective nature of the move: "It was a worked-out scheme for their not wounding her, for

[93] Seltzer sees the indissoluble ties of power and love in this novel also operating in James's *The Turn of the Screw* (157).

their behaving to her quite nobly; … which therefore, so far as that went, proved that she had become with them a subject of intimate study" (*GB* 2: 43). The last words of her reflection install the reversal of the controlling agency: the close surveillance Charlotte and Amerigo have now undertaken promotes *their* predominance in the family circle. Maggie's imagination articulates this reassignment of roles as follows:

> They had built her in with their purpose–which was why, above her, a vault seemed more heavily to arch; so that she sat there, in the solid chamber of her helplessness, as in a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her, over the brim of which she could but just manage to see by stretching her neck. (*GB* 2: 44)

In this citation, the verb "built in" unmistakably subordinates Maggie to the constrictive mode, "the arching vault" enhances that circumscription, and the "bath of benevolence" subsumes her. Furthermore, "the arching vault" references Maggie's lately acquired awareness of her husband and Charlotte's attachment: "[I]t now arched over the Princess's head like a vault of bold span that important communication between them on the subject couldn't have failed of being immediate" (*GB* 2: 42). In both citations, the Verver principle of unfazed self-absorption has ceased to function. As Anat Pick notes, "Maggie is forced to think about her relationship with Adam, Adam's relation with Charlotte, and her own relation with the Prince, as relations which must be reckoned with equally, and which therefore can no longer exist oblivious of each other" (127). In Chapter II of Book Fourth, Maggie had envisioned the evolvement of their tangled lives in the metaphor of a four-wheeled carriage, which "Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling … while she and her father were not so much as pushing. They were seated inside together, … so that the exertion was all with the others" (*GB* 2: 23). In the moment Maggie becomes aware of her husband's relationship with her father's wife, "the family

coach," for which she herself had secured a "fourth wheel" by introducing Charlotte to Adam, comes to a halt.

The metaphor of the imposed "bath of benevolence" also reverses the operations of "collecting". The acquirer's lavish but restrictive care upon the prized artifact is replaced by the procured object's equally confining watchfulness of its owner. The method adopted by Maggie's detractors is paradoxical; they virtually immobilize her by extravagant deference. Conversations with Charlotte now appear shrouded in "a kind of silver tissue of decorum" (*GB* 2: 38); the "lady-in-waiting" insists upon "never passing first, … not sitting till she was seated, … not interrupting till she appeared to give leave, [and] not forgetting, too, familiarly, that in addition to being important she was also sensitive" (*GB* 2: 38). As for Amerigo, "his instinct for relations, the most exquisite conceivable, prompted him immediately to meet and match the difference, to play somehow into its hands. That was what it was, she renewedly felt, to have married a man who was sublimely a gentleman" (*GB* 2: 40). When Maggie strives to identify the motive behind this seemingly affectionate attention – "the bath of benevolence," she divines its impetus: in her words, her husband's and her friend's harmonized attitude is

> some required process of their own, a process operating, quite positively, as a precaution and a policy. They had got her into the bath and, for consistency with themselves–which was with each other–must keep her there. In that condition she wouldn't interfere with the policy, which was established, which was arranged. (*GB* 2: 44).

The reversed dynamics of control converge in the trope of arrangement. The word appears at several instances, but its collocation with the "bath of benevolence" consolidates its multivalence. Its most aggressive value resides in the assignment of a position where the subject's movements are restricted. Allocation of a position echoes two earlier depictions of

immobilization in the novel, both made to Fanny Assingham. Charlotte refers to her position in the communal space as a "pin stuck, up to its head, in a cushion. I'm placed – I can't imagine anyone more placed. There I am!" (*GB* 1: 256); Prince Amerigo describes his union with Maggie as a boat, "a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored if you like out in the stream" (*GB* 1: 270). Both Charlotte and Amerigo occupy the sites earmarked for them readily, for by doing so they can luxuriate in the self-governance otherwise denied to them. Both submit to the diminution of the self implemented by their respective spouses, accessing in return their subjectivities, notwithstanding the refractions of individuation they must suffer.

The strategy of enforcing a "bath of benevolence" upon Maggie strives to restore the former status quo and proposes to remove any hindrance to its maintenance. In this light, "arrangement" also implies the lovers' conspiratorial scheme of preserving an expedient state of affairs. "Policy or no policy, it was they themselves who were arranged. She must be kept in position so as not to disarrange them" (*GB* 2: 45). Additionally, the word also demarcates the individual positions the four characters occupy in the communal space:

> Of course they were arranged–all four arranged; but what had the basis of their life been, precisely, but that they were arranged together? Ah! Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she–to confine the matter only to herself–was arranged apart. (*GB* 2: 45)

Arguably, Charlotte and Amerigo's move is an extension of their earlier infantilization of Maggie, mimicking the relational dynamics of a caregiver and a child. The lovers' tactic also replicates Adam Verver's maintenance of control through the self-imposed "sacrifice of his vessels." Just as he had wilfully immobilized himself to retain his administrative authority,

similarly, the lovers lavish upon Maggie subservient attention to upkeep their predominance.[94] Their corrective manoeuvres address the objectifications both endure in their marriages, responding to the curtailment in kind – albeit delicate – violence. That aggressiveness emanates from the energies contending for ascendancy in the "arena." The characters engaged in the contest recruit the policy of reducing another's subjectivity, elaborated in the figuration of people as movable items. The tactic affixes relative permanence to the subject's social station. In Anat Pick's view,

> To treat people as placed objects is to draw attention to the way in which people–like things–are organized, and organized in relation to one another. The rhetoric of objectification is characteristically administrative in accordance with the novel's dynamics of placing, arranging people together and later rearranging them (124).

The mutual objectifications of the two main couples disrupt the apparent harmony in the space of interaction, relegating the other occupants to more assailable positions; alternatively, the reversal of their agencies buttresses the predominance of a couple within that space.

In *The Golden Bowl*, there are several instances where one character is placed in relation to another, such as the moment when Maggie looks up from Eaton Square at Charlotte gazing at her from a window (*GB* 2: 103).[95] Another remarkable instance occurs in Chapter IV of Book Fifth, when Maggie and Adam observe Charlotte as she performs the duties of tour guide for neighbours visiting Adam's collection of art objects. Placed at opposite ends of the

[94] Gregory Phipps approaches the novel from a Hegelian perspective. Phipps reformulates the master-slave dialectic of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* by inserting women in Hegel's framework, in order to spotlight the Hegelian features of the exclusively female bi-directional master-slave relations of Maggie and Charlotte. See Phipps, "Desire, Death, and Women in the Master-Slave Dialectic" 233-34.

[95] James favours such architectonic images: in *The Ambassadors*, prior to his first meeting with Chad Newsome, Lambert Strether spends considerable time contemplating the young man's apartment from the sidewalk across the street (*AM* 68).

picture gallery, father and daughter communicate by knowing glances only: upon listening to Charlotte drawing the visitors' attention to the *vieux Saxe* garlands ornamenting a vase, Maggie's eyes suddenly fill with tears:

> The high voice went on; its quaver was doubtless for conscious ears only, but there were verily thirty seconds during which it sounded, for our young woman, like the shriek of a soul in pain. Kept up a minute longer it would break and collapse – so that Maggie felt herself the next thing turn with a start to her father. "Can't she be stopped? Hasn't she done it *enough*?" (*GB* 2: 292)

Charlotte mimics Madame Merle's momentary drop of her artful self in the scene of her encounter with Isabel at the convent, but while Isabel's response in that scene was only a sharp rejoinder, Maggie's verges on pity here for she has already prevailed; but also because Maggie assumes responsibility for having instigated the rebounding debilitation Charlotte and Amerigo collusively inflict upon Adam and her. Maggie's final "readjustment of relations" is to impress upon her father that the happiness of both couples rests on parting ways, that he leave England with Charlotte to go to American City and pursue his museum project. Maggie's recovery of her husband's fidelity necessitates her desistance from blithe complacency. In this, the future of her marriage seems more secure than Isabel's at the end, while Charlotte's exile to America parallels Serena Merle's course. Charlotte looks upon a grim future, her desires thwarted and her self absorbed by the conventionality of marriage. A similar "arrangement" awaits Amerigo at the end of *The Golden Bowl*: in the last scene, he submits to Maggie's reappropriation of him. Standing face to face with her, "He tried, too clearly, to please her – to meet her in her own way; his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See'"? I see nothing but *you*" (*GB* 2: 368-69). The equivocation of this pronounced complete devotion to her becomes legible in the next sentence: looking at his eyes, Maggie

sees the not passion but a "strange light" that fills her with "pity and dread of them" (*GB* 2: 369). As Jessica Berman states, "[Amerigo] who first appears as something exotic and unfathomable, … finishes the novel almost completely possessed by Maggie. … [H]is adventure with an American family … ultimately absorbs him, imposing upon him an American version of the rules of propriety and property that come with marriage" (*Modernist Fiction* 67). "Arrangement" comes to full circle.

Critics generally agree that Maggie's purchased happiness at the end is at best ambiguous, mitigated as it is by the couple's capitulations from formerly privileged stances. Gregory Phipps expresses this view best: "[A]t the end of *The Golden Bowl*, there is every indication that Amerigo has lost his attraction to Charlotte and truly *does* desire Maggie, whereas Maggie, in turn, has lost the jealous ardor that excited *her* passion, and can only take her place as the guardian of the divine law" (248).[96] Similarly, Michael Reid finds the novel's ending "intricately patterned, … [E]ach character sacrifices one person to gain another" (279). Other critics take exception to ambiguity of the novel's last scene, claiming "the future looms frighteningly for both of them" (Wessel 588); "Maggie does not find her reward but the pressure of the man she has sequestered but scarcely known, the man whose intense concentration on her alone casts her into the unknown again" (Steele 87). Freedman even goes so far as to declare Maggie's "victory" hollow:

> [I]t seems to me absolutely clear in the final lines of the book that she has achieved, more or less, nothing. Her father and her best friend are lost to her, immured in an exile to which she sends them as sacrifice (for one) and

[96] The ambiguity of the ending is also maintained by Joseph A. Boone, who believes "her marriage is left ambiguously suspended, open to question, at the text's end" ("Modernist Maneuvrings" 379), and by Ruth Yeazell: "[W]hat we really witness here is less a closed fiction than a character struggling to will such a fiction" (125).

> punishment (for the other); she has won again the love of her husband, but he seems to be as much a hypnotised automaton as an active participant in their marriage. ("What Maggie Knew" 112-13) [97]

In both *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, foreignness proves to be circumscriptive but not without its own agency to contend in kind force. John Carlos Rowe suggests, "Living elsewhere is sometimes just parasitic tourism, sometimes mindless worship of the past, occasionally an emancipatory experience of your own freedom. In part, these rare moments of liberation are the consequence of alienation, such as James's feminine protagonists experience from the outset of their fictional journeys" ("Globalization" 211). The confluence of otherness with power and desire in the novels I have discussed in this chapter endows James's foreigners with brief opportunities to insert the self within the adopted community, but such inclusions ultimately attest to the mutability of both.

[97] Anna Despotopoulou holds an optimistic view of the novel's ending: "Amerigo's words "'See'? I see nothing but *you*" do not reveal casual marital tenderness, … but sincerity, as Maggie herself observes" ("Invisible Buildings" 431-32).

Conclusion

Signposts

I have endeavoured to demonstrate in the preceding pages that if and when components of female subjectivity cohere in James's late novels, they do so in almost always unexpected ways. In order to actuate her self, the Jamesian heroine indulges in wayward, often subversive acts. The chief concern of this dissertation has been to frame said courses of action by Kristeva's systematized theories. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth observes, "In approaching the postmodern problem of subjectivity, the important first step is methodological. The most influential discussions of it have been grounded in philosophical texts, so that literary texts have only figured marginally, if at all, as quotation-quarries and exempla" (406). If that is indeed the case, this dissertation seeks to redress the literary text's peripheral relevance to subjectivity studies by situating James's female characters at its centre; hence my decision to elucidate the processes of their subject formation in a Kristevan framework. This repositioning does, I think, contribute a productive engagement with the constitution of female subjectivity in Henry James's late novels. The overriding ambition of my investigation is to render accurately "the picture of the struggle involved, the adventure brought about, the gain recorded or the loss incurred, the precious experience somehow compassed," as I hope I have done.[98] For to assume it is possible to arrive at a teleological reading of the female subject's circulations in James is practically futile: his novels offer mostly relational perspectives that resist definitive interpretations. In his incisive work on the lack of referential security in James, Ralf Norrman terms this irresolution

> end-linking, [the] endless escalation of textual growth. … This feature in James's style reflects an insecure world is which everything remains tentative. James is never certain that what he has put down will do after all. James does not merely hand his readers a *product*; he hands them a *process.*" (70-71)

[98] The citation is from James's Preface to *The Wings of the Dove* (*AN* 288).

Finite meanings are deferred *ad infinitum*, and the ensuing proliferations of signification summon the reader to explore their consequent slippages into ontological and literary discourses lying well beyond them. While writing this dissertation, I paused frequently at Jamesian moments of such dialogic relations. I came to designate them as signposts, of which what follows is but a sample.

Signpost 1: The authorial weight

Positioning James's female characters at the centre entails a conscious effort to keep the author at the farthest possible distance from them. The few instances James comes into their vicinity in my dissertation are the footnotes and my invocation of his expatriate status in the fourth chapter.[99] That James's Americanness bears relevance to his work in Europe is now a commonplace suggestion, and Jamesian scholarship has amply substantiated that claim. Yet there are numerous references to himself as an *émigré* artist in his correspondence. In a letter to William Dean Howells from Berne, dated 22 June 1873, he writes, "What is the meaning of this destiny of desolate exile–this dreary necessity of having month after month to do without our friends for the sake of this arrogant old Europe which so little befriends us?" (Lubbock 1: 34). Five years later, he still frets over his exiled condition to his brother William: "I am still completely an outsider here, and my only chance for becoming a little of an insider (in that limited sense in which an American can ever do so) is to remain here for the present" (Lubbock 1: 59-60). His anxieties are apparently somewhat alleviated in 1880, when he mentions in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton that he is "at least now a thoroughly naturalised Londoner – cockney "*convaincu*" (Lubbock 1: 70). This perception of his integration is

[99] James became a naturalized British citizen just one year before his death in 1916 (Rowe "Henry James and the United States" 228).

propped by his friendships during those years with Robert Louis Stevenson, Edmund Gosse, and George Meredith, and by the celebrity status he enjoyed following the publications of *The Europeans* and "Daisy Miller" in 1878. Philip Horne's valuable work *Henry James: A Life in Letters* (1999) vouches for the pertinence of James's correspondence to his creative output: as Horne states, "The eloquence and interest of certain passages in both notebooks and letters mean these forms become not here merely ancillary to literature: they *are* literature, constitute part of James's achievement" ("Letters and Notebooks" 69). It seems to me there is still much in James's letters to be unpacked for inventive approaches to his tales and novels. Likewise, the prefaces he wrote for the New York Edition are yet another portal to accessing the intricacies of his art, especially since their reflexivity complicates the insight they furnish. I established in the second chapter that James allocates authorship positions to his characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*. The question my claim begs is this: do such assignments not engender hermeneutic bafflements in both the characters involved and in the reader? Laurel Bollinger attests to the validity of this question:

> If … meaning occurs only through the interplay of signs, then meaning is by definition unstable, slippery. This concept becomes particularly problematic when applied to the now commonplace idea–so clearly evoked by James's complex figuration in *The Portrait*–that subjectivity too can be described in terms of text. (141)

Bollinger is pointing to the ways James's works transmute the structurally justified meanings prevalent in Victorian fiction into radically ambiguous significations. James rejects readily available endings by inserting incongruity in the consciousness in his characters. Poring over James's prefaces to chart this shift may be a worthwhile project. The same might also be true

as regards his travel writings: *Transatlantic Sketches* (1875), *Portraits of Places* (1883), *The American Scene* (1907), and *Italian Hours* (1909).

Signpost 2: From Theory to Text

My study of James's texts may convincingly be argued as archaeological, for it scans five of his late novels to identify discursive sequences that corroborate Kristeva's theories. Simultaneously, it spotlights intertextual features in the Kristevan continuum: her linguistic theories substantiate the notion of the subject-in-process, which in turn leads to abjection and melancholia, to otherness and forgiveness. Beyond these confluences, Kristeva's life and works bleed also into her fiction. However, the response to five novels she has published thus far has been less than enthusiastic, if not disparaging. Benigno Trigo reports that her first novel *Les Samouraïs* (1990) was panned more than those that followed (66): *Le vieil homme et les loups* (1991), *Possessions* (1996), which was written while France turned from socialist to right-wing politics, *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004), *Thérèse mon amour* (2008), and most recently *L'Horloge enchantée* (2015). In the popular media, her fiction has been compared with Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins* (1954) and with Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1984) (Trigo 67). Academic critics, on the other hand, gave favourable reviews, finding links with Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory and practice.[100] She has stated that she finds the writing experience "cathartic and extremely reconstitutional for the writer. To the extent that it deals with imagination, the writing of novels leads us into memory, and memory proceeds from signs to perceptions, from ideas to the body, which, in turn, allows for a kind of permanent come-and-go that remakes the personality as a whole" (Kolocotroni 220). The spectrum she

[100] Kristeva became a practicing psychoanalyst in 1979.

describes is an incentive to research her fiction and discover ways to enhance our understanding of her work.

Signpost 3: Modernism

The chronological proximity of James's works to the inception of modernist works has garnered considerable attention in Jamesian criticism. Brenda Austin-Smith submits that *The Golden Bowl* "anticipat[es] the fragmentation in Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the complex personal mythologies of Yeats" (62); in the same track, Holly Blackford suggests Isabel Archer's vigil in Chapter XLII of *The Portrait of a Lady*

> is a hallmark of experiments in focalization to come, both by James and later modernists, who would focus on the active minds of characters in trapped conditions. For example, in T. S. Eliot's 1915 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Prufrock tragically cannot speak or participate in social life, but he compensates with a rich interior, reflective practice on his alienated condition. (368)[101]

In *The Awkward Age*, "the inaugural work of Henry James's late period" (Krook 135), the setting of the final chapters may be conceived as a literal proto-figuration of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929).[102] Nanda finds in her schoolroom the voice of her perseverance in spite of the iniquities she suffers; and Woolf imagines for herself and other women the feminine space where "no gate, no lock, no bolt … can [be] set upon the freedom of my mind" (76). Not surprisingly, Woolf thought the "huge tight-stuffed rather airless books of Henry James are in truth the bridge upon which we cross from the classic novel … to that other form

[101] See also Britzolakis (373), Boone (374), and Haralson (218).

[102] J. Oates Simon detects an affinity between *The Wings of the Dove* and Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), "in their use of minute psychological observations, Woolf casting about much more freely than James; and in their deliberate, unhurried, at times relentless faithfulness to these observations" (119).

of literature which if names have any importance should someday be christened anew–the modern novel, the novel of the twentieth century" (qtd. in McWhirter "(Post)modernist?"170).

Convergences of James and other modernists also surface in "The Little Review," the American literary periodical founded by Margaret Anderson in 1914. The magazine published in 1918 a special Henry James issue, with contributions by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.[103] More recently, James's works have been studied in comparative contexts. Emma Kafalenos casts a narratological net over her reading of *The Ambassadors* and Kafka's "Before the Law" (1919); Barbara Eckstein concludes her essay on *What Maisie Knew* by juxtaposing Maisie with Nabokov's Lolita: "All the sexual desire that lurks in *What Maisie Knew* Nabokov parades before the reader, mocking James's reticence. Nabokov teases the reader with the relationship between narrator (Humbert Humbert) and author in Lolita as James does in *What Maisie Knew*" (190). The same relation occurs to Tessa Hadley, who reminds us that Maisie is dissimilar to Lolita, "but the reader is unwillingly forced almost into a Humbert Humbert role, bound to have sex perpetually on his or her mind in Maisie's company, just because, although it is going on all around her until she's swamped with it, she *doesn't* have it on hers" ("*What Maisie Knew*" 222). These conjunctions of James and later writers' works reveal the growing inclination in Jamesian scholars to regard him as a precursor to modernism.

The detours I have made above are rudimentary itineraries in this dissertation's line of vision. Embarking on these tangential routes will, I think, contribute in a meaningful way to Jamesian and Kristevan scholarships. For the present, it is sufficient to address two questions

[103] Incidentally, the 1918-21serialization of Joyce's *Ulysses* in "The Little Review" led to the U.S. Post Office's notorious confiscation and burning four issues of the periodical (Cornell *Writing & Publishing Ulysses* n.pag.).

my dissertation poses: why Kristeva, and why James's late novels? The inducement to recruit Kristeva's theories came above all from her relational theories and her systematized approach to them. Her work consistently equips us with tools to negotiate the anxieties permeating Western societies and culture, as well as our forays into literary criticism. As for James, Linda S. Raphael links the "refined secret plot" in *The Wings of the Dove* to James's "maturating use of limited point of view" (90). Tracing that sophistication in his novels would have been challenging, to be sure: but as I have pointed out in the first chapter, the works James produced in the major phase of his career reveal a commitment to female subjectivity via strategies distinctly apart from the contemporary texts mandated by *fin-de-siècle* socio-political pressures. Sarah B. Daugherty says, "[F]or reasons troth humane and aesthetic, James sided with female characters against male writers who belatedly defended the status quo. Without venturing into political criticism, he deplored the dullness of predictable plots and the falseness of happy endings" (179). My choice, then, was determined by the stimulus to study those strategies. In *The Art of Fiction*, Henry James writes, "As people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it. This closeness of relation is what we should never forget in talking of the effort of the novel" (5). That his novels enter into a dialogic relation not only with his time but also with post-modern theories is an enduring testament to his legacy.

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