

OLD TRADITIONS, NEW HOPES:
WOMEN IN THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

by

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When The Portrait of a Lady was written in 1881, society was in a state that would induce Henry James, in his new novel, to label the times as "a foolish period of history,"¹ "the age of advertisement"(p.230), and "an overcivilized age"(p.458). Materialistic and empirical assumptions were manifesting themselves in the growth of commercialism and science; capitalism and technology were becoming firmly established. Despite men such as Comte and Spencer who warned that people were not quite so free as they believed, this new machine age brought with it hopes of infinite power: man by means of his intellect could conquer the universe.

In the midst of man's awakening to power, the other half--womankind--was stirring to new possibilities as well. "A woman . . . has no natural place anywhere . . . has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl," says Madame Merle in The Portrait of a Lady (p.182). But because of the growing formation of women's rights groups following the women's rights conventions in the 1850's, many women--especially American women--were becoming aware of the possibility of a state of 'not crawling,' of a life more rewarding than that of domestic servitude and spiritual adulation by males. In the old scheme women had been cast as domesticated ladies and angels, "placed above men in the ladder of love" and duty-bound to "teach the lesson of

self-denial."² The new freedom preached independence of this genteel role and, reflecting the age as well as real female deficiencies, stressed development of intellect and acquisition of power, both of which had previously been the sole province of the male.

Nevertheless, the fact that the struggle for female emancipation continues to this day signifies that surface living was not to be as readily escaped in actuality as was hoped for in theory. Given the fact that women had been denied a sense of viable female identity for such a long time, it became a sad irony that the masculine power of an age which woke them to the need for a female identity frequently aided in precluding its real development. William Wasserstrom phrased the problem well in his book, The Heiress of All the Ages, remarking that "American society bred troubled women who struck for freedom and gave the mere appearance of autonomy."³

Henry James, as I have hinted, was as aware of these problems of women as he was of the uniqueness of the times in which he lived. His sympathy with women may have taken the form of direct identification, critic Leon Edel suggesting that as a child a "disguise of femininity was necessary . . . when he was confined to 'Family' and had to contend with his elder brother; in that relationship he always saw William as strong and active and himself as inhibited and

passive."⁴ Later in life, James's admiration for such successful women as George Eliot became strongly apparent, and in his own craft also he was patiently awaiting the time when women would really come to the forefront, happily suspecting, for example, that it would eventually be they who would shatter the old restrictions on writing about sexual matters.⁵

Yet he, too, without the benefit of historical hindsight, was concerned that emancipation was too frequently only a substanceless ideal, and that the development of a full female personhood was not, even by ardent liberationists, being accomplished. In The Bostonians, written three years after The Portrait of a Lady, James would be at satiric pains to show a concern for the direction of the new movement; specifically, he exhibits the problem of liberated women becoming masculinized and solitary, and of the movement itself existing as a haven only for cold-hearted females and lesbians.⁶ He would similarly worry in an essay on George Sand that "their [women's] aim has been, as yet, comparatively modest and their emulation low; the challenge they have hitherto picked up is but the challenge of the average male."⁷ While James sympathized with the European woman who continued to face subjugation, it was his view that the newer, freer American woman "had been grown in an air in which a hundred of the European complications did not exist . . . she could develop her audacity on the basis

of her security, just as she could develop her 'powers' in a medium from which criticism was consistently absent. . . . she was full blown . . .".⁸ James was aware, then, of the danger of women adopting but the rhetoric of liberation. By striving blindly for "freedom" in such a "foolish" age, the author feared that women might well make of themselves "conveniences," not unlike appliances.⁹ He also foresaw a damaging effect for relations between the sexes, women's pseudo-independence contributing further to what he termed "a queer deep split or chasm between the two stages of personal polish at which the sexes have arrived."¹⁰ While hoping, then, for great accomplishments from women, Henry James was worried that American women were frequently fooling themselves in their too-easy quest for selfhood; were sacrificing their female qualities in mere emulation of males, whose accomplishments as evidenced in the new age James found not particularly impressive. While James did not reveal such sentiments in a direct way within The Portrait or at the same time as its writing, a consciousness of these views is of great help in illuminating the work.

For in The Portrait of a Lady James grapples with the new age of power and commercialism that he disliked, women's developing roles in that age, and a concomitant loss of human feeling as epitomized in deteriorating relations between the sexes. The focus is on women--American women

placed in Europe with "European complications"-- women of innocence and women of experience, women of intellect and of passion. Forced to deal with such complications, virtually all, "liberated" or not, become victims ("conveniences"). Their lack of a complete personhood adequate to deal with their surroundings leaves them vulnerable to defeat. They try to sacrifice feeling for intellect and the signposts of male success about them, or intellect for feeling (a rarer situation), or abandon selfhood altogether for the security of the tradition of ladyhood. While centering attention on the latest European arrival, Miss Isabel Archer, James paints a canvas of many women reduced to playing surface roles dictated to them by the "masculine" world in which they live--women dominated by the force of individual men or of the age. In perusing this canvas the reader finds that while women can no longer take sustenance from the old traditions without becoming martyrs to a dead cause, they cannot either reach forward to selfhood by merely donning the forms of male success: they must, to avoid being but distorted fractions of their true potential, be brave enough to take up an altogether new form--one roomy enough for their sexuality, their hearts, and their heads.

James's conviction that the old form of passive womanhood was unsatisfactory is revealed initially through

the very minor background characters. The manner in which these characters are developed makes their presence important, for it is a revelation of deprived selfhood. The very classification people give the Archer sisters indicates a problem: they are labelled "the practical one," "the beauty," and "the intellectual"(p.25), as if these three categories were mutually exclusive, each capable of denoting an entire female personality. Edith Archer Keyes gains her identity solely as the "wife of" her husband; the author reports rather wryly that she is the "ornament of those various military stations . . . to which, to her deep chagrin, her husband was successively relegated"(p.25). Practical Lilian Archer Ludlow is spoken of as "thankful to marry at all"(p.25), and looks after Isabel as "a mother spaniel might watch a free greyhound"(p.25)--seeming to live vicariously through her. Neither woman is presented to us in terms of her own personhood or force, but rather in relationship to her husband. Lord Warburton's married sisters are similarly cast in the dependency mould, "one of them having done very well, the other only so-so"(p.62). They remain even without names, and again there is a sarcastic twinge from the author in the suggestion that the "doing" in their life had been "done" when they got themselves married. Others of the minor female characters, such as Mrs. Varian and the Misses Molyneux, come across with an unattractive dim-wittedness; inane Mrs. Varian spreads

what she regards as damning rumors of Isabel writing books, while her own daughters she determines to bring up "properly . . . they read nothing at all"(p.44). The nice Misses Molyneux sit about as harmless, tea-serving appendages to their brother. Significantly, they gaze at free Henrietta "in a manner suggesting a conflict between deep alienation and yearning wonder"(p.117). Because these women seem so incomplete, so much deprived of personhood, and also because of the cynically amused tone used in presenting them, it becomes clearer through them that the novel advocates a change of some sort from the old "dependent" form which they represent, despite its later criticism of certain forms of independence. Living within the secure tradition of passivity, they form a quietly indistinct group portrait of the common lot. As they focus their eyes on women of change, so does the entire novel.

The opening tea scene of the novel is highly suggestive of this process of change, the partakers of tea "being not of the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony"(p.1). Women are not present here for a typical duty, one they are "supposed to" do. Ralph gives us a clue as to their mysterious absence later when he reveals that his father "was the more motherly; his mother on the other hand, paternal, and even gubernatorial"(p.31). In Mrs. Touchett, the missing mother, we find a woman who has

been trying to develop a system of her own, one apart from her husband's. She is the first of the "free" women encountered.

As Ralph's suggestive "paternal" indicates, this woman is much taken with the masculine world. She is cool, sharp, and very logical. Capable of handling business she is anything but the quiet, passive lady. But while clearly being independent--possessing her own "will"(p.32), "a system"(p.18), and "no belief in anyone's power to help her"(p.10)--her early avoidance of any show of feeling makes us suspicious of this role. After a long absence she prefers to see her room rather than Mr. Touchett, and she seldom seems concerned over the problems of others. Mrs. Touchett is every bit as isolated as she is free, and has "locked herself in" emotionally as well as into her room(p.13). Influenced, willy nilly, by the spirit of the new age, she coolly keeps "moral account-books"(p.190), has a sense of "property" about Isabel (p.36), and sees in her niece a "convenience"(p.96). A clipped timetable manner, a preference for the definitive and the utilitarian, and her "comprehensive waterproof mantle"(p.21) serve literally and figuratively to enforce the impression that she is, like the "commercial," "overcivilized" age, not receptive to feeling. Loss of the "maternal" adjective, along with the reality of non-compassionate motherhood to dying Ralph, carry implications of a loss of warmth and humanity even into the biological realm. Mrs. Touchett

easily makes us skeptical of female independence.

Yet the blame for her rigid humanity does not seem to be placed on her; she is painted sympathetically, and James makes it clear that this woman is not without admirable qualities. Mrs. Touchett is a very honest and decent person who will explain her motives if asked (Isabel will not), and is natural to the extent that she can confess "I like to be well thought of"(p.37) while refusing to sacrifice her peculiar sense of integrity to be thought "well of" more frequently than her sad little row of friendship cards would indicate. She is not a wicked or deceitful person; does not, in spite of her coldness, deliberately hurt others; and even Ralph defends her right to her own way. Mrs. Touchett seems a victim; if she will have her freedom, she seems forced to sacrifice something else--she is the first of the women in the novel with an apparent inability to fuse intellect and feeling.

The cause of the tendency to sublimate all energies into exaggerated rationality is perhaps best understood through a statement made by Madame Merle regarding Mr. Touchett: ". . . he has his identity, and it's a rather massive one. He represents a great financial house, and that, in our day, is as good as anything else"(p.183). This statement hints of Madame Merle's envy of such position, and indeed hints of the envy many women must have felt of the

growing male identity as seen in business and science of the nineteenth century. Mr. Touchett, representing this tremendous "masculine" success, can, according to James, maintain a "fine ivory surface . . . opposed to possibilities of penetration"(p.32) as well as a "maternal" capacity for feeling and human relationships; but Mrs. Touchett, trying with all her might to attain an equality with him, only emulates the surface dimension. She is the polar antithesis of female dependency. Recently awakened into independence, she attaches herself to the form most clearly independent--the masculine success story of precision and coolness. She does what James feared in The American Scene:* emulates the masculine, loses her female self, and in her physical split from Mr. Touchett contributes to the "chasm between the sexes" James also referred to. All Mr. Touchett has left to cling to of his wife are his shawl and the word others supply to him of what she is doing; small comforts to counter a disease which, with symbolic implication, involves a steady loss of physical feeling extending into "vital regions"(p.164).

The Touchett situation thus comes to embody many of James's fears--a world grown too business-like, masculinized women, decline of sex, and a spreading emotional and physical "numbness." With such fears realised, and the intimation given that life might have been sweeter had Mrs. Touchett stayed home, it is small wonder that Touchett questions what women are after when they seek independence,

*See p.4 and notes 8-10.

that (through a query about a telegram) he doubts their sense of purpose: "In what sense is the term [independence] used?--that point's not yet settled"(p.9).

Within such a light his later advice to Isabel that there's room everywhere, "if you'll pay for it"(p.104), also strikes a rather ominous note for women who would be free. And when he ties Mrs. Touchett to Isabel with his comment regarding their similarity, and suggests that Isabel might make a martyr of herself, there is a fear touched off that any woman seeking to maintain her integrity or her 'own system' in 1880 might be thwarted, doomed by the traditions of the age to a coldness and isolation in which her positive "female" qualities would not survive.

Isabel nevertheless comes on the scene full of life and visions of the new freedom. She seems prepared for emancipation, for she has always been different from those about her; her father, after all, had given her his large views, as a young girl she had read in secret and scared the boys, and in school she had "protested against its laws"(p.19). She appears willing now to protest the laws of female passivity-- "to suffice to herself and be happy"(p.46). This invigorates those about her. As Ralph puts it:

Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come their way and furnish them with a destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own(p.57).

Yet Isabel's originality is clearly relative to the passive creatures about her (such as her sisters), and the "intentions of her own" never seem narrowed into a concrete reality. "If Isabel's a genius," comments Mrs. Touchett rather sharply, "I've yet to see her special line"(p. 37). Possessed of a great many theories, the girl believes that "if one should wait with the right patience one would find some happy work to one's hand"(p.47). She expects life's values to come to her, relying on luck for the execution of her theories. She lacks that good definition of independence Touchett had requested, lacks even Mrs. Touchett's inadequate pretense to a good definition. Isabel lives up on cloudy ideals of female emancipation, allowing the winds to blow her where they will. It is not surprising that her keenest sense of "liberty" comes after depositing her totally dependent sister ("poor Lily") on the dock ready to go back to America: she engages in an aimless walk through London to epitomize that "she could do whatever she chose"(p.302). Even James cannot resist chuckling over such a choice to prove one's freedom: "tolerably discreet" he calls it.

Isabel seems more and more to be the kind of woman James spoke of when he used the term "full-blown." Built up by friends and relations, she has, the author tells us, "the habit of at least seeming to feel and to think"(p.49) [emphasis mine]. Her father may have given her his large views, but he had also

protected her from ugliness and hence from a means of dealing adequately with a real world of complications. While frequently amusing the reader, and apparently the author, James's major character ultimately serves a serious purpose in representing the hopeful spirit of all women who have abstract visions of freedom but, "protected" from developing them, no real abilities or goals; she is the women's liberationist whose abstract liberation is her sole occupation. Free in appearance only, Isabel's innocence, imagination, confusion and lack of force leave her highly impressionable to the forces surrounding her.

Isabel's vulnerability is such that we find her entire identity in a pliable state, she acquires it from whoever, whatever is at hand and (being full blown) "flatters herself" that this is not determinism but a matter of her own choosing:

"If a thing strikes me with a certain intensity I accept it. I don't want to swagger, but I suppose I'm rather versatile. I like people to be totally different from Henrietta--in the style of Lord Warburton's sisters, for instance. So long as I look at the Misses Molyneux, they seem to answer a kind of ideal. Then Henrietta presents herself, and I'm straightway convinced by her"(p.85).

The distance travelled in admiring the Misses Molyneux and Henrietta seems obvious; this statement from Isabel gives us the range of her fluid character, shows her tendency to adopt models, and illustrates that faculty of "seeing without judging"(p.27), the emphasis on appearances, with which James characterizes her. Isabel here sees her main problem.

and the problem of many young women, a lack of real identity, but misjudges it, translating it by way of her ego into a merit. Isabel's unsure state lends itself to frequent inconsistencies; for a girl who "flattered herself that contradictions would never be noted in her" (p.45), Isabel contradicts herself right and left:

"I'm not afraid, you know" (p.42).	"I'm afraid" (frequent).
"I always know why" (p.42).	"I don't know why" (p.104).
". . . that's what I came to Europe for, to be as happy as possible" (p.43).	"I can't escape unhappiness" (p.121).
"I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live" (p.146).	"There's nothing higher for a girl than to marry a person she likes" (p.324).

James makes it quite clear that Isabel simply does not know what she is doing.

That this is a female identity crisis rather than just a problem of growing up (although it is a problem of women "growing up") is emphasized through Isabel's adoption of traditional male forms. As Mrs. Touchett had culled her identity from the male world, so Isabel gains much of hers. Her romantic idealizations of warfare and heroics, reason and intellect are in abundance throughout the novel. They suggest for us, again, the ongoing deterministic influence of a masculine age, women's envy of the male identity, and an apparent incapacity to achieve a true sense of "female" self that would be better than the old gentility.

The Civil War was an especially strong influence on Isabel--we are told that, from the safety of innocent girlhood, she indiscriminately "enjoyed" it, deriving from it a feeling of "passionate excitement"(p.30). Later on, all grown up, she relives this masculine occupation in a kind of playtime war with men. Sex becomes a battleground in which the only passionate excitement exists in "the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power"(p.152), the power of rejection and spurious taunts. She sees Caspar as "plated and steeled, armed essentially for aggression"(p.143). Gaining a certain satisfaction from the romantic view of "the strong man in pain"(p.144), she looks back on her rejections of Caspar and Lord Warburton as "honourable victories"(p.301). It is, of course, apparent that to exercise her rather negative power in this war she must first deny her own sexuality; she must quell her own "agitation." Thus this "male" influence of war--taken up in revenge against those who have a place in a world which dominates her--operates to Isabel's detriment and back again to the detriment of men.

The related heroic vision, too, gains a foothold on Isabel's life, probably due to her reading too many of those novels with the inspiring frontispieces: ". . . she went so far as to wish that she might find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded"(p.45). The

influence of this desire is at least partially responsible for her marriage to Osmond; as none of her friends approve of him it becomes a kind of heroic act to take him up: "she would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence"(p.402). The heroic seems predominant in the background as we watch Isabel try to hide her unhappiness, to always justify herself, and it ultimately helps to shape her decision of staying with Osmond--she will accept her mistake"just immensely (oh, with the highest grandeur!)"(p.382). Being such a hero brings Isabel no gain except within her own masculinized ego. As warrior and hero Isabel unconsciously emulates the male to the extent that she is a distorted person: as Touchett had suggested she has to "pay" for her place, an illusory one at that.

The overriding influence in Isabel's life, however, woven in and over battles and heroics, is that of intellect. When Mrs. Touchett comes across her she is, in military fashion, training her mind "to advance, to halt, to retreat, to perform ever more complicated maneuvers at the word of command . . ."(p.20). Awakening to a world of intellectual power she, like Mrs. Touchett, overreacts to it; her head becomes an overvalued quantity. "Whatever I do I do with reason," she proudly declares (p.317). Ironically, however, in her too hearty adoption of but the imagined ideal of intellect, she fearfully avoids any original thinking (eg: she appropriates Henrietta's "see Europe first" as her

own excuse for not marrying; she glibly repeats Lord Warburton's definition of aristocracy as her own). For a person who reminds us often of her ideas, she offers few good ones.

This devotion to but the ideal of intellect is also a frequent cause of misjudged character. For instance, Isabel early perceives something wrong in Madame Merle's lack of a natural quality (p.78), but is unwilling to weigh such a non-intellectual intuition heavily enough to do her any good. Isabel's judgement of this lady reflects the scales she uses: "She [Madame Merle] knew how to think . . . an accomplishment rare in women, and she had thought to very good purpose. Of course, too [afterthought?] , she knew how to feel . . ." (p.174). Similarly, Osmond's "beautiful mind" becomes an overrated complement to her own--"she had lived in it almost" (p.403). It thus becomes less likely than otherwise that Isabel might penetrate the devious nature of these two characters. Combined with her own inadequate thought processes (an inability to put "two and two together," as Countess Gemini so aptly puts it), such spellbound devotion to intellect contributes to Isabel's vulnerability, leaving her open to trickery. Real thought, it is worth noting, might have saved her.

Too much a creature of intellect and battle tactics, Isabel loses out on feeling. While she may have a theory of following through on good feelings, and is capable of

them, her fear of the logical inconsistencies involved causes her to repress herself: "she resented, so strongly, after discovering them, her mere errors of feeling"(p.45). And while she can empathize with people who reflect a condition similar to her own (pitying Pansy) or who are caught up in her own problems (crying for Ralph), Isabel is never really a spontaneously warm human being. It is because of this overzealous adoption of a false form that Isabel becomes cold and separates reason and feeling, not because of her desire to be free.

Again, James chooses to illustrate this point chiefly in the sexual realm, further making clear that incomplete, unreal personhood on the part of females would have implications for males. For the men--who had managed by 1880 to be creatures of intellect and passion, gaining a reputation for force in both areas--are left confused and saddened by idealist Isabel. The two sexes have clearly arrived at what we remember James called "different stages of personal polish." To Isabel's repeated urgings that they be "reasonable," both Caspar and Warburton do their best to encase their sexual and romantic passion within a rational framework, to sift themselves free of "the baser parts of emotion"(p.96). In the final scene Caspar "wished to prove he was sane, that he had reasoned it all out"(p.557) and we find Isabel "listening more than ever; it was true that he was not the same as that last time. That had been aimless,

fruitless passion, but at present he had an idea"(p.556). When she finds the "idea" is a cover once again for "fruitless" passion, she rebels, for such passion not only counters her ideal, it necessitates a willingness to lose a self she never really has had in feeling, to partake of substance when the only security she knows has been in appearances. The only way, ironically, that Isabel will accept these men of force is within her "masculine" terms of rationality. In her brother-sister relationship with Ralph, her dead marriage to Osmond, and the loss of her child, James further suggests Isabel's sterile situation.

Thus having expressed--perhaps without choice--her longing for personhood with exaggerated, unsupported attempts to imitate what she has perceived since childhood to be the qualities of power about her, Isabel gains little sense of meaningful human action. James seems not to be critical of her desire to be free, but rather of the weightiness of the "commercial," "overcivilized" age which allows her neither the time nor the respect to develop a personhood that would be more than such an imitation, and more than laughable. Not only the age but the men in her life, knowingly or not, seek to squelch her identity before she has a chance to grow. Caspar sees nothing wrong in declaring, "I don't care a cent for your admiration--not one straw, with nothing to show for it"(p.144), nor is he "afraid of any force in her"(p.149). Lord Warburton

enjoys discussion with her until she disagrees: "Many of them [ideas he dislikes] indeed she supposed she had held herself, till he assured her she was quite mistaken, that it was really impossible, that she had doubtless imagined she entertained them"(p.62). Ralph, kind though he is, enjoys having her "in his power"(p.134); and Osmond denies her even a semblance of human respect--she is a "silver plate," "a polished elegant surface" to "reflect one's thought," and is awarded a "decorative value"(p.329).

But while James's attitude toward Isabel may ultimately be a sympathetic one, he remains insistent on forcing upon her the consequences of not knowing what she is about, a central problem for all women. For those armed only with false identity, "independence" or "freedom" could hardly become a reality. Given the economic freedom (from a male source, of course) to pursue whatever goals she might have, Isabel becomes afraid:

"I'm afraid, I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's a constant effort. I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless"(p.208).

Personal power in a battle between the sexes she wields happily; larger arenas of power she coils away from. The author points up her lack of confidence in herself, Isabel here admitting the unsureness that has lain dormant under her pride and confidence. She wants to "transfer the weight of her economic freedom to some other more

prepared receptacle"(p.402), that receptacle being a man. After the long pre-wedding trip in which "a certain incoherence prevailed in her" (p.304), she is ready to seek refuge in "some private duty that might gather one's energies"(p.331). Isabel so easily succumbs to Madame Merle's treachery because of this growing uneasiness about her own worth; to marry Osmond would be to make herself "useful," would allow her to avoid her identity crisis: ". . . she should be able to be of use to him [Osmond] . . . she was not only taking she was giving"(p.312). Having had but the appearance of autonomy, as James saw many freedom strikers as having, Isabel crumbles back into the traditional reality of female selflessness and dependence on the male. She is a "lady," much like her sisters, the rest of her life, "the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. . . . she represented Gilbert Osmond"(p.371). With a sense of heroically trying to please her husband by suppressing herself, we find Isabel afraid of him, ashamed of her plans, holding back her "ideas," preaching duty, and ultimately teaching Caspar "the lesson of self-denial" we mentioned, just as genteel ladies were supposed to. Though Isabel's insight into her situation grows throughout the novel, she arrives at the stage of convenience of which James warned: her face becomes "fixed and mechanical . . . an advertisement"(p.369) (significantly the same terms James uses in criticizing the age). She is used in a manner that makes her "as senseless

and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron"(p.522)(in The American Scene James used this word to describe what he worried might happen to women)*. The problem of Isabel and many women is realised by her on her long night vigil: "she had effaced herself"(p.401).

As if to build on this problem of women not being themselves, James uses Pansy as a parallel for this second half of Isabel's life. Pansy's protected dependency and exaggerated passivity do not serve her interests, either. Not striving to assert herself she is an even easier victim, becomes unknowingly a part of the nineteenth century spirit. She values bouquets by their number of flowers, and sadly voices her feelings of worthlessness in commercial language: "I should be very sorry if he were to pay much money for me, because I don't think I'm worth it"(p.297). Her father (who makes the rather important comment that he is convention [p.293]) protects her from ugliness, as Isabel's had. Pansy, too, in such a sheltered state is "not afraid at all"(p.334), but after some experience with life she becomes very much afraid, afraid of the male power above her that can separate her from Rosier because of money. Yet she remains inadequate to deal constructively with her fears.

More directly than Isabel, Pansy exhibits the influence of male directives on the tabula rasa of female innocence.

*See p.4 and note 9.

She becomes an experiment for Osmond one moment, an item for sale the next. Even "innocent" Rosier speaks of her as a "consummate piece"(p.336), worth all his bibelots. She does what her father (convention) tells her and her intellect, like Isabel's, is ultimately wasted:

Isabel: "What have you thought?"

Pansy: "Well, that I must never displease papa"(p.526).⁴⁶²

Possessed of "no will, no power to resist, no sense of her own importance"(p.296), Pansy is a "passive spectator of the operation of her fate"(p.219).

Yet in her repressed longings for pretty things rather than useful ones, in her quiet hopes for loving Rosier, James shows that she is not content with the fate of a cold age and a dominant father, although having no will she does not aspire to change it. She, like Mrs. Touchett and Isabel, thinks there should be something better for women:

Pansy to Isabel : "I've only the occupations of a child. When did you give them up, the occupations of a child?" (p.298).

As Pansy has been shut up in the convent of childlike innocence and passivity too long, so, the author seems to imply, have all women lived too long in the convent of gentility, where tea-serving and angelhood, self-denial and moral superiority reign. Undefined independence would not do in the new times, but the outdated mode of lady-like passivity most certainly would not do. Pansy, after all, is left deserted in a sterile convent, alone, waiting for

Osmond to make his next move, as much a convenience as Isabel. She bows down to "convention" as many women would, and becomes, in Isabel's words, a "martyr decked out for sacrifice"(p.442).

A stark contrast to such innocence comes through in the person of Countess Gemini, a more European, experienced version of female subjugation. The direct opposite of Mrs. Touchett, she balances that lady's cool logic with the only active passion in the novel: "one should like a thing or one shouldn't. . . . But one shouldn't attempt to reason it out"(p.240). She can recognize Isabel's problem of too much reason, but because of her own incomplete state she, too, is unhappy and "bored"(p.422). Her illicit affairs are her only escape from the domination of her husband, he "wouldn't let her"(p.423) come to Rome more often, and because of him she's come to view marriage as a "steel trap" (p.335). Thus male domination affects the Countess, too, and she has developed her own way of countering it. But blindly following the instincts of feeling brings her more social isolation than Mrs. Touchett. Knowing that the "position of woman's very uncomfortable"(p.426), she is powerless, apparently, to change it; she lacks any reason or moral awareness to direct her. By instinct she disparages the utilitarian and the cold and unlike others admirably avoids the influence of the age, but unaware of what she is doing

she tends to travel in the circles of her own ego. She revels in the drama of seeing Osmond overtopped; she is disappointed when her revelation to Isabel is not received with a greater air of disaster. A liar only for gain, a sex kitten for the gentlemen she laughs with, a creature of little impact on anyone (except for her moment with Isabel), it is not surprising that the Countess, like many of the women in this novel, does not think much of herself: "I am only rather an idiot and a bore"(p.242). Again a woman is less than she clearly might have been; a good mind with quick perceptions is wasted, an honest spirit compromised, and a heart--if Osmond can be believed on this point--"given away--in small pieces, like a frosted wedding cake"(p.424).

In Madame Merle, surely, one might expect to find a complete and happy woman, but her situation suggests that even a very talented woman has difficulty making her way in the world:

"What have my talents brought me? Nothing but the need of using them still, to get through the hours, the years, to cheat myself with some pretence of movement, of unconsciousness"(p.186).

She is perhaps the greatest loss of the novel, for her perfect awareness of balance and harmony combined with a sharp mind and understanding of people indicate, as Ralph (probably for James) says, a human being who "has no business with small claims, she has a perfect right to make large ones"(p.234).

But Madame Merle has given up ambitions, instead has learned to scrap for existence while operating from the form of ladyhood. As we have noted previously, this woman is envious of the male identity but sees surface living as an inevitable fate for the female; as a result she has become bitter and cynical. To Isabel she comments that "you've actuality. I once had it--we all have it for an hour"(p.182). No longer living for herself, she has decided to impose her old ambitions for money and position --the wish Countess Gemini terms "to marry Caesar"(p.516)-- upon Pansy, and unscrupulously makes use of people to accomplish such "goals": "I only know what I can do with them [people]"(p.224), she openly admits.

Madame Merle had started life not following the ground rules for women and so, like Isabel, seems now to be doing a grudging penance in self-denial. By feeling too much passion in an age unsympathetic to the sex drives of women (albeit in a not particularly respectable affair with Osmond years prior to the novel's opening), Madame Merle had left herself vulnerable to abuse. Her emotions have been "horribly chipped and cracked"(p.179), and perhaps as a result she now speaks of any feeling as "historic"(p.174). For all that Madame Merle has done for Osmond he now seems bored with her. The sense that she has been made use of by men and that she has been separated from her daughter forever because of propriety are to a degree explanation though not vindication for her use of other people.

It is also clear that even in her manipulations--taught to her by the manipulative commerce and utility about her--Madame Merle is made to suffer. Another woman who has polarized reason and feeling, there is a sad note in the fact the "Madame Merle had suppressed enthusiasm; she fell in love now-a-days with nothing; she lived entirely by reason and wisdom"(p.378). Another cold lady of logic, a slave to materialism, she ultimately cries that "I would give my right hand to be able to weep, and . . . I can't!"(p.492). She is faced with the depressing conclusion, upon Pansy's continued state of singleness, that she has been "so vile all for nothing"(p.496); and that Osmond (convention) has virtually destroyed her soul, "which was a very good one to start with"(p.493). The woman who would make conveniences of others realizes that this is all she has been to Osmond and to fate.

Thus even this grand, talented lady is reduced and degraded, having devoted all of her talents and charm to strive for vicarious goals of limited human worth, which are not accomplished and which are based on her own traditional visions of what a successful woman should amount to: married, and to a wealthy man. Having accepted the usual dictate that as a woman over forty she is "of no more interest than last week's newspaper"(p.182), Madame Merle has become corrupted in her attempt to nevertheless covertly manipulate events beneath the facade of charm; her values, as if they

were on sale, have been (in Isabel's words) "marked down" (p.305). A hater of men (advising Isabel to get used to them so as "to despise them"--p.229), a human existence defined only by her superficial relations to others, a creature of too much reason and too little feeling, this woman of unwisely used talents is left, like the others, at last alone and dissatisfied. She has plans to return to America--to regain, hopefully, some of the natural qualities which "complications" had worn away.

A major portion of the canvas in The Portrait of a Lady is, then, devoted to depicting helpless female souls floundering in a world they do not understand. They all tend to commit Isabel's error of overvaluing the appearance of "masculine" success and male dominance in the world of power about them, and thus honor it with submission or imitation rather than developing their own female identity. James emphasizes their situation with a repeated metaphor of role playing; they are all little players on a stage, with traditions and the new age handing out parts. Isabel finally plays "the part of a good wife"(p.391), Pansy gets to be a "winged fairy in a pantomime"(p.296), while Madame Merle is "something of a public performer, condemned to emerge only in character and costume"(p.304). They are finally engaged in a tragedy of womanhood, the implied flaw being a lack of complete identity that marks their lives

for easy reduction. In the end Mrs. Touchett is completely alone, her "little sharp face looked tragical"(p.540); Pansy is left shivering in a convent seeming somehow "the heroine of a tragedy"(p.503); Countess Gemini must continue on as before, but not showing unhappiness "tragically, she shows it comically instead"(p.244); and Madame Merle makes her exit to America wailing, "The tragedy's for me!" Isabel, as we recall, runs flying from Caspar's arms back to what may be viewed as a martyrdom of duty to Osmond. Each shows slightly differently the shallowness and the ultimate sadness of living an assigned part; the emptiness of submissive, ego-denying ladyhood; the unsatisfactory state of diffuse, haphazard passion and feeling; or the limitations of honoring too much the cool power of reason. They are sexless, headless, or heartless creatures who are totally inadequate to saving men from the seriousness of the age--the task Touchett had envisioned for them near the beginning of the novel: "The ladies will save us," he had said. "They'll not be affected by the social and political changes . . ."(p.8). But the ladies in this novel are very much affected and so do little saving of men.

Indeed, virtually all of the relations between the sexes in the novel reflect the split we saw between Mr. and Mrs. Touchett. The women, on the whole, have formed a rather disdainful opinion of men, have become resentful of those who dominate them or who have a place in a world which

dominates them. Even passionate Countess Gemini asserts that "there are no good ones"(p.254). The tendency in a cool age, as James displays it, is for women to totally abandon the roles of good wife and good mother, adopting false ideals of personhood that are not viable and do not bring them satisfaction. Women's lack of wholeness contributes to the seriousness of the age rather than solving it.

Old Touchett, in failing to consider what the women would hang on to when he advised men to "get hold" of a woman to see them through the times (p.7), obviously misjudged the stability of most of them. But how do we judge Miss Stackpole in all of this? I believe that Henrietta may be a rough sketch of a new woman adequate to the problem of finding a place in the world while maintaining human wholeness; in her, comical though she is, the novel seems to evince a hope for the future.

Before defending this view with direct reference to The Portrait, it should be acknowledged that such a reading of Miss Stackpole is somewhat unusual. This is the case not only because she is amusing and somewhat one dimensional, but also because in the preface to the 1908 edition of The Portrait James himself states that Henrietta's role was to be merely supplementary. Speaking of Henrietta in conjunction with a similar female character from another

novel James writes: "Each of these persons is but wheels to the coach; neither belongs to the body of that vehicle."¹¹ He speaks also of Miss Stackpole's "superabundance, not an element of my plan, but only an excess of my zeal. So early was to begin my tendency to overtreat, rather than undertreat (when there was choice or danger) my subject."¹² Quite obviously, such words do not flatter the lady in question. Yet if the coach is, in our reading, the tragedy of womankind, then Henrietta, in failing to be defeated in any way, should not be expected to be a part of "the coach"; she runs counter to the main drift of the novel. James is exploring the situation of women as they exist typically, and Henrietta is certainly atypical both of the novel and of women in general. In this regard, Isabel is clearly and admittedly the focus--her thoughts, her emotions, her changes--these are the center of the novel. Still, may not a peripheral character, one running "beside the coach," offer insights that the major one does not? It seems to me that James might feel he overemphasized a character, as he states here, might even regard her as comical, and yet have that character express an idea important to the novel. For this reason I do not believe that his prefatory comments, in and of themselves, invalidate Henrietta's claim to a serious, not merely comical, function in the work.

Furthermore, even if this statement by James is taken to be genuinely damaging to Henrietta, there exists the

possibility of some confusion in James' own mind in regard to his creation. It is well to remember that James was writing this preface in 1908, nearly thirty years after writing the work itself. In the meantime, Henrietta had fallen under much attack by literary critics. Could not the author's comments in part reflect embarrassment over this criticism as well as (or, rather than) his own thoughts on Henrietta? He seems both embarrassed and confused when he apologetically states that "I may well be asked, I acknowledge, why then, in the present fiction, I have suffered Henrietta (of whom we have indubitably too much) so officiously, so strangely, so almost inexplicably, to pervade."¹³ A clear answer is never provided.

Problems for us in interpreting the novel may also stem from James' own childhood and upbringing. It was mentioned earlier that James may have identified somewhat with women, seeing himself (in some biographers' views) to be in a passive or feminine role during his growing up years. Throughout his life women and what they might be or do were a constant source of fascination for James. He pursues the "American girl" in many pieces and most of his best drawn characters are women. As biographer Leon Edel sees it, the author judged from the situation of his mother and father that "men derive strength from the women they marry and that conversely women can deprive men of their strength and life."¹⁴ Certainly we saw the latter situation exemplified with the Touchetts. But the

marriage of Henrietta in The Portrait is, as will presently be shown, more positively suggestive of the former. A "fear of women and worship of women," as Edel puts it, is carried throughout much of James' work.¹⁵ There is a conflict in James himself. While he longed for the culturally and socially developed American girl and--according to Edel--mourned that "women existed only as images in men's minds and as 'patient, sympathetic, submissive' creatures willing to model themselves upon those images,"¹⁶ he frequently criticized those who were heading the women's movement, finding such persons callous and cold (The Bostonians was mentioned earlier as an example). The proper balance of independence and humanity never seemed to be struck. In some ways Henrietta may have expressed both James' "fear" and his "worship." While she suggests the independent, "liberated" American type, she is certainly not callous or cold, as will also presently be shown. She may, in sum, be a reflection of the author's own uncertainty on the confused state of woman-kind.

I myself, however, am convinced, partially because she is not the liberationist James typically tore down, that at the time he was writing the book he had a relatively clear, positive purpose in mind for her. Henrietta is not painted so starkly nor so unkindly as she might have been had James really feared or scorned her. He himself admitted that. He "overdid" her. Could it be that he "overdid" her because he rather liked her? That she was an experimental caricature

of the "new" American woman he hoped to see surface? Naturally such a creature would be rough rather than polished due to her very newness (roughness being the most frequent criticism made of Henrietta). Like the newness of democracy, with which she is compared, she has her weak points, but dishonesty, false fronts and lack of humanity--so apparent and so criticized in much of The Portrait--are not among them.

Of course, much of this is conjecture. We can only speculate on what James was thinking and on what message he wanted Henrietta to convey. But the fact that there had been criticism of Henrietta when he wrote his preface, that she had only been viewed comically, and that James may have been psychologically prepared to sanction a new, more dynamic form of some sort for women can at least make us wonder. For if not taken as a new form of non-tragic, non-victimized womanhood, Henrietta simply does not fit into the canvas of women James painted. She at least deserves a new look, and a softer appraisal than she has gotten heretofore. The novel itself bears me out on these points.

What, after all, can be said to the fact that Henrietta is the only woman at the close of the novel who is happy? The only woman in whom head and heart are not made pointedly separate, polarized entities? That she is the only woman who does not have the word "tragic" associated with her at any point in the novel? That she is the one person with

whom James associated the phrase "get hold of things"--the words Touchett had used in describing what men and women of the nineteenth century needed to be doing? That her projected marriage to Bantling at the close of the novel provides the thematic and structural counter to the Touchetts' early split, the "chasm between the sexes" which James so worried about?

Miss Stackpole's happiness seems to be a function of her having hold of her own identity. By making use of herself --"Make yourself 'useful' in some way" is her repeated advice(p.82)--she neither is reduced to using others nor being manipulated by them, and it is significant that she is the only contented woman present at the close of the novel. Her advice to Isabel might have come from James himself, addressing women of 1880 trying for freedom:

"You think you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing yourself and pleasing others. You'll find you're mistaken. Whatever life you lead you must put your soul in it--to make any kind of success of it--and from the moment you do that it ceases to be romance"(p.202).

By putting her soul into life, Henrietta is able to do a bit of saving--the only "lady" who does so in the entire novel; the only woman who, by having a sense of self, is able to get out of it enough to help others. Instead of thinking about freedom, yearning for it, Henrietta lives it; existing not as a full-blown dreamer or a cold freedom striker or a masculinized female, but as a reasonably complete human

being pointedly endowed by the author with "her own motion"(p.467) rather than one whose actions are linked to outside forces.

Henrietta's motion is defined by a combination of the qualities which we saw separate and fragmented in the other women characters. She obviously uses her mind in her line of work, regarding her observations as "conscientious exercise of a natural right"(p.76). But it is made clear that Henrietta--unlike Mrs. Touchett, Isabel, or Madame Merle --does not idealize intellectual pursuits to the detriment of heart. She is glad, for instance, that Bantling appreciates intellect, but also happy that he "doesn't exaggerate its claims"(p.535). Miss Stackpole's desire to fuse the intellectual facet with the human--again, something not very well accomplished by the other women--is also witnessed in her work, for she wants perpetually to get at the "inner life" in her reporting. Her work has a human purpose outside itself, too--Henrietta "had adopted three of the children of an infirm and widowed sister and was paying their school bills out of the proceeds of her labor(p.46). Feeling is evidenced in her concern for these children, in her reiterated awareness of the poor non-aristocrats of the world, her aid to Isabel and Ralph, and her guiding

belief that "one's never too much in a hurry to save a precious human creature from drowning"(p.113). On the whole, Henrietta does not care for things or the appearance of things (criticism of mere appearances is made throughout the novel), but rather for people and their feelings.

Nor does Henrietta in her strivings for a purposeful life sacrifice any of her "femaleness" as do some of the others. She does not become the stereotyped tough and isolated liberationist James disliked and feared; even her physical description maintains her femininity: she is "neat," "delicate," and "round"(p.76). Later we find that she reveres motherhood in a manner not suggested by any of the other women, her favorite art work being the Correggio of the Tribune, in which the mother Mary kneels down before the infant Jesus, "clapping her hands to him while he delightedly laughs and crows. Henrietta had a special devotion to this intimate scene--she thought it the most beautiful picture in the world"(p.431). Though Henrietta had formerly been an art critic, her judgement here seems based more upon the human situation of mother and child rather than upon aesthetic qualities.

While not played up like Countess Gemini's, Miss Stackpole's sexuality is also indicated. It is largely through Isabel that this woman's cool singleness is implied; Henrietta

herself hints otherwise. "There's nothing so simplifying as a grand passion," she declares(p.89), and early insists that even as a liberated woman she has "a right to marry"(p.83). Also, the information we receive on the innocence of her tour with Bantling comes mainly from the unreliable view of Isabel; Ralph for one, takes Miss Archer's credibility to task in easy banter over the nature of "that episode"(p.191). Despite Isabel's intimations Henrietta seems interested in the opposite sex.

Thus Henrietta espouses her right to thinking personhood along with her regard for feeling, and does no repressing of spontaneity, or maternal or sexual feelings. She blends these qualities in a form that, while lacking surface polish and respect for privacy, is boldly brave enough to cut through an appearance-ridden, propriety-governed age. Her boldness is triggered by concern, as even Isabel pointedly admits: "You must be very fond of me, Henrietta, to be willing to be so aggressive"(p.153).

But even if it is accepted that Henrietta achieves a rough wholeness and a freeness in her actions not found elsewhere in the novel, that she does not sacrifice intellect for feeling or feeling for intellect or fall into safe traditions, the question remains as to how she manages to achieve this state when women as accomplished as Madame Merle play parts and become victims. If the rest of the canvas offers

a view of women as easily determined by traditions or the environment about them, as dominated--one way or another--by a male world, and if such a grim view indeed pervaded the author's thoughts evidenced elsewhere, how is it that Henrietta endures as a free "mixture"(p.536)?

Henrietta's wholeness and control over her own destiny are possible most likely because of a thoughtful disregard for traditions of "femaleness" and "maleness." Henrietta had, after all, no parents; symbolically speaking, no patterns or conventions to shape her. (Both Pansy--her father was "convention"--and Isabel were clearly indicated as having been protected from reality by their parents, and thus inadequately shaped to deal with it.) Henrietta's natural development has fostered new attitudes toward certain societal values. As a being who has had always to think for herself, she is freer to reject old views. As a result, she can caustically remark to the Misses Molyneux and their traditionally accepted docility that "I suppose it's sufficient for you to exist"(p.123). Similarly, she is unimpressed by the honors accruing to men successful in war (warfare, we recall, had rather strongly influenced Isabel): "Lord Nelson? Was he a Lord too? Wasn't he high enough that they had to stick him a hundred feet up in the air? That's the past--I don't care about the past . . ."(p.129). No, Henrietta does not care much for the past and is therefore not vulnerable to it; she avoids as well the cool

influence of the present, refusing to put people into the scientifically analysing, buy and sell language common to the rest of the novel.

Instead this woman looks to the future, just as all women would have to look to the future to be truly free. If women were brave enough to search for a new form broad enough to include all of their human facets, if they were willing to acquire a real sense of responsibility and an early awareness of life's realities and complications (as Henrietta does to some degree), then perhaps--suggests the novel--they would not have to become conveniences to individuals or to the age.

This kind of independence is much more sophisticated than the independence of Isabel or Mrs. Touchett; it adequately answers the request for a definition of independence which Touchett had made. It is an independence of the forces about one rather than an independence of people; it does not result in coldness or isolation, but necessitates a willingness to build one's own supports based on qualities inherent in all human beings. It is an independence which does not exclude men, for in Henrietta's engagement to Bantling hope is held out of closing the gap between the sexes. Both she and Bantling have "something to find out" about the other(p.537), and Bantling, who does not desire to dominate Henrietta, is rather pleased that his new wife "would not be wanting in initiative"(p.537). Their levels of personal development come close to being equal.

Thus, while The Portrait of a Lady--through the minor sister characters, Mrs. Touchett, Pansy, Countess Gemini, Madame Merle, and especially Isabel--emphasizes the detrimental power that traditions of "femaleness" or more successful "maleness" might have upon women without a secure sense of themselves, in Henrietta Stackpole the suggestion is raised that the tragedy they represent is not unavoidable. After all, women who believed with Madame Merle that crawling about on the surface of life was the inevitable state of women would do their share to create such inevitability. Women who made small claims could expect small gains, but women who made larger claims, such as Isabel, had best know what they were about ahead of time.

Henry James, in The Portrait of a Lady and elsewhere, did a service to women in dwelling upon the problems and pitfalls intrinsic to their search for freedom in an age in which powerful forces surrounded them, for such problems were not always recognised. Yet in back of his fears seems to have rested the hope that freedom would eventually become a reality and an asset to both men and women. Perhaps The Portrait expresses this hope most sincerely in the tête-a-tête between Mrs. Touchett and Henrietta:

"Poor American Ladies!" cried Mrs. Touchett with a laugh. "They're the slaves of slaves."
"They're the companions of freemen," Henrietta retorted.
"The companions of freemen--I like that, Miss Stackpole," said Ralph. "It's a beautiful description"(p.87).

If the description would not be realized in society for some time to come, if conventions would not easily be escaped even by the bravest, The Portrait of a Lady indicates a new form as a possibility as well as a necessity; a synthesis of head and heart and body might someday come about for women desirous of viable identities. The identity crisis which began during James' day has now extended into our own, but as Henrietta says to Caspar, so does the novel to us: "Just you wait."

FOOTNOTES

¹Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), p. 30. Subsequent references within the text refer to this edition. It is the revised version of 1908.

²William Wasserstrom, Heiress of All the Ages: Sex and Sentiment in the Genteel Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 20.

³Wasserstrom, p. 128.

⁴Leon Edel, Henry James: The Treacherous Years (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), p. 210.

⁵Henry James, "The Future of the Novel," The International Library of Famous Literature, XIV (1899), rpt. in Theory of Fiction: Henry James, ed. James E. Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1972), p. 343.

⁶Henry James, The Bostonians (New York, Macmillan & Co., 1886).

⁷Frank Moore Colby, "In Darkest James" [within which Colby cites passages such as this one from James's essay "George: The New Life," which is taken from an unnamed American magazine], in The Question of Henry James, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1945), p. 22.

⁸Henry James, The American Scene (1907; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 348.

⁹James, The American Scene, p. 347.

¹⁰James, The American Scene, p. 65.

¹¹Henry James, Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, New York Edition of The Novels and Tales of Henry James, Vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1908), p. xix.

¹²James, Preface, p. xxi.

¹³James, Preface, p. xix.

¹⁴Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years
(Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1953), p. 53.

¹⁵Edel, The Untried Years, p. 55.

¹⁶Edel, The Untried Years, p. 260.

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OLD TRADITIONS, NEW HOPES:
WOMEN IN THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

by

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The purpose of this study is to examine the functional position of women in Henry James' The Portrait of a Lady. James paints a canvas of many women reduced to playing surface roles dictated to them by the masculine world in which they live--women dominated by the force of individual men or of the age about them. Those ladies in the novel who submit to the old traditions of womanhood do not achieve success or happiness; those who reach to selfhood by donning the forms of male success do not do any better. Indeed, all of the women in the novel except one are referred to at least once as "tragic." James illuminates their situation with a repeated metaphor of acting--women here play roles rather than live meaningful lives.

The one exception to this situation is Henrietta Stackpole. Consistently neglected or disparaged by critics, she is the one woman who is secure and fulfilled at the end of the novel. My study suggests that her import to an understanding of the novel is more major than usually thought. James himself may have been somewhat confused in his sketch of her, but her positive position in an otherwise negative grouping of confused "ladies" permits a new and defensible feminist perspective on the novel.