

DIALEKTIK

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAITURE OF THE HEROINE IN HENRY JAMES'S *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

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Abstract

One function of literature is to give the readers an insight of the human life. It shows the experiences of man in his or her efforts to live.

The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James, as a literary work, provides its readers with human experiences and struggles. It shows the life of a woman wanting to find her place in the world, wanting to exist. One can learn many things from her experience.

Introduction

In 1881, Henry James (1843-1916), as a young novelist, finished writing what is considered by many critics as his first masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady*. Like its two predecessors, *Roderick Hudson* and *The American*, it was serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* in Boston, Massachusetts. It also appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in England. The novel gained success in these two countries. (Bamberg, 1975: 3)

James intended to make *The Portrait* a culmination of his work and to confirm his position as a major writer "who could avail himself of the strengths of both the European and American traditions of fiction, while developing the international theme, which he had effectively made his own." (Tanner, 1985:40) When, early in

1880, T.S. Perry, a friend of his, wanted to write an article on his works, he was told to wait until the novel he was working on (*The Portrait*) finished. James told him: "It was from that I myself shall pretend to date--on that I shall take my stand." (Anderson, 1977: 122)

James originated "the large building of *The Portrait of a Lady*" with a "single small corner-stone, the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny." He started with a "slight 'personality,' the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl" whom he would make an "ado" about. The girl is Isabel Archer. (James, 1936, vol.1: xii-xiii) This paper is an analysis of the portraiture of this heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady*. The writer hopes that through this paper the

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readers will be able to see "the portrait" of Isabel as a reflection of women's condition, expectations and struggle to exist. It is also hoped that this paper will encourage the readers to read other works of Henry James.

Isabel: Her Relations with Other Characters

The Portrait of a Lady is, certainly, a novel about a woman, or rather, it is "a study of what it cost to become and remain a lady." (Habegger, 1982: 67) It is, without doubt, a "vivid and life-like portrait of a woman at different stages of her life from girlhood to womanhood;" (Bamberg, 1975: 654) As defined by W.C. Brownell from The Nation:

The Portrait of a Lady is a modest title, though an apt one. The portrait of the lady in question is indeed the theme of the book, and it is elaborated with a minuteness so great... (Bamberg, 1975: 649)

James, in his search for a "subject", seems to prefer women better than men. He has been known for his great female characters, such as Milly Theale and Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove and Maria Gostrey in The Ambassadors. As F.W. Dupee puts it in his book Henry James:

James might be called the great feminine novelist of a feminine age in letters. In any case he was able, without being at all doctrinaire about it, to imagine women, not as a

distinct species with peculiar problems, as they had nearly always been presented by novelists, but as typical of human possibilities in general. In their relatively greater freedom from material pressures they figured for him the pleasures and responsibilities of freedom in whatever sex or condition of society. (Dupee, 1956: 97)

James's "women" characters are usually intelligent ones who search for their destinies. They are also innocent and the victims of some villains or even of their own ideals and conceptions. Martha Banta in her essay, compiled in the book What Manner of Woman, states that Jamesian heroines are "participants in a tragic destiny which has the most personal and human of causes and consequences." His heroines are not typical, in the sense they take the form of "woman who knows; who makes a difference; who is more than the dupe, more than the passive acceptor of her plight." (Springer, 1977: 263-264)

Isabel is that type of woman. In the beginning, she is portrayed as an independent American young woman wanting to cultivate her mind by going to Europe. She is "very fond of" her freedom. Granted a considerable sum of money by her uncle, she becomes a victim of betrayal. She is betrayed by her closest friend, Mme. Merle and her husband, Gilbert Osmond who tricks her into a marriage for her money. Yet, in the end, she comes to a full understanding of what has happened and is

ready to face the consequences of her choice.

James created a "limited heroine" out of Isabel Archer: "limited" for the reader to see the development that occurred within this character. (Wagenknecht, 1983: 83) She is not a perfect being. She has her own limitations and faults for her "painter" made her "insensibly influenced by varying local, personal, and social environments, or by the teachings of sweet or bitter experience,...." (Margaret Oliphant from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. Cited in Bamberg, 1975: 654) However, this does not mean that the creator disfavoured her. "Far into the book," Charles Feidelson declares, "we are asked to adopt an appreciative, sympathetic, but essentially moralistic attitude toward the heroine,...." (From The Moment of the Portrait of a Lady filed in Bamberg, 1975: 746)

The author's sole purpose was to bring into light the development or the changes taken place in the life of his heroine and also to stir some sense of sympathy on the reader's part toward her. (Wagenknecht, 1983: 83) James explains in the book that "she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant." (James, 1936, vol.1:69)

In bringing out the heroine, Henry James establishes three principal relations to Isabel, aside from her intimate bond with her much-beloved cousin Ralph Touchett. First is her

relation with Lord Warburton, a radical lord; second with Caspar Goodwood, a man from Boston and the last with a cosmopolitan expatriate named Gilbert Osmond whom she marries regardless of her friends' disapproval. (Bamberg, 1975: 714) Yet, there are also other characters endowing her "education," such as, Mme. Merle, Isabel's confidante, who betrays and brings her to her tragic marriage with Osmond; Mrs. Touchett, the aunt who brings her to Europe and Daniel Touchett, her uncle who leaves her the money. Other fictive personalities are Henrietta Stackpole, a woman journalist and a loyal friend, Pansy Osmond, Isabel's stepdaughter and Countess Gemini, Osmond's sister who holds the key to the secret relationship of Osmond and his long time mistress, Mme. Merle.

The Portrait of a Lady opens up with the view of "the lawn of an old English country-house" in a "splendid summer afternoon." Three persons--Mr. Daniel Touchett, an American banker, his son, Ralph Touchett and an English aristocracy, Lord Warburton--apparently having their tea--are "taking their pleasure quietly." It is Mr. Touchett who first brings out the topic of a certain young girl, on whom the story would most concern, as they are in the middle of a discussion on life and women. Lord Warburton is "sick of life" and the old Mr. Touchett suggests that he "take hold of a pretty woman" for she would save him.

Mr. Touchett, not happily

married himself, counsels, "make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting,...but you mustn't fall in love with my niece."

Now, it is the first time his lordship has ever heard the mention of a niece in the Touchetts, so, he asks whether the young lady is interesting. However, not one of the male members of the family knows for sure anything about this young woman from America, except for the information given by Mrs. Touchett who has taken up the girl. Through her "rather inscrutable" telegram, the wife of Mr. Touchett informs: "... Taken sister's girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent."

Questions remain, as clearly expressed by Ralph:

"But who's 'quite independent,' and in what sense is the term used?--that point's not yet settled. Does the expression apply more particularly to the young lady my mother has adopted, or does it characterise her sisters equally?--and is it used in a moral or in a financial sense? Does it mean that they've been left well off, or that they wish to be under no obligations? or does it simply mean that they're fond of their own way? (James, 1936, vol.1:13-14)

From the very start, Arnold Kettle explains, James has put into the reader's attention the main themes of the novel. One is "the importance of wealth," and then "the difficulty of marriage." Following it is "the problem of freedom or independence," which is,

without doubt, "fundamental to the other two." (Bamberg, 1975: 678) These two themes are very important in revealing Isabel's search for a meaningful life.

Ralph's earliest impressions of his cousin from America are that Isabel looks "unexpectedly pretty," "had a high spirit," and "strong will." She does not "take suggestions" and has "a great passion for knowledge" but, "charming as he found her, she had struck him as rather presumptuous" which "indeed... was a part of her charm." For the most part, Ralph finds her as "a really interesting little figure," "the finest thing in nature." On looking about the scenery, Isabel reacts as follows: "her head was erect, her eye lighted, her flexible figure turned itself easily this way and that." She is unmistakably excited about Europe. Further on, when Ralph suggests that his mother has adopted her, Isabel looks alarmed and seems offended. She, then, explicitly proclaims that she is not "a candidate for adoption," since she is "very fond of (her) liberty" and would only "allow things to be settled for (her) if they're settled as (she) liked them." Furthermore, she always wants to know the things one shouldn't do, not "so as to do them" but "so as to choose." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 16-93)

Undoubtedly, Isabel is a woman who greatly values her independence, yet, what kind of freedom does she hold to believe and what effect does it have on her searching for destiny?

Kettle, in his essay Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady, additionally points out in the following excerpt:

The independence of Isabel is the quality about her most often emphasized.... From the very first the ambiguous quality of this independence is stressed. Isabel is attractive, interesting... but she is also in many respects inexperienced, naive.... The Portrait of a Lady is the revelation of the inadequacy of Isabel's view of freedom. (Bamberg, 1975: 679)

Isabel's view of freedom is inadequate because, as put forward by her aunt, "she thinks she knows a great deal of (the world)--like most American girls: but like most American girls she's ridiculously mistaken." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 56)

Innocent and "ridiculously mistaken," Isabel falls in the trap designed by Mme. Merle, an American ancient friend of Mrs. Touchett whom she meets at Gardencourt at the time of her uncle's dying days. "Charming, sympathetic, intelligent, cultivated... rare, superior and preeminent." Those are Isabel's opinion of her. "She was in a word a woman of strong impulses kept in admirable order" that "commended itself to Isabel as an ideal combination," for "to be so cultivated and civilised, so wise and so easy, and still make so light of it," Isabel thinks, "that was really to be a great lady." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 243-290) Isabel confides in Serena Merle and cannot see that there is something mysteriously dark and harmful about her. This is foreshad-

owed by James's following use of setting in the scene where Isabel first meets her playing the piano in Gardencourt.

...while she played the shadows deepened in the room. The autumn twilight gathered in, and from her place Isabel could see the rain, which had now begun in earnest, washing the cold-looking lawn and the wind shaking the great trees. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 246)

The aforementioned extract foretells that her befriending Mme. Merle would lead to some kind of destruction or darkness in Isabel's life as the image of "shadows" and "autumn twilight" convey since it is Mme. Merle who introduces her to Gilbert Osmond, the cause of her shattered life and dreams.

Isabel's ties with the other two suitors--Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood also exemplify Isabel's conception of freedom and independence.

Upon seeing Isabel in her initial appearance at Gardencourt, Lord Warburton is fascinated by the heroine, thinking that she is the most interesting woman he has ever encountered. He falls in love with her; it is a love at first sight. Isabel admits that she herself likes the lord immensely, nevertheless, she renounces his proposal because she feels:

...that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to

resist--murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own....She couldn't marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to support any enlightened prejudice in favour of the free exploration of life that she had hitherto entertained or was now capable of entertaining. (James, 1936, vol.1: 144, 155)

"A nobleman of the newest pattern, a reformer, a radical, a contemner of ancient ways." Lord Warburton is a man with, according to Mr. Touchett, "great responsibilities, great opportunities, great consideration, great wealth, great power, a natural share in the public affairs of a great country." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 95, 98) In rejecting him, she turns down "the peace, the kindness, the honour, the possessions, a deep security and a great exclusion." (James, 1936, vol.1: 189) Determined as she is to retain her independence, Isabel fears her own resolution for dismissing his lordship, for she asks herself the following questions in her meditation:

Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions?...she was wondering if she were not a cold, hard, priggish person.... (James, 1936, vol.1: 156)

In William H. Gass's essay, entitled The High Brutality of Good Intentions, it is pointed out that Isabel refuses Lord Warburton because

"marriage to him would not satisfy her greed for experience, her freedom to see and feel and do." (Bamberg, 1975: 710) Isabel finds her justification from her sole purpose of coming to Europe, that is:

...to get everything she can out of her life and its opportunities,--all the sensation, the information, the variety of experience which it is possible it can convey. (Margaret Oliphant as quoted in Bamberg, 1975: 658)

On the other hand, Isabel still has to deal with another admirer, a very determined man from Boston, known as Caspar Goodwood. He follows her to Europe and appears in every stage of Isabel's career, until the end of the novel. He comes to Isabel upon her departure to Europe and sails the seas just to take a glance of her. Like Lord Warburton, Goodwood "represents a threat to her sense of freedom." (Bamberg, 1975: 609) Isabel feels "the influence he had upon her that he seemed to deprive her of the sense of freedom." Isabel thinks that "there was a disagreeably strong push, a kind of harshness of presence, in his way of rising before her" and that "Caspar Goodwood expressed for her an energy--and she had already felt it as a power--that was of his very nature." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 162) She, then, dismisses him.

Many critics have asserted that Isabel's fright of Goodwood is that of sexual kind, for, according to Anthony J. Mazzella, "she feels that she would

yield to him fully as she would to no one else." (Bamberg, 1975: 609)

Manzella goes on as to say:

...Isabel fears sexual possession as it affects freedom....James suggests that, at heart, what Isabel fears is a loss through the erotic of a special freedom--the freedom of the mind to function unimpeded....She is not afraid merely of the erotic experience itself but rather its tendency to diminish the life of the mind. Goodwood threatens not so much her body as that annihilation of consciousness which comes with the intensely erotic; which would mean her "death," because for Isabel consciousness is the real center of her being. She exists supremely on the level of pure mind, and the erotic would destroy that existence. (Bamberg, 1975: 610-611)

Having rejected the two suitors described above, Isabel is "free" to affront her destiny. However, she is hampered to explore life since she has no money. It is worth recalling that one of the main themes of the novel, as previously mentioned, is the importance of wealth. Dorothy Van Ghent explains:

... money is the chief symbol of freedom. The vague rich gleams of money are on every cornice and sift through every vista of the world of *The Portrait*, like the muted gold backgrounds of old Persian illuminations; and the human correlative of the money is a type of character fully privileged with easy mobility upon the face of the earth and with magnificent opportunities for the cultivation of aesthetic and

intellectual refinements. (Bamberg, 1975: 690)

Henry James has always created his characters rich. Rich in the sense that "they are able to meet the requirements of their imagination." This is expressed by Ralph in Chapter XVIII of *The Portrait*. Ralph, denied the position of a lover because of his defective condition, wants to see how Isabel would explore the world and find her destiny. Therefore, he provides her with financial help by persuading his father, Mr. Touchett, to give her half of his own share from his father's inheritance. It is a pagreat deal amount of money--seventy thousand pounds. In his mind, "she must be rich in order to be free of the material world. She must be free in order to live." (Bamberg, 1975: 682) The old Touchett, then, warns his son that a girl with such an immense possession might fall a victim to the fortune-hunters. Indeed, she catches the attention of a fortune-hunter in the disguise of a *dilletante* by the name of Gilbert Osmond, thanks to the help of Mme. Merle.

One character that strongly objects to the late Mr. Touchett's leaving Isabel a fortune is the loyal American woman journalist, Henrietta Stackpole. She thinks that it "confirm (her) dangerous tendencies," that is "(her) exposure on the moral side" and warns her of the harm it may cause her. This is what she says to Isabel:

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....You think 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 sort of success of it; and from the moment you do that it ceases to be romance, I assure you: it becomes grim reality! And you can't always please yourself; you must sometimes please other people. That, I admit, you're very ready to do; but there's another thing that's still more important--you must often displease others. You must always be ready for that--you must never shrink from it. That doesn't suit you at all--you're too fond of admiration, you like to be thought well of. You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views--that's your great illusions, my dear. But we can't. You must be prepared on many occasions in life to please no one at all--not even yourself." (James, 1936, vol.1: 310-311)

Isabel herself, at first, is afraid of her possession. She talks to her cousin, Ralph, about it. (She does not know that it pays her cousin who gives her his share of the inheritance until Mme. Merle tells her near the end of the story.)

I try to care more about the world than about myself--but I always come back to myself. It's because I'm afraid....Yes, 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. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 320)

Nevertheless, after a while, Isabel gets used to idea of having the means to explore life, that is with money. As Henrietta has expected, it causes her to imagine the ideal things she could do. It adds up to her pride.

She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the mass. Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty. (James, 1936, vol.1 : 321-322)

What Isabel does not know is that Mme. Merle visits her long time friend, an expatriate American, Gilbert Osmond. She talks about Isabel and wants him to make her an acquaintance. She specifically suggests that Osmond marries her for, aside from being "beautiful, accomplished, generous and, for an American, well-born," Isabel is "also very clever and very amiable," and more important "she has a hand-

some fortune." (James, 1936, vol.1 : 344)

Gilbert Osmond, then, comes to Mrs. Touchett's Pallazzo Crescentini to visit Mme. Merle, who in turn presents him to Isabel. The visitor invites Isabel with Mme. Merle to come to his place at the hill-top to visit his daughter. Isabel wonders about this seemingly accomplished man. She asks her cousin, Ralph. He gives this information:

He's a vague, unexplained American who has been living these thirty years, or less, in Italy....I don't know his antecedents, his family, his origin. For all I do know he may be a prince in disguise; he rather looks like one, by the way--like a prince who has abdicated in a fit of fastidiousness and has been in a state of disgust ever since....He has a great dread of vulgarity; that's his special line; he hasn't any other that I know of. He lives on his income, which I suspect of not being vulgarly large. He's a poor but honest gentleman--that's what he calls himself. (James, 1936, vol.1 : 358)

To Mrs. Touchett, Osmond is nothing but "an obscure American dilettante, a middle-aged widower with an uncanny child and an ambiguous income,...." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 394) At any rate, as time moves on, Isabel and Osmond are getting closer. An attentive observer of Isabel will ask these questions: how can Isabel fall for this "prince in disguise" when she has rejected the other two perfect suitors? What draws her to him?

Alfred Habegger in one chapter of his book entitled Henry James and the "Woman Business" thoroughly reveals the deep background for The Portrait of a Lady. The chapter suggests that even though Isabel is a grown up, independent young woman, there are still parts of her that need the parental attention and affection, especially those of a father. Habegger, here, calls Isabel "the fatherless heroine." It is probable that Osmond manipulates Isabel's feeling in this case, Habegger argues, since when visiting Osmond's apartments on Bellosguardo for the first time, she is fascinated by Pansy, Osmond's "obedient, porcelain-like daughter." Pansy is already physically mature--she is fifteen years old--but in a way remains a little girl and Osmond is forty. Osmond, at that time, holds Pansy

...making her stand between his knees, leaning against him while he passed his arm round her little waist. The child fixed her eyes on Isabel with a still, disinterested gaze, which seemed void of an intention, but conscious of an attraction. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 370)

Habegger additionally explains:

The silent display has no heat or pressure, only a cool, still limpidity. A childish grown-up is required, in the presence of a stranger, to stand between her father's knees, her waist encircled by his arm, her mind emptied of all volition or interest and containing only a passive responsiveness. The eyes of the child-woman (Isabel) are wide open, but she does not seem to be fully awake. We wonder what cruel

operation has been performed on her to make her so perfectly responsive to another's will. (Habegger, 1989: 150-151)

It is clear that Osmond is using Pansy to get hold of Isabel's heart for, the visit carries away an image of "a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man" who walks on a terrace "holding by the hand of a little girl whose sympathetic docility gave a new aspect to childhood." For Isabel, the image seems "to tell a story--a story of the sort that touched her most easily...." The picture speaks of "a serious choice... of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land; of an old sorrow..." and "a feeling of pride...; a care for beauty and perfection...a quaint, half-anxious, half-helpless fatherhood." (Habegger, 1989: 152)

Isabel is deeply touched by the image because she remembers her own experience. As much as she loves and adores her father, she still recalls the event when her father abandoned her in Switzerland where she had to stay with a French maid, who then ran off with a Russian. (Habegger, 1989: 150) In her mind, she wants to help the "quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished" and "half-helpless father" and "the porcelain-like" girl.

Isabel, in her relationship with Osmond, fancies that she has found a way to let go of the burden the money brings her. Marrying Osmond, she will help both him and Pansy while also maintain her freedom. It is, she imagines, her mission to put the money into

good use through her relations with the father and the daughter.

That he was poor and lonely, and yet that somehow he was noble--that was what had interested her and seemed to give her opportunity. There was an indefinable beauty about him--in his situation, in his mind, in his face. She had felt at the same time that he was helpless and ineffectual, but the feeling had taken the form of a tenderness which was the very flower of respect. He was like a sceptical voyager, strolling on the beach while he waited for the tide, looking seaward yet not putting to sea. It was in all this that she found her occasion. She would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence; it would be a good thing to love him. And she loved him--a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal also for what she brought him. As she looked back at the passion of those weeks she perceived in it a kind of maternal strain--the happiness of a woman who felt that she was a contributor, that she came with charged hands. (James, 1936, vol.2: 192)

Furthermore, in her mind, Osmond does not present a power that will suppress her idealized freedom. Habegger in another book of his called Gender, Fantasy and Realism in American Literature points out that:

Isabel desires to marry and at the same time go free and retain the total (and impossible) autonomy she innocently dreams of. Osmond looks safe to her, because he lacks the

fundamental tokens of masculinity--a career, a visible occupation, a place in the world of men...Osmond seems to have a graceful placidity....The tableau of Osmond and Pansy, father and daughter, living in retirement from the world, has a potent and mysterious appeal for Isabel, and not simply because she finds freedom a burden and would like the strong paternal protection she has never known. (Habegger, 1982: 72-73)

Despite her friends' warning and objections, Isabel marries Osmond. Later on, she finds out that Osmond is the worst of all. Behind the mask of "a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man" is the most conventional of man that claims her as one of his collected objects of art. Instead of being free, she is imprisoned by her husband's "requirements and expectations." During her midnight vigil, as she evaluates her marriage, she sees "the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end." (James, 1936, vol.2: 189)

In the peak of her tragic marriage comes the news about Ralph dying in Gardencourt. Isabel wishes to go and see him in his last days. She asks for her husband's permission to go to England (she lives in Rome). He refuses by saying that it is not decent for a married woman to travel and see her cousin. He even threatens her. If she leaves Rome "it will be a piece of the most deliberate, the most calculated opposition" to him. (James, 1936, vol. 2: 354)

Isabel is confused because of her husband's opposition to her plan and probably would not go to England defying her husband's prohibition if Countess Gemini, her sister-in-law, does not share her a long-kept secret about the relationship between Osmond and Mme. Merle. The Countess reveals that the two people concerned are lovers and that Pansy is Mme. Merle's daughter from the relationship. She also discloses that it is all Mme. Merle's plan to introduce Isabel to Osmond so that he will marry her and get her money. She does it to help her daughter with the dowry, which is Isabel's money. Upon hearing this revelation, Isabel makes up her mind and goes to England. But before that she visits Pansy in her convent. There, she promises her step-daughter that she will return for her. (James, 1936, vol.2 : 362-386)

By leaving for England to meet her cousin, Isabel finally regains control of her life. Although disappointed and unhappy, she is not afraid of her husband anymore. However, she does not know where to go to after her cousin dies and wonders whether she should come back or not. This time, her relation with Caspar Goodwood plays an important part in her making up the decision.

Goodwood, knowing that Isabel has a sad marriage and is miserable about it, comes to Isabel in Gardencourt and encourages her to go away with him, urging that they "can do absolutely as (they) please...the

world's all before (them).... This, nonetheless, is not what Isabel chooses. She does not run away, at least it seems so for James leaves the ending open, and is responsible for the choice she has made. She goes back to Rome. As grim as her life may seem to her, Isabel will be there for Pansy, to make sure that Osmond will not manipulate his daughter. (Osmond forbids Pansy to marry Ned Rosier because he thinks that the young man is not rich enough.) At last, she realizes that she cannot have the kind of freedom she previously imagines and has to live in reality, with "the toiling, striving, suffering,...sinning world" that surrounds her, as Henrietta has said before.

James in his characterization of Isabel uses many of her relations with the remaining characters to help develop the plot. Mrs. Touchett is the first person used. If it had not been for her, Isabel would not have had the opportunity to come to Europe. She would remain in America and would probably be married to Caspar who persistently comes to her asking her to be his wife.

In Europe, it is her cousin, Ralph, who gives her the opportunity to search for her fate by asking his father to give half of his part of the money to Isabel as the means to be free. Ironically, it is also the money that draws Mme. Merle's attention to Isabel. She wants to save her daughter's position so, she introduces Isabel to Osmond and traps her into an unfortunate marriage which confines her and denies her the freedom that she dreams she will

get out of this union. However sad Isabel's marriage is, she loves her step-daughter very much and wants to help her. Her intimate connection with the girl causes her to come back to Rome, making her choose the grim reality in having to face her husband's hatred. Nevertheless, towards the end, her husband does not have the power to control her for she has known the truth about him and Mme. Merle which is revealed by Countess Gemini. Isabel gains freedom in having her own mind which Osmond cannot take control of.

Isabel: A Reflection of Women's Conditions

One of the contemporary reviews about The Portrait of a Lady which was written by Horace E. Scudder and printed in The Atlantic Monthly in January, 1882, recounts the next citation about the heroine of the story:

...our admiration is increased when reflection shows that, individual as Isabel is in the painting, one may fairly take her as representative of womanly life today. The fine purpose of freedom, the resolution with which she seeks to be the maker of her destiny, the subtle weakness into which all this betrays her, the apparent helplessness of her ultimate position, and the conjectured escape only through patient forbearance,—what are all these, if not attributes of womanly life expended under current conditions? (Bamberg, 1975: 651-652)

Isabel Archer is, without question, the representation of feminine circumstances in both Victorian and late nineteenth-century eras. She personifies women of the time who wanted to be independent and, yet, fear the freedom itself and fell. She is the kind of woman who is limited by conventions and limitations; "a victim of large cultural ideas and currents." (Habegger, 1982: 71) This induces a reader of the aforementioned literary work to seek out the conditions of women in the two periods of time that might affect the author's view in characterizing Isabel.

A mixture of the perfect Victorian lady and the independent American girl, as previously hinted in the first chapter of this *skripsi*, Isabel is, in the beginning, described as different from other woman of her time in general which is presented through her sisters. Here is how James depicts her:

...the depths of this young lady's nature were a very out-of-the-way place, between which and the surface communication was interrupted by a dozen capricious forces....She had a great desire for knowledge....; she had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering. 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. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 45)

A further description of her shows that:

Isabel Archer was a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably

active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a larger perception of surrounding facts and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar. It is true that among her contemporaries she passed for a young woman of extraordinary profundity; for these excellent people never withheld their admiration from a reach of intellect of which they themselves were not conscious, and spoke of Isabel as a prodigy of learning, a creature reported to have read the classic authors--in translations. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 66)

She determines to explore life and the world for she takes pleasure in "seeing great crowds and large stretches of country, of reading about revolutions and wars, of looking at historical pictures." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 45) She wishes for something more than just:

...kindness, admiration, bonbons, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the world she lived in, abundant opportunity for dancing, plenty of new dresses, the London *Spectator*, the latest publications, the music of Gounoud, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 46)

From the preceding quotations one knows the activities and roles that women in the society of that time were limited. In the field of education, the courses that they were allowed to take were "music, dancing, art, German, Italian, French, English, morals, and

religion," some which only provided "a superficial catechistic education." (Springer, 1977: 140-141) Harriet Martineau discusses this matter of education in the succeeding excerpt:

The intellect of woman is confined by an unjustifiable restriction of both methods of education,—by express teaching, and by the discipline of circumstance. The former,... is a direct consequence of the latter, as regards the whole of the sex. As women have none of the objects in life for which an enlarged education is considered requisite, the education is not given.... There is a profession of some things being taught which are supposed necessary because everybody learns them. They serve to fill up time, to occupy attention harmlessly, to improve conversation, and to make women something like companions to their husbands, and able to teach their children somewhat...the necessary learning, and yet more, the indispensable experience of reality, are denied to her.... (Rossi, 1973: 126)

Furthermore, women were not given the kind of education that males had because they were not supposed to have minds of their own since it would scare men away and ruin their "chances in the marriage market," as well as "jeopardize the dignity of their rank or the delicacy of their sex." (Springer, 1977: 141)

Readers are reminded of this when James tells:

Isabel saw the young men who came in large numbers to see

her sister, but as a general thing they were afraid of her; they had a belief that some special preparation was required in talking with her. Her reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic; it was supposed to engender difficult questions and to keep the conversation at a low temperature. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 41)

The heroine, liking her liberty too much, however, regards little of her chances in getting involved in a nuptial union. She holds it that she "was very fortunate in being independent," and that she "ought to make some very enlightened use of that state." For her, being independent does not mean "the state of solitude," or "singleness," and in her opinion, "a woman ought to be able to live to herself, in the absence of exceptional flimsiness." Moreover, "it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 69-71) "There are other things a woman can do," she says, "I don't see what harm there is in my wishing not to tie myself. I don't want to begin life by marrying," because "I do not need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live. I can find it out for myself." When given a chance to go abroad with her aunt, an opportunity rarely offered to a woman at that time, she sees her opportunity to find her destiny and decides not to marry until she has seen Europe. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 210-225) She

does refuse two suitors: Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood whom others consider as ideal for husbands.

Her opinions are, of course, contrary to what the society of that time held to believe, that is marriage being "the only destiny possible to women who were trained for nothing else," (Springer, 1977: 165) and "the only object left open to woman," (Rossi, 1973: 126) for "the only natural role of women are daughters of...wives of...(and) mothers of..." (Springer, 1977: 128) Furthermore, for a woman: the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men--inferior in mental power, in the same proportion...inferior in bodily strength. (Springer, 1977: 128)

Isabel intends to be "the maker of her destiny." She is determined to take control of her life, which is unlike what her contemporaries in general had in mind. They did not know what to do with their lives. The only way offered by the society was marriage. The next quotation from one novel of Charlotte Bronte, *The Professor*, will prove it so, as put forward by Carolyn G. Heilburn. Here, the heroine cries out:

I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health; half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave?...Probably I shall be an old maid...I shall never marry. What was I created for, I

wonder? Where is my place in the world? (Springer, 1977: 166)

Carlyle, quoted by Marlene Springer, once wrote the following in a letter to a friend:

I have never doubted the true and noble function of a woman in this world was, is, and forever will be, that of being Wife and Helpmate to a worthy man; and discharging well the duties that devolve on her in consequence, as mother of children and mistress of a Household, duties, high, noble...the true destiny of a Woman, therefore, is to wed a man she can love and esteem; and to lead noiselessly, under his protection, with all the wisdom, grace, and heroism that is in her, the life prescribed in consequence. (Springer, 1977: 129-130)

Isabel, definitely, regards highly her freedom and independence. When Caspar Goodwood, her suitor from America, argues that "an unmarried woman--a girl of (her) age--isn't independent," because "there are all sorts of things she can't do," that hamper her at every step, Isabel answers back:

I'm not in my first youth--I can do what I choose--I belong quite to the independent class. I've neither father nor mother, I'm poor and of a serious disposition; I'm not pretty, I therefore am not bound to be timid and conventional; indeed I can't afford such luxuries...I try to judge things for myself, to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at

all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 228-229)

What a "bold sketch" of "love of liberty" it is that she has put forward to this personage of the opposite sex. Yet, it is "almost exclusively theoretic" and "she had not been able to indulge it on a large scale." (James, 1936, vol. 1: 223)

Goodwood is right in his opinions. Isabel is not free because she is penniless. Having no financial support, Isabel would, in the end, be forced by circumstances to give up her freedom in a marriage because there is nothing she could do. She, consequently, will not have the chance to find her fate for it is in marriage that a woman's identity is at stake. (A discussion on marriage will be unfolded later on.) This is in accordance to a fact put forward by Marlene Springer:

Once married, women became legal slaves... they could not even hold property...the married woman's property, liberty, earnings, children, even her conscience belonged to her husband. (Springer, 1977: 128)

Ralph, her cousin as well as an admirer of her, realizes this fact from the start. He decides to put "a little wind in her sails" in the form of seventy thousand pounds to keep her away

from the set of conditions aforementioned. He would like "to see her going before the breeze," to succeed in her life. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 260)

In persuading his father to leave the money for Isabel, Ralph reasons out:

...she has less money than she has ever had before...She has nothing but the crumbs...to live on, and she doesn't really know how meagre they are--she has yet to learn it...Isabel will learn it when she's really thrown upon the world, and it would be very painful to me to think of her coming to the consciousness of a lot of wants she should be unable to satisfy. (James, 1936, vol. 1: 263)

Having the money in her purse, Isabel is unhampered to encounter the world. She goes to countries of Europe to experience its greatness. The surroundings of the new environment affect her.

She had ranged, she would have said, through space and surveyed much of mankind, and was therefore now, in her own eyes, a very different person from the frivolous young woman from Albany who had begun to take the measure of Europe on the lawn at Gardencourt...She flattered herself she had harvested wisdom and learned a great deal more of life than this light-minded creature had even suspected. (James, 1936, vol. 2: 32)

She decides, now, that it is time for her to marry and she chooses a man whom she imagines as having the

right qualities to be her life companion. She favors Gilbert Osmond for she finds him as different from other men she had encountered. In her mind, Osmond is the most cultivated; he lives for art and is "indifferent to small considerations, caring only for truth and knowledge." He lives alone with his child, Pansy.

Isabel imagines that Gilbert Osmond is "a suitable recipient for the wealth she had inherited." Andrew Hook states:

This American dilettante, of such delicate good taste, had seemed a poor, lonely, yet noble figure. 'She would', romantically, 'launch his boat for him.' (Hook, 1983: 44)

What Isabel expects from her union with Osmond is a kind of marriage in which she is a partner, a contributor and an active agent in the search for happiness. She has her own reasons, which others may not be able to comprehend. She marries him because of the following:

...her ardent desire to enlarge and enrich her experience of life, to grow in wisdom and virtue under the guidance of this most superior of men... (and) her desire, equally ardent, to serve. More specifically, it is the desire to do something with her money that will be at once useful and imaginative; most specifically to use her money in the service of someone she loves. These are the two fundamental needs of her nature; and in Gilbert Osmond she believes she has found someone who will satis-

fy both. Osmond she believes, is a man to whom her fortune will be of real service, whose enjoyment of it she can intimately share. At the same time (she also believes) he is a man who in his turn will share her desire for self-development, and by virtue of his superior gifts and accomplishments will contribute everything in the world to the enlargement of her mind, the refinement of her sensibilities, indeed to the extension--the most splendid extension imaginable--of her life's experience. (Bamberg, 1975: 718)

But reality bites. Osmond is not only the most conventional man but also, as he says it, the convention itself. He admires her as an object. He thinks her as having "too many ideas" which she must get rid of. He is the master and she is to follow him in every way. When Isabel refuses, he hates her. The marriage has proved to be an unhappy one. Isabel, in her midnight vigil, re-introspects her marriage and life.

...he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour, and so far from desiring her mind to be a blank she 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;....Nothing was a pleasure to her now; how could anything be a pleasure to a woman who knew she had thrown away her life? There was an everlasting weight on her heart--there was a livid light on everything. (James, 1936, vol.2: 200)

The marriage turns out to be a tragedy in Isabel's life. It is tragic

because:

she should be hated not for what is worst but for what is best in her--for her free enquiring mind, for her moral purity, for her desire to uphold, to her capacity, what she believes to be right and good. And this,... is indeed one of the profoundest of the tragic ironies of life: to be rejected and despised--hated as Osmond comes to hate Isabel--for what is best in one, and by those in whom one had placed one's most loving trust. (Bamberg, 1975: 727)

In going to England to visit her cousin, Ralph, Isabel defies her husband. It marks her taking over her life, independence and freedom which her husband does not want her to have. She is, therefore, ready to face the consequences of this act for:

...to break with Osmond once would be to break for ever; any open acknowledgement of irreconcilable needs would be an admission that their whole attempt had proved a failure. For them there could be no condonement, no compromise, no easy forgetfulness, no formal readjustment. (James, 1936, vol. 2: 246-247)

However, breaking up with Osmond does not mean divorce; Isabel refuses to take this way. When Goodwood offers her the opportunity to run away, she says no. She, in spite of her misery, resolves to take responsibility of the marriage. She goes back to Rome, presumably to help her step-daughter from experiencing the cruelty of the father who pressures and dominates his child. There is still hope for Isabel.

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, of that...She should never escape; she should last to the end. (James, 1936, vol. 2: 392-393)

Isabel's marriage is a failure because there is no equality in it. The man is the one who dominates, not letting the other part to participate in it. Auden opines that for a couple to have a happy marriage they should have:

...a healthy mixture of physical desire and philia, a mutual personal liking based on common interests and values, where the dominant feeling is of mutual respect between equals. (Springer, 1977: 173)

Readers of The Portrait of a Lady are shown the facts of marriage. It is central in the novel since everyone in the story is involved in the problem of marriage. One from the novel, can observe the marriages of Mr. and Mrs. Touchett, Countess Gemini and her Italian husband, and also of Henrietta Stackpole and Mr. Bantling. However,

marriage which James discusses is not marriage as a specific social constitution," but as "a condition of existence -- of Isabel's existence in particular." (Dupee, 1973: 104)

Isabel who is portrayed so free like a bird in the beginning has proven to be oppressed by this institution. She is denied her own identity, her own intellectual, her own feelings. She is supposed to represent her husband. Ralph sees this and :

Slender still, but lovelier than before, she had gained no great maturity of aspect, yet there was an amplitude and a brilliancy in her personal arrangements that gave a touch of insolence to her beauty. Poor human-hearted Isabel, what perversity had bitten her? Her light step drew a mass of drapery behind it; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament. The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what did Isabel represent?....she represented Gilbert Osmond. "Good heavens, what a function." (James, 1936, vol. 2: 143-144)

Isabel, in breaking up with Osmond, in her resolution to take control of her own destiny, is a personification of feminism. The word, here, does not mean liberation in politic movements, but liberation to exist. She wants to have freedom to express her own mind and decisions. She does not want to be an ornament of Osmond. She wants to be treated as equal, not merely as "the portrait of a lady" hanging in the house of her husband.

Conclusion

Female readers of The Portrait may learn something from Isabel's dreams, ideas and efforts to be someone. They should appreciate the opportunities that they have at the moment and should make the best use of them to have a more meaningful life.

The society itself should get rid of its wrong opinions about women. A woman's place is not in the kitchen, but in the world. She should be a part of the world because she is a human being also. Men and women should work together, they are equal. However, the woman herself, should prove it to the society that the opinions are wrong by, for example, studying harder.

Male readers of this novel should not have it in mind that they are superior to their female counterparts. They should not be like "katak dalam tempurung", thinking that they are better and not trying harder in their lives. The women of today are very advanced in their education, ways of thinking and lives which makes it a must for men to work harder unless they want to be left behind.

One should not also be possessive like Osmond. He is controlled by his ambitions to be the man of the world. He is enslaved by money and power and especially by his egotism. The result is a miserable life-- his wife and daughter leave him to live on their own.

Above all, as a human being, one should be responsible in one's

decision no matter how bad it comes out. Hard it may seem to Isabel, she returns to Rome because she does not want to run away from the reality of

her decisions. There is still hope for her, that what keeps her going and strong.

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