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The Masculine Mind in The Portrait of a Lady

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1984

THE MASCULINE MIND IN
THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by

Nora Elaine Neagle

July 1984

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THE MASCULINE MIND IN
THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

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The Masculine Mind in
The Portrait of a Lady

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July 1984

66 pages

Directed by: William McMahon, James Flynn, George McCelvey

Department of English

Western Kentucky University

The strongest and best-developed supporting characters in The Portrait of a Lady are the men in Isabel Archer's life: Ralph Touchett, Caspar Goodwood, Lord Warburton, and Gilbert Osmond. Because it is largely through the eyes of these men that the reader sees Isabel, a thorough understanding of their personalities is essential for a clear interpretation of Isabel.

James shows the four men in vivid detail--their physical appearance, cultural background, intellect, moral convictions, sense of humor--everything from a habit of keeping hands in pockets to having a wardrobe which seems to have come from a single bolt of cloth. This study draws together the details James gives the reader about Ralph, Caspar, Warburton, and Osmond along with the critics' comments about them in an analysis which attempts to show how each personality contributes to the development of Isabel Archer.

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Introduction

The transitional novel The Portrait of a Lady serves as a bridge between Henry James's early and middle phases. This work, his first long novel centered on a female character, moves in a new direction from early novels with main characters such as Roderick Hudson and Christopher Newman and begins a succession of masterpieces about women. For this reason most of the critical attention to the novel has been focused on the main character, Isabel Archer.

James intended, from his first inspiration, to fix the reader's attention upon Isabel. In his preface he explains that he imagined her personality before he gave any thought to plot or setting and had to create the relations and circumstances that would be most stimulating to her personality:

I seem to myself to have waked up one morning in possession of them--of Ralph Touchett and his parents, of Madame Merle, of Gilbert Osmond and his daughter and sister, of Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Miss Stackpole, the definite array of contributors to Isabel Archer's history. They were like a group of attendants and entertainers who come down by train when people in the country give a party; they represented the contract for carrying the party on.¹

Each supporting character is a stimulus to Isabel's

development.

With the exception of Madame Merle, the strongest and best-developed supporting characters are the men in Isabel's life: Ralph Touchett, Caspar Goodwood, Lord Warburton, and Gilbert Osmond. They are important because it is largely through them that Isabel is painted before the reader in all her strengths and weaknesses. William T. Stafford says, "they are the lines of action shifting our perspectives of the figure always before us" and that they "are never as important in themselves as they are as a means of defining still more finely our sense of whatever we come to see Isabel to be."² Marjorie Perloff agrees, and adds that the reader overlooks Isabel's faults "because she is almost always seen through her own eyes or through the eyes of the men who are under her charm."³ James, in his critical preface, writes that he meant these characters to have importance only in their relation to Isabel--"press least hard, in short, on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributive only to the greater one" (p. 51). Thus, these characters remain in a supporting position while having the conspicuous power to manipulate the reader's view of Isabel.

A thorough understanding of the personalities of Ralph, Caspar, Osmond and Warburton is essential because

if Isabel were described by characters whose tastes and prejudices were unknown, her portrait would be blurred. It is only after the reader knows these men that their estimation of Isabel has full significance. For this reason James shows the four men in vivid detail--their physical appearance, cultural background, intellect, moral convictions, sense of humor--everything from a habit of keeping hands in pockets to having a wardrobe which seems to have come from a single bolt of cloth. The following chapters will draw together the details James gives the reader about Ralph, Caspar, Warburton, and Osmond along with the critics' comments about them and attempt an analysis which will show ultimately how each personality contributes to the painting of Isabel's portrait.

Chapter I
Ralph Touchett

Ralph Touchett, the first man about whom James goes into detail, is perhaps the most important of the four male characters who become involved with Isabel. Some critics have even declared rashly that Ralph is the main character of The Portrait of a Lady. While Ralph is the observer of much of the action, he is not the central character or even the narrator.

Although James claimed that the inspiration for Ralph, like the other characters, came upon him all at once, scholars have isolated at least three possible sources for Ralph's personality which include characters created by George Eliot and George Sand and events from James's own past. Oscar Cargill points out the similarities between Ralph and Philip Wakem, from The Mill on the Floss, a hunchback who is in love with the heroine but brings disaster to her through good intentions; Cargill also finds a similar character in Sir Ralph Brown, from George Sand's Indiana, who "introverted and inept, is cousin, as well as the devoted protector and silent lover, of the . . . heroine."¹ Sir Ralph also brings trouble in trying to help and, like Ralph Touchett, is generous in offering to share his fortune with his

cousin's husband when they lose their wealth. The events in James's own past which might have been a source for his creation of Ralph happened fifteen years before he wrote the novel, when James was twenty-two years old. Peter Buitenhuis gives important background information:

When the Civil War broke out, the family had recently returned from Europe and settled in Newport, R. I. Henry's two younger brothers were soon to join the Union Army, but Henry was incapacitated by a back injury that he had sustained in fighting a fire. The injury kept him prostrate for several hours a day for years.²

Buitenhuis then describes the incident which might have inspired James:

In the summer of 1865 Henry went for a vacation to North Conway in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. With him were two friends, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. and John Gray. Holmes and Gray had recently been demobilized from the Union Army and were still wearing their officers' uniforms. Henry had to compete with them for his cousin Minnie's attention. Beside the bronzed, vigorous, and articulate veterans and the vivacious Minnie, Henry felt awkward and inadequate. (p. 3)

Thus, James knew what an invalid feels and therefore was able to write about Ralph's situation more knowledgeably even if he did not consciously pattern Ralph after himself. Ernest Sandeen quotes a passage from a letter James wrote to William after his cousin died:

She never knew how sick and disordered a creature I was and I always felt that she knew me at my

worst. I always looked forward with a certain eagerness to the day when I should have regained my natural lead, and friendship on my part, at least, might become more active and masculine.³

The reader's sympathy toward Ralph's character might be attributed to the sense that Ralph is perhaps a creation from real human experience. Richard Chase claims that Ralph "often speaks with the wisdom of the author," but this is not to say that he speaks for the author--that the reader is meant to see Ralph as James.⁴ Cristof Wegelin supports this idea, and writes, "Ralph is not to be identified with James. He dramatizes merely James's expectant sympathy with the American quality which Isabel represents--the imagination. . . ." ⁵ Possible sources for Ralph's character, then, are conspicuous if not certain.

James leaves little uncertainty about Ralph's background, giving many of the details of Ralph's past as early in the novel as the fifth chapter. Ralph was taken from Vermont to England as a small boy when Daniel Touchett took a position with a British bank. He was sent back to America for several years of schooling and a Harvard degree, then sent to Oxford for three years to re-Anglicize him a bit. After distinguishing himself at Oxford he spent two years travelling and a year and a half working in his father's bank before he became a consumptive and had to make a career of staying alive. James describes

Ralph's educational and professional training in order to establish his nationality or lack of nationality, an aspect of character which is important in all of James's "international novels."

Critics generally agree that Ralph is an equal mixture of British and American. F. R. Leavis writes, "He is neither American nor English--or he is both: that is, he combines the advantages while being free from the limitations."⁶ Ralph is clearly a member of James's ideal civilization, one which James never found in reality. Ora Segal describes Ralph's dual nationality well:

Not only is Ralph perfectly acquainted with both systems, he is actually a product of both; he has acquired European urbanity, sophistication, and refinement of manners, yet has never really lost those supreme American national traits--an independent mind and a lively imagination. In fact, it is clearly suggested that Ralph's Americanness goes deeper than his Englishness: "His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was none the less the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence, on which nothing long imposed itself, and which, naturally inclined to adventure and irony, indulged in a boundless liberty of appreciation," (V;3,49).⁷

Gordon Pirie assumes that, because Lord Warbuton seems to enjoy Ralph's sense of humor more than the other characters do, James invented Ralph's humor to appear especially British.⁸ American, English, or cosmopolitan, Ralph exhibits universally admirable qualities.

While James gives fewer details about Ralph's personal past than his professional background, he does reveal some significant facts about Ralph's relationships with people. Early on, the reader learns that at some point in Ralph's life his mother set up her own residence in Florence, going back to England only for brief visits. Although James writes that Ralph was given apartments in his mother's home, he insinuates that Ralph was not fond enough of his mother to use them often. And he makes this clear when he says that the news of Isabel's engagement was "even more sensibly chilling than Mrs. Touchett's maternal kiss."⁹ James stresses Ralph's devotion to his father, who had probably shown him more love than anyone else he had known. Few other people are mentioned as having had a part in Ralph's past, although he tells Isabel that he was once in love with Madame Merle. His greatest friends at the beginning of the novel are clearly his father and Lord Warburton. Ultimately the background information James gives about Ralph serves to strengthen Ralph's credibility to such a point that the reader trusts his judgment beyond that of any other character, including Isabel.

Much more powerful in increasing the reader's trust in Ralph than the facts about his past are the excellent qualities present in his personality. James mentions two terms which describe Ralph when he writes of Isabel,

"she spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity" (p. 53). Beauty hardly applies to Ralph--he is even referred to as the "ugly young man" several times. But Ralph personifies bravery and magnanimity. These two traits, which have been attributed to epic heroes throughout history, serve here to encompass central facets of Ralph's character.

Ralph shows his courage in a variety of situations. He bears bravely his own illness and bleak future, his father's death, and blame for Isabel's ruin, and bases his actions on his own moral convictions, never compromising them for the conventions of society. A great deal of Ralph's humor serves as a shield against fear of sickness and death. In the ninth chapter James writes of Ralph ". . . he had long since decided that the crescendo of mirth should be the flower of his declining days," (p. 80). And earlier in the novel when Isabel accuses him of "an odious want of seriousness," Ralph explains jokingly a truth which is not lost upon her:

"I keep a band of music in my ante-room," he said once to her. "It has orders to play without stopping; it renders me two excellent services. It keeps the sound of the world from reaching the private apartments, and it makes the world think that dancing's going on within."
(pp. 60-61)

Once Isabel sees through the jokes she feels sympathy for Ralph--"It seemed to her he was talking as a blind

and had little heart in what he said" (p. 61). Ralph's father, conversely, seems to misunderstand Ralph's need to laugh at himself and the world. Elizabeth Stevenson points out an example of the misunderstanding:

"You young men have too many jokes. When there are no jokes you've nothing left."
 "Fortunately there are always more jokes" the ugly young man remarked.¹⁰

Mr. Touchett probably understands why Ralph jokes and is trying to warn him that his sense of humor might fail him someday and leave him to despair if he abuses it. This will not happen. When Ralph leaves Rome for the last time, under the care of Henrietta, his humor has completely served its purpose. He is genuinely amused at the idea of Henrietta caring for him, and he is at last able to take down his shield of humor and face death without fear--in fact, with anticipation. And if Isabel has felt all along that Ralph's mirth has been a mask, she is sure when she sees him just before his death; Charles Anderson describes Isabel's discovery: "His valiant wit had been used for concealing not only his suffering and defeat but his hopeless love for her."¹¹

Ralph's "hopeless" love for Isabel calls for another act of bravery. Because he believes that neither people who are seriously ill nor people who are first cousins should marry, he renounces his right to woo Isabel. He also believes, as Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley points out,

that he could never satisfy Isabel's imagination.¹² Robert L. Gale presents as proof the passage in which James likens Isabel to a house and writes, "The door was fastened, and though he [Ralph] had keys in his pocket he had a conviction that none of them would fit."¹³ Ralph underestimates his appeal. If Ralph had tried, at any point before Isabel's marriage, to win her by showing her his true character, he might have succeeded. He does win her love as he dies and is content because to him this spiritual union is the only acceptable form their love can take.

Several other events emphasize Ralph's bravery. Although Mr. Touchett has been his closest companion all his life, Ralph bears his father's death quietly and with a minimum of emotional display. Knowing the risk he is taking with Isabel's future, Ralph daringly puts his trust in her and arranges to make her rich. When Isabel decides to marry Osmond, Ralph has the courage to tell her (gently) what he thinks of Osmond, even though he knows it will alienate her. And when Ralph realizes what a hellish situation she is in, he defends her in the only way he can think of--he challenges her to disobey Osmond, and forces her to confess her troubles. Finally, in Ralph's death scene he gallantly takes the blame for Isabel's ruin. If Ralph has any real fear, it is of inadvertently hurting Isabel, and he avoids this even when it causes

him to be hurt himself. Ralph shows bravery at every turn.

Magnanimity, in its definition as greatness of mind and generosity of heart, describes a heroic quality in Ralph's character. His fine intelligence, his disdain for meanness, his unselfish nature, his refreshing modesty, and his gracious manner combine to make the reader (if not Isabel) find his charm irresistible. Arnold Kettle comments that "his is the 'finest,' and fullest intelligence in the book."¹⁴ James establishes Ralph's credibility so early and so well that the reader relies on Ralph's judgments about all the other characters in the novel. Ronald Wallace points out, "When he expresses his dislike for Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond the reader is forewarned that the two are up to no good."¹⁵ One reason the reader trusts Ralph so completely is that his illness detaches him from the world a bit and leaves him a more unprejudiced observer. James explains this through Isabel:

He was so charming that her sense of his being ill had hitherto had a sort of comfort in it; the state of his health had seemed not a limitation, but a kind of intellectual advantage: it absolved him from all professional and official emotions and left him the luxury of being exclusively personal. (p. 280)

The knowledge that Ralph was once in love with Madame Merle strengthens rather than weakens the credibility

of his opinion about her, and, although Ralph has only met Osmond briefly, James points out how advanced Ralph's observation skills are:

. . . but Ralph had never--to his own sense-- been so clever as when he observed, in petto, that under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world. (pp. 324-25)

Isabel, when she later becomes aware of her imprisonment, sees just how intelligent Ralph is:

It had never had time to die--that morning in the garden at Florence when he had warned her against Osmond. How could he have known? What a mystery, what a wonder of wisdom! As intelligent as Gilbert? He was much more intelligent--to arrive at such a judgement as that. (p. 357)

Ralph has a fine mind, but what distinguishes him most from Osmond are his moral principles, which are constantly displayed in the novel. Refusing to stoop to the devious tactics of others, Ralph disdains meanness and maintains calmness and civility:

Ralph was imperturbable--Ralph had a kind of loose-fitting urbanity that wrapped him about like an ill-made overcoat, but of which he never divested himself; he thought Mr. Osmond very good company and was willing at any time to look at him in the light of hospitality. (p. 229)

Another evidence of Ralph's courtesy is found later in the novel when Osmond appears at St. Peter's. James

writes ". . . Ralph Touchett appeared to take the case as not committing him to joy. He did not hang back, however, from civility. . ." (p.247). Ralph is still unruffled when he visits Rome for the last time, and Isabel notices:

Ralph never said a word against him, but Osmond's sore, mute protest was none the less founded. He wished her to have no freedom of mind, and he knew perfectly well that Ralph was an apostle of freedom. (p.379)

Thus Ralph, although touched by many frustrations, remains courteous throughout.

Ralph's magnanimity involves other aspects--he is generous, modest and gracious. Stevenson expresses well the first evidence of Ralph's generosity:

At the beginning of The Portrait of a Lady, Ralph Touchett, who will give Isabel Archer a fortune, gives her his dog. The incident is a natural, unceremonious manifestation of the man's character. (p. 132)

But Ralph gives Isabel much more than his dog and a fortune. He patiently and gently teaches Isabel lessons about life. Richard Poirier applauds James's effort:

James permits Ralph to exercise a comic playfulness, a capacity to avoid all obvious pedagogical seriousness, thereby allowing Isabel to come painlessly and with only pleasurable embarrassment to a recognition of her own absurdities.¹⁶

In sending for Isabel when he is dying, Ralph is trying

one last time to teach Isabel about duty and freedom and loyalty. Frederick Willey writes:

The legacy he bequeaths her is his generous love, his kindness--and the example of his life, that is, the assurance that life is suffering. Alive, Ralph understands as no one else does that love is freedom.¹⁷

And even as he is dying Ralph gives Isabel hope, telling her that he will be nearer to her after his death and that she will not suffer all her life (p. 471).

Ralph's modesty is genuine (not a pose as Osmond's is) and can be seen from the beginning of his acquaintance with Isabel when he is alarmed at her misunderstanding of his remark about her adoption, through the middle phase when Ralph thinks himself unworthy to propose marriage and instead provides her with a fortune, to the comment to her from his deathbed, "I was afraid you'd get tired of sitting there" (p. 469). He blushes with pleasure when Isabel tells him that she adores his father (p. 146); he blushes with embarrassment when he tries to warn her about Osmond and admits his own feelings for her (p. 284). In fact, Isabel is the only person who can jar Ralph's self-confidence. He loves her.

Leavis sums up Ralph's grace in a few words:

He knows how to treat everyone. For Ralph Touchett is the centre, the key figure, of James's "system"--the poise or harmony I have spoken of as characterizing The Portrait of a Lady. (p. 150)

Poirier attributes to Ralph an "ideally civilized view of experience"--the very thing Isabel thought she was getting in Osmond (p. 190).

Perhaps the characteristic which makes Ralph truly "better" than Osmond is his view of life and art. Charles Anderson points out James's attempt to express Ralph's conviction through a portrait Ralph isolates as being his "ideal of a regular occupation":

It represented a gentleman in a pink doublet and hose and a ruff, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of a nymph in a garden, and playing the guitar to two ladies seated on the grass. (Lancret's Conversation Galante in the Wallace Collection, London, answers his description perfectly and even has a title appropriate to Ralph Touchett.) (p. 116)

Anderson then explains the significance of the painting by saying that Ralph "wanted art to be a joyous thing, he wanted to express his own life as a service to beauty" (p. 116). Edwin T. Bowden reinforces this idea by describing its importance in Ralph's treatment of Isabel:

Ralph Touchett began his comparison with a careful distinction between art and nature: Isabel is like a work of art, but is even finer, for she is a part of nature. The distinction is fitting, for of the various relations to the arts shown in the novel, his alone is consistently sane and admirable. And the most admirable quality of this relation is his insistence on the greater importance of life than art.¹⁸

And Alden R. Turner shows that finally Ralph gives Isabel

the key to being able to "bridge the gulf between art and life"--that key is her belief that "love remains."¹⁹ Therefore, the argument that because art lasts longer it is more important than life is destroyed by Ralph's insightful deduction that love is a part of life which can escape death and which is ultimately more sacred than art.

Even though James clearly intended Ralph to be the finest man--intellectually and morally--in the novel, there are those critics who believe Ralph is little (if any) better than Osmond. Donald L. Mull writes, "Several critics have been led by Ralph's attitude toward Isabel to consider him a violator of the Kantian categorical imperative of nearly Osmondian magnitude."²⁰ Leon Edel takes a mild view of Ralph's villainy by believing that he gave her the fortune both because he truly loved her and because he thought that seeing what she would do with it would be very entertaining.²¹ Charles T. Samuels is not as kind. He accuses Ralph of merely touching life and writes, "He is also so irresponsible as to be destructive."²² He goes on to describe Ralph's relation to Isabel as parasitic, claiming that James erases Ralph's sin with sentiment, and then challenges all who would argue by the statement:

Eloquent proof that the trick is effective can be found in the nearly universal absence of negative criticism concerning Ralph's role.

In Ralph's death scene, he drowns our clamorous memories of the man's egotism in a deathbed hush. This scene is the book's unique lapse into Dickensian sentimentality. (pp. 116-17)

But James does not trick the reader into forgiving Ralph. He has gone into much detail describing Ralph's moral code, and it is because the reader knows the principles that move Ralph that he should never be seen as a villain. Ralph's only mistake is in trusting Isabel to do the right thing with her money, and this mistake is minute when compared with Osmond's evil. Ralph acts through a genuine love for Isabel, and does not stop loving her when his high view of her is crushed by her own mistake. Mull claims that the purpose of Ralph's character in the novel is distorted if he is blamed too much for Isabel's ruin, but that it is necessary to examine his mistake in trusting Isabel's wisdom (p. 75). Ralph clearly trusted Isabel's love of her independence to save her from the money-hunters, not seeing that her need to sacrifice herself to help the less-fortunate would be even greater and would soon cause her downfall. Ralph makes an error in judgment; he does not commit a deadly sin.

Ralph's last conversation with Isabel is the culmination of all his heroism (and Isabel's). Isabel finally admits what Ralph has meant to her, and Ralph is, at last, able to confess his love without embarrassment. Before he dies, Ralph gives Isabel several things.

Martha Banta, quoting from the text, writes that his most valuable gift was that he "made her feel the good of the world; he made her feel what might have been."²³ Quentin Anderson simply states that "Ralph's love will be her real inheritance" (p. 190). But Lyall H. Powers pinpoints the most important thing Ralph does for Isabel:

Thus one can say that Ralph's death is quite literally responsible for Isabel's breaking her association with the evil which Osmond is and represents. It is perhaps permissible to say that in this Ralph assumes a Christ-like role. Ralph's love for Isabel serves the same function, ultimately, as Milly's for Densher: the means of salvation.²⁴

Ralph gives Isabel back her independence. He cuts the strings Osmond has been using to control her and gives the reader the conviction that Isabel will return to Osmond prepared to combat the devil.

If the reader is left at the end of the novel wondering what Isabel will do, he is also given the opportunity, through James's statement that Ralph "made her feel what might have been," to wonder how things could have turned out differently. Douglas W. Jefferson believes that because Isabel is "critical and independent and a little cold and dry at times" it is not in her destiny to meet the "right" man.²⁵ But who could have been more perfect for Isabel than Ralph? He loved her and allowed her what she most wanted--her freedom.

Surprisingly, Charles Anderson seems to be the only critic who allows himself to dwell on "what might have been":

Now it is confided to her in his last words: "Remember this, . . . that if you have been hated you have also been loved" (III, 231). Though nothing more is stated, what is evoked by the whole scene is a vision of the life they might have had together, at least for a few years. As mistress of Gardencourt she would have enjoyed a freedom quite as untrammelled as at Lockleigh; and if her position would have been higher as Lady Warburton, her situation would have been happier as the wife of Ralph Touchett. Gardencourt could have been transformed from a house of death into a house of sweetness and light. The glow of Ralph's love and the lambent play of his wit would have made it the opposite of Palazzo Roccanera, "the house of darkness and suffocation." (pp. 118-19)

Thus, if anyone was the person who could have fulfilled Isabel's purpose in coming to Europe, which was "to be as happy as possible," it was Ralph Touchett.

Although Ralph spends a considerable portion of the novel in some country other than the one being focused upon, his spirit is ever-present. The reader cannot help but think of Ralph when his predictions for Isabel's marriage come true, and she herself begins to compare Osmond to Ralph and finds them opposites. Ralph has affected the reader's opinions about almost every character in the novel, and is therefore almost a part of the reader. Because James's entire purpose in writing the novel was to show Isabel's development, Ralph

cannot be seen as the main character. Still, Ralph is the finest person in The Portrait of a Lady.

Chapter II

Lord Warburton

Lord Warburton is what Leon Edel calls "the most attractive of Isabel's suitors."¹ But James makes it very clear that the British nobleman is not the right man for Isabel because, while Warburton is handsome, rich, and has a pleasant personality, his character lacks the wisdom and freedom of imagination Isabel requires. James uses Warburton to show both the charm and the shortcomings of the British, so at times the portrait becomes almost a caricature of the British nobleman of the nineteenth century.

Sources for Warburton's character are easily recognizable. Edel holds that the character was taken from the young British gentlemen James often met in the London clubs with which he was affiliated. Edel quotes James's descriptions of a couple of these young men--descriptions which might also be applied to Warburton--"a very good fellow, and a specimen of a fortunate Englishman: born, without exceptional talents to a big property, a place in the world, and a political ambition" and:

. . . one of those manly, candid, reasonable, conscientious, athletic, good-looking young Englishmen who only need a touch of genius or of something they haven't got to make one

think that they are the flower of the human race. (p. xiv)

Warburton is, therefore, a model of a type of Briton with which James was quite familiar.

In James's descriptions of Warburton he echoes his comments about the young men of the London clubs and adds details which are important in justifying Isabel's refusal. James first introduces Lord Warburton as he is taking tea on the lawn at Gardencourt:

One of these was a remarkably well-made man of five-and-thirty, with a noticeably handsome face, fresh-coloured, fair and frank, with firm, straight features, a lively grey eye and the rich adornment of a chestnut beard. This person had a certain fortunate, brilliant, exceptional look--the air of a happy temperament fertilized by a high civilization--which would have made almost any observer envy him at a venture. He was booted and spurred; he wore a white hat, which looked too large for him; he held his two hands behind him, and in one of them--a large, white, well-shaped fist--was crumpled a pair of soiled dog-skin gloves. (p. 19)

This is only a physical description. James says Warburton looks brilliant and exceptional--later the reader learns that this appearance is deceptive. James mentions that almost anyone would envy Warburton--but Ralph does not; Mr. Touchett does not; Isabel does not. Warburton wears a white hat, which strikes the reader as a clumsy, slightly foolish touch, and he carries crumpled, soiled dog-skin gloves, in part symbolizing his own exploita-

tion of the lower class to maintain his aristocratic lifestyle, yet also revealing crassness in using the skins of "man's best friend" to keep his white hands clean. As for Warburton's appearance when he returns seven years later, he is a bit heavier, but otherwise unchanged. His good looks never fail him. James shows the opinions of two of the genuine Americans, Mr. Touchett and Henrietta Stackpole, when they describe Warburton by his possessions:

Lord Warburton's a very amiable young man--a very fine young man. He has a hundred thousand acres of the soil of this little island and ever so many other things besides. He has a half a dozen houses to live in. He has a seat in Parliament as I have one at my own dinner table. (p. 71)

Henrietta is succinct--"He owns about half England; that's his character" (p. 250).

Because his British qualities are his most negative ones, Lord Warburton's nationality is his greatest handicap in winning Isabel. Even the surname Warburton, which sounds much like a British place name, carries a negative tone of pomposity. F. R. Leavis believes that Warburton takes a liberty with Isabel in the candle-lighting passage which shows just what a double standard his system had for courtesy to English ladies and to independent American girls (p. 149). Most significantly, Isabel herself says that there is something "stiff and

stupid" about the British system which would make it "a complication of every hour" (p. 94). The most abominable characteristic attributed to the British national character and demonstrated by Lord Warburton is, Dorothea Krook contends, the inability to understand the most personal motives behind human actions.² It is this lack that prompts Warburton in the proposal passage to ask Isabel, "Are you afraid--afraid of the climate?" (p. 100). It is also this lack that enables Warburton to accept calmly the idea that Pansy would marry him to please her father (p. 365). Thus, although Isabel says she rejected Lord Warburton because "she liked him too much to marry him," a more important reason was that she saw the British system of which he was a product as a trap in which she did not want to be caught (p. 101).

The best quality Lord Warburton gets from the British national character is his good breeding or courtesy. Dorothea Krook describes his good manners:

In this well-bred, thoroughly honest and sincere, and most satisfyingly ardent Englishman, perfect breeding wears the richer aspect of a delicacy utterly natural, unforced, unlearned; and this naturalness is somehow compatible with its being at the same time the product of a highly artificial form of social life. (pp. 28-29)

Many examples of Warburton's British courtesy appear in the text. Isabel tells Henrietta of Warburton, "An

Englishman's never so natural as when he's holding his tongue" (p. 82). His discretion again appears when he meets Isabel in Rome and she describes his behavior: "he was both discreet and frank--not even dumbly impertunate or remotely intense. He thus left her to judge what a mere good friend he could be" (p. 245). Warburton shows a related characteristic when he goes to see the Osmonds before returning to England--"Then he advanced, with his English address, in which a vague shyness seemed to offer itself as an element of good breeding" (p. 389). This shyness is addressed earlier when Isabel tells Osmond, "You know Englishmen are shy," and Osmond tries to hurt her by saying "He wasn't when he made love to you" which prompts the retort, "I beg your pardon; he was extremely so" (p. 347). Warburton's courtesy extends to Pansy, who explains this kindness, "It's as if he said to me: 'I like you very much, but if it doesn't please you I'll never say it again'" (p. 386). And when Warburton calls on Mrs. Touchett after Ralph's death it is a sincere although more formal courtesy. Thus, when Ralph tells Isabel that Warburton "will do nothing dishonourable" in regard to Pansy and when Miss Molyneux his sister says "Oh, Warburton does everything one wants," each is testifying to Warburton's superb and conspicuous good manners.

Warburton's personality displays aspects other than

courtesy--a simple intelligence, an easy-going nature, a sense of humor, and a uselessness that inspires sympathy. Early in the novel Isabel sees him as the hero of a romance (p. 62). Although later many shortcomings have been revealed, she still describes him in heroic terms, "He was pleasant, he was powerful, he was gallant; there was no better man than he" (p. 243). Warburton's intelligence is not of the same fineness as Ralph's, but he shows an occasional perceptiveness that makes the reader excuse some of his more idiotic ideas. Ralph points out one of these instances of insight:

Lord Warburton had been right about her; she was a really interesting little figure. Ralph wondered how their neighbour had found it out so soon; and then he said it was only another proof of his friend's high abilities, which he had always greatly admired. (p. 62)

And Isabel is impressed by his talk of his travels: "There was no mistake about his being very intelligent and cultivated and knowing almost everything in the world" (p. 69).

Warburton has a casual, peaceful nature which charms everyone. Isabel describes it early:

His quality was a mixture of the effect of rich experience--oh, so easily come by!--with a modesty at times almost boyish, the sweet and wholesome savor of which--it was as agreeable as something tasted--lost nothing from the addition of a tone of responsible kind-

ness.

(p. 342)

But his placidity suggests a deficiency in passion, a serious matter. Perhaps the best example of his cheerful nature comes from something Isabel notices at their last meeting, "He was very grave, very proper and, for the first time since Isabel had known him, greeted her without a smile" (p. 476). He had always been pleasant, even after she rejected him. Warburton's sense of humor is almost as good as Ralph's, but he depends on it less. Almost all of his jokes are shared with either Ralph or Henrietta--the most hilarious episode in the novel is the dinner conversation between Warburton and Henrietta about the British aristocracy and potatoes. Unfortunately, much of the humor that involves him is directed at him. Despite his intelligence, Warburton is gullible, as he proves by telling Isabel about the explanations given him in America, "You know I think they often gave me the wrong ones on purpose; they're rather clever about that over there" (p. 68). His political position is also humorous--he does not realize that his disestablishmentarianism does not make him unique--rather, it makes him just another follower of fashion. There are instances when Warburton actually seems "simple-minded," Dorothea Krook believes, as well as "simple-hearted" (p. 29), and Isabel admits that Lord Warburton should suit Pansy because they are

"limited" (p. 339). His limitations only add to his humor, and the reader is charmed as well as amused by him.

While the reader may pity Warburton for his gullibility and foolish ideas, the most pitiable thing is that he lives to no purpose. This is his prediction in his proposal scene with Isabel, and he echoes it when he runs into her unexpectedly in Rome, "Oh dear, I'm quite alone, I've nothing on earth to do" (p. 241). Although at one point Isabel believes that his devotion to British politics has cured him of her, Warburton carries his love for Isabel throughout. He admits he is not really in love with Pansy, and the reader feels that even his engagement is made only because he feels he must follow convention.

Warburton does adhere to tradition, but he is far from the slave to convention that Osmond is. The difference is that, as Wegelin points out, Warburton was born into a family and a society which molded him to be a conventional man, so that his actions are almost instinctive (p. 74). Osmond consciously chose to follow convention. At least Warburton is trying to break away from tradition through his radicalism even if, as Poirier says, this too is an action within the system (p. 213). In one of Isabel's first conversations with Mr. Touchett, they talk of the "stupidly conventional"

British. Mr. Touchett says, "you can't tell what they'll like. They're very inconsistent; that's their principal interest" (p. 59). If Warburton had been completely conventional he would not have proposed to an American girl. William R. Veeder comments on a related proprietary instinct of Warburton's:

As Isabel proves more and more intractable in the proposal scene, Warburton begins "giving short nervous shakes to his hunting whip." Finally defeated, he "shaking his hunting whip with little quick strokes . . . walked rapidly away" (102). In crises the traditional lordly instinct surfaces--thrash what will not submit to proprietorship.³

Because Warburton's conventionality seems slight next to Osmond's obsession with it, the reader does not like him less for it.

One technique that helps to convey Warburton's goodness is, according to Charles Anderson, his association with light (p. 94). The light imagery is very effective, especially in the proposal scene:

"It's for life, Miss Archer, it's for life," Lord Warburton repeated in the kindest, tenderest, pleasantest voice Isabel had ever heard, and looking at her with eyes charged with the light of a passion that had sifted itself clear of the baser parts of emotion--the heat, the violence, the unreason--and that burned as steadily as a lamp in a windless place. (p. 96)

Anderson cites the same scene:

. . . it seemed to her that a "radiance surrounded him like a zone of fine June weather"--though it was a day in late Autumn. When Warburton spoke to her of marriage, "These words were uttered with a tender eagerness, . . . like the fragrance of she knew not what strange gardens" (I, 129, 138).
(pp. 94-95)

The light image is used in the scene where Warburton runs into Isabel in Rome, "He was splendidly sunburnt; even his multitudinous beard had been burnished by the fire of Asia" (p. 242). However, the reader suspects light without heat.

Some critics cite Warburton's interest in Pansy as sordid because he is twenty-three years older than she. No one is surprised when Warburton goes back to England without proposing to her because James makes Warburton's continued interest in Isabel clear. True, leading the Osmonds on about his intentions toward Pansy in order to see Isabel is not a noble act, but it is natural and understandable. It is not a serious wrong when compared to Osmond's evil because it harms no one and is a result of his love for Isabel.

Thus, James meant Lord Warburton to be one of the good characters. Although his moral code is not as fine as Ralph's, this is due to things beyond his control--his place in the British system and his inability to understand deep personal motives. He is not as wise as Ralph; moreover, his system would have been a trap for

Isabel. Daniel J. Schneider even points out the name of Warburton's estate, Lockleigh, as a warning of the prison it could become.⁴ While Warburton is not the right man for Isabel, he is, as James wrote of the young men he was patterned after, "one of those . . . good-looking young Englishmen who need only a touch of genius or of something they haven't got to make one think that they are the flower of the human race" (p. xiv).

Chapter III
Caspar Goodwood

If Lord Warburton's character is too much a portrait of the British nobleman, then Caspar Goodwood's character is too much a portrait of the American businessman. While Caspar is not without attractive qualities, he is actually the least appropriate for Isabel of the three characters discussed thus far. Caspar is handsome, athletic, straight, and tall, and reminds Isabel of an armored warrior. His bold, uncompromising, passionate manner does have an effect on Isabel, but he threatens her independence even more than Warburton.

James found inspiration for Caspar Goodwood in Thomas Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd, according to Oscar Cargill, who explains the relation:

That James drew on Far from the Madding Crowd is demonstrated not only because both heroines belong to the court of Diana and because the love-sick madness of Farmer Boldwood may have suggested the violence of Caspar Goodwood, but also because in the famous final scene when Isabel is passionately kissed by Goodwood the author thinks of the experience in Hardy-esque terms of natural violence, actually imitating the description of a scene he had admired in his review. (p. 85)

Indeed Caspar lives largely on the physical level; this idea is furthered in the background James creates for

him. Caspar attended Harvard (like Ralph), but excelled as a gymnast and oarsman, not as a scholar. His father owned Massachusetts cotton mills, of which Caspar turned out to be a wonderful manager. He even patented an invention to improve the spinning process. Caspar thrived on this lifestyle. James writes, "There were intricate, bristling things he rejoiced in; he liked to organize, to contend, to administer; he could make people work his will, believe in him, march before him and justify him" (p. 105). Caspar's nationality puts him at a disadvantage with Isabel because he represents a type of American by which an imaginative, independent American girl might well feel threatened. For Arnold Kettle, Caspar represents the part of America that is "young, strong, go-ahead, uninhibited, hard," and he suggests that Goodwood's motto might be expressed by lines of Archibald MacLeish's American Dream:

America is promises
For those that take them. (p. 63)

Frederick C. Crews points out another aspect of nationality which puts Caspar (as well as Henrietta) at a disadvantage in dealing with the Europeans--"Isabel's American friends are incapable of dealing successfully with Osmond and Madame Merle because they know nothing about the meaning of appearances."¹ Caspar's nationality is almost always seen in a negative light, especially

by Isabel, as in their meeting after Isabel becomes engaged to Osmond:

Mr. Goodwood made these detached assertions with dry deliberation, in his hard, slow American tone, which flung no atmospheric colour over propositions intrinsically crude. The tone made Isabel angry rather than touched her. (p. 272)

It is not only Caspar's nationality that makes him difficult--the reader sees more clearly even than Isabel that Caspar is not a delightful person, for Caspar has no personal relationships with anyone in the novel except Isabel. He seems not to have friends in America (none are mentioned); he merely tolerates Henrietta Stackpole when she tries to help him, and although he does like Ralph, he never really develops a friendship with him. Moreover, Caspar has no interests in common with any of the other characters. He is oblivious to art, a fine example being his habit of crossing the Atlantic time after time to see Isabel without ever really seeing any of the great works of art. And he spent only an hour at the Tribune in Florence.

The personality of a man who does not like people or art is bound to have other serious flaws. One of the first ideas the reader has about Caspar Goodwood's personality is that he is boring. The letter he writes to Isabel is stiff and formal--instead of the charm of

a love letter, it has the tone of a lawyer's argument for a case. And in a most important passage Isabel describes his monotonous wardrobe:

Then she viewed with reserve a habit he had of dressing always in the same manner; it was not apparently that he wore the same clothes continually, for, on the contrary, his garments had a way of looking rather too new. But they all seemed of the same piece; the stuff, was so drearily usual. (p. 105)

She also criticizes his conversation--"he showed his appetites and designs too simply and artlessly; when one was alone with him he talked too much about the same subject, and when other people were present he talked too little about anything" (p. 106). These are devastating revelations of a lack of depth. Caspar is uninteresting also because he is not intelligent. Isabel admits that he is simple-minded and later remembers having said "Mr. Goodwood speaks a good deal, but he doesn't talk" (p. 404). Caspar's intellectual deficiencies are worse than Warburton's, for he lacks the charm and wit to make people overlook them.

Caspar is also stubborn. This idea comes through in Isabel's comparisons of Caspar to an armored warrior. She notices, "his jaw was too square and set and his figure too straight and stiff: these things suggested a want of easy consonance with the deeper rhythms of life" (p. 105). This, along with his bland wardrobe,

points to a Puritan background. James, after convincing the reader of Caspar's stubbornness through example, admits it freely: "He had presented himself hitherto as a person destitute of the faculty of compromise, who would take what he had asked for or take nothing" (p. 403). Ultimately it is his own stubbornness in refusing to give up on Isabel that causes Caspar to waste his life. From Puritanism to Capitalism, Caspar represents a cluster of basic American attitudes.

In one personality trait especially Caspar Goodwood is a foil to Lord Warburton. Dorothea Krook writes:

He may be full of all the shining virtues of character and disposition that no disinterested mind can fail to recognize and admire; but he always falls short in respect of that ineffable quality that Englishmen of an earlier generation called breeding: he always remains just that shade "common"--just that shade provincial, gauche, crude. (pp. 36-37)

It is this physical, forceful, assertive manner in Caspar that threatened Isabel, as Leon Edel writes in his biography of James:

He [Caspar] insists "with his whole weight and force." He is in short monotonously masculine; and if Isabel finds his sheer sexual force attractive it is also terrifying. Passion or sex is not freedom.²

Edel is wrong to identify hardness with sexuality, but Caspar's passionate kiss is perhaps what drives Isabel away forever. She compares his love to the "hot wind

of the desert" and his kiss to white lightning, but his forcefulness reminds her that he is only another trap, and a crude one, and she flees toward the lights of Gardencourt. Jaques Barzun writes, in The Question of Henry James, that he believes James meant the reader to admire Caspar Goodwood for "the robustness of his desires" and to dislike Osmond because of his "tepid feelings" and "systematic constraint."³ Yet James was actually showing two extremes, neither of which he meant to be particularly admirable.

Caspar Goodwood is not, then, quite as good as his name implies, nor is he evil like Osmond. He does have some qualities which are advantages. He has amazing self control for one so forceful; he suffers quietly and never shows fatigue. He is at least civil, if not as charming as Ralph or Warburton. He supposedly has the ability to make people believe in him and follow him, although it is not actually shown in the novel. And even if Caspar has no sense of humor, no friends, no appreciation of art and no intellectual interests, he is still a much better man than Osmond because he does not beguile and manipulate people and he does not pretend--he is genuine. Isabel does not run away from him in the end because his trap would be worse than the one she is in with Osmond, but probably because she realizes that she will never be free again until she

goes back to Osmond and challenges him on his own terms. Caspar, who had always been able to get what he wanted through perseverance, faces defeat when he learns from Henrietta that Isabel has gone back to Rome. He finally sees how much of his life he has wasted. Caspar learns that there are "disappointments that last as long as life" (p. 415). His character is his fate. Both are bleak. His limitations, like Warburton's, are so serious that Isabel (or any sensitive woman) would not be able to accept him as a good prospect to be either husband or father. The critics who think they know which man Isabel should have chosen have failed to see that she has no really promising candidates.

Chapter IV

Gilbert Osmond

Gilbert Osmond is perhaps the most thoroughly evil character James ever produced. Although some critics accuse James of it, he never crossed the fine line that separates the supremely chilling villain of high drama from the villain of melodrama, who is so obviously evil that he becomes somewhat comic. James avoids this by veiling many of the seamier aspects of Osmond's life and showing merely what is pretense while leaving what the pose hides in darkness. In this way James carries off making Isabel fall in love with Osmond while almost everyone else hates him.

If James was actually inspired by the sources critics have suggested for Osmond's character, he had some fine models. Leon Edel points to one of James's friends, Francis Boott, as a source for Osmond's Italianate-American character because he "lived for many years in Italy, where he brought up his American-born daughter as if she had been a continental jeune fille," but is quick to add that Boott was a "mild, generous-hearted" man.¹ The sinister qualities probably came from literary sources. Oscar Cargill points

out Osmond's similarity to George Eliot's Henleigh Grandcourt, a man who is larger and more vulgar than Osmond, but is strangely less repulsive (p. 87). And William C. Brownell, writing in 1882, comments upon the similarities of character development of the Lydgates in Eliot's Middlemarch and the Osmonds in The Portrait of a Lady.² James may even have taken the name Gilbert Osmond from Gilbert Osgood in Silas Marner. William R. Veeder suggests other sources for the name:

Seeking a name for his villain in The Castle Spectre, Monk Lewis may well have gone back to a bloody and exotic drama of the British theatrical past, Osmond, the Great Turk. The Castle Spectre contains a "knave" named Gilbert (Ii). His master is "Osmond [sic] the very antidote of mirth" (Ii).
(p. 120)

Joseph Anthony Ward identifies an American source, calling Osmond almost a Hawthorne villain--a Chillingworth or a Rappacini.³ And Wegelin accuses Osmond of Ethan Brand's "unpardonable sin" of tampering with "the sanctity of the human heart" (p. 72). Moreover, Buitenhuis claims that the house in which Hawthorne lived in Florence became the model for Palazzo Roccanera, which so exudes Osmond's personality (p. 109). Thus Gilbert Osmond appears as a composite of well-wrought literary villains set in a realistic situation with which James was familiar.

James begins his limning of Osmond's personality by giving him a very vague background. Whereas James gave a great deal of information concerning Ralph's education, Warburton's title of nobility, and Caspar's career in the cotton industry, he purposely leaves many questions about Osmond's past unanswered. When Madame Merle first speaks of him, she says he has no past, no position, no career (p. 169). His own sister, the Countess Gemini, asks "Who is he, if you please? What has he ever done?" and adds "he has always appeared to believe that he's descended from the gods" (p. 228). Laurence B. Holland sums up what little Osmond family history is given in the text:

Osmond, the son of a "rich and wild" father and a mother who combined a practical "administrative" view with a talent for poor poetry, has made in his expatriation a "wilfull renunciation" which is nonetheless a social construct; it is founded on the habitual intent to utilize economic resources without creating them and is centered on his immediate family.⁴

James makes a significant point in emphasizing through Madame Merle that Osmond's father died long ago and that anyone could tell he had been brought up by a woman. Two sentences later his mother, "the American Corinne," is labelled a horrible snob (p. 235). Thus the origin of both Osmond's snobbery and his suspected lack of masculinity is explained before the qualities themselves have been introduced to the reader.

Although James is vague about so many details, he gives perhaps a more complete physical description of Osmond than of any other character in The Portrait of a Lady. He gives the first description when Pansy returns from the convent:

He was a man of forty, with a high but well-shaped head, on which the hair, still dense, but prematurely grizzled, had been cropped close. He had a fine, narrow, extremely modelled and composed face, of which the only fault was just this effect of its running a trifle too much to points; an appearance to which the shape of the beard contributed not a little. This beard, cut in the manner of the portraits of the sixteenth century and surmounted by a fair moustache, of which the ends had a romantic upward flourish, gave its wearer a foreign, traditional look and suggested that he was a gentleman who studied style. His conscious, curious eyes, however, eyes at once vague and penetrating, intelligent and hard, were expressive of the observer as well as the dreamer. . . . He was dressed as a man dresses who takes little other trouble about it than to have no vulgar things. (p. 194)

Veeder comments that Osmond's grizzled hair is significant because "premature graying traditionally signifies moral inadequacy" (p. 126). This description gives the reader nothing in particular to dislike, yet its very tone warns that there is more to this inconspicuous gentleman than his appearance suggests. Isabel's imagination has clearly already taken over her objectivity when she describes him for the first time:

She had never met a person of so fine a grain. The peculiarity was physical, to begin with,

and it extended to impalpabilities. His dense, delicate hair, his overdrawn, re-touched features, his clear complexion, ripe without being coarse, the very evenness of the growth of his beard, and that light, smooth slenderness of structure which made the movement of a single one of his fingers produce the effect of an expressive gesture-- these personal points struck our sensitive young woman as signs of quality, of intensity, somehow as promises of interest. (p. 220)

Osmond has the perfect sort of ambiguous appearance and character that can profit greatly from the workings of a vivid imagination such as Isabel's.

Another blank left unfilled in Osmond's character is that of nationality. Most critics call him an expatriate, but several have argued for either the European or the American influence as being stronger. Jefferson argues for the American--"Here is the quintessence of the expatriate way of life, an excellent specimen of the American's gift for appropriating values not his own" (p. 111). Wegelin is also sure that Osmond is an American, but does not blame his nationality for his problems; he believes Osmond is just an example of the dangers European traditions have for some Americans (p. 74). Conversely, Stevenson claims that Osmond is "more European than the Europeans" (p. 42). Also, Wegelin mentions that Philip Rahv calls Osmond "virtually a European" (p. 73). Carl Maves joins neither faction, but presents a good analysis of Osmond's nationality:

He deceives, but unlike a true Italian, he deceives himself as well as others. The life of a "sterile dilettante" has hardly rendered him "human and accomodating"; he recurringly demonstrates a most un-Italian inflexibility. Italy has given him scope for his aesthetic interests but not for his ambitions, and over the years his indolence has become the veil of a deep frustration; he wants power and has found only beauty. No wonder he is dangerous, no wonder an Italianate-American is the devil incarnate.⁵

If Ralph is a combination of the good qualities of Europeans and Americans, Osmond is his foil. The shortcomings of Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood are to a large extent attributable to their nationalities and character types. Osmond does not represent a country or type; therefore, his character deficiencies are even less forgivable, for they are exclusively his own.

Osmond has fewer healthy relationships than the other men. He dislikes people in general; he is only interested in them in terms of how much power he has over them. He does not love Pansy--she is merely one of his art objects, collected in order to make people admire him. He loves Isabel, or rather the image he has of her as an adoring wife, but he comes to hate her when he sees how truly powerless he is to control her mind or soul. He has a great disdain for Ralph, Caspar, Rosier, and others, and only admires Warburton for his position, not for his goodness. His short first

marriage is veiled in darkness until the end, when his sister tells Isabel that Pansy was not the child of his first wife, but of Madame Merle. His power over Madame Merle is then understandable--he has Pansy. He uses this power to such an extent that Madame Merle tells him "you've dried up my soul" (p. 427). Pansy shall also serve as Osmond's power over Isabel when she returns after Ralph's death. Osmond, the man who wanted to be an emperor, has no use for people unless they are exclusively under his control.

Osmond's personality has the most serious flaws of any in the novel. First, like Caspar Goodwood, he has no sense of humor. Gordon Pirie says "His lack of humour erects a barrier between him and the author, which explains why he cannot be 'gone behind' for more than a few brief moments" (p. 73). Another serious problem is Osmond's false stoicism--he pretends to be resigned to his fate while he curses the stars for not having made him a ruler. Then there is the question of Osmond's masculinity. Stephen Reid claims that while Osmond is neither impotent or sterile, he is sexually passive, a quality which he supposes would make Osmond more attractive to Isabel.⁶ Paul O. Williams takes the idea perhaps too far by writing:

Thus James leads us to see, though Osmond does not, that Isabel is really the active principle of the union. She has husbanded the marriage

by providing the necessary funds. Osmond keeps the house, having as Isabel remarks, "a genius for upholstery" (p. 131). He is the preserver of perfect domestic order, she is the errant soul seeking freedom outside.⁷

While Osmond is not physically forceful (like the very masculine Caspar Goodwood) his need to dominate Isabel psychologically might be seen as absolutely male.

Osmond's thirst for power is Machiavellian, a fact James may have over-emphasized by disclosing that Osmond's favorite author is Machiavelli. Alwyn Berland addresses the same idea when he writes, "James's villains are seen to want something which their victims can help them get; their villainy is a pragmatic means to a pragmatic end."⁸ James causes Osmond to seem even more black-hearted by stressing that he is more evil than Madame Merle. Sister M. Corona Sharp observes that "Madame Merle, although versed in evil, discerns new depths in the sinister soul of Osmond. At the sight even she recoils."⁹ And Ford Madox Ford, in speaking of James's villains, points out Pansy triumphantly as "a real, tangible, illegitimate child."¹⁰ Although Osmond did acknowledge Pansy and seemed a loving father, if she had not been such a beautiful and docile child he probably would not have bothered to take her out of the convent school at all.

Osmond's character flaws are so severe that he is

quite fairly accused of committing unpardonable sins, and appropriately compared to Satan. Wegelin describes his immorality:

His perversion is underlined by the fact that his traditions not only take no account of such fundamental moral values as simple "decency" but actually include things so "hideously unclean" as to make Isabel feel like pushing back her skirts." (p. 74)

Wegelin goes on to say that Osmond is "the incarnate negation of the living spirit" (p. 72). Madame Merle says "When not in the right mood he could fall as low as any one, saved only by his looking at such hours rather like a demoralized prince in exile" (p. 206). Ralph also says "For all I know he may be a prince in disguise . . . a prince who has abdicated in a fit of fastidiousness and has been in a state of disgust ever since" (p. 210). James is giving obvious descriptions of Lucifer. Leo Ben Levy agrees that Osmond is demonic, "suspended in an abstract void of evil."¹¹ Thus, although Alwyn Berland is speaking of no particular Jamesian character, he expresses a conclusion about Osmond well: "The prince of darkness, we have been told, is a gentleman; he has never appeared more like one than in the novels of Henry James" (p. 38).

How could James first present an Osmond who was so charmingly irresistible to Isabel and still make the disclosure of his true devilish nature believable later

in the novel? He did it by deliberately leaving certain aspects of his character to the imagination of Isabel and the reader, and by portraying Osmond as absolutely sincere in his love for Isabel. Some critics have a great deal of sympathy for Osmond because they feel he was just as innocently mistaken about Isabel's true nature as she was about his. One of these critics, Dorothea Krook, explains:

What we discover first is that Osmond's original motives for wishing to marry Isabel had not been as base as might be supposed. He had certainly not been a mere adventurer who was marrying her for her money. If Isabel had been in the least like her impossible friend Henrietta Stackpole, he would not have married her were she ten times the heiress she was. The money motive had indeed not been absent, and the aesthetic motive had certainly been present; but his main reason for wanting to marry her was simply that he liked her: that he found her really charming and graceful; that he was in fact, to his capacity, in love with Isabel--genuinely, even ardently, in love.
(pp. 51-52)

Isabel and Osmond were in love. Each was in love, however, with the personality he had imagined the other to possess. Both were mistaken. Osmond thought Isabel would be a submissive, adoring wife--"this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate . . . that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert" (p. 290). In his egotism Osmond

thought that because Isabel loved him she would not only accept but support his convictions. And Isabel believed Osmond was so fine a man that he would respect and admire her own intellectual and moral views. The authors of "The Time Scheme in The Portrait of a Lady" point out that although the two knew each other more than a year before they were married, they did not spend much time together; James gives them a year after their marriage to discover their mistake.¹² Naomi Lebowitz also defends Osmond by calling attention to Isabel's realization that Osmond was sincere "in his wish to preserve appearances."¹³ Osmond's sincerity, however, does not justify his obsession. He cares most about how their marriage will appear to others--as long as they can convince society that they are happily married, it does not matter how vile their lives really are. Isabel is also concerned with appearances but refuses to compromise her own high standards in order to deceive the world.

Thus, Isabel has merely made a mistake in her wish to do good, while Osmond has committed some very black sins. Osmond uses people for his own purposes--he uses Pansy to control both Madame Merle and Isabel; he uses Madame Merle so completely that she feels he has destroyed her soul; he uses Isabel's reverence for the marriage vows to control her. Moreover, Osmond uses art, for which he has no genuine love or appreciation (as Ralph

does), as Manfred Mackenzie says "as a means of mystifying society into paying him the recognition it would otherwise refuse him."¹⁴ Charles Anderson explains James's use of the image of Osmond copying the antique coin to represent his use of art:

It symbolizes his concern with the formal aspects of art, the faultless imitation rather than the inspired creation ; his treatment of marriage as a mere social convention rather than a private affair of the heart; his cold metallic nature, calculating values either in terms of the rarity of an old coin or the current purchasing power of Isabel's fortune. (p. 116)

Indeed, Gilbert Osmond is a hollow, false character, and in his great empty soul there is enough evil to make him the best of James's villains.

The masculine mind, as James represents it in The Portrait of a Lady, operates on three levels. First, in the stubborn Caspar Goodwood, it works on the sensuous plane. Isabel does not love him because he is a boring, simple-minded, overbearing man who never does anything to try to persuade Isabel that he is really worthy of her love; he simply demands that she marry him. In Lord Warburton the masculine mind works on the active level--he patiently shows Isabel what a good person he is and how pleasant he could make her life if she would marry him. Gilbert Osmond's mind is also on the active level--he spends his energies showing society a facade

that he thinks will make it respect him. Ralph is the only one of the four who becomes involved with Isabel on the contemplative level. Because he has no personal ambitions to cloud his judgments, he can make less-biased decisions. Although Ralph loves Isabel, he prudently decides that making a claim to her might be best for him, but giving her freedom to live as she pleases would be best for her. So in his bravery and his magnanimity, Ralph has a finer morality, a finer mind than the others.

James developed the personalities of Ralph Touchett, Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Gilbert Osmond very carefully and expertly. Isabel has a fine mind and is idealistic, and therefore gullible. Samuel Gorley Putt compares her choice of husband to Portia's in The Merchant of Venice:

One is strangely reminded of Portia's Belmont with Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton figuring as the Princes of Morocco and Aragon, and Osmond as an unworthy Bassanio linked with the attractions--for the heiress--of the leaden casket.¹⁵

The four men who love Isabel are perfectly designed to stimulate her personal development. When she refuses to marry Caspar, she gives up a boring but secure life as the wife of a Massachusetts cotton mill owner; when she refuses Lord Warburton she rejects the traditions of the British noble class; it is only when she accepts Gilbert

Osmond that she fails to follow her intellect and follows instead her imagination. This act becomes the center of The Portrait of a Lady. R. W. B. Lewis writes of James:

He saw himself in relation to French, Russian and English novelists; but the form which life assumed in James' fiction reflected the peculiar American rhythm to the Adamic experience: the birth of the innocent, the foray into the unknown world, the collision with that world, "the fortunate fall," the wisdom and maturity which suffering produced.¹⁶

Isabel's "collision" with Ralph, Warburton, Caspar and Osmond gives her the wisdom that comes from experience. She is able to try out her imagination, her intellect, and her moral code on these men. Although she is correct in her dealings with Caspar and Warburton, her "fall" comes when she mistakes Osmond for what Charles Anderson terms an "appreciator," instead of the "exploiter" he truly is (p. 114). Isabel suffers in her marriage to Osmond. He is an expert at just the type of psychological torture to which she is most vulnerable. Her realization that Ralph was everything she had expected in Osmond and that he had loved her and suffered with her helped to give her the maturity and the courage to go back to challenge Osmond's evil.

James did just what he set out to do with Isabel in The Portrait of a Lady. He had the inspiration for Isabel's personality; he asked himself "Well, what will she do?" Then he created the circle in which she moved

throughout the novel. She goes to Europe, refuses two unworthy men, accepts the third unworthy man, and learns to live with her mistake when she realizes that one worthy man truly loved her--The Portrait of a Lady is that simple and at the same time so much more complex--an intricate psychological novel. The masculine minds of Ralph Touchett, Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood, and Gilbert Osmond give the novel more depth than the story of a young lady from Albany and her trip to Europe could ever have had without them. It would be wrong of interpreters of James to see Isabel at fault in her basic decisions about these men. Osmond seems to possess the refinement, intelligence, and general promise (and also the need) to which she should respond. She is wrong, of course, in her judgment, but only because Osmond's nature is well hidden. However, Warburton, who is too shallow; Goodwood, who is too crass; and Ralph, who is too ill--these men would not have satisfied Isabel, and James sees to it that the reader has enough hints to approve of Isabel's decision.

Notes

Introduction

- ¹ The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 53. Throughout this study, parenthetical documentation will be used except for first references.
- ² Perspectives on James's The Portrait of a Lady: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. xii.
- ³ "Cinderella Becomes the Wicked Stepmother: The Portrait of a Lady as Ironic Fairy Tale," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 23 (1969), 417.

Chapter I

- ¹ The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 89-90.
- ² Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Portrait of a Lady: A Collection of Critical Essays, Ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 2.
- ³ "The Wings of the Dove and The Portrait of a Lady: A Study of Henry James's Later Phase," PMLA 69 (1954), 1063.
- ⁴ The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957), p. 131.
- ⁵ The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p. 67.
- ⁶ The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 150.
- ⁷ The Lucid Reflector: The Observer in Henry James's Fiction (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 35.
- ⁸ Henry James (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowan and

Littlefield, 1974), p. 76.

⁹ The Portrait of a Lady, Ed. Leon Edel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. 281.

¹⁰ The Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 123.

¹¹ Person, Place, and Thing in Henry James's Novels (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1977), p. 114.

¹² The Early Development of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 286.

¹³ The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 219.

¹⁴ Arnold Kettle, "The Portrait of a Lady" in Henry James's Major Novels: Essays in Criticism, Ed. Lyall Harris Powers (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1964), p. 55.

¹⁵ Henry James and the Comic Form (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 61.

¹⁶ Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). p. 198.

¹⁷ "The Free Spirit and the Clever Agent in Henry James," Southern Review, New Series 2 (1966), 323.

¹⁸ The Themes of Henry James: A System of Observation Through the Visual Arts (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 64.

¹⁹ "The Haunted Portrait of a Lady," Studies in the Novel, 12 (1980), 236.

²⁰ Henry James's "Sublime Economy": Money as Symbolic Center in the Fiction (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 75.

²¹ Henry James 1870-1881: The Conquest of London (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1962), p. 423.

²² The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 115.

²³ Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 171.

²⁴ Henry James's Major Novels: Essays in Criticism, Ed. Lyall Harris Powers (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1964), p. 82.

²⁵ Henry James and the Modern Reader (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), p. 112.

Chapter II

¹ The Portrait of a Lady, Ed. Leon Edel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. xiv.

² The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 29.

³ Henry James: The Lessons of the Master: Popular Fiction and Personal Style in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 149.

⁴ The Crystal Cage: Adventures of the Imagination in the Fiction of Henry James (Lawrence, Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), p. 121.

Chapter III

¹ The Tragedy of Manners: Moral Drama in the Later Novels of Henry James (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 16.

² Henry James 1870-1881: The Conquest of London (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1962), p. 423.

³ Jaques Barzun, "Henry James, Melodramatist," in The Question of Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, Ed. Frederick Wilcox Dupee (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1945), p. 265.

Chapter IV

¹ The Portrait of a Lady, Ed. Leon Edel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. xiv.

² Perspectives on James's The Portrait of a Lady: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 32.

- 3 The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 51.
- 4 Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 39.
- 5 Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Work of Henry James (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 74-75.
- 6 "The Source of Moral Passion in The Portrait of a Lady and The Spoils of Poynton," Modern Fiction Studies 12 (Spring 1966), 27.
- 7 "James' The Portrait of a Lady," The Explicator 22 (March 1964), Item 50.
- 8 Culture and Conduct in the Novels of Henry James (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 38-39.
- 9 Perspectives on James's The Portrait of a Lady: A Collection of Critical Essays, Ed. William T. Stafford (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 230.
- 10 Henry James: A Critical Study (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 112.
- 11 Versions of Melodrama: A Study of the Fiction and Drama of Henry James, 1865-1897 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 47.
- 12 M. E. Grenander, Beverly J. Rahn and Francis Valvo, "The Time Scheme in The Portrait of a Lady," American Literature 32 (May 1960), p. 134.
- 13 The Imagination of Loving: Henry James's Legacy to the Novel (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 70.
- 14 Communities of Honor and Love in Henry James (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 103.
- 15 Henry James: A Reader's Guide (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 146.
- 16 The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Transition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 153.

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