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Trophies or Treasures:
The Burden of Choice for Mothers, Wives, and Daughters in
Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, and The Bostonians

A Thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of English
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in English

by
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ABSTRACT

Trophies or Treasures:

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by

Melissa C. Huisman

In the world of Henry James's novels, characters are often placed in difficult situations where their happiness depends on their ability to make a free choice. Female characters are manipulated and diminished by a patriarchal system that not only seeks to subordinate their will, but also to objectify them, to place them on the shelf as a trophy. Fathers and husbands are typically the controlling agents, but James also presents women who appropriate the dominating role.

With varying degrees of success, each female character rejects the status of trophy. Instead, each attempts to make choices and determine her own future. James allows for ambiguity and nuanced resolutions. With ambiguity comes hope in the steadfastness of Catherine Sloper in Washington Square, in the tragic heroism of Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady, and even in the sacrificial loss of Verena Tarrant for Olive Chancellor in The Bostonians.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Catherine Sloper, Isabel Archer, Pansy Osmond, Olive Chancellor, and Verena Tarrant face limitations and restrictions on their freedom by fathers and husbands who treat them as trophies and treasures. In the world of Henry James's novels, characters are often placed in difficult situations where their happiness depends on their ability to make a free choice. In Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, and The Bostonians, the patriarchal system manipulates and diminishes female characters, not only subordinating their will, but also objectifying them and placing them on the shelf as trophies.

In these three novels, fathers and husbands are typically the controlling agents, but James reveals that women also appropriate the dominating role, as in the case of Olive Chancellor with Verena Tarrant in The Bostonians, and even in Isabel Archer's relationship with Pansy Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady. The characters guilty of this manipulation range from the evil Gilbert Osmond in his cannibalistic, soul-killing marriage to Isabel, to the well-intentioned Olive Chancellor, who nonetheless participates in emotional vampirism with Verena Tarrant. In the moral universe of these novels, characters commit a grievous sin when they attempt to use another human being for their own purposes.

The great wrong done to the women in these books is in the limitations on their freedom to choose: "To achieve moral maturity a human being must be allowed freedom of choice, and freedom of choice necessarily involves the possibility of choosing wrongly, facing the consequences of such choice, and, if possible, rising above them" (Wagenknecht 74). When Dr. Sloper stands in the way of Catherine's marriage to Morris

Townsend, he reduces her to the level of his personal property, as a trophy of his wealth and status. Gilbert Osmond tries to diminish Isabel Archer, to harness her intelligence and vitality for his own amusement: "He could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring" (PL 296). He diabolically and systematically smothers Isabel's will and personality, but he does not succeed in molding her into the perfect trophy wife. Similarly, Olive Chancellor retards Verena's moral maturity by exploiting her talents in the service of promoting social causes. Although Olive is not as malignantly characterized as Osmond, she is still guilty of objectifying Verena. In each case, the controlling characters try to limit freedom of choice, to prevent moral growth and responsibility, and to hold their victims hostage as trophies.

But James's heroines do not have to remain victims. Catherine's stubborn refusal to accept her father's ultimatums inspires respect and admiration. Isabel's decision to return to her cold marriage is tragic because readers want so much more for her. Verena's choice of Basil Ransom over a life with Olive is less tragic than pathetic because her decisions indicate a weakness of personality more than a triumph of will. In fact, Catherine Sloper's moral victory at the end of Washington Square should be viewed as the standard by which to judge the choices of the characters that follow her.

Washington Square, published in 1881, is one of Henry James's earliest and shortest novels. Following the successful novella, Daisy Miller, Washington Square fell flat with the American public; William Dean Howells reviewed it as "exquisitely provincial" (Moore 43). James apparently agreed because he did not republish the novel in his New York editions, claiming he could not even reread it (Willen v). Certainly briefer and less complicated than his later novels, Washington Square is a valuable

introduction to James's style and themes, and he revisits the father-daughter issue in subsequent novels.

The Portrait of a Lady was serialized in Macmillan's Magazine and The Atlantic Monthly in 1880, and later it appeared in novel form in 1881 (Bamberg viii). The Portrait of a Lady was a massive success and it cemented James's reputation. He intensively reworked it for the New York edition in 1908 and it remains one of the most popular and studied of his novels (Bamberg vii). The depth and texture of the novel, the variety of characters, and above all, the personality of its heroine, Isabel Archer, make The Portrait of a Lady stand out among James's finest.

Following the deaths of both his parents, James published both The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima in 1886. Perhaps the burden of producing two novels in one year or the improbability of repeating the success of The Portrait of a Lady was too much for James. The Bostonians was a flop, disliked by both critics and fans of James's earlier works. It was to be the last book James wrote on American soil, and, smarting from its failure, James turned to playwriting (Bamberg xii). He would enter a long period of artistic depression for almost twenty years until his successful later period that produced The Wings of the Dove, The Ambassadors, and The Golden Bowl (Bamberg xiii). He would republish many of his successful novels in the New York editions of 1908, but The Bostonians would not make the cut.

Of the novels now under consideration, The Portrait of a Lady is the critical and artistic masterpiece. But readers can observe a common thread among the female characters: Catherine Sloper, Isabel Archer, Olive Chancellor, and Verena Tarrant. All of these women struggle to create a life for themselves. Many are objectified, fashioned as

trophies in a patriarchal system that cannot allow personal choice or growth. Instead of being treasured as individuals, they are victimized by husbands, fathers, and even other women. Nevertheless, each of them rejects the status of trophy. Instead, each attempts to make decisions and to determine her own future. These female characters do not always succeed, and unlike many nineteenth-century novels, they do not all have happy endings. James allows for ambiguity and nuanced, unfinished resolutions. But with ambiguity comes hope in the steadfastness of Catherine Sloper, in the tragic heroism of Isabel Archer, and even in the sacrificial loss of Verena Tarrant for Olive Chancellor. Each of these characters has struggled for autonomy and has won her freedom to choose.

CHAPTER 2

WASHINGTON SQUARE: Doctor Sloper's Trophy Case

Washington Square provides a deep evaluation of the exploitative relationship between Dr. Austin Sloper and his adult daughter Catherine. Their father-daughter dynamic is a tragic example of abuse, submission, and a patriarch's attempt to own and control his child. The doctor's scientific background informs his parental philosophy and motivates his belief that Catherine is his possession, an extension of his wealth and property; therefore, he feels justified in performing experiments with her heart and mind.

Dr. Sloper is a proud man who would like to hold up his daughter Catherine as a trophy representing his intellect, his scientific successes, and his material wealth. Unfortunately, Catherine is not the brilliant, witty, and beautiful trophy that the doctor thinks he should have. His relationship with Catherine is typical of so many of James's dysfunctional families where one person with power and authority attempts to manipulate the life of another for his own selfish purpose. In Dr. Sloper's case, his purpose is to make Catherine a symbol of his accomplishments, but she cannot meet his expectations.

Catherine also represents treasure to Dr. Sloper, not because she is loved and treasured as his only child, but because she is a physical extension of his financial status. He views her more as a possession than a beloved daughter, and his attitude towards her is as another facet of his financial portfolio. As an heiress of a substantial fortune, she represents the wealth he has earned in a successful career. Dr. Sloper is fully aware that his daughter will be the target of fortune hunters, in spite of her plain appearance, and he relishes the power he wields by dangling Catherine in front of potential suitors.

In contrast to Sloper's clinical and capitalistic appraisal of her worth, Catherine regards her father with a worshipful and fearful awe:

her deepest desire was to please him, and her conception of happiness was to know that she had succeeded in pleasing him. She had never succeeded beyond a certain point and to go beyond the point in question seemed to her really something to live for. (WS 72)

Unfortunately, Catherine's devoted love and passive personality retard her personal maturity and sense of self. She will tragically learn that she can never please her father because her actions are rooted in love and filial duty while his are motivated by a lust for complete control and intellectual superiority.

As a physician and scientist, Dr. Sloper enjoys observing the phenomena of causes and effects in the relationships around him: "To learn something interesting, and to do something useful—this was, roughly speaking, the programme he had sketched" (WS 67). He is intellectually confident and thinks the application of sound logic can solve all of life's questions. His only regret is his perceived inability to save his son and wife from illness, a belief that reveals his egocentric, god-like view of his powers as a physician. Instead of relishing his surviving daughter as a comfort in his loss and a treasure to love, he is profoundly disappointed in Catherine's lack of brilliance: "[he] was a proud man and would have enjoyed being able to think of his daughter as an unusual girl" (WS 72). Dr. Sloper sees nothing promising or unusual about Catherine, however: "Her plain face, matched, he believes, by a dull intellect, neither solaces his grief nor satisfies his pride. His assessment of her he considers to be the judgment of an impartial logic; in actuality, it reveals only the absence of love" (Rosenberg 56). Because Catherine

cannot be showcased as a trophy of his intellect and achievements, Dr. Sloper reduces her to a pawn in an academic exercise. By refusing to treasure his only child, the Doctor places a heavy burden of expectation upon her as he exerts his terrible will over her.

Sloper's method of control over Catherine is not through physical abuse but insidious: verbal and mental manipulation. Where Catherine represents honesty and artlessness, her father embodies sarcasm and irony, as Ian Bell explains:

Dr. Sloper's linguistic performance shares those features of abstraction and paralysis that we have seen are characteristic of bourgeois behavior. This sharing is seen in his predilection for aphorism, maxim, and epigram—his principal discursive tools. It codifies and freezes the world it inhabits by isolating the objects and the people of the world from any relational context. (75-76)

Because Catherine is a truth-teller and her speech is free of irony or artifice, her father is able to entangle her in his cold logic:

Delicately and gently understated is the true ugliness of Sloper's power—not a starkly naked matter of force, but a confidence trick that leaves the victim with "pleasure" while being prey to manipulation. What is particularly moving is that Catherine is allowed so little sense of what is going on: Sloper's power is such that its exercise goes largely unrecognized by his daughter. (I. Bell 85)

Dr. Sloper's sterile reasoning and argument effectively cage Catherine's will by exploiting her inability to match wits with him. This naked abuse of parental authority denies Catherine's personhood and illustrates Sloper's twisted conception of parenthood. James

subsequently explores a similar manipulative parental relationship in Osmond's dominance of his daughter Pansy in The Portrait of a Lady, and later in Selah Tarrant's exploitation of Verena in The Bostonians.

At the beginning of the novella, James seems to confirm Dr. Sloper's opinion of his daughter. James alternately pities and admires "poor" Catherine, describing her as "excellently, imperturbably good; affectionate, docile, obedient, and much addicted to speaking the truth" (WS 72). James compels the reader to accept Catherine's father's and others' impressions of her by describing her character through their eyes. Indeed, Catherine's artless and quiet personality leads to misreading:

People who expressed themselves roughly called her stolid. But she was irresponsive because she was shy, uncomfortably, painfully shy. This was not always understood, and she sometimes produced an impression of insensibility. In reality she was the softest creature in the world. A dull, plain girl she was called by rigorous critics—a quiet, ladylike girl, by those of the more imaginative sort; by neither class was she very elaborately discussed. (WS 73-74)

Mostly overlooked, Catherine is consistently misjudged. Her subsequent actions will seem unexpected and even subversive to readers if they have formed similar false impressions of her character.

Dr. Sloper believes that his evaluation of Catherine is correct and his domination over her is complete, so he is incredulous that any potential suitor could find her attractive: "I have never thought of her as a charming girl, and never expected any one else to do so" (WS 120). James says that Catherine "grew up a very robust and

healthy child, and her father, as he looked at her, often said to himself that, such as she was, he at least need have no fear of losing her" (WS 68). James even more crudely remarks, "Catherine, at the age of twenty-two, was after all a rather mature blossom, such as could be plucked from the stem only by a vigorous jerk" (WS 96). Andrew Scheiber analyzes the implications of Catherine's size:

Her physical robustness and vitality provide additional evidences of her atavism, evoking an earlier, anterior type of woman, one both closer to the natural state and more distant from the feminine delicacy and extreme sexual dimorphism of the Victorian—and therefore the evolutionary—ideal. Indeed, her very preference for being natural—in contrast to her father's hope that she will prove "clever"—tells against her. Her naturalness underscores her seeming inability (which is actually a principled refusal) to engage in the artifices and mannerisms—not to mention subterfuges—that are the mark of the cultured ingénue of her age and class. (250)

It is important to note James's frequent mention of Catherine's size because it reveals how even her physical attributes subvert her father's wishes to showcase her. The appropriate trophy daughter should be slim and maiden-like; her virginity would be apparent by her perpetual resemblance to a girl. Catherine's bulk is another disappointment to Dr. Sloper because it depreciates her value in the Victorian marriage market.

Besides not conforming to the waif-like standards of contemporary fashion, Catherine's size intimidates her father because it represents a sexual force to be controlled:

Catherine's financial and physical abundance are an embarrassment and a potential danger: she has too much power. Worse, Catherine's body looks indiscreetly married: complete, fulfilled, and therefore powerful. Rather than embodying an alluring timidity in the face of masculine attention, Catherine appears as a formidable Victorian matron, who either has no need for male sexuality, or, even more threatening, may be capable of demanding it. Unlike the virginal and incomplete aspect of the Victorian girl—an amorphous being for her husband to form—what Catherine's full figure represents is "a woman of thirty." (Griffin 135)

Obviously uncomfortable with his daughter's physical maturity, Dr. Sloper attempts to infantilize her abilities and intelligence. He cannot appreciate her natural beauty and artless behavior because they are completely out of place in the fashionable world. He fails to understand Catherine's transparent, honest speech and, believing her weak-minded, misinterprets her refusal to participate in a verbal chess match. The doctor wants a beautiful trophy of the quintessential American girl, but he is mortified by her full-figured, plain appearance.

Convinced of her deficiencies in appearance and perceiving Catherine as dull, Dr. Sloper enlists the help of her Aunt, Mrs. Penniman, to "[t]ry and make a clever woman of her" (WS 70). This charge to Mrs. Penniman is insincere because Dr. Sloper does not believe Catherine is capable of becoming a clever woman. Mrs. Penniman serves as an additional safeguard, a sentinel at Sloper's fortress of authority. Calling her a "cheerful exploiter," Mary Doyle Springer evaluates Mrs. Penniman's real role in Catherine's life:

Washington Square is a square trap, and Aunt Penniman is an indispensable fourth angle which completes the square. Aunt Penniman exists to reveal by her actions the real heart of the darkness: that in such a milieu women (the imperfect sex) not only cooperate passively with what the ethics of a paternalistic society makes necessary, but also cooperate actively in exploiting each other because that is what the whole social system gives them to do, and gives them little else to do if they are unmarried. (81)

Instead of providing a needed, loving, maternal influence for Catherine, Aunt Penniman—a silly and tedious woman—will also use Catherine for her own satisfaction. Hoping for some drama and excitement, Aunt Penniman will exploit the relationship between Morris Townsend and Catherine for her own amusement. Catherine does not have an advocate in Aunt Penniman; she has an additional abuser. Within this square trap, and with Aunt Penniman's unwitting assistance, Dr. Sloper will conduct a cruel experiment when Morris Townsend appears to court Catherine.

Catherine is instantly and predictably charmed and carried away by the handsome Mr. Townsend. Although Dr. Sloper correctly surmises that Townsend is a fortune hunter who has no real feelings for his daughter, Sloper initially allows the courtship. Giving Catherine the freedom to receive Morris Townsend, Dr. Sloper amuses himself by viewing the budding relationship as entertainment. By allowing Morris Townsend to enter the Washington Square home and court his daughter with no intention of permitting a union, Dr. Sloper resembles Hawthorne's Dr. Rappaccini, as Robert Long explains:

As in Washington Square, "Rappaccini's Daughter" involves a set of three characters in a triangular relationship—domineering father, pure and meek daughter, and prospective lover. In it, Dr. Rappaccini is a scientist overweeningly proud of intellect who, for the sake of a psychological experiment, sacrifices his daughter's life. In Washington Square, Dr. Sloper has strong affinities with Dr. Rappaccini, for he, too, has a pure and meek daughter under his trust and guardianship, whose life he sacrifices for the sake of an intellectually gratifying experiment. (Early Novels 90)

James wrote a critical study on Hawthorne in 1879, and there is a substantial amount of criticism on the influence of Hawthorne's writings on Washington Square and The Portrait of a Lady (Willen vii). The most obvious connection is with the character of Dr. Rappaccini. The image of that malevolent scientist and his use of his daughter in the laboratory of his garden will appear repeatedly in James's portrayals of fathers and daughters and husbands and wives. Sloper resembles Rappaccini in his abuse of authority over his daughter, as Long describes, "The doctor, in truth, plays God with his daughter's soul, acting out the role of Rappaccini" ("The Hawthorne Relation" 586). Although he claims to be protecting Catherine from a mercenary suitor, Dr. Sloper is conducting a horrifying experiment in his ever-persistent pursuit of knowledge.

Dr. Sloper's scientific approach to relationships reveals his attempts to categorize people and contain his emotions. Scheiber describes Sloper's accordance with the prevailing opinions about human relationships among nineteenth-century scientists:

[Sloper] treats the romantic goings-on in his own household as a kind of experiment in human sexual selection. He evaluates others—including his

own daughter—by means of what were considered scientific systems, such as physiognomy and sexology, which were used to rank individuals on the evolutionary ladder. And, like popular Darwinism of the day, he sees reason and logic as the benchmarks of evolutionary superiority—qualities on which he highly prides himself, but which he finds wanting in the others around him. (245)

Sloper's attitudes about people were typical of the Victorian mindset concerned with economic status and class position, which seeks to categorize and define human beings:

Sloper's logic, authorized by the scientific practices upon which the bourgeois imagination and progress rely, is a clear denial of the relational process, a determinant schema of cause-and-effect that sanitizes (or balances) the potential threat of awkwardness or otherness, which might disrupt a measured world. (I. Bell 88)

Townsend, a penniless fortune hunter, is not impressive enough for Sloper to allow a union with Catherine. Just as Sloper cannot accept his daughter's womanly shape, he will not accept the integrity of her heart.

Unlike many Victorian fathers, who view their daughters' marriages as a fortuitous expansion of their wealth and status, Sloper does not need to increase his finances and does not care to add to his family through grandchildren. He prefers to hold Catherine back from the marriage market as a trophy, as Ian Bell explains:

Sloper's freezing of Catherine is to keep her (as with any object in a shop window) at the point of exchange without allowing the possibility of full transaction, of entry into the relational world. By accumulating her to

capital, which keeps itself inert, Catherine will mirror with extraordinary accuracy the paradox of the commodity: she is there for purchase, for use, but that purchase, which would enable a relational context for her, is indefinitely suspended. At the same time, the sanctity of Sloper's class position is preserved, safe within the freezing and the balance that resists the relational, the integration of other class positions, in the figure of Townsend. (89-90)

Because Dr. Sloper wishes to "freeze" his financial and social position, Morris Townsend represents first an annoyance and then a threat. Even though the doctor is right about Townsend's mercenary motives, that is not the real reason he refuses to let Catherine marry him. Since Dr. Sloper is unconcerned with his daughter's happiness, his sole motivation in carrying out his parental "protection" is keeping Catherine by his side to benefit himself. In Dr. Sloper's view, Catherine's only attractive quality is her future inheritance; therefore, he cannot believe anyone else can value her. Although Dr. Sloper is right about Townsend's true motives, his attitudes are shortsighted, and his patriarchal commodification of his daughter is painfully evident. This commodification is a form of emotional incest, where a father claims the right to assign value to the daughter, refusing access to a lover who might alter or depreciate that commodity.

Catherine will never be the beautiful, witty trophy daughter that Sloper's vanity demands. His knowledge that any marriage offer she receives will most likely be financially motivated wounds his pride and rather than parting with his daughter and a substantial dowry, he prefers to keep her in his home as static capital. He blocks the traditional route of capital transfer from the father's to the husband's home, and in so

doing, aborts Catherine's emotional, sexual, and procreative future. By denying her most basic needs of womanhood, in fact, humanity, Dr. Sloper commodifies her as a frozen asset, not available for transfer.

Because Sloper has neatly categorized Catherine's abilities, he is unprepared for her passive but determined resistance to his authority. When Catherine announces she and Townsend are engaged, her father determines to display his influence over her. Townsend asks if he will forbid the marriage, Sloper replies, "She is past the age at which people are forbidden, and I am not a father in an old-fashioned novel. But I shall strongly urge her to break with you" (WS 123). As Dr. Sloper anticipates his victory, he is unaware that Catherine has already begun a transition. From her first meeting with Townsend, Catherine develops a private, inner life, preferring to keep some of her thoughts to herself. In response to her father's queries whether she enjoyed the party or where she has met Townsend, Catherine evades him: "For the second time in her life she made an indirect answer; and the beginning of a period of dissimulation is certainly a significant date" (WS 83). Sloper believes that Catherine's feelings for Townsend are an infatuation that will soon pass, but her Aunt Almond warns him,

"She doesn't take many impressions; but when she takes one, she keeps it. She is like a copper kettle that receives a dent: You may polish up the kettle, but you can't efface the mark." The simile is simply meant to warn the doctor of Catherine's steadfastness. However, its accuracy ultimately lies in its implication of the depth and constancy of Catherine's emotions. (Rosenberg 54)

Sloper cannot imagine that his daughter could hide her emotions or have a secret, inner life outside his control. This attitude prevents him from realizing the true complexity of Catherine's character:

Sloper axiomatically brands Catherine as a simple and transparent creature, a graph with no concealed depths. Her complex inner life is masked because she must deal from a position of relative powerlessness. Even while outwardly confirming her father's estimate of her, Catherine nurtures an inner self that both escapes his scrutiny and is protected against its withering judgment. The inability of the doctor, with all his apparatus, to apprehend or understand Catherine's "secret history" drives it deep underground, and allows her to derive advantage and pleasure from the gap between her hidden self and the one visible to her father. (Scheiber 258)

As Catherine's passive resistance to her father's demands increases, her personality and will begin to develop. She begins to transfer her unquestioning admiration and devotion for her father to Morris Townsend. That growing emotional bond with Townsend will weaken her eagerness to please her father and open a rift between them.

Catherine's first victory over her father is in disappointing his hopes for a fight:

He had been puzzled by the way that Catherine carried herself; her attitude at this sentimental crisis seemed to him unnaturally passive. He was even a little disappointed at her not giving him an opportunity to make up for his harshness by some manifestation of liberality which should operate as a compensation. (WS 134)

Sloper's habit of offering a reward for obedience, typical in abusive relationships, is thwarted by Catherine's non-compliance with his expectations. As the conflict deepens, Catherine's perception of herself changes: "She had an entirely new feeling, which may be described as a state of expectant suspense about her own actions. She watched herself as she would have watched another person, and wondered what she would do" (WS 134). Catherine begins to evolve as a character as her personality expands and grows stronger. Subverting both her father's and Morris Townsend's demands, Catherine neither defies her father nor breaks with her lover. She resolves to wait and hope for a happy resolution. Her passivity is significant because, rather than open rebellion, it bewilders her father by refusing his ultimatum.

When Dr. Sloper takes Catherine on a long journey to Europe, hoping that her attachment to Townsend will fade, the subject of her engagement is not mentioned for six months, until the frightening confrontation on the mountain. Up to that point Catherine is respectful and outwardly obedient, but when he pushes her to give up Townsend once and for all, she refuses. Sloper becomes unhinged, his rage unmasked: "You try my patience, and you ought to know what I am, I am not a very good man. Though I am very smooth externally, at bottom I am very passionate; and I assure you I can be very hard" (WS 180). At this turning point, Catherine realizes that her father will annihilate her personality if she lets him. It dawns on her that "it might be part of his plan to fasten his hand—the neat, fine, supple hand of a distinguished physician—in her throat" (WS 180). Not his hand on her throat, to hurt her, but in her throat, symbolizing his efforts to silence and completely control her. Although terribly frightened and intimidated, Catherine stubbornly resists.

Upon returning home, Catherine has made the awful choice. She is prepared to marry Townsend, realizing how much that will displease her father. Her words to Mrs. Penniman indicate her resolve:

"You were angry last year that I wouldn't marry immediately, and now you talk about my winning my father over. You told me it would serve him right if he should take me to Europe for nothing. Well, he has taken me for nothing, and you ought to be satisfied. Nothing is changed—nothing but my feeling about father. I don't mind nearly so much now. I have been as good as I could, but he doesn't care. Now I don't care either. I don't know whether I have grown bad; perhaps I have. But I don't care for that. I have come home to be married—that's all I know. I shall never plead with him for anything; that is all over. He has put me off. I am come home to be married." (WS 187)

These are Catherine's strongest and most defiant words in the novel so far, revealing her anger and an independence not yet seen. Her word choice is unknowingly ironic when she says her father has taken her for nothing. On one level it signifies that their trip to Europe has not resulted in her giving up Townsend, but on another level, Catherine acknowledges that her father thinks nothing of her. The trip has dissolved the adoration she once had for her father: "It has broken the grip of her idolization of him, and in this way, has prepared her independence" (Rosenberg 63). The time spent apart from Townsend has not weakened her love for him; instead, it has strengthened her resolve to resist her father's authority.

Failing to keep Catherine in line with the trip to Europe, Sloper announces that he will disinherit Catherine if she marries. Townsend predictably breaks off his engagement with Catherine. Hiding her broken heart and admirably salvaging some dignity, Catherine lies to her father and claims that she is the party who broke off the engagement. Dr. Sloper gloats, believing that he has successfully defeated Townsend. He feels mildly sorry for Catherine's anguish but revels in his victory. He is unaware, however, of the significant and permanent change in Catherine.

Seventeen years pass after Townsend leaves. Catherine receives several attractive offers from suitors, all of which she turns down. Like Melville's *Bartleby*, she simply declines:

Bartleby, like Catherine, is a copyist. He is a figure who habitually faces a literal wall, who resists the materiality of the world even to the extent of refusing food, whose taciturnity consists in a single phrase, awkwardly repeated ("I prefer not to"), and who ends the story in the mummifying atmosphere of a prison called "The Tombs." It registers an authenticity of resistance to an overly loquacious world but can at best be seen only as a painful reminiscence of an earlier linguistic sincerity and directness that remain as possibilities yet lack effective authority. (I. Bell 100)

But facing the wall, Catherine does not fade away. She achieves a limited victory by existing, by continuing on amidst her disappointment. James describes her life:

Catherine, however, became an admirable old maid. She formed habits, regulated her days upon a system of her own, interested herself in charitable institutions, asylums, hospitals, and aid-societies; and went

generally, with an even and noiseless step, about the rigid business of her life. She was greatly liked, and as time went on, she grew to be a sort of kindly maiden-aunt to the younger portion of society. Young girls were apt to confide to her their love-affairs, and young men to be fond of her without knowing why. (WS 224)

In the years following, Catherine becomes a woman who chooses. She leads an uneventful but deliberate life.

She throws off the domination of her father, who, as he ages, becomes increasingly obsessed with extracting a promise from Catherine that she will never marry Townsend. Even though she has not seen Townsend in years, Catherine refuses to give a promise that would represent submission to her father's will. Catherine thwarts her father in the only way possible, as Millicent Bell describes:

And though she could not herself utilize the rhetoric of deception, she could be silent with the father who desired to know the truth. He had called her a "plain, inanimate girl" in earlier days, and now she rewards him for regarding her as an object, a mere stone, by being as immovable as one and as voiceless. In the end he is reduced to supposing Catherine the "vilest of hypocrites"—the anti-rhetoric of her silence is incomprehensible to him, and he comes to believe his earlier histrionic outburst which had invited her to wait for his death. He tries to get her to promise that she will not marry Townsend after his death—and she refuses. (37)

She refuses to promise not to marry Townsend after the doctor dies, even when he threatens to cut her out of his will. Her latent pride asserts itself: "Poor Catherine's

dignity was not aggressive; it never sat in state, but if you pushed far enough you could find it. Her father had pushed very far. She knew herself that she was obstinate, and it gave her a certain joy. She was now a middle-aged woman" (WS 227-28). Rosenberg adds, "In refusing to give to coercion what she had previously offered willingly, Catherine refuses humiliation. To her father, she will grant no leeway to injure her once more" (67). When her father spitefully reduces her inheritance to a fifth, Catherine declines to dispute the will. She had longed to earn her father's respect and love, and failing to do that, the financial punishment is insignificant.

After her father's death, Catherine is free of his tyranny. Although she is unbound by a promise, she declines to give Morris Townsend a second chance when he reappears, "fat and bald" (WS 227). She plainly confronts him with his wrongs: "You treated me too badly. I felt it very much; I felt it for years" (WS 239). Catherine has learned to value herself enough not to jump at the opportunity to be with Townsend. Her victory is made complete in her ability to reject an unworthy lover. She prefers to remain the mistress of Washington Square, once the trophy case and symbol of stored treasure, but now her home and the setting of her life, "as it were" (WS 240). This last phrase casts a final shadow on Catherine's life—her triumph is tempered by deep sadness and loss.

Many readers of Washington Square interpret Catherine's fate as a tragedy. Unloved and rejected by father and lover, her long years afterward are lonely and uneventful. But Catherine emerges as a victorious character in Washington Square by her principled choices:

The plot itself would seem to give dominance to the two opposing and apparently opposite characters, Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend, rather

than to Catherine who must choose between them. Their victimization of Catherine creates within her precisely this consciousness, one whose action, the absolute rejection of them both, defeats their every intent.

(Rosenberg 55)

Catherine is a solitary, sad, but undefeated figure at the conclusion of Washington Square. Her father's dominant personality has ruled the home and overshadowed her personality, but in the end Catherine remains standing and living, not preserved in the trophy case.

Catherine Sloper is typical of so many of James's daughters and wives who are victimized and diminished by their fathers and husbands. What makes Catherine so interesting and victorious is that she wrests control of her life from her father and lives the remainder through her own deliberate choices. Her character and her choices will serve as a gloss for James's subsequent novels about women, including The Portrait of a Lady and The Bostonians.

CHAPTER 3

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY: Trophy Wife and Daughter

Isabel Archer is the kind of trophy daughter Austin Sloper would have delighted in: clever, beautiful, charming, and intently curious to experience life. She arrives at Gardencourt, the English estate of her Uncle Touchett, eagerly "looking all round her again [with] a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited" (PL 28). Isabel explains to her cousin Ralph that since she is "very fond of my liberty" her aunt has not adopted her but has instead benevolently taken an interest in Isabel and has brought her "notable specimen" with her to England (PL 30). The term "specimen" is interesting because it appears in another definition of trophy: "a specimen or part, such as a lion's head, preserved as a token of a successful hunt" ("trophy," def. 1b). In The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel is made a specimen for the observance of others. She begins the novel hunting for experiences but becomes the trophy of the fortune-hunting Gilbert Osmond. As she discovers that he means to make her as much a specimen in his house of taste as his daughter Pansy, Isabel will have to choose between accepting the role of trophy wife or pursuing a more active path.

Isabel's upbringing has been characterized by a lack of discipline and direction from an alternately indulgent and neglectful father. James explains that Isabel has been permitted to remain home from school because she "protested against its laws"; therefore, the "foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house," and her formal education consisted of "uncontrolled use of a library full of books" (PL 32-33). As an adult, Isabel "had a great desire for knowledge, but she really

preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; she had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering" (PL 41). Isabel is different from Catherine Sloper; she is bright and curious with a great potential for success. But Isabel's education is primarily built on presumption, and her foundation of wisdom is quite shaky. This undisciplined eagerness to know and experience without a substantial education points to the naïveté that will hinder Isabel later in the novel.

Isabel's attitudes and intellect were formed by her early experiences with her father, for whom she cherishes a romantic and nostalgic memory. The true nature of Mr. Archer and his stewardship of his children and finances are described by James:

A few very harsh critics went so far as to say that he had not even brought up his daughters. They had had no regular education and no permanent home: they had lived with nursemaids and governesses (usually very bad ones) or had been sent to superficial schools. Before Isabel was fourteen, he had transported them three times across the Atlantic, giving them on each occasion, however, but a few months' view of the subject proposed: a course which had whetted our heroine's curiosity without enabling her to satisfy it. He had still shown his children all sorts of indulgence, and if he had been troubled about money matters nothing disturbed their irreflective consciousness of many possessions. (PL 40)

Because of her father's financial imprudence, the family home must be sold after his death, and Isabel, his only unmarried daughter, must find her own way without the privileges of wealth or a substantial educational foundation. Isabel fails to understand her unpromising future before her Aunt Touchett quite literally redeems her. The affectionate

and indulgent Mr. Archer failed at the primary responsibility of a nineteenth-century father, to provide for his dependent daughter, and now Isabel must rely on the beneficence of estranged relatives. Unfortunately, Aunt Touchett will be equally guilty of benign neglect.

Kristin Sanner discusses the entrapment of unmarried women, either with fortunes or without: "The ideals of freedom, liberty, and independence are not necessarily won, at least within the context of James's novel. They must be purchased or earned, and certainly once that freedom is earned, one becomes a commodity worthy of economic negotiation" (165). By coming to England with Aunt Touchett, Isabel earns a reprieve and an opportunity to negotiate a more attractive future and is afforded the chance to improve her enthusiastic but limited intellect through exposure to European culture and tradition.

Lord Warburton, a rich and progressive aristocrat, is smitten with Isabel's radiance, wit, and unique value. From his point of view, she would make a splendid companion, but Isabel astoundingly rejects his marriage offer:

Though she was lost in admiration of her opportunity she managed to move back into the deepest shade of it, even as some wild, caught creature in a vast cage. The "splendid" security so offered her was *not* the greatest she could conceive. 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. (PL 100-101)

Isabel's "enlightened prejudice" informs her view that marriage to Lord Warburton would put her in the role of trophy wife to a rich and powerful man. By passing up this opportunity, Isabel refuses to view herself as a commodity and instead subverts conventional expectations of young ladies by choosing unknown experiences over a tangible and attractive offer.

Lord Warburton's is the second marriage proposal she has refused. Caspar Goodwood, the aggressively energetic American, pursues Isabel throughout the novel. Isabel is alternately attracted and frightened by his insistent sexual energy: "There was a disagreeably strong push, a kind of hardness of presence, in his way of rising before her" (PL 105). Isabel interprets the two marriage offers as opposite forms of slavery. Her acceptance of this false dichotomy leads her to view marriage to Warburton as enslavement to wealth and convention, and a life with the aptly named Goodwood as enslavement to sexual passion: "The suggestions of sexual fear in her reactions to Caspar begin very early; they are too recurrent to be ignored" (Poirier 34). Isabel fears that sexuality will distract from her intellectual growth and Goodwood represents an obstacle to her wide-open vista to pursue her ideas of life:

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. (Mazzella 611)

There is little evidence that either Warburton or Goodwood want to "enslave" Isabel, in light of the ultimate conclusion of the novel, many readers believe Isabel would have had a better life with either man. But Isabel believes that marriage equals a necessary repression of her will and believes—incorrectly—that love and freedom cannot coexist. This conflict between the life of the body and the life of the mind illustrates a struggle in Isabel's character that manifests itself in a Dionysian hunger for experience versus the Apollonian exaltation of the intellect.

Isabel is unsure if she wants to have the experiences or just watch them, as she discusses with Ralph when he asks her if she wants "to drain the cup of experience":

"No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself."

You want to see, but not to feel," Ralph remarked. (PL 134)

Isabel has a dual nature: she craves the experience of being alive, while at the same time she wants to step back, observe, and view life as a work of art. She wants her life to be a portrait of a full and moral existence, yet she is reluctant to jump fully into the experience of being alive. A study of the gods Apollo and Artemis sheds light onto Isabel's contradictory nature.

Apollo is the god of light, order, beauty, and intellectual inquiry (Leadbetter online). His twin sister, Artemis, or the Archer, is featured with bow and arrow, "roaming mountain forests and uncultivated land with her nymphs in attendance hunting for lions, panthers, hinds and stags" (Leadbetter online). Artemis is the goddess of the wilderness, the hunt, and fertility. The Greek myth describes how Artemis requested and

was granted eternal virginity by her father, Zeus. James's choice for Isabel's last name, Archer, suggests a connection to the virgin goddess of the hunt, Artemis.

Studying the various and even contradictory qualities of Artemis can illuminate Isabel's character and her puzzling choices. At the beginning of the novel, Isabel's potential future is broad and hopeful; her chief occupation is hunting for experiences. Like Artemis protecting her chastity, Isabel intends to pursue her quest while evading the attentions of interested suitors. Just as Artemis's eternal chastity allows her to hunt and guard the forests unmolested, Isabel believes she must be free from romantic passions to experience the life she wants.

The chaste, aloof, and independent life of the mind is at war with Isabel's Dionysian hunger to participate in life, to step out of the portrait and taste the cup of experience. She is given the chance to taste and explore when Ralph convinces his father to bestow a great fortune upon Isabel. Ralph's motives are somewhat mixed. Although he means well, Ralph is guilty of viewing Isabel as a specimen. In the process of giving her financial independence, he is also observing her with interest. Declaring that he wants to "put a little wind in her sails," Ralph admits that he intends to watch what Isabel will do with some "amusement" (PL 161). Of course, Ralph's illness prohibits him from pursuing relationships, and his gift to Isabel may also be motivated by a wish to maintain an interest in her life while keeping emotional distance. His father prophetically warns that such a large amount will expose Isabel to fortune-hunters, but Ralph is convinced that, if given the resources, Isabel will manage prudently.

Instead of liberating Isabel, the money ultimately enslaves her, as Stephanie Smith analyzes:

The capital in question, while emanating from the daughter, must never remain in her hands. And, in The Portrait of a Lady, capital does not remain in Isabel's control. Isabel only seems to be a source of value; in fact, she merely facilitates a transfer of one father's wealth into another father's house, keeping value under masculine direction. (600)

Ralph's father has correctly realized that the money would ultimately become a burden rather than a liberator to Isabel. After a few years traveling and exploring, Isabel finds herself maneuvered into the path of Gilbert Osmond.

How is Osmond, the least appealing candidate for marriage, able to convince Isabel to abandon her Artemis-like free existence? His cunning charm, combined with Madame Merle's machinations, deceives Isabel, and she willingly walks into his cage. Ralph pointedly interrogates Isabel on this point:

“You were the last person I expected to see caught.”

“I don't know why you call it caught.”

“Because you're going to be put into a cage.”

“If I like my cage, that needn't trouble you,” she answered. “One must choose a corner and cultivate that.” (PL 288)

This statement represents an evolution in Isabel's character. She renounces the Dionysian experience and the thrill of the hunt for a life of beauty and order; she unwittingly chooses life as a portrait rather than an adventure.

Ralph speaks for the reader when he laments, “You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue—to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly some one tosses up a faded rosebud—a missile that should never have reached you—and

straight you drop to the ground” (PL 291). Indeed, that missile should not reach Isabel, but she is naive regarding the crafty manipulations of Osmond and Madame Merle. Thinking her choice to marry Osmond completely independent of outside influence or ulterior motives, Isabel is duped, “mystified to the top of her bent” (PL 332). Even the warnings of friends fail to deter Isabel, as Ralph says, “you were meant for something better than to keep guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante!” (PL 292) Isabel is too proud and willfully ignorant to hear the truth from friends.

Isabel shares responsibility in making such a bad marriage. An unattractive quality of Isabel, but expected of someone modeled on Artemis, is her desire to be above other people, to “look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity” (PL 356). Leon Edel describes Isabel's character:

A person who is dogmatic and exacting on the strength of meager knowledge can only be characterized as presumptuous; and there is presumption in Isabel, for all the delicacy of her feeling: presumption suggests also a strong measure of egotism. (95)

Isabel wants to be intellectual without going through the process of being formally educated. She wants to bestow charity through the conduit of a husband, rather than take ownership for her life and decisions. Uncomfortable and afraid of the freedom that her money allows her, she chooses to give it up to someone more than willing to take the burden from her.

The desire to conquer is fitting with Artemis's abilities to hunt and slay. Isabel believes Osmond, with his exquisite refinement, can help her achieve that conquest. James reveals her motives:

At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some other conscience, to some more prepared receptacle. What would lighten her conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world? (PL 358)

The responsibility of the money becomes wearisome to Isabel, and she trades the independent life for what she believes will be an altruistic partnership: “Osmond is exactly what a large part of Isabel wants. He seems to offer release from the troubling life of turbulent passions; he seems to offer a life dedicated to the appreciation of ideal beauty” (Tanner 70). Isabel gives up the virginity of Artemis but retains the chaste pursuit of beauty through her partnership with Osmond and his seeming lack of egotism.

While certainly there was an element of romance in their courtship, James downplays the sexual attraction between Isabel and Osmond. Isabel is not carried away by desire, but rather, she sees Osmond as “the finest—in the sense of being the subtlest manly organism she had ever known” (PL 358). She admires his perfect taste and lofty ideals, as Tanner describes:

His seemingly empty detachment from the world is more attractive to Isabel than the solid identity, the heavy actuality of Goodwood and Warburton. Certainly his claim that he has renounced passional life and ordinary human attachments to pursue his high-minded study, his "taste," echoes something in Isabel. (71)

Osmond's lack of wealth allows Isabel to benefit someone, thus achieving the appearance of altruism. Ironically, appearances are the only things that interest Osmond. Appearance

over substance, intellect over emotion, order and beauty above human passion; all are unconscious choices that Isabel makes by marrying Osmond.

Once he captures his trophy wife, Osmond slowly strangles the free spirit of Artemis in Isabel. Osmond characterizes his marriage as he provokes Goodwood, “We’re as united, you know, as the candlestick and the snuffers” (PL 420). Isabel gradually discovers that Osmond hates her independent mind and wishes to rid her of her own ideas. He has indeed married her for her money and expects Isabel simply to be a reflection of his own tastes. Osmond’s evil intentions are described: “For him, the capture is that of a living soul. There is a horrible knell—in the notion of this impotent life-sucking manikin teasing his captured prey” (Gorley 129). When Ralph visits Isabel, he is disturbed by the faded personality in his once active and opinionated cousin: “if she wore a mask it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it; this was not an expression, Ralph said—it was a representation, it was even an advertisement” (POL 330). The advertisement is for Osmond, as Isabel tries to put forth a façade of marital harmony. She has accepted the role of trophy wife.

In his study of The Portrait of a Lady and George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Robert Long compares Osmond’s treatment of Isabel to Grandcourt’s marriage to Gwendolen Harleth:

That the perversity of Grandcourt and Osmond is associated with the darker side of human nature is suggested by their comparison to reptiles and snakes, they have a similar kind of bored lassitude, together with the power to inflict intense psychological suffering. They not only rule the heroines’ outward behavior but also invade their inner lives and

consciousness, causing them to feel imprisoned and in torture. (Great Succession 103)

Osmond's abuse is much worse than physical; it is the slow strangling of Isabel's personality with the goal of reducing her to a beautiful but empty shell. Together they are creating the portrait of a marriage.

Isabel is not simply tricked into the marriage; she shares complicity by her bad decision and motivation to "help" Osmond: "Her disillusionment thus begins when she is forced to recognize that, despite her munificence, Osmond has not become her property" (Perloff 421). Indeed, the reverse has happened: Isabel has become a trophy and a commodity. She represents a financial treasure coveted by Osmond and Madame Merle: "She represents an economically desirable commodity who, once obtained, will continually provide them (Mme Merle by default since her daughter Pansy directly benefits) with her precious capital" (Sanner 162). Like Catherine Sloper, Isabel's worth is defined by the men in her life. Unlike Catherine, who resists her father's definition of value, Isabel allows Osmond to use her as a commodity, make her his trophy wife, and exploit her treasure.

The spirit of Artemis will reawaken in Isabel through her relationship with Pansy. In Mythology, Edith Hamilton describes the qualities of Artemis: "Like a good huntsman, she was careful to preserve the young; she was 'the protectress of dewy youth' everywhere" (31). From the beginning of her courtship and marriage to Osmond, Isabel eagerly undertakes the role of stepmother to Pansy: "Pansy already so represented part of the service she could render, part of the responsibility she could face. 'My good little Pansy,' said Isabel gently, 'I shall be ever so kind to you.' A vague, inconsequent vision

of her coming in some odd way to need it had intervened with the effect of a chill” (PL 298-99). Not only does her strong relationship with Pansy bring Isabel relief from her troubled marriage, it also gives her purpose, to protect Pansy:

It was also a part of her tenderness for things that were pure and weak. Her sense of the girl’s dependence was more than a pleasure; it operated as a definite reason when motives threatened to fail her. Pansy’s sympathy was a direct admonition; it seemed to say that here was an opportunity, not eminent perhaps, but unmistakable. (PL 341)

Isabel enjoys Pansy's dependence on her because it alleviates the powerlessness she feels in her marriage. Marjorie Perloff sees a selfish purpose in Isabel's attentions to Pansy: "Isabel refuses to be humbled by Osmond; instinctively, she tries to find a substitute, a person more docile and submissive than Gilbert Osmond, who will be dependent on her alone. That person, of course, is Pansy" (421). Isabel finds solace in her companionship with Pansy and projecting her truncated dreams of freedom and fulfillment onto Pansy's future.

There is ample motivation for Isabel to want to help Pansy, who has been brought up to be completely submissive to her father's will. Pretty, docile, and girlish, Pansy is a perfect trophy daughter. Her relationship with her father is quite similar to Catherine Sloper's in her devotion to and willingness to please her father, and again James invokes Dr. Rappaccini and his daughter, Beatrice:

Osmond is guilty to the same kind of intellectual pride as Rappaccini; and like him, he plays God with "the delicate organism of his daughter."
Osmond’s daughter has been conceived in the Beatrice mold; with her

purity of instinct and feeling, she is remarkable unassertive, and virtually as helpless as Beatrice in her father's garden. Indeed, Pansy belongs peculiarly to a garden world, and has the name of a small flower. She is first seen with her father in the garden of the Osmond villa and is shown finally in the garden of a convent, where she has been placed by her father until he finds a suitable "use" for her. (Long, GS 111)

Pansy is Gilbert Osmond's greatest treasure, in whom he takes immense pride. She is the living embodiment of his fine taste and aesthetic values. Although he has Isabel's money, an advantageous marriage for Pansy will cement his social status. Beyond that, it will be the culmination of her training and his careful preparation. Pansy is a valuable commodity to both of his parents:

For Madame Merle, Pansy's innocence is a commodity; by selling it to the highest bidder she will realize her own frustrated ambitions. For Isabel this aspect of Pansy's character has purely moral value. For Osmond, his daughter's innocence has merely aesthetic worth; it completes the picture of the perfect *jeune fille*, preserves the compositional arrangement of his domestic work of art. (Shine 104-05)

Unfortunately, Pansy lacks the ambitious spirit of Isabel, or even the stubborn will of Catherine Sloper. When Pansy is faced with the option of marrying Ned Rosier, with whom she is in love, or complying with her father's wishes, she is unable to assert herself.

Osmond has successfully trained Pansy to please only him, and this devotion is so ingrained in her character that any other choice is unthinkable. Kristin Sanner details the psychologically incestuous nature of their father-daughter relationship:

When Isabel talks to Pansy of Osmond, Pansy admits that she doesn't "care for any gentleman" except for her father. She then catches herself, and adds, "If he were not my papa I should like to marry him; I would rather be his daughter than the wife of—of some strange person." These declarations reveal two elements of a complicated relationship. On one hand, Pansy's absolute devotion to her father reflects the complete control he has wielded over her for so long. In positioning himself as the absolute authority, Osmond has guaranteed that Pansy will endlessly search for ways to please him. Later, though, when Pansy does meet with alternatives to Osmond's authoritarian rule (Mr. Rosier begs her to leave home and marry him, and Isabel offers to take her to England with her) she remains steadfastly committed to her father. (155)

Osmond's control over Pansy has even extended to her appearance and size. Unlike Catherine's solid and womanly figure, suggesting mature sexuality, Pansy is the ideal Victorian young lady, forever youthful, unspoiled, a blank page:

Pansy's desire remains focused on Osmond, even as she ages, suggesting an arrested development that James reinforces in physical descriptions of the girl. At fifteen she wears a dress "too short for her years" and has a "slim, small figure" that nonetheless prompts Osmond to comment that "she had grown" and Sister Catherine to respond that she thinks Pansy has stopped growing, that "She'll remain—not big". Without a strong and consistent maternal influence, Pansy cannot move out of the relationship with her father and into another. (Sanner 156)

Isabel tries to sever the hold Osmond has over Pansy by encouraging her freedom and choices. As Pansy's stepmother, Isabel has the opportunity to provide a consistent maternal influence, but she is too conflicted in her own marriage to really help. Isabel also misjudges Pansy, thinking her capable of defying her father.

The tale of Artemis and Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, can shed light on Isabel's role in Pansy's life. While Agamemnon journeyed to Troy, Artemis withheld the winds so that his ships were stalled:

With no winds to sail his ships he was told by the seer Calchas that the only way Artemis would bring back the winds was for him to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. Some versions say he did sacrifice Iphigenia, others that Artemis exchanges a deer in her place, and takes Iphigenia to the land of the Tauri as a priestess, to prepare strangers for sacrifice to Artemis.

(Leadbetter 1)

It is unclear if Artemis accepted Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter or redeemed her life and carried her off to a life of seclusion. Likewise, it is unclear if Isabel is friend or foe to Pansy when she discusses Warburton and Rosier with her. As Isabel undertakes the disagreeable task of finding out Pansy's thoughts about Warburton, she imagines her as "a childish martyr decked out for sacrifice and scarcely presuming even to hope to avert it" (PL 391). Isabel knows that if she is loyal to her husband's wishes and promotes Warburton, she will destroy Pansy's small hope to marry Rosier.

Unfortunately, Pansy is incapable of asserting her will because Osmond has completely suppressed her thoughts and hopes: "All her natural vitality and spontaneity have been quietly suffocated to be replaced by a perfected puppet-like behavior which

does not express Pansy's own inner life, but simply reflects Osmond's taste" (Tanner 71). Isabel hints and tiptoes around the subject, but she neither presses Pansy to marry Warburton nor encourages her to wait for Rosier. The ambiguous quality of their talk reflects Isabel's inner conflict over pleasing Osmond or helping Pansy break free.

An element of that conflict is Isabel's misplaced desire to live vicariously through Pansy. Because Isabel knows she is trapped in a loveless marriage, she tends to view Pansy as her second chance, a junior Isabel who will make better choices. Yet in so doing, Isabel is attempting to control and direct Pansy as much as Osmond: "It seems that Isabel edifies her own sense of independence by invoking the dependence of her stepdaughter" (Sanner 161). Isabel subtly discourages Warburton by informing him about Rosier and Pansy's affection for each other. Warburton graciously steps back. It would seem that the path is clear for Rosier, but Isabel forgets that Pansy is quite different from her: "Isabel has projected herself into Pansy; confusing their respective roles, she now sees Pansy as a second Isabel, dismissing the rich nobleman because it is not her inclination to marry him, and swearing allegiance to her poor suitor in defiance of the whole world" (Perloff 429). Pansy lacks Catherine Sloper's stubborn will and cannot disappoint her father; the results of Isabel's assistance are disastrous for her. Furious that Warburton has slipped through his fingers, Osmond returns Pansy to the convent until he can find a new suitor.

After Pansy is returned to the convent, it dawns on Isabel how bleak Pansy's chances are:

At the moment when Osmond announces to Isabel that he is sending Pansy to live in the convent, he is seen, artist-like, arranging a basket of

flowers, after which he stands back and admires his work; and it is cruelly clear that Pansy's soul has become another of his studied floral arrangements. (Long, GS 112)

Isabel can see how far Osmond is willing to use his daughter for his own interests. But Isabel has also used Pansy in her own interests. She has tried to force Pansy to make a choice that she herself is unwilling to make: "The irony is that Isabel who married for love and found nothing but unhappiness should insist that little Pansy, so ill-equipped for defiant gestures, must marry 'for love'" (Perloff 432). Warburton would have made a good husband for Pansy, or Isabel, as the reader can attest. Osmond will eventually find a new prospect for Pansy, and Isabel realizes how badly she has ruined things for her.

Their disagreement over Pansy exposes the rift between Isabel and Osmond. Ralph's terminal illness forces Isabel further to strain her marriage as she chooses to visit him. Before Isabel travels to England, she visits Pansy at the convent. Pansy repeatedly pleads with Isabel to return, "Don't leave me here... You'll come back?" (PL 460-62). Isabel's loyalty to Pansy is a powerful bond that lies heavily on her mind as she leaves for England. This trip also represents a significant break or turning point in her relationship with Osmond because this is the first time she outwardly resists his wishes. She actually does something moral rather than just looking moral. She is aware that she may never return to Rome; if she does, it will be on radically different terms.

After Ralph's funeral, Isabel is tempted to leave her husband by a persuasive and passionate Caspar Goodwood: "Turn straight to me. I want to persuade you to trust me. Why should you go back—why should you go through that ghastly form?" (PL 488). The reader can imagine Isabel's leaving Osmond forever, returning to America with

Goodwood and having a perfectly happy life. But again James subverts the reader's expectations. After a passionate kiss Isabel flees from Goodwood: "She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path" (PL 490). That path is straight back to Rome.

Isabel returns to the chastity of Artemis by turning away from Goodwood. She responds to him with resistance, rejecting the power he has over her: "The kiss means possession, and by a mental fiat Isabel induces a scene of archetypal drowning. It is through this induced death of eroticism that Isabel secures her release and makes her decision to return to Rome" (Mazzella 611). But beyond the rejection of the life Goodwood offers, Isabel must return to Rome to fulfill her role as the guardian and friend to Pansy: "Such chaste choice confirms for us the mythological reference of her family name, which the whole novel bears out: the goddess Diana-Artemis, whose archery was so different from Cupid's" (Cambon 340). As disappointing as Isabel's choice appears to readers, it is a choice based in accepting the consequences of her decisions. Isabel feels a burden of responsibility for Pansy, fueled by Pansy's desperate pleas not to be left behind.

Isabel resembles Artemis in her loyalty to Pansy. Dorothy Van Ghent explains why Isabel must return and help Pansy: "[Pansy] shows the full measure of the abuse that Isabel resists, and it is to nourish in her whatever small germ of creative volition may remain—to salvage, really, a life—that Isabel returns to Rome and to Osmond's paralyzing ambiance" (686). Isabel's final decisions are characteristic of Artemis's qualities of protection and loyalty to the weak, especially children.

When she returns to Rome, her situation with Osmond will definitely change. The reader hopes that Isabel will rescue Pansy from the convent and they will spirit away

to a free and fabulous life away from Osmond's cruel influence. But Pansy's unwillingness to defy her father makes that improbable. The reader hopes that Osmond will keep the money and let Isabel go, but his fastidiousness in keeping up appearances makes an easy divorce improbable.

Isabel's choice is frustrating to the reader, but it is consistent with her character:

In the first half, it is important that readers be made aware of Isabel's faults and her naivety, since if she is to develop into a "lady" she must learn something about herself and about "life" in order to graduate to a higher plane of consciousness. Because the text gives the illusion of moral development, it is necessary for readers to perceive Isabel's growth so that they may understand that it is Isabel's "integrity" which propels her to return to Rome. In this light, her action results from her decision to accept the consequences of her foolish behaviour, and not from her acceptance of the passive, submissive Feminine subject position accorded to her in nineteenth-century Realist/humanist ideology. (Allen 56)

But the reader can hope that Isabel's restored spirit of resistance and her loyalty to Pansy will subvert Osmond's control, even if just in denying the power of his will. Isabel recognizes that she is still young, and she still has the desire to create an exceptional life for herself. The independent spirit of Artemis is resurrected in Isabel as she begins the next phase in her journey.

James concludes The Portrait of a Lady more ambiguously than Washington Square. Catherine's fate, while sad, is still dignified because she has gained ownership over her life. For Isabel and Pansy, however, the reader can only speculate whether they

will remain the trophy wife and daughter or choose something more. The novel's ending is dark and obscure, so perhaps the following tale about Artemis is appropriate: When the hunter Actaeon unwittingly stumbled upon Artemis as she bathed, she turned him into a stag. As Actaeon fled in fear, his own dogs caught and killed him (Hamilton 374).

Artemis is a hunter. Besides her qualities of independence, chastity, and protection, Artemis is primarily a slayer. It is hard to imagine that she will allow Osmond to crush her. Isabel Archer's character is invested with more strength than Catherine Sloper's, and while the conclusion of The Portrait of a Lady is dismal, there remains the possibility for hope.

CHAPTER 4

THE BOSTONIANS: The Spoils of War

There is no one to love in The Bostonians. There is no loyal Catherine Sloper, no heroic Isabel Archer or sweet Pansy Osmond. The subject matter is thorny and the plot is long and unwieldy. Mark Twain wrote, "And as for The Bostonians, I would rather be damned to John Bunyan's Heaven than read that" (Long, Early Novels 129). The Bostonians has never been a favorite among James's critics or fans. Perhaps the greatness of The Portrait of a Lady eclipsed subsequent works: "Novels of great power were regularly accompanied or succeeded by others distinctly inferior. It is as if the stronger works had sapped the strength of those that grew beside them, rising to a greater height and depriving them of sunlight" (Beach 221). James declined to include The Bostonians in the New York editions, and the book has been long overlooked and undervalued.

In The Bostonians, James returns to the American scene: exploring the emergent feminist movement, the world of mesmerists and healers, and featuring a love triangle between a social crusader, her Southern cousin, and the beautiful young girl they both want to possess. Verena Tarrant is both trophy and treasure in The Bostonians who is perpetually fought over and passed from hand to hand. In that struggle, her identity is consumed as she becomes the spoils of war.

Contending for the trophy are cousins Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom. Olive is a harsher, less attractive, type of American girl than Isabel Archer. Idealistic, rigid, and principled, Olive "regulate[s] her conduct on lofty principles" (Boston 21). Like George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, Olive lives in a frosty world of convictions and political ideas that she adheres to with religious zeal. Like Isabel Archer, Olive yearns to make her life

meaningful, and, as James tells us, "The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something" (Boston 11). Like both Dorothea and Isabel, Olive is uncomfortable with her wealth and social position, and she wishes to atone for her good fortune by channeling it into others: "It is she who tries hardest of all to make life be a thing that suits her self. Her habit of conduct is characterized by a strenuous egocentricity that she mistakes for altruism" (McMurray 340). Olive shares that unattractive hypocrisy with Isabel; the appearance of altruism is often more important than the real motives behind it, as James describes:

That in a career in which she was constantly exposing herself to offence and laceration, her most poignant suffering came from the injury of her taste. She had tried to kill that nerve, to persuade herself that taste was only frivolity in the disguise of knowledge; but her susceptibility was constantly blooming afresh and making her wonder whether an absence of nice arrangements were a necessary part of the enthusiasm of humanity.

(Boston 27)

Olive is conflicted between desiring reform and social change and feeling personal discomfort with authentic contact with other people. She pours her money into causes and regularly attends lectures and speeches, but she often feels out of place among fellow sympathizers.

Basil Ransom is Olive's Southern cousin, having recently relocated to the North in hopes of a career. James describes Ransom as "a little hard and discouraging, like a column of figures" (Boston 3). For the sake of familial politeness, Olive begrudgingly

invites Basil to her Boston home. The prim Yankee and the loquacious Mississippian are instantly at odds. James describes Ransom further:

[T]he young man looked poor—as poor as a young man could who had such a fine head and such magnificent eyes, dark, deep, and glowing, with their smoldering fire. His expression of bright grimness and hard enthusiasm, his discourse was pervaded by something sultry and vast, something almost African in its rich, basking tone, something that suggested the teeming expanse of the cotton-field. (Boston 4)

Basil Ransom is the polar opposite of Olive Chancellor. Olive represents New England morality, progressivism, and austerity; Basil, with his fiery eyes and charming voice, represents the South in all its antiquated glory.

The cousins take an instant dislike to each other, and both hope that this courtesy meeting will signify the beginning and end of their acquaintance. Ransom is much more comfortable around Olive's sister, the silly and sensuous Mrs. Luna: "That was the way he liked them—not to think too much" (Boston 10). But Ransom surprisingly accepts Olive's offer to join her at a lecture, and this innocuous encounter will spark a terrific clash between two strong wills.

That evening, Ransom and Olive see Verena Tarrant for the first time, and their war to take possession of her begins. As they are equally absorbed by her speech, they simultaneously begin to formulate plans to befriend and influence her. Both see their conflict to win Verena in teleological terms:

Ransom and Olive are starkly contrasted as Southerner of the deepest dye and Northerner of the most tenacious imprint, as royalist with smouldering

eyes and Puritan with eyes of ice. Yet both are idealogues, with a religious element to their thinking. Olive estranges herself from normative human relationships to find holy purification in suffering; and Ransom finds spiritual aggrandizement, even if at the loss of his humanity, by imposing his will upon his foes. (Long, Early Novels 150)

Olive and Basil are both taken with the beautiful and talented Verena Tarrant. Olive would like to channel Verena's gift for public speaking into the women's suffrage movement. Basil is awestruck by Verena's charm and would like to possess her for himself, but as the novel progresses, his desires to squash Olive's intentions to apprentice Verena will intensify.

Verena is a strange creature. As the daughter of the quack spiritualist Selah Tarrant, she has been exposed to a bizarre upbringing, as James describes:

She had been nursed in a darkened room, and suckled in the midst of manifestations; she had begun to "attend lectures," as she said, when she was quite an infant. She had sat on the knees of somnambulists, and had been passed from hand to hand by trance-speakers; she was familiar with every kind of "cure," and had grown up among lady-editors of newspapers advocating new religions, and people who disapproved of the marriage-tie. Verena talked of the marriage-tie as she would have talked of the last novel. (Boston 77)

Verena is Selah's protégé and prop. During his mesmeric events, he lays his hands on Verena's head, putting her in a sort of trance in which she begins to speak with profound charm and persuasion. Basil and Olive are both offended by the snake-oil salesman-like

proceeding and wish to rescue Verena from the sideshow. But Basil is also impressed with Verena's ability to hypnotize listeners with her speech:

He wondered afterward how long she had spoke; then he counted that her strange, sweet, crude, absurd, enchanting improvisation must have lasted half an hour. It was not what she said; he didn't care for that, he scarcely understood it; he could only see that it was all about the gentleness and goodness of women, and how, during the long ages of history, they had been trampled under the iron heel of man. (Boston 56)

When Verena is finished speaking, her father takes his hands off her head and the spell is broken. Basil is disgusted with the charlatan's ruse, while Olive is eager to impress Verena's talents into service to a higher cause. As Olive begins to plan how she might separate Verena from her parents, Basil arranges an introduction to Verena.

As the battle heats up between Basil and Olive, Verena remains unaware of the players jockeying for her attention. James describes her fundamental innocence in contrast to the world in which she has been reared: "She had kept the consummate innocence of the American girl, that innocence which was the greatest of all, for it had survived the abolition of walls and locks" (Boston 114). Verena's naïveté amidst the open lifestyle of her parents suggests the tabula rasa of her personality. Like the blank page typified by Pansy Osmond's character, Verena has been steeped in her father's ideas and opinions, yet she remains remarkably free of any lasting impressions. She speaks powerfully on many issues, but there is a sense that those opinions and values are not deeply held but simply echo her father's beliefs. This shallowness of substance suggests

that Verena can easily adopt someone else's opinions, providing he or she is more forceful than her father.

Olive's will is certainly more powerful than Selah Tarrant's, and he readily relinquishes his authority over his daughter when Olive opens her checkbook. Selah has employed Verena much as a ventriloquist uses his dummy: Verena is the public, articulate face of the Tarrant philosophy. When Olive approaches him about allowing Verena to stay with her and embark on a course of intellectual and social improvement, Selah is happy to trade her for financial gain. Olive literally buys Verena from her parents: "Selah's 'possession' of Verena is both psychical and material. Olive comes to own her in the same sense that Selah had owned her. Like Selah, Olive cannot be heard on her own and needs Verena as a medium" (Wolstenholme 583). While Selah Tarrant is eager to take the money, Verena's mother is anxious for Verena to improve her social stature. She has long smarted under Selah's undignified lifestyle and has worried about Verena's position in society. She views Olive as a boost to the family's status. Verena offers no resistance and easily acquiesces to the plan: "The girl was both submissive and unworldly, and she listened to her mother's enumeration of the possible advantages of an intimacy with Miss Chancellor as she would have listened to any other fairy-tale" (Boston 64). Verena's parents essentially marry her off to Olive, receiving monetary reward and anticipating a climb up the social ladder.

Verena is similar to Pansy in her compliant, sweet nature, but she also shares Isabel's ambition to create meaning with her life, as she claims to Olive, "I want to give my life! I want to do something great!" (Boston 79). Verena has certainly been schooled

in progressive ideas and causes, and she has a hunger to live authentically, but a lifetime of submission to stronger wills leaves her ill-equipped for deliberate action:

If she is to be true to her nature of an absolutely open and selfless consciousness, Verena cannot exercise nor act upon any exclusive and discriminatory self-reference or self-intention. Verena's "gift" is her selfless capacity for experience (its specific mode being love) which renders her self-transcendent nature incapable of acting upon any mundane impulse originating in self. (McMurray 342)

Verena can receive and reflect others' opinions and desires, but she never generates her own beliefs and she is constantly buffeted between the stronger personalities in her life. James describes her character, "What *was* a part of her essence was the extraordinary generosity with which she could expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her" (Boston 350). This generosity of will makes Verena an empty vessel for Olive's ambition.

Verena becomes Olive's ambitions in the flesh. Like Selah Tarrant, Olive plays the ventriloquist to Verena: "She tells me what to say—the real things. It's Miss Chancellor as much as me!" (Boston 208). Olive takes a dominant role in Verena's life, working to improve her talents and intellect but never encouraging Verena's growth in individuality or independence:

Olive is quite literally absorbing Verena, inhabiting her "form." Verena dispenses now with her father's mesmeric exhibition before performing. Olive thus takes on the role of Verena's father. The rather bizarre circumstance of having a young woman in a paternal relationship with

another young woman only emphasizes the problematical nature of the relationship—and provides an addition to the list of sexual displacement problems in the novel. (Wolstenholme 583)

Instead of treating Verena as an equal and establishing an equal partnership between two women who share the same goals, Olive appropriates the paternalistic role with Verena. She begins to fashion a trophy out of Verena much as Selah has, using her as the embodiment of her public opinions but neglecting Verena's personhood and ignoring her right to choose her own path.

Olive goes farther than Verena's father, though, as she literally tries to fuse their lives and minds: "This is intimate territory, the occupation of one person by another; and there is violence in it—the grasping, feverish desire not only to commingle with the beloved but to take total possession of her" (Hustvedt xxvi). The insidiousness of one person's controlling and consuming another is a frequent theme in James's novels, and often the worst cases are when the offender means well. Olive wants good things for Verena but thinks she can want it for both of them. Verena frankly admits that her own feelings are not as strong as Olive's:

"Do you know, Olive, I sometimes wonder whether, if it wasn't for you, I should feel it so very much!"

"My own friend," Olive replied, "you have never yet said anything to me which expressed so clearly the closeness and sanctity of our union."

"You do keep me up," Verena went on. "You are my conscience."

(Boston 145)

Olive interprets this as a healthy sign of Verena's acceptance of their closeness of minds, but she fails to realize the tenuous nature of their relationship. Olive has achieved what she wants by exploiting Verena's natural docility: "The fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense as a suit of golden mail" (Boston 157). But that web of authority is vulnerable.

One cannot read The Bostonians and miss the subtext of lesbianism and critics are divided about its significance. Robert Long believes James means to portray Olive as an unconscious lesbian:

Among the many things that Olive does not understand is that her attraction to the lovely, young Verena has not only a very personal but even sexual basis. James's handling of Olive's unconscious lesbianism is extremely suave, but everything in the novel points to it and James's intention is clear. (Early Novels 146)

Olive's language and thoughts certainly sound like an individual profoundly in love; in fact, many times her strong feelings are echoed in Basil Ransom's romantic hopes. But other critics downplay the homoerotic clues:

But despite the intensity of the emotional attachment that James attributes to at least one woman in the relationship, he probably would not have characterized it as "lesbian" had the term been available to him, only because popular reaction to a relationship that has been given that label ignores the whole complex of human emotions involved; and James was too subtle a novelist to reduce his characters to what could be summed up by knowing nods. (Faderman 324)

If Olive is a lesbian, James provides no evidence that Verena has similar feelings. But whether she is motivated by attraction or idealism, Olive oversteps the boundary in their relationship by appropriating the parental role to control and influence.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg examines contemporary readers' difficulties with the intense same-sex friendships of the nineteenth century in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America: "The twentieth-century tendency to view human love and sexuality within a dichotomized universe of deviance and normality, genitality[sic] and platonic love, is alien to the emotions and attitudes of the nineteenth century and fundamentally distorts the nature of these women's emotional interaction" (59). The intensity of the attachment between Olive and Verena would be quite normal for the time, and, as Smith-Rosenberg explains, many such friendships took on a mother-daughter dynamic: "Dear friends might indeed continue this pattern of adoption and mothering throughout their lives; one woman might routinely assume the nurturing role of pseudo-mother, the other the dependency role of daughter" (67). But Olive's "nurturing" is paternal rather than maternal as she continues Selah Tarrant's exploitation of Verena.

The obvious similarities between Olive and Basil's intense attraction to Verena illustrate the displacement of equality in their relationships. In 1886, the readership of The Bostonians would not have been as quick to notice a sexual element between Olive and Verena: "When The Bostonians was published, James's lesbian portraits were subject to greater ambiguity than they are now, and in certain passages, James plays on the vagaries of sexual identity, the shifting, indefinable motion between the masculine and the feminine" (Hustvedt xxiii). Olive's role in Verena's life quickly bleeds over from friend to parent—a father-figure. What is clear is the unequal distribution of attachment

between Olive and Verena. Olive needs Verena to complete her own identity and to fulfill her ambitions, but Verena's participation seems compelled by her submissive personality and generous loyalty:

All we can be sure of is that Olive's intense attraction to Verena did have an element of infatuation in it and that what she hoped to accomplish for the world and for her sex through their association was robbed of complete disinterestedness by the fact that their relationship did satisfy a deep emotional need for her. (Wagenknecht 105)

Because of Olive's great need to hold on to Verena, she begins to worry that she might lose her and so she forces Verena to promise never to marry.

Ostensibly, Olive's reasons for not wanting Verena to marry anybody are so that she would remain free to pursue women's causes without the impediments of a husband and family. But as Olive is aware of Henry Burrage's interest in Verena, and as she suspects Basil's rivalry, she becomes more and more desperate to prevent Verena from marrying. Olive's frantic efforts to secure Verena's affections mimic Dr. Sloper's final years and his obsession with extracting a similar promise from Catherine.

Mrs. Burrage, hoping her son Henry can marry Verena, tries to convince Olive to make the way clear:

"Don't attempt the impossible. You have got hold of a good thing; don't spoil it by trying to stretch it too far. If you don't take the better, perhaps you will have to take the worse—for with us you know the worst—than as a possible prey to adventurers, to exploiters, or to people who, once they had got hold of her, would shut her up altogether." (Boston 290)

While trying to pry Verena from Olive's grasp, Mrs. Burrage reassures her that Verena would be granted a measure of freedom to continue her speeches, but that someone else would never allow that liberty. Mrs. Burrage is attempting to buy Verena from Olive in the same way Olive has purchased Verena from her father.

As Olive discovers the burgeoning relationship between Basil and Verena, she decides to encourage a marriage with Henry Burrage, hoping that at least she can retain a measure of access and control over Verena's public life. By this time, however, Basil has already tipped the scales in his balance. Because Verena's nature is so pliant, she is bending to the strongest will, and Basil emerges as the victor. James describes Verena's transfer from Olive to Basil:

It was in her nature to be easily submissive, to like being overborne. She could be silent when people insisted, and silent without acrimony. Her whole relation to Olive was a kind of tacit, tender assent to passionate insistence, and if this had ended by being easy and agreeable to her, it may be supposed that the struggle of yielding to a will which she felt to be stronger even than Olive's was not of long duration. (Boston 305)

Verena's attachment to Olive is based on loyalty and affection, but she is not motivated by the same social causes, driving ideologies, or egotism. Long before Olive is aware of the competition from Basil, Verena is forming a connection with him.

Like Catherine Sloper, Verena has a secret, inner life. She has met with Basil in Cambridge and not told Olive. The act of keeping that secret from Olive enhances the romantic possibilities of her brief acquaintance with Basil. His strong personality, unflagging pursuit, and obvious sexual attraction combine to sway Verena from Olive:

Her friendship with and loyalty to Olive Chancellor, her attraction to Basil Ransom, and her sweet, confused desire to please them both has all the poignancy of a child trapped in a custody battle. Verena's dawning awareness that she has an inner life and personal desires turns on a secret she keeps from Olive. She does not tell her friend that she has seen Basil Ransom in Cambridge. (Hustvedt xxv)

Verena feels guilty about keeping this secret from Olive and is conflicted over her attraction to a man who does not respect the views she espouses. But because those convictions are adopted rather than stemming from her core, her attraction to Basil overrules her belief system and her loyalty to Olive.

As Olive realizes her influence over Verena is weakening, Basil gloats that his is strengthening: "To go away proved to himself how secure he felt, what a conviction he had that however she might turn and twist in his grasp he held her fast" (Boston 370). Basil certainly resembles Gilbert Osmond in the delight he takes in his control over his victim. His ambition to own Verena is equally matched by Olive's attempts to keep her:

Ironically perhaps, the character with whom Ransom has most in common is Olive. Characters placed in opposition in James's novels often turn out to be very much like one another. Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend, although locked in contention as adversaries, have similar natures and a similar desire to control Catherine. (Long, Early Novels 150)

Both Basil and Olive believe they are looking after Verena's best interests, but their own selfish motives rule their actions: "With their sense of mission, they do not recognize the selfish uses they themselves make of Verena, and are largely unable to see her apart from

what they project of their own inner drives upon her" (Long, Early Novels 151). They both long to possess Verena as a trophy, as the spoils of war. She is the treasure motivating their rivalry. They want to display her as a reflection of their victory, their ambitions, and their success. "By the end of the novel he is as obsessive in his male chauvinism as Olive is in her feminism, and his goal shifts from consummation of his love to revenge on his adversary. He wants, more than anything else, to defeat Olive" (Wallace 37). In fact, Olive regards Basil's "resolute pursuit of Verena as a covert persecution of herself" (Boston 360). As their battle intensifies, Verena's identity diminishes. She becomes less of an individual as Olive and Basil reduce her to a prize.

Basil ultimately succeeds, hurrying Verena away from the performance hall with his cloak draped over Verena's head: "Her final weeping exit, in which Basil's cloak obliterates her 'identity,' signals her objectification by, and commodification and bondage to, patriarchy" (Sensibar 62). He has won his battle, he has emerged victorious over his rival, but in the process, he has reduced Verena into the spoils of his war with Olive: "Verena has been vulgarized by almost everyone around her, and as the wife of Ransom, who has previously affirmed that were she to speak he would find a way to strike her dumb, she will suffer yet further distortion of identity" (Long, Early Novels 152). Instead, Basil will absorb Verena's identity into his own; she will become an embodiment of his victory.

Basil has never had any sympathy with Verena's speeches or causes, and he views her as an empty vessel that he has "saved" from the clutches of unscrupulous promoters. "Verena Tarrant is to Ransom a 'moving statue' and a 'picture.' The white page on which may be written a sentimental novel and a balance sheet" (Godden 162). Basil wants a

private life with Verena, and he intends to keep her all to himself, purging her mind of what he considers disagreeable nonsense. Given Verena's pliability, he will probably be successful.

Even though Verena and Basil share an obvious sexual attraction, James is quick to warn that it will not form the basis of a happy life:

When Verena finally goes off with Ransom it is, in a sense, her "fall." She is in tears. James comments that "it is to be feared that with this union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed." She has never before suffered, nor has she ever before understood the issues on which she has been speaking for so long. She has been an incomplete personality, will-less, over-pliant, and moulded by those with whom she has come in contact. Even when she goes off with Ransom it is a matter of impulse rather than of will. (Fox 33-4).

Besides Basil's romantic pull, Verena has other motivations influencing her decision to leave with him:

Verena has always before her the image of her submissive mother; and therefore Basil Ransom can easily become the possessing spirit who brings to conscious behavior the part of her subconscious which holds her mother as model. In the depths of her personality, in her background and training, stands the role-model of a woman in a traditional, submissive relationship with a man. (Wolstenhome 587)

Even though Verena has claimed she does not agree with traditional marriage, those beliefs are held fairly lightly. She definitely has the example of her mother, a woman who has allowed her identity to be consumed by a dynamic and dominating man. Selah Tarrant's overbearing personality echoes Olive's intensity, yet their force of personalities seem to turn Verena into a passive rather than a strong person. As much as Verena has been trained to pursue a progressive lifestyle, it is easy for her to enter into a traditional/submissive marriage with Basil and leave behind her presumed opinions.

Those opinions and beliefs were never deeply held. At the core, Verena is not an opinionated or cause-driven personality, but she is malleable, able to take any impression:

As "the most good-natured girl in the world she had always done everything that people asked" and was always able to "expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her." Consequently, she passes from her father's control to Olive's and from Olive's to Ransom's without undergoing any essential change in her inner being" (Wagenknecht 103).

Verena has been a trophy her whole life. Her greatest value comes from her potential to be exploited, and wrested from the hands of Olive by Basil, there is little value to preserve.

The reader feels sympathy for Verena, but her choice lacks the agonizingly disappointing effect that Isabel Archer's has: "Verena's fate is sad, but she is too wobbly and empty a character to be tragic, and Basil Ransom's hunger for Verena Tarrant is augmented by the stature of his adversary, Olive Chancellor, who, unlike Verena, is truly his equal" (Hustvedt xxviii). Olive and Basil, as opposing rivals, hold more interest for

the reader than Verena. Indeed, Olive generates more sympathy at the end of the book, as she faces the angry Boston crowd like "the sacrificial figure of Hypatia" (Boston 413). Olive's total defeat and anguish over her loss is moving, but there is a small hope that she will learn and grow. Verena will be shelved as an unhappy trophy wife, but perhaps Olive will find her own voice.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, and The Bostonians represent a significant achievement in their realistic portrayal of female characters. James's heroines are allowed to make significant, life-changing choices. He never offers convenient happy endings, as found in so many previous nineteenth century novels, nor does he leave them powerless against the forces of fate, as in the deterministic world of Thomas Hardy.

At his best, James produces characters with a rich inner life, ambitious for experiences, and admirable in their intentions. They are also flawed human beings who are susceptible to pride, vanity, foolishness, and weakness. In Washington Square, Catherine Sloper provides the template of resistance. She rejects the commodification of society and her father, choosing an authentic, albeit sad, life.

A much more complex novel, The Portrait of a Lady features one of James's greatest female characters, Isabel Archer. Her early hopes, her immature intellect, and her unquenchable imagination make her capture by Osmond so tragic. Her ambiguous final decision at the end of the novel illustrates the complexities of choice, responsibility, and human nature. If she is to help Pansy and resist Osmond, she must tap into the strength of Artemis.

Verena Tarrant trades one tyrant for another. She does make a choice, but her character reveals that a weak person is incapable of self-determination. James punishes Olive Chancellor for her appropriation of another person to meet her needs, but he also offers a miniscule chance for future growth. Her final act of going before the crowd in Boston shows a courageous determination to use her own voice, however inadequate.

Perhaps Olive will begin a new life, developing her own personality instead of controlling someone else's. That potential choice, that ability to redirect the path of one's life, allows for moral maturity:

The moral decision, however, is seldom a matter only of an ethical choice between right and wrong, but more often involves a choice between two ways of life, one offering some opportunity for a greater fulfillment of the possibilities of the human spirit, and the other offering eventual frustration and aridity. (Bowden 53)

All of the female characters make choices, but in Catherine and Isabel there is moral growth. In Olive there is only potential so far.

Because James allows for change in his heroines, he can leave the reader with an unfinished story, an unwritten ending. James respects his characters; he allows them to fail; he reveals the contradictions in their natures. He never makes a trophy of them by putting them on a shelf to collect dust. He offers them to the reader as individuals, in a sense, opening up the text to multiple interpretations. The element of potential growth and the evidence of maturity in his characters invest James's novels with a glimmer of hope in otherwise dark stories.

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