To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Amy Sloan entitled "The Crisis of the Marital Institution in Henry James: An Analysis of James's Experiments in Marriage in *The Bostonians*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Golden Bowl*." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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# THE CRISIS OF THE MARITAL INSTITUTION IN HENRY JAMES: AN ANALYSIS OF JAMES'S EXPERIMENTS IN MARRIAGE IN *THE BOSTONIANS*, *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, AND *THE GOLDEN BOWL*

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for R.B.S.

For many months as I read and wrote about James and the strains placed on marriage throughout the nineteenth century, I took constant solace knowing that somewhere close at hand was my husband, full of wordless reassurances that marriage would emerge from this turbulent time strengthened and secured both as a permanent institution in society and within our home.

You have my love and my gratitude.

A.M.S.

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine Henry James's novels *The Bostonians*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Golden Bowl* in an effort to create a wider picture of the threats that James perceived were closing in on the institution of marriage at the end of the nineteenth century. The paper begins by attempting to place James's narrative style in a suitable context by comparing it to that of other American realists and to the popular genre of domestic fiction. Then it translates the more generic discussion of his narrative stylings into a more honed focus on the specific threats that he interacts with in each novel.

The section on *The Bostonians* explores how the societal division over the concept of separate spheres worked to interfere with individual marriages in an effort to determine the effects of this tension on the marital institution. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the major focus lies in discovering whether the enlarged sense of independence experienced by nineteenth-century women created a general move towards a less hierarchical marital model. In *The Golden Bowl*, the discussion moves into how the tension caused by the weakening of the doctrine of the spheres and the burgeoning sense of independence in young women has created an alternate version of the concept of love, which becomes equated to a struggle for power.

The consensus that this paper finally draws is that while James certainly felt that the rapid changes currently occurring in America were drastically affecting the marital institution, he does not provide evidence to indicate that he believed that the institution had become outmoded or needed to be eradicated but that accommodations must be made in order to prevent the marital institution from collapsing under its own strain.

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## Chapter 1: The Convergence of Realism and Domesticity in James

Henry James published his first novel, *Roderick Hudson*, in 1876 and his last novel, *The Golden Bowl*, in 1904. By the 1880's, a national market for books in America was already well-established. Bestsellers of this time could be broken down into three primary types. The first type, novels of domestic realism, were primarily penned by female authors and aimed at middle-class women. The second and third types of popular literature were aimed at the urban working class; they consisted of "dime novels," which emerged in the 1860's and "story papers" or newspapers that contained romances and adventure. In order both to appeal to and to reach a truly national market, an author would probably have had to conform to one of these styles of popular fiction; authors who were more interested in creating literature than popular fiction could publish in literary magazines such as *Harper's Monthly* or *Atlantic Monthly*, which is primarily what James and other so-called American realists did. Though James's fiction conforms in interesting ways to the precepts of domestic realism, he did not want position himself alongside these women who were gaining national popularity creating domestic tales for a largely female audience. But, his literary project also differs in certain distinct ways from the project of realism embarked upon by most of his male contemporaries.

Though James's brand of realism diverges in certain significant ways from that of other male realists, it finds its roots in the same place as that of his contemporaries: a reaction against American Romanticism, which had been extremely popular from the 1830's to the end of the Civil War. As William Harmon comments, "Moral qualities were significantly present" in romanticism, as is seen in the works of its most prominent

figures including Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville.[1] They often used fiction (and/or poetry) to create moral fables and to suggest significant moral truths to their readers instead of as a means of capturing or recreating the actual. While this moral dimension had been an important quality throughout the entire history of fiction and was not the only defining characteristic of the romantics, the realists reacted strongly against the importance that the American romantics placed upon it. In their works, the realists moved away from idealism and into a business of preservation. The years from the end of the civil war to the beginning of the twentieth century were characterized by rapid development and sweeping economic, social, and political changes, which, as Robert Shulman comments, made a "questioning of conventions and the conventional . . . perhaps the central unifying convention of realism."[2] The methods that realists found most conducive to questioning these conventions in an effort to preserve and to understand society included "plausibly rendered speech, recognizable settings and recognizable characters facing everyday problems."[3] James most resembles other realists in his adherence to this principle of realism.[4] However, many of the major male authors of this period, including Twain, Howells, Harris, Crane, and even Bellamy were drawn to realism in an attempt to understand and expose the major social issues of post-war American society including racism, a growing urban and working class, and the development of cities. While James still attempted to capture and interpret the world around him, he continued to set his novels in the more typically romantic setting of the

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[1] Harmon, William and C. Hugh Holman, eds. *A Handbook to Literature*. 7th ed. (Up Saddle River, New Jersey, 1996). 454-55.
[2] Elliot, Emory. *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1991). 161.
[3] Shulman 162.
[4] James argued, "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" ("The Art of Fiction" 346).

domestic sphere. As John Carlos Rowe notes, "James has often appeared to be one of the few masculine moderns to be eminently concerned with the problems facing modern women."[5] Some other male authors of this time period, including Howells, also worked within a domestic framework, but James does not have a male contemporary who expended nearly the energy he did upon the issues confronting women during this turbulent period in American history.[6]

The problem for James with allying himself with the women writers who also continued to focus on the domestic sphere was twofold.[7] First, though these writers enjoyed a widespread popularity and reached a broad audience, their works were designated as belonging more to popular than to literary culture. The dominant conception was that "popular women novelists . . . merely reproduced a standardized product that appealed to a mass audience composed primarily of undereducated and underemployed middle-class women desperate for something to fill their days."[8] Thus, as Rowe argues, "There is a repeated concern in James's novels that he himself might become merely another of those 'woman scribblers,' with attendant ironies resulting from . . . his ambivalent views regarding the politics of feminism."[9] Therefore, not only does James find his connection with this genre popularized by these women writers troubling because it fails to display the said qualifications necessary to classify it as art, but he

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[5] Rowe, John Carlos. *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1984). 10.

[6] For another example of a male's portrayal of the domestic sphere, see Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Instead of focusing upon the upheaval caused by the strict separation of the spheres and the troubled state of marriage, this novel is more concerned with the uneasy relationship between class and economic prosperity.

[7] I refer here to women like E.D.E.N. Southworth, Maria Susanna Cummins, and Susan Warner who wrote best selling domestic novels written primarily for financial gain and not in an attempt to create literary art.

[8] Elliot 113.

[9] Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* 87.

finds his connection with the female gender troubling as well. Though James "claims for himself a certain authority regarding the representation of women, insofar as their social situation is a central problem in his fiction,"[10] he hesitates to credit female writers' explorations of the marital institution and the doctrine of separate spheres as anything more than 'scribbling' meant rather aimlessly to amuse women of the middle class. In some sense, even James, who often acknowledged in his novels that women cannot be relegated solely to the domestic sphere, refuses to admit that their voices can have relevance in the wider world of art, where women are meant to be muses, not artists.

Not surprisingly, James's project differs in a couple of significant ways from the popularized versions of domestic fiction. For James, as Martha Nussbaum notes, "Life is simply never *presented* by a text; it is always *represented* by something."[11] While most of the authors of domestic novels probably were not attempting to create a carbon copy version of life within their books, these books often failed to truly embody deeper levels of meaning and to offer the amazing psychological insights that characterize James's fiction. Furthermore, most domestic realism still held to fairytale endings of connubial bliss based on the standard conception of true love; love for James's characters leads more often to deep suffering. Domestic novels function more as a means of escapism than James's novels do which were shaped by his idea of realism.[12] Literature for James

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[10] Rowe, John Carlos. *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. ( Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984). 87.

[11] Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1990). 5.

[12] In *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, Robert Shulman notes that James's good friend William Dean Howells "argued against the demand for a conventional love plot and all it signified, particularly a focus on marriage as the goal of life and an avoidance of the full range of contemporary concerns" (161). Though he concerned himself with marriage, James's novels move far beyond the typical escapist romantic novel.

becomes "an extension of life, not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life."[13] Most works of domestic realism, conversely, only served as a horizontal extension of life. Furthermore, James's interest lay in revealing the current destabilization that the marital institution was experiencing through the specific examples he presents in his novels whereas the writings of these women essentially worked to reinforce that institution.

What James clearly understood was that the marital institution itself had become so thoroughly embedded in the core of American society that its destabilization threatened to collapse the entire social system, and he believed imperatively that his audience needed to face this specific, and new, problem. Though the idea and practice of marriage has existed throughout the history of the civilized world, it had come to play an even more significant role in Western society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the middle class began to rise to prominence. The fundamental purpose of marriage as a bourgeois institution began as a method of structuring and managing society. Marriage has also always been a means both of controlling procreation and designating proper procreative partners. In addition, however, Joseph Boone argues that "the contract of marriage became 'the structure that maintains the Structure'—became, that is, a metonymy for proper social order and sexual hierarchy that disguised the

[13] Nussbaum 48.

asymmetries of class and sex encompassed within the trope of balanced 'order.'"[14] Marriage became a small microcosm of society, allowing for the maintenance of the proper social order, as policed by the husband/father of each household, to help preserve the Structure. Furthermore, as long as proper matches based on economic and class equality continued to be made, marriage also served to uphold and even embody the current class system. This aspect of marriage, as a structuring and policing device for society, is one that seems fascinating to James. He often plays with this structuring to reveal just how fundamental marriage is to the ordering of the Structure, and he often portrays marriages that do not uphold this structure through introducing factors such as adultery, which threaten the stability of the marriage, in an effort to reveal the possible consequences.

Unsurprisingly, the economic factor in creating individual marriages eventually became one of the primary considerations in making matches. Marriages were traditionally arranged by families based on a principle of equal wealth or on some other facet of economic exchange. A marriage between completely unequal economic partners, such as the marriage between *Jane Eyre's* Rochester and Jane, was typically accepted only in the pages of a romance. A person's goodness or even love for his or her prospective partner was not considered social currency so that no matter how beautiful/good/loving the poor person might be, the match would not maintain the proper social order and would thus be discouraged. However, marriage also became a primary means of attaining a greater class status, especially for people who had not been born into

[14] Boone, Joseph. "Modernist Maneuverings in the Marriage Plot: Breaking the Ideologies of Gender and Genre in James's *The Golden Bowl*." *PMLA* 101.3 (1986): 375.

the upper or middle class but who had attained a great deal of wealth. In this instance, marriages could be made whereby an old name tied to a waning family fortune might marry a no name with a significant purse.[15] But, marriage was not only a means of negotiating status through economics; sometimes marriage was a matter of economic survival, especially for women. Women at this time did not have careers, nor did they typically inherit money from their families, and as a result, marriage became the primary method of attaining economic security. James explores different ways that these economic factors affected individuals and individual marriages throughout many of his novels, and usually marriages that break the accepted economic expectations or even could be classified as a strained compliance to these expectations are some of his most tragic.

Though the economic and structuring factors played crucial roles in the marital system, they were accompanied by the more celebrated element in deciding on unions—love. Romantic love, while seen as so crucial to creating successful marriages today, did not always enjoy the same status as an integral factor in matchmaking. Indeed, love's rise to prominence is the result of a rather complicated history:

> As various historians have demonstrated, the ideal of 'romantic wedlock'—uniting the poles of passion and utilitarian marriage held apart in Continental tradition—came into being in the English Renaissance because of a complex series of factors, including demographic shifts in kinship patterns, economic and political developments, and, perhaps most influential, the Puritan glorification of

[15] James's novel *The American* centers on his exploration of this particular aspect of the marital economic exchange system and reveals interesting inconsistencies between the European and American systems.

> 'holy matrimony' (as opposed to celibacy) to combat Catholic ideals. With the rise of the doctrine of sentimentalism and practice of capitalism, those odd bedfellows of the eighteenth century, a secularized version of the Puritan ideal emerged in the concept of the loving companionate marriage.[16]

Once this ideal became truly rooted within the marital institution, it became impossible to ignore or to bypass, especially as a result of its origins in religious doctrine. Society thus embraced this added component and often used it to cover up the less attractive economic and policing purposes behind the marital system. Further, domestic novels helped to perpetuate the increased focus on the necessity of love through their tales of couples who fall deeply in love and through marriage are able to live happily ever after. Such 'marriage plots' helped to transform marriage into a desirable state and not just a necessary component of societal ordering.

Love thus became an element that in essence distanced the sexual and economic factors of marriage, which if analyzed too closely would reveal an intensely uncomfortable relationship. However, one might also argue that the ideal of love functioned merely as camouflage hiding the relationship between the sexual, the economic, and the personal and not as a replacement or recompense for any of these components. This unmasking of love's function is a recurring theme in several of James's novels, but, as Barbara Welter explains, in nineteenth-century American society the mask usually remained firmly in place: "Most American girls believed that this new state [marriage] would bring automatic happiness because they believed that to marry for anything but the purest love was unworthy of their sex and nation. This freedom was

[16] Boone 375.

more apparent than real; most American girls married within their own class, religion, and geographic background."[17] Marriage became the key factor that balanced all of the primarily male gains under the current marital system—a woman received love in return for her constant service to her husband, and because he loved her (and she him), she would want to devote her life to him. As a result, love became the keyword to designate not only which marriages were proper but also to help police the marriages once they were consummated. A person is much less likely to rebel against the demands of someone he or she "loves" and will endure more in the name of love.

The marital institution could thus combine the economic and romantic factors into a network that would function as a method of policing through the rhetoric of the ideology of the separate spheres, which dictated that the proper role of the woman was to run the household, while the male went out and worked within the public sphere to earn a living. This ideology theoretically maintained that though the domestic and the public spheres remain completely separate, they are actually equal fields—separate but equal. As Nancy Armstrong illustrates in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, the basis for this argument is that psychologically women are more suited and supposedly happier remaining within the domestic domain while men naturally seek the world that lies outside in the more political terrain of the public arena.[18] In other words, the separation of women into the domestic sphere and men into the public sphere was supposed to be a natural occurrence that equally suited both sexes who, if they are perhaps not quite equal partners because of the fundamental superiority of the male gender, occupy equal and

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[17] Welter, Barbara. *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976). 8.
[18] Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). 4.

complementary spheres. Alfred Habegger explains that the belief in the complementary nature of the sexes depended on the idea that "men had the 'sway-power' and women were affectionate, selfless, and yielding, and the 'sentimental' consequence of this natural difference was a powerful attraction between the sexes. This feeling was by nature asymmetrical: the man's sentiment for the woman necessarily included his sense of her sweet dependency and the woman's sentiment for the man was based on his superior force."[19] Therefore, women's natural submissiveness allows their husbands to police them, and conversely, because they who were responsible for both their wives and children, the men were forced to remain good citizens in order to provide.

What so intrigues James, however, is not how the doctrine of the separate spheres worked but what aspects of this patriarchal ideology ultimately failed and how these failures affected the marital institution. While in practice the function of the separate spheres worked in conjunction with the traditional patriarchal ordering to produce extremely specific roles for both husbands and wives, the primary place where the ideology of separate spheres fails is not in declaring each gender to be more suited to naturally different roles or in proposing that the sexes are predisposed to certain behavioral patterns. Instead, its major problem lies in its claim that all members of each sex fit into these predetermined roles and thus that all females are inherently inferior. As Elizabeth Allen so lucidly points out, "The idealisation of woman's moral influence in the domestic sphere obscured the glaring contradiction of ascribing women a superior moral virtue and yet rendering that superiority inferior to masculine legal, social and

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[19] Habegger, Alfred. *Henry James and the 'Woman Business'*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). 51.

economic restraint."[20] Though the idealization of woman's moral influence may have obscured the contradictions temporarily, the obvious truth remained that in practice not only were the sexes separated into a hierarchy, the spheres were as well. Therefore, in order "to convince middle class girls and women that not only were they merely icing on the cake, but that this [marriage] was their supreme destiny, greater than any incidental talent they as individuals might possess," a "powerful mythology" was needed.[21] In other words, for this current ordering system to work, a mythology explaining this natural hierarchy of the sexes must be invoked, and it must be potent. The problem became that no mythology, including the idealization of woman's superior moral virtue, was influential enough to quell acknowledgement of the inherent truth, as Tessa Hadley argues, that "buried deep under the sophisticated courtesies of that ideal, the dissimulations of its elaborate homage to female refinement, somewhere the male seeks the right female *animal* to match with. She must reflect his nature, its special superiority, she must absorb his superiority and re-radiate it out of a superiority of her own matching his."[22] James became a master of uncovering the grave consequences that arose when this idea became completely exposed within a marriage by a forced acknowledgement that all else was simply, albeit powerful, rhetoric. By the 1880's, however, these hidden agendas and masked-over ideologies were no longer a secret only occasionally revealed within the confines of a marriage; they were beginning to be questioned seriously and very publicly by a certain sector of women. And though not all women were actively

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[20] Allen, Elizabeth. *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James*. (London: Macmillan, 1984). 12.
[21] Allen 16.
[22] Hadley, Tessa. *Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 152-53.

participating in this radical movement of questioning the status quo, they were all aware of its existence. This awareness began to produce widespread shifts in the success of the ideological concepts inherent in the notion of the separate spheres and of the patriarchal doctrine. Part of James's project was to depict the psychological effects that subordination and women's knowledge of their subordination had in the nineteenth century.[23] Consequently, James also explores with great interest the effect that this subtle (or not so subtle) shift in gender ideologies had on the marital institution.

James's rather unusual decision to dwell on the domestic setting in a time when other contemporary male authors were shifting away from it stems from many different personal and professional factors. Primarily, he believed that the romances of his predecessors failed in some way to depict an honest portrayal of the current marital system, which he believed could best be revealed through a more realistic fashion allowing him to capture, portray, and interpret the world of everyday characters in an effort to reveal some hidden truth or meaning. More importantly, he also believed that the current marital system, like the larger social arena, was at a point of crisis due to the questioning of the doctrine of the spheres. James explains in his essay "The Art of Fiction" that he believes artists should be free to choose their own subject matter, and, as he famously noted, he believed that "the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of their sex, the agitation on their behalf" was "the most salient and particular point in our social life."[24] Though other novelists were attracted to the struggles brought on by

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[23] For a more in-depth discussion of this aspect of James's works, see Rowe's *Theoretical Dimensions* 85-118.

[24] James, Henry. *The Complete Notebooks*. Ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). 18-20.

urbanization and industrialization, James found the tensions emanating from the parlor and the hearth—those supposed safe havens from outside societal cares—fascinating. His ability to recognize and understand the seriousness of these issues could be seen as an intellectual inheritance from his father, Henry James Sr. James Jr. grew up in an environment steeped in the ideologies of the separate spheres. His father expended a great deal of energy and a large part of his career contemplating the proper role of the sexes, and he eventually came to be a strong proponent of the most traditional form of the separation of the spheres. Thus the idea, as clichéd as it now sounds, that "the woman's place is in the home, and her calling is to be a wife" was, as Kim Townsend points out, received in the James household as an unquestioned truth.[25] However, James could clearly see by the time he wrote *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881 that these "truths" were quickly becoming antiquities of the past. Understandably, he found the tension between the philosophies of his father and his own generation concerning the change in beliefs about gender roles disturbing.

James's father had not always endorsed the ideology of the separate spheres. James Sr.'s interest in marriage seems to have stemmed from a deep disappointment about his own union.[26] His earliest arguments actually came relatively close to a free love philosophy; he felt that "marriage failed because it gave each spouse 'an absolute *property* in the affections' of the other" which "directly instigates deception, adultery,

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[25] Townsend, Kim. *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others*. (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1996). 62.

[26] For a more complete picture of the origins of the philosophies of Henry James Sr. concerning marriage, see Louis Menand's very informative book *The Metaphysical Club*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

domestic tyranny, and dissension throughout the land."[27] Accordingly, James Sr. came to believe that promiscuity could really only be committed within a marriage where partners probably would not be coupling out of a feeling of true desire or intimacy. Sexual intercourse, then, could only be "divinely beautiful" when committed by unwed partners.[28] Unsurprisingly, Americans found this philosophy troubling, and it somewhat tarnished James Sr.'s reputation. Whether or not as a result of this backlash, he soon began to promote a new philosophy of marriage which directly aligned itself with the doctrine of the spheres. Thus, as Habegger relates:

> James [Sr.] kept his old view that marriage is a disappointment for the husband because his wife can never 'fulfill the promise which the unappropriated woman held out,' but he now preached that this disappointment is precisely what man needs to raise himself from the physical to the spiritual. The history of each man and of civilization itself follows the same path: First man glimpses in the 'downcast eyes' of the woman he has enslaved a radiant glory; he binds himself to her for life; and eventually the confinement of marriage proves to be a saving discipline for him through which he transcends himself.[29]

Woman's purpose, according to Henry James Sr., is therefore to live a life of absolute submission to her husband, not for any gain of her own, but so that through his suffering by being bound to her the man can find salvation. Women did not even have a right to their own wants and desires under this system; they were only a means through which men could find transcendence.

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[27] Habegger 30.
[28] Habegger 31.
[29] Habegger 35.

According to Habegger, James Jr. wrote three different letters in 1870 alone wherein he expressed an agreement with his father's philosophical views on women and marriage, but he reveals a much more complicated relationship with these ideologies within the pages of his novels.[30] Undoubtedly, James carefully considered all of his father's philosophies regarding marriage and may in general have regarded them as containing a certain wisdom, but his novels plainly show that he understood that they were no longer truly viable within the current societal situation. Clearly, though, the father's fixation on marriage is a direct influence on the preoccupation of the son. And, one can certainly point to aspects of different novels or even characters who seem to arise directly out of his father's teachings.[31] Some ideas, including the view that "love and marriage were not compatible in the present civilization,"[32] even seem to inform the dominant themes in several of James's works. But, the relationship between James's literary interactions with marriage as related through his literature and the philosophical beliefs of his father must be understood to be deeply complicated. Further, the marital issues James explores go far beyond his father's preoccupations. Why exactly a man who understood that he would never marry devoted such a large portion of his career to investigating the crisis of the marital institution and the tensions resultant from the ideology of the separate spheres undoubtedly cannot be wholly explained through his interest in representing salient issues of the current social climate or because of his father's persistent interest in the same subjects. However, these factors and others

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[30] Habegger 29.
[31] The character whose correlation to James's father is most obvious is Basil Ransom in *The Bostonians* whose philosophy towards women and marriage is extremely similar to that of Henry James Sr.
[32] Habegger 34.

combined to produce fascinating explorations of the American marital situation in many of his novels, including *The Bostonians*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Golden Bowl*.

Those three novels combined create an interesting spectrum of responses to various crises in the marital institution. Though *The Bostonians* was written in 1886, five years after *The Portrait of a Lady*, I have placed it first in my discussion partly because James explores only the courtship phase of the primary couple in the novel, Basil Ransom and Verena Tarrant, whereas in *The Portrait of a Lady* both Isabel Archer's courtship with and marriage to Gilbert Osmond are related in depth. Then, in *The Golden Bowl,* the marriage between Maggie Verver and Prince Amerigo and between Adam Verver and Charlotte Stant comprise the major focus of the text. In each of these novels, James creates a different combination of factors, all primarily related to the institution of marriage itself and not the idiosyncrasies of the individual characters that work in juxtaposition to one another continually to damage, often irreversibly, the marriages themselves. Through these individual marriages, all created to represent a larger spectrum of marriages, James deftly works to force his readers to acknowledge many problems inherent in the institution of marriage which have combined to force the institution into a very precarious position.

Though *The Bostonians* traces the courtship of two different couples, only one of them could legally marry. Olive Chancellor is certainly courting Verena Tarrant with a fervor equal to that of Basil Ransom, but this relationship can serve only as an obstruction in James's representation of the marital institution insofar as it threatens to come between the marriage of Basil and Verena. Therefore, the primary relationship that directly pertains to the threats James perceived on the marital institution is that between

Verena and Basil. James or, more accurately, the narrator, prophecies that the marriage will not be a great success during the novel's final scene after Basil and Verena leave the hall and set off to begin their life together. Verena proclaims that she is glad to have shed her other life for Basil, but "though she was glad, [Basil] presently discovered, that beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed."[33] Both Basil and Verena believe they are deeply in love, and their marriage satisfies the social and economic criteria necessary to be accepted by society. Yet the marriage is still doomed to be "far from brilliant." The primary cause of their future marital strife originates from a larger social issue—the breakdown of the ideology of the separate spheres and the shifting definition of gender roles, which James depicts as intruding so thoroughly that marriage will inevitably fail to function in any coherent manner. In *The Bostonians,* James creates a marriage that from all appearances should be felicitous but stands doomed because of the intruding outside forces that have placed such a strain on the institution itself so as to drastically affect individual marriages.

James sets up *The Portrait of a Lady* similarly to *The Bostonians* in that, like Verena, Isabel Archer is courted by several suitors before she marries Gilbert Osmond. Furthermore, the tension surrounding all of the possible marriages and then the marriage itself arises directly out of problems relating to the shifting status of the ideology of separate sphere and proper gender roles, just as in *The Bostonians.* However, though both novels explore the effects that these shifts in thought have on the marital institution, they enter into this investigation in dramatically different ways. In *The Bostonians*,

[33] James, Henry. *The Bostonians.* Ed. Charles R. Anderson. (New York: Penguin, 1886). 433.

James investigates how societal shifts regarding gender roles disrupt the relationships of those who choose to adhere to traditional gender and marital ideologies; in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the vantage point has changed. In this novel, James introduces a main character thoroughly enamored of a modernized version of femininity. While Isabel does not directly involve herself in the women's movement, she is heavily influenced by it. The narrator notes that "it was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate to be independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of that state."[34] Proper American girls at this time were not supposed to desire independence; they were brought up to believe that their function was to assist the man they were destined to marry. And they certainly were not encouraged to do anything that could be categorized as enlightened. Therefore, Isabel's courtships and her subsequent marriage reveal not so much how the intrusion of these ideologies from the outside will affect the marital institution but how marriage will be affected once enlightenment enters from within the institution.

In *The Golden Bowl*, published almost two decades after *The Bostonians* in 1904, the issue James chooses to investigate in relation to the institution of marriage has shifted once more. The decline of faith in the doctrine of the separate spheres again surfaces, but this time the focus has moved to how this doctrine has affected the idea of love and, more specifically, how love has become almost indistinguishable from a power play for complete possession of the other person. Love, power, and possession are closely connected in both *The Bostonians* and *The Portrait of a Lady* as well, but they play a much more peripheral role to other issues with which James is more concerned. Then, in

[34] James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*. Ed. Geoffrey Moore. (New York: Penguin, 1881). 105.

*The Golden Bowl*, the struggle for possession and control becomes the central factor in both of the primary marital relationships. James also takes a more serious look at the relationship of economics and marriage and how economics contributes to the power struggles occurring within the marriages in this novel. Furthermore, the relationship between Maggie and Amerigo, possibly due in part to its sharp contrast to the incredibly unhappy union of Charlotte and Adam, becomes the only marriage in any of these novels that has been interpreted as successful. Charlotte has unmistakably become a possession by the end of the novel, which the narrator makes clear when he depicts her as wearing "a silken noose" with a leash that is hooked at the other end around Adam's thumb.[35] Maggie and Amerigo's relationship, conversely, is more ambiguous; Maggie may have "thrown the dice," but Amerigo's "hand [is] over the cast," indicating their struggle for power over one another has not yet ended even though the novel has.[36]

Part of the major difference, then, between James and other novelists who wrote about the domestic sphere is that in their works "it is ultimately individual weakness, never the idealized institution, that is held accountable for the failed marriage."[37] In these three novels, James has reversed this trend by attempting to portray the weaknesses thrust upon the institution by society rather than that of the individual whose follies may or may not have any effect on society at large. James constantly introduces two specific elements in relation to the marital institution into his novels. The first is the tension that has begun to pervade society concerning the discrepancy between the growing interest in freedom and independence among women and the "patriarchal fantasy" that women's

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[35] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl*. Ed. Geoffrey Moore. (New York: Penguin, 1904). 553-54.
[36] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 579.
[37] Boone 376.

only true place in society is in a position of complete subservience to men. As Rowe points out, "James's novels focus on how this discrepancy is played out in the individual: interest is directed to how these women wrestle with that fantasy and the hold it takes on their psyche."[38] But, Rowe fails to acknowledge that James explored how *both* sexes dealt with this discrepancy in his efforts to understand how that fantasy affected the marital institution. The second element he regularly introduces is the role that "love," which Mark Seltzer argues is the "name that James gives to the exercising of power," plays in helping to perpetrate these same tensions.[39] These two elements continually reveal themselves as interrelated in many ways. However, as Rowe acknowledges, "James's novels and stories are centrally concerned with marriage as a primary social institution," but, "as critical as James is of marriage, his characters remain trapped by it to the very end."[40] James is not revealing these tensions in an effort to eradicate the institution of marriage; instead, he was portraying a significant social institution that must undergo reform or will face collapse under its own strain in an attempt to rouse his readers into taking action to prevent this collapse.

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[38] Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. 49.
[39] Seltzer, Mark. *Henry James and the Art of Power*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984). 62.
[40] Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. 89.

## Chapter 2: *The Bostonians* and the Failure of the Spheres

James stretches the boundaries of both the genre of realism and of domestic realism in interesting ways in *The Bostonians*. Before writing *The Bostonians*, James commented in his notebook that he wanted to write "an American story . . . very national, very typical."[41] Thus, part of his overall goal for this project, creating a national American story, fits nicely within the bounds of realism. Furthermore, James wanted write about "the situation of women" which he believed to be "the most salient and particular point in our social life."[42] Part of realism's project involved attempting to reveal central societal issues through fiction, a goal which James clearly accomplishes in this novel. John Carlos Rowe believes that James "represents the perversity of family and marital relations in particularly perverse ways" in *The Bostonians*.[43] James's intention here is to expose the problems inherent in a society whose system of patriarchal values is in turmoil. However, the characters in *The Bostonians* cannot be unreservedly termed characters drawn from everyday life, as one would expect in a novel classified as realism. Though the characters are realistic in the sense that they cannot be categorized as true heroes or heroines,[44] they are drawn from a small sector of citizens whose views do not represent those of the greater American society.[45] Olive Chancellor's highly

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[41] James, Henry. *The Complete Notebooks*. Ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). 47.
[42] James, *The Complete Notebooks*. 18-20.
[43] Rowe, John Carlos. *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1984). 91.
[44] For further explanation as to why the characters, especially Verena and Basil, cannot be classified as heroes of the novel, see Charles Anderson's introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Bostonians* (24-27).
[45] Joyce A. Rowe notes in "'Murder, what a lovely voice!'" that most women who were beginning to enter into the public domain in the 1870's were middle-class and were not suffragists (159).

liberal brand of feminism and Basil Ransom's extremely conservative anti-feminism, especially when placed in direct contrast to one another, push the novel beyond depicting a situation that could be occurring anywhere in America in the late 1870's; it is, instead, a more extraordinary situation.[46] Unlike a character such as Jurgis Rudkus from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle,* whose story is representative of thousands of similar stories, James has chosen figures from society's periphery in an attempt to expose how the issues relating to the women's movement and the questioning of gender roles affect the rest of society whose lives are seemingly less directly involved in the battle over reforming gender ideologies within America.

Though the majors characters in *The Bostonians* may be uniquely positioned in society and fail to conform to the archetypal characters found in typical domestic novels, the basic plot outline of the novel perfectly fits the mold of the classic domestic novel: boy meets girl; a mutual attraction is formed; an impediment (in the form of a rival) emerges; love conquers; and girl marries boy. The problem, as Charles Anderson points out, is that at the end of *The Bostonians* "they married and lived *unhappily* ever after."[47] Joseph Boone argues that James created this effect very deliberately in order to fulfill his "desire to evolve a mode of representation capable of expressing an ambivalent vision of marriage beyond the 'happy end' of traditional fictions."[48] James never appears expend

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[46] In some ways Verena seems to be the least realistic character in the sense that her failings seem to result from an unusual hollowness of character, but Habegger argues that "it is femininity that determines her behavior, and this femininity has two related components, a weak capacity for thought and an emotional disposition to yield to others" (217). He is essentially arguing here that the qualities that make up Verena are those that James felt could be located in any woman who is truly feminine, a representative quality that fits squarely in with the tenets of realism.

[47] Anderson, Charles R. Introduction. *The Bostonians.* By Henry James. Ed. Anderson. (New York: Penguin, 1984). 27.

[48] Boone, Joseph A. "Modernist Maneuverings in the Marriage Plot: Breaking the Ideologies of Gender and Genre in James's *The Golden Bowl.*" *PMLA* 101.3 (1986): 374.

to a great deal of time questioning the tendency of domestic novels to depict marriage as one of the most important goals for young women nor does their formulaic nature seem overly problematic for James. He rebelled most against the inevitability in these novels that any turmoil that has existed throughout the courtship disappears after the wedding, allowing the couples to embark on a life of guaranteed happiness based on the combination of love with a proper marriage. James does not believe in the fairy tale ending; instead of the problems ceasing once that sacred vow is taken, they only really begin in earnest. Then, as David Southward argues, in a further attempt at removing idealism from the domestic tale in *The Bostonians,* James also "mute[s] the love story—subjecting it to analysis, suffusing it with ambiguity, and darkening its mood."[49] These specific modifications to realism and to the domestic novel afford James the necessary freedom to represent the threats facing the marital institution from larger social issues, specifically the turbulence surrounding the stronghold of the patriarchal system.

For James, the marital institution remained supremely important in upholding a valid societal system. He always presents permanently unwed characters, such as Ralph Touchett and Miss Birdseye, as anomalies, not as characters readers should emulate. His married characters are never allowed to abandon the system either. However, James lived in a time during which many aspects of society were struggling to adapt to the emerging societal structure. As Joyce Rowe argues, "The world James depicts is precisely a transitional one. In it older gender styles and forms of behavior are confounded as well as confronted with new ones that produce as many contradictions

[49] Southward, David. "Flirtations in Early James." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52.4 (1998): 505.

within each antagonist as oppositions between them."[50] The characters are immersed in a world that has lost its clear cut boundaries. As a result, as Robert Pippin notes, "what is important is to see what they have lost, how little of what they think they understand can fit anywhere."[51] Everything that their society once held to be an unquestioned truth has become widely questioned, and the resultant changes have begun to spread widely. The transitional nature of society spread far beyond the marital institution and changing gender roles, and James saw the threats facing the marital institution becoming lost amidst the focus on the 'larger' social issues such as urbanization and the expansion of the lower class. So, he decided to portray the struggles facing the hearth in an attempt to draw attention to the underlying dangers located there. All of the characters within *The Bostonians* have been deeply affected by these changes, and eventually the reader begins to notice that these changes affect every character slightly differently. Olive and Basil have the most radical views regarding these changes, but all of the characters have formulated their own unique conception of marriage and handle their gender role accordingly. Love also seems to have become confounded in this novel by the unsettled question of how marriage should function and the role each gender plays therein. In order to portray how the marital institution has been affected by these tensions, James depicted a couple content, and even determined, to conform to the most traditional

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[50] Rowe, Joyce A. "'Murder, what a lovely voice!' Sex, Speech and the Public/Private Problem in *The Bostonians*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 40.2 (1998): 176.
[51] Pippin, Robert B. *Henry James and the Modern Moral Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). 56.

patriarchal beliefs and set their courtship in the midst of one of the most vicious battlegrounds in America.[52]

James has placed his characters in the middle of a heated battle between those whom we would contemporarily refer to as feminists and anti-feminists. Throughout *The Bostonians*, James creates a clear comparison between these two camps and explores thoroughly how each group views the marital institution, the doctrine of separate spheres, and proper gender roles. The past thirty years or so has seen an intense debate over which of these factions James supported or, at least, which one garnered more of his sympathy. Many still argue that he uses *The Bostonians* to scorn women's desire and their attempts to be admitted into more public roles, which was the standard reading of this novel for many years after its publication. These critics concur that James portrays the feminists and their ideas as so ridiculous that no sane human could sympathize with their movement based on James's depiction. These critics also believe that however flawed the anti-feminists may be, James sides with them and pushes his readers to as well. In discussing this debate, for instance, Alfred Habegger contends in regard to Basil that "the novel wants us, in spite of everything, to like this man—to wish his career and courtship well, to sense the real distinction in his opinions, to take him seriously as a conservative intellectual. James attacks Basil superficially but backs him on a deeper level."[53] Habegger perfectly expresses the majority position taken by the critics who argue that while James has not created an idealistic or romantic hero to serve as the voice

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[52] The tensions James portrayed here are so marked that William James argued that *The Bostonians* "was about the second civil war, the one going on between men and women" (Townsend 71).
[53] Habegger, Alfred. *Henry James and the 'Woman Business'*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). 191.

of the anti-feminists, James is seeking an understanding from the reader that the anti-feminist characters have right on their side.

Conversely, those who argue against the standard reading claim that James did not intend for his readers to view Basil or the anti-feminist movement sympathetically in this novel tend not to cite sympathetic readings of Olive or any of the other feminists as evidence. Instead, they read the "new and brutal" masculinity of characters such as Basil, of which William James had so approved, as a reproach to those who would support the anti-feminists.[54] Leland Person takes this stance in his work *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity* when he says, "In my view, *The Bostonians* critiques such anti-feminism and interrogates the male subjectivity that sponsors it."[55] Critics such as Person claim that while James may not have found the women involved with the women's movement overly sympathetic, he was even more wary of increasingly unrestrained masculinity. They feel he empathized with the women because he understood the dangers inherent in the patriarchal system which these women fought against and thus implicitly backed their movement. However, any reader who finds James entirely sympathetic to one faction and unsympathetic to the other has missed something fundamental about this novel: James has satirized those who are active on both sides of the issue. The inanities of both sides here undergo attack, and to read this novel as truly supporting either social stance is to misread it. We understand James's position more

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[54] For further information regarding William James's reaction to *The Bostonians*, see Townsend's *Manhood at Harvard.*

[55] Person, Leland. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003). 110.

clearly if we picture, as Pippin does in *Henry James and the Modern Moral Life,* that "offstage, James is more scratching his head, let us say, than wagging his finger."[56]

Instead of writing a novel with the implicit goal of persuading readers to agree or disagree with a certain position in the current debate over proper gender roles and societal organization, James's interest lay in exploring how these larger societal issues affected individual marriages. Though no characters actually marry in *The Bostonians*, James uses Basil and Verena's courtship to reveal how thoroughly the unstable "situation of women" had begun to disturb individual marital situations. More specifically, in this novel he attempted to portray how the marriages of those who still maintain the old patriarchal ideals will be affected. He uses this novel to question whether or not the stronghold of the traditional patriarchal ordering of society has become more of an outmoded male fantasy left over from an already forgotten age. However, his depictions of the philosophies of both factions reveal interesting insights into the relationship between marriage and the tension surrounding each movement.

Within the framework of this novel, as Verena tells Basil during their courtship, most feminists have come to believe that women no longer feel that they must make marriage their career.[57] They want to eradicate the ideas permeated the theories even of more liberal theorists like John Stuart Mill who Armstrong believed based his support for women's suffrage on his belief that "a woman's destiny depends on her desire for a mate, in exchange for which she will readily relinquish a political identity of her own."[58] These feminists also wanted to prove that women who choose to remain unmarried

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[56] Pippin 4.
[57] James, Henry. *The Bostonians.* Ed. Charles R. Anderson. (New York: Penguin, 1886). 329.
[58] James, *The Bostonians.* 39.

should not be considered abnormal or be marginalized within society. In fact, for James, not only do some of the feminists not desire a mate, they seem not to have been created for the purpose of mating at all. In describing Olive, the narrator explains that "there are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are unmarried by option; but Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being. She was a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry."[59] Remaining unmarried for Olive is not a matter of a lack of desire—it is, we are led to believe, encoded in her genes. However, the feminist group as a whole in *The Bostonians* is not opposed to marriage; in fact, their most prominent speaker, Mrs. Farrinder, is married. What they do oppose is a marriage that forces a woman to remain quietly within her household with no political rights or voice of her own. They want women to have the option to have a mate *and,* if they so desire, a political identity of their own.

Marriage and romantic love remained closely associated during late the nineteenth century, but the feminists in *The Bostonians* do not present a set stance on the subject. Romantic love does not seem to have been identified by those involved in the movement as part of the problem within the traditional patriarchal society, at least as it is depicted in *The Bostonians*. Certainly none of the feminists can be found anywhere within *The Bostonians* supporting the ideas of free love and romance outside of marriage that had characterized the early writings of Henry James, Sr. and many later feminists, nor does love become a reason why men should not keep their wives in bondage within marriage. The only indication anywhere in this novel that love plays a different role for some of the feminists than it does for those outside of the movement surfaces in the relationship

[59] James, *The Bostonians*. 47.

between Olive and Verena because here marriage becomes a threat to romantic feelings instead of a natural outcome. Olive's feelings towards Verena, as Mrs. Burrage shrewdly notes, are much deeper and more proprietary than the love usually shared by two bosom friends. In fact, the only major difference between this conception of love and the more traditional conception of romantic love becomes that the sex of one of the partners has changed. William James wrote in his diary that "in love, as against friendship, 'the interest is deepened and concentrated on the mere possibility in the object of being possessed—without so much regard to those qualities that make it worth possessing."[60] His description aptly fits Olive's feelings for Verena. Thus, romantic love for those most closely associated with the movement actually maintains this very characteristic that William James described, the same characteristic that has allowed men to treat women as objects with no need for a political identity or voice of their own.

While the feminists in *The Bostonians* are actively supporting a cause, the anti-feminists in the novel do not believe that they are working to promote a cause but are working, instead, to save a natural and positive way of life which has recently come under attack by unscrupulous mischief-makers. They continue to believe that the established patriarchal order remains the surest method of maintaining a well-ordered and functioning society, meaning that woman's place within society should stay in the home. Her job is to care for her husband, while his is to protect her. Basil, the most vocal anti-feminist in *The Bostonians*, believes the following:

> that women were essentially inferior to men, and infinitely tiresome when they declined to accept the lot which *men* had made for them. He had the most definite

[60] Townsend, Kim. *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others*. (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1996). 51.

> notions about their place in nature, in society, and was perfectly easy in his mind as to whether it excluded them from any proper homage. The chivalrous man paid that tax with alacrity. He admitted their rights; these consisted in a standing claim to the generosity and tenderness of the stronger race.[61]

In this passage, Basil emphasizes his faith in the 'natural' hierarchy of the patriarchal system. For Basil, men are superior to women, and the public sphere is superior to the private; therefore, women must naturally belong in the private sphere, and their inherent rights are only those that are compatible with this position. If the feminists view marriage as merely a job women can choose to accept, those in favor of the more traditional way of ordering society view it as a sacred duty and women's highest calling.

While the feminists in *The Bostonians* mostly ignore romantic love and its possible implications for their cause, those who oppose the movement use love as the primary support for their position. Many, perhaps even most, women found the allure of romantic love more enticing than that of political autonomy, and the anti-feminists in *The Bostonians* use this reasoning accordingly to their advantage. Anderson comments that "in the text of the novel the words most often associated with [Basil] are 'home,' 'family' and 'love'. Those on the lips of the feminists are 'lecture platform', 'the Cause' and 'Justice.'"[62] The anti-feminists realize that lecture platforms and meeting rooms cannot levy the same emotional pull as a structural ordering system that promises women a home, romantic love, and protection. Those against the movement in this novel plainly believe that appeals to emotion will ultimately be a more successful tactic with women

[61] James, *The Bostonians*. 202.
[62] Anderson 22.

than appeals to their intellect. So, the anti-feminists argue that the inherent right of women, as Basil so eloquently states in the above passage, has little to do with a political identity and everything to do with "a standing claim to the generosity and tenderness of the stronger race." Under this system, then, women's greatest right is the right to be loved. However, James never loses sight of the fact that this love that the anti-feminists posit as the greatest gift a woman could hope for is the same love that William James described as the need for possessing an object regardless of its merit.

Attempting to differentiate between Basil's conception of marriage and the anti-feminist stance on marriage in this novel may seem redundant; however, James reveals a complicated philosophy of marriage in Basil that extends far beyond the philosophy of the other anti-feminists in the novel (including Mrs. Luna, Mrs. Burrage, Henry Burrage, and even Dr. Prance). Part of how James distinguishes Basil's ideas about marriage is the strength of his convictions and the vehemence with which he holds to the older patriarchal model. Another crucial difference between Basil and all the other characters is that he comes from Mississippi. Though the Civil War has ended, introducing the tension between the North and the South adds a deepened complexity to the novel. As a displaced southerner who has lost both his wealth and his status, Basil needs marriage to solidify him in a way that the others do not. Leland Person argues that because Basil suffers from a "felt impotence," he needs "economic success and marriage—traditional signs of manly success" to serve as compensation.[63] Marriage will help reinforce Basil's masculinity because he tends to rate his virility in direct proportion to his subjugation of

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[63] Person, Leland. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003). 113.

women. Thus, having a submissive wife would virtually guarantee him a permanently strengthened manhood.

However, James understands that a man like Basil would know that his problems would only increase if he went out and married at the earliest opportunity. Just as Basil has a very specific idea of the proper function of marriage, he harbors distinct conceptions about when marriage is proper and how a marriage should be conducted. Basil primarily believes that in order to justify a woman's subordinance to one man for all eternity, that man must be able to offer her certain compensations beyond the obvious one of love. He must be able to provide economically for the woman, a responsibility Basil takes seriously. Though "he wanted to take possession of Verena, to carry her to a distance . . . he was too shamefully poor, to shabbily and meagrely equipped, to have the right to talk of marriage to a girl in Verena's very particular position. He understood how good that position was, from a worldly point of view."[64] Basil plainly reveals here that he understands that his outlook on marriage differs from the standard viewpoint, which he labels as 'worldly.' Thus, the more traditional patriarchal stance on marriage has become positioned as 'other' in that it is no longer the customary societal position. Further, no matter how capable the woman may be of supporting the family, for Basil the man must be the sole economic provider if he is to expect to stand unopposed in his natural position of dominance. Furthermore, Basil also expresses the belief that even with enough accumulated economic wealth to support a wife, a marriage will only truly be successful if the man marries a woman who appreciates her rightful position as one who is being cared for and will trust her husband in the public domain while she busies

[64] James, *The Bostonians*. 314.

herself with making their private world into a comfortable haven. Basil explicitly explains this viewpoint to Verena after she exclaims to him that his social system has no place for women. He replies, "No place in public. My plan is to keep you at home and have a better time with you there than ever."[65] Because of Basil's need to reconstruct his masculinity through the subservience of a woman, not only will his future wife be barred from having a career, but she must further accept that she can never enter into the public side of the social system. Her job will be solely to administer to and help shoulder the burden of the man to whom she has bound herself. In return, his future wife can expect not only to be provided for but also to have a devoted and even doting husband. Thus, part of what makes Basil unique is his determined chivalry towards the female sex in general and towards his chosen bride in particular.

Basil's views on marriage can perhaps be even more clearly understood by examining why he refuses the amorous advances of Mrs. Luna. She makes her designs towards him quite apparent as she attempts to court him throughout the course of the novel. In one sense, as both Mrs. Luna and Olive take for granted, Basil and Mrs. Luna seem to be the most sensible match between any of the characters, largely due to their mutual disdain for the women's movement. Mrs. Luna does not harbor a secret desire to acquire a political identity of her own and finds nothing but pleasure in the idea of having her name attached to a man. Their distant relation to one another lends another favorable aspect to this potential match. Finally, if Person is correct in his deduction that Basil needs economic success and marriage in order to recover his masculinity fully, a marriage to Mrs. Luna could gain him both in one shrewd movement. Mrs. Luna has a

[65] James, *The Bostonians*. 328.

large fortune left to her by her late husband that Basil could manage while enjoying the benefits of an instant rise in social and economic status, and, not surprisingly, he finds these enticements momentarily seductive. Towards the end of one of Basil's last visits to Mrs. Luna's home, the narrator explains Basil's state of mind by noting, "At the end of the hour he felt, I will not say almost marriageable, but almost married. Images of leisure played before him, leisure in which he saw himself covering foolscap paper with his views on several subjects, and with favorable illustrations of Southern eloquence."[66] However, as Basil soon realizes during this reverie, the gender roles in this courtship have been reversed—Mrs. Luna's purse gives her the power in the relationship, and he has become the pursued, which means that this marriage would entitle him to none of the proprietary masculine "rights" in which he places such stock. All the money in the world cannot induce a man like Basil Ransom to give up the rights that his masculinity affords him under the traditional patriarchal system. Mrs. Luna could never truly be a suitable wife for Basil because of her threats to his masculinity.

A reader unacquainted with any of the particulars of James's life would likely be tempted to attribute Basil's idiosyncrasies about marriage to his Southern heritage, but as several critics have noted, the origin of many of Basil's ideas concerning the marital institution can be traced directly back to the philosophies of James's father. The form of marriage Basil so blatantly desires is the exact version of marriage that Henry James, Sr. publicly advocated. As Habegger explains in *Henry James and the "Woman Business,"* James Jr. openly declared a sympathy towards his father's views concerning the position

[66] James, *The Bostonians.* 205.

of women in society and the idea of separate spheres,[67] but his sympathies do not extend so deeply that his father's philosophies enjoy a privileged position safe from James's satirical pen in *The Bostonians*. Indeed, many of Basil's ideas most nearly resembling those of James Sr. suffer the brunt of James's satire. For instance, when discussing their future marital prospects, Basil explains to Verena that women "have one source of happiness that is closed to us—the consciousness that their presence here below lifts half the load of *our* suffering."[68] This idea bears a direct correlation to James Sr.'s belief that "everything is calculated with certain male needs in mind, and women's own dissatisfactions or desires or liberties never once enter into the matter. Woman is man's angel, a totally different kind of being from himself."[69] For both of these men, woman's role is to help alleviate the suffering of the man, and because she is an "angel" who has descended "below," her own needs do not require tending. However, though Verena finds this idea "graceful," James's treatment of this idea is not as one full of grace. The novel makes clear that James finds this idea threatening to the marital institution because it turns the love Basil offers Verena into less a love for a particular woman and more a love for the unburdening that he can enjoy at her expense. Such blatant inequality in marriage will always endanger the marital institution because of the inevitable dissatisfaction that follows. His father's anti-feminist belief that women are men's intellectual inferiors also surfaces quite clearly in Basil to the effect previously mentioned of creating such a brutal masculinity so as to reinforce the need for feminism, thus

[67] Habegger 47-54.
[68] James, *The Bostonians*. 327.
[69] Habegger 36.

producing exactly the opposite effect Basil needs to occur in order to ensure the continuation of the patriarchal mindset.

While Basil's views on marriage do categorically belong to the philosophies of one of the two factions within the novel, Verena's ideas regarding marriage cannot be so easily defined, in part because she herself defies categorization and in part because James does not reveal her beliefs in the same systematic way as he does for Basil. The only concrete reference made to Verena's views on marriage before her courtship with Basil occurs during one of her first interviews with Olive. Verena explains to her that she had "grown up among . . . people who disapproved of the marriage-tie. Verena talked of the marriage-tie as she would have talked of the last novel—as if she had heard it as frequently discussed."[70] She relates further that she prefers "free unions," but the narrator deftly reveals in this passage that Verena's ideas about marriage are nothing more than a parroted version of what she has heard discussed among her parents' friends and has little to do with her actual feelings on the subject, of which James indicates that she has little. While the feminists whom she admires, particularly Olive, strongly disapprove of the marital institution, Verena's disapproval stems only from the desire to be agreeable. However, she does not honestly seem to believe in marriage as the highest and most sacred of women's duties either. Her willingness to promise Olive that she will never marry does not appear forced or false. In short, marriage as an institution seems not to have been a subject of particular interest for Verena; even when her interest in marrying becomes intense, it is only the individual marriage and not the system of marriage that she focuses upon.

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[70] James, *The Bostonians*. 105.

Accordingly, Verena's sense of what elements must be present in a marriage in order for that marriage to be successful cannot be clearly defined, which James views as problematic because marriage requires forethought and serious planning. While Basil's idea of what characteristics his future bride must have can be easily traced throughout *The Bostonians*, Verena never daydreams in the novel about her future husband/marriage, which as Barbara Welter's argument throughout *Dimity Convictions* suggests, would have been highly unusual in a young woman of marriageable age in the late 1800's.[71] James seems here to believe that young women's daydreams are beneficial as long as they avoid becoming too idealistic. Verena's reason for not daydreaming is that she claims to prefer "free unions," but she fails to back up that statement or even to define what she means by this term. All of her actions and motivations arise from one of two sources—the will of another or an emotional reaction. Verena can easily promise Olive that she will never marry because Olive holds sway over Verena's strongest emotions during the time when Olive attempts to extract this promise, but when a stronger will with an accompanying emotional force arrives, Verena becomes prey to that will instead. If she cares about money, social status, or even social norms, the narrator never informs the reader of these feelings; her focus always seems to be on immediate gratification, which she often derives through making someone close to her happy. In a sense, Verena's failure to indulge in daydreams and to plan for her future marriage becomes even more dangerous than idealistic imaginings because when she marries Basil she will be totally unprepared to extract any benefits for herself out of this union.

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[71] Welter, Barbara. *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976).

Just as he did for Isabel Archer five years before, James presents several suitors to Verena who make offers worthy of being taken seriously. And, like Isabel, Verena does not even consider the offers made to her by Matthias Pardon or Henry Burrage. Matthias becomes interested in Verena and makes his intentions known before either Henry or Basil does. His interest also precedes Olive's, but he does not manage to propose before Olive enters onto the scene and usurps all Verena's attention. Verena's decision to marry Matthias, however, would have been sensible from a social standpoint. On the more practical level, Verena's father favors Matthias over the other suitors: "It was Tarrant's conviction that if Matthias Pardon should seek Verena in marriage, it would be with the view of producing her in public; and the advantage for the girl of having a husband who was at the same time reporter, interviewer, manager, agent, who had command of the principal 'dailies', would write her up and work her, as it were, scientifically—the attraction of all this was too obvious to be insisted on."[72] Matthias's intentions seem to be more of a business proposition than a romantic endeavor, at least from the vantage point of Tarrant, who always remains most interested in his daughter from a business perspective. However, the narrator also explains that it was Matthias's "impression that he himself was in love with Verena, but his passion was not a jealous one, and included a remarkable disposition to share the object of his affection with the American people."[73] On paper, Matthias appears to be the perfect man for Verena; he loves her and part of what he loves so much about her is her gift, and he keenly desires for her to share this gift, an activity she finds immensely enjoyable. Verena admits to Olive that Matthias

[72] James, *The Bostonians*. 140.
[73] James, *The Bostonians*. 140.

"does place things in a very seductive light" and that Olive "ought to allow that all that is rather dazzling—for [Verena] is not naturally concentrated like [Olive]!"[74] She finds the offer 'seductive' and 'dazzling' and knows that he would allow her to continue both with the women's movement and with her friendship with Olive, but she still refuses the offer without hesitation. Even with all of these inducements, the reasons behind her rejection can be easily discerned. First, Olive uses a large store of the force of her will to discourage the idea of Verena's even marrying, and second, Matthias needs a jealous and demanding personality if he wants to make Verena's choice difficult because she will always seek to please the least contented person. Verena may be easily distracted by sparkly pretty things, but it will take force to break her from the attachment she has made with Olive. Of the three offers Verena receives, the marriage to Matthias comes across as Verena's shrewdest move because he would allow her the greatest personal freedom and has the least proprietary interest in her. Yet, James clearly does not attempt to overly engage his readers' emotions in this possible union. The marriage would be too blatantly connected to business/commerce and lacks the necessary emotional aspects.

Henry has the misfortune of meeting Verena during the formation of her friendship with Olive, but this timing also allows him to perceive that the main obstacle to gaining Verena's affection has become obtaining the approval of Olive, which he sets out to accomplish immediately. However, he realizes that he stands in a position of great advantage because he can offer Verena a security and social standing that she is unlikely to receive through any means other than marriage to him. Much to Mrs. Tarrant's delight, this match does not conform to the proper social standards because of the large

[74] James, *The Bostonians.* 159.

gap in their social status, but Henry himself has no interest in marrying for proper social reasons. He has another motivation. In the grand tradition of James characters including Gilbert Osmond and Adam Verver, Henry Burrage is a collector: "He collected beautiful things, pictures and antiques and objects that he sent for to Europe on purpose."[75] Henry enjoys surrounding himself with interesting and beautiful objects, and he admits to Verena that his interest in her is proprietary: "The furthest he had gone as yet was to tell her that he liked her for the same reason that he liked old enamels and old embroideries; and when she said that she didn't see how she resembled such things, he had replied that it was because she was so peculiar and delicate."[76] He wants Verena and uses all of his available means in his quest to obtain her for his collection. However, his desire does not equal Olive's whose interest in Verena can also be described as proprietary, because Olive has become emotionally involved with the young woman, and Henry is no more emotionally involved with her than he would be an old embroidery. But, he still makes love to her, and had Verena been even slightly encouraged by Olive, she would probably have made this match as well. Thus far, both of her decisions regarding marriage have much less to do with her own feelings than with Olive's. In James, marrying a collector virtually assures an unhappy future as nothing more than a prized possession, but he has already explored the danger posed by collectors to the marital institution in depth in *The Portrait of a Lady* and thus focuses his attention on a different though equally volatile threat posed by the clash of gender ideologies.

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[75] James, *The Bostonians*. 160-61.
[76] James, *The Bostonians*. 161.

This threat starts becoming most apparent in *The Bostonians* when Basil begins to pursue Verena earnestly, who has already refused two offers of marriage, both favorable opportunities for her and her family, almost exclusively because she knows how painful her marriage would be for Olive. Verena also understands Basil inspires the greatest horror in Olive and has the least to offer from society's perspective. Yet she falls for him. And, she agrees to marry him. A discerning reader will not construe the flight away from the hall at the end of the novel as a kidnapping, suggesting that Verena has discovered something in unique in Basil. She realizes by their third meeting, the clandestine walk through Cambridge, that Basil holds a certain power over her, though she does not yet know what it might be. While her other suitors make love to her, she has learned to "dissimulate" and can even "pretend not to notice" during their love-making speeches;[77] Basil renders her incapable of utilizing such safeguards. Fleeing from him becomes the only action Verena can conceive of to prevent her from undertaking an irreparable deed. As the narrator notes, "We don't run away from people unless we fear them and that we don't fear them unless we know that we are unarmed."[78] Verena knows she is unarmed even while she does not completely understand the weapons in Basil's arsenal.

His most powerful weapon, the weapon no other man has, is that not only does he truly understand her but he is attracted solely to the one element that most clearly defines Verena—her "singular hollowness of character."[79] Olive understands this peculiar trait of Verena's also, and she desperately seeks to keep the hollow area completely filled with

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[77] James, *The Bostonians*. 286.
[78] James, *The Bostonians*. 365.
[79] James, *The Bostonians*. 85.

their relationship and their dedication to the women's movement. However, Olive knows that "the reality was simply that Verena had been more to her than she ever was to Verena, and that, with her exquisite natural art, the girl had cared for their cause only because, for the time, no interest, no fascination, was greater."[80] She needs Verena, and for a while that need alone cements their relationship, but then Basil arrives and makes Verena understand that while he needs her, she also needs him in a very vital way. Basil will be Verena's last interest, her last fascination, because their relationship is based on reciprocity. He needs her to bear half his burden, and she needs him to help her to understand herself. Basil instinctively knows that Verena's interest in the women's movement has little to do with believing in their cause and everything to do with her desire to please others.[81] Basil is the only character in *The Bostonians* capable of forming this insight; even Verena herself does not fully recognize this facet of her personality. She has to believe in her own sincerity because if she did not her ability to be pleasing would diminish. Only when Basil explains to her that she does not believe in the feminist cause does Verena truly begin to understand that her motivation does not stem from outrage at the plight of women historically. At the very least, she comes to believe in his understanding of her. His words, "the most effective and penetrating he had uttered, had sunk into her soul and worked and fermented there. She had come at last to believe them, and that was the alteration, the transformation."[82] Verena's transformation marks a turning point in the novel; before, the major tension emanated from the conflict between the feminists and their detractors. Once Basil convinces Verena of the veracity of his

[80] James, *The Bostonians*. 397.
[81] James, *The Bostonians*. 85.
[82] James, *The Bostonians*. 374.

claim, the contrast between Verena's and Basil's desire to establish a marriage conforming to the most traditional patriarchal values and the social upheavals surrounding that ideology form the crux of the conflict in the novel. Though Verena remains firm in her denunciation of all that she had embraced, the discarded philosophies do not simply disappear. Along with continual pressure to change because of the societal shift away from such traditional marriages, those beliefs will also intrude from within. Verena may have renounced those beliefs, but she cannot have forgotten them.

Olive callously believes, or at least attempts to convince herself, that Basil becomes interested in Verena only as a means of crippling the woman's movement, but Verena quickly perceives that his interest is entirely in her personally. However, James also describes Basil's conception of an ideal woman, and Verena clearly does not meet the criteria, at least superficially. Her interest in the movement along with her penchant for public speaking theoretically should remove Verena far from Basil's thoughts. But, he sees through these superficial additions created for the edification of others. Allen claims that what Basil comes to love about Verena is that she "can be anything for anyone, she no longer even has the autonomy and clarity of signifying anything clear cut, perhaps only 'potential', potential meaning."[83] Even more than that though, she can be *everything* for him, and to do so comes naturally to her. Allen points out that in the nineteenth century a woman was expected to "embrace her own subservience—indeed a true woman does so 'naturally.'"[84] In this respect, Verena is all woman. She will take her subservience seriously and allow her will to become completely malleable to Basil's

[83] Allen 84.
[84] Allen 14.

desires, meaning that she will never question his authority and that she will also remain pretty and clever and delicate so that he can be devoted to her in return.

Of course, if one could ask Verena or Basil why they decided to marry each other, their answer would be much simpler than the one given above; they would simply reply, "love." Love, especially in a James novel, however, is never so deceptively simple. Jamesian love is complicated, assuming many shapes as he grappled with it throughout his career. James never portrayed love in that catchall version so common in domestic novels wherein it becomes the solution to all of life's problems and the anecdote to society's ills. "Indeed," Southward argues, "a certain skepticism about love may be said to mark the modern era as it was interpreted by James."[85] Part of James's skepticism, as Mark Seltzer notes in a chapter on *The Golden Bowl,* arises from his belief that love has become the word people use in order to "exercise" power over those with whom they have become intimate.[86] Love and power play decidedly interconnected roles in *The Bostonians* as well. However, whereas in *The Golden Bowl* both partners in a relationship struggle to exercise power over the other, in *The Bostonians* a love relationship can be more accurately characterized as one member of the relationship obtaining complete power over the other and exercising it in a state of total domination, which conforms perfectly to the traditional patriarchal ideology endorsed by James Sr., among others. Verena never seeks power over either Olive or Basil, but both want complete control over her. Love here describes a union of fundamentally opposite beings within a hierarchy of dominance, leading to a dangerous imbalance of power. Habegger

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[85] Southward 493.
[86] Seltzer, Mark. *Henry James and the Art of Power.* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984). 62.

argues that relationships with this level of imbalance were viewed as normal in the nineteenth century, at least within the James household.[87] However, the imbalance created within the union between Verena and Basil was supposed to be counteracted by a powerful and binding attraction, which should theoretically allow each partner to meet the needs of the other in a way that no one else could. For instance, Basil *needs* to have someone dependent upon him and his masculine ego for survival, and Verena finds her greatest happiness through filling the needs of another and through Basil's complete understanding of who she is. But even if James believed at some point that this type of relationship and this definition of love could bring happiness, *The Bostonians* shows that he now views this type of relationship as highly unstable.

However insecure James felt about this less-than-perfect version of love, the rather dismal outlook for the Ransoms' future cannot be solely attributed to an imperfect ideal of love. The imbalance in the relationship between Basil and Verena extends beyond their definition of love. For instance, for their relationship to exist under the terms they have defined, Verena will be forced to give up far more than Basil will. In truth, Basil stands to lose very little while gaining immensely from this marriage, while Verena has to sacrifice everything that she has held dear in her life up to this point: "She was to burn everything she had adored; she was to adore everything that she had burned."[88] While Verena remains under the glow of new love, she probably will not feel the scalding effects of this burning, but as life settles down, she will be forced to learn to live without many comforts and old habits which have grown dear. Not only will her

[87] Habegger 51.
[88] James, *The Bostonians*. 374

relationship with Olive be severed, she will have to renounce her old community in its entirety. Regardless of whether Basil will take the same approach as Olive did and permit Verena to visit her mother, he will not allow Verena any illusions about maintaining any part of her life associated with her father whom Basil sees as "the cheapest kind of human product."[89] Even though Verena's life cannot be categorized as wonderful before Basil's arrival, her sacrifices will eventually weigh on her spirit, especially once she realizes that Basil did not have to give up anything so important as to have it be considered a sacrifice.

While Verena flatters herself that she understands that their union will be filled with hardship, Basil does not hesitate to characterize their relationship in terms of the difficulties that lie ahead during his attempts at wooing her:

> He allowed her, certainly, no illusion on the subject of the fate she should meet as his wife; he flung over it no rosiness of promised ease; he let her know that she should be poor, withdrawn from view, a partner of his struggle, of his severe, hard, unique stoicism. . . . She felt that to throw herself into this life (bare and arid as for the time it was) was the condition of happiness for her, and yet that the obstacles were terrible, cruel.[90]

This characterization of their future hardships, accurate though it may be, omits any version of suffering that would not appeal to the sense of stoicism that Welter argues young women of the nineteenth century longed to experience in their attempts to prove

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[89] James, *The Bostonians.* 82.
[90] James, *The Bostonians.* 375.

themselves to be "true women."[91] In reality, factors such as a never-ending loneliness will quickly become so monotonous and wearying as to lose the savor of martyrdom. Furthermore, Verena and Basil face the shock of discovering that though Verena may have the disposition necessary to transform into a model woman under the patriarchal system of the separate spheres, she does not have the training. Contrary to what men may have wanted to believe, a little girl is not born with the innate knowledge of how to run a proper household, and Verena's mother, as interested in society as she was, did not prepare her daughter to run her own home. Welter explains that "a dutiful daughter . . . was expected to help her mother in tasks recognized as 'female,' and mothers were advised to subtly direct their daughters toward those skills which would be most useful to them in maturity. These tasks were supposed to inculcate equally well-recognized feminine 'virtues.'"[92] A woman began her training to be a wife and mother as a young girl, and the training continued until she married. Even after marriage, a young woman could still turn to her mother and other women in her family for advice in running a household. Verena has neither of those advantages. The narrator notes, "That branch of the education of young ladies, known as 'manners and deportment' had not yet figured, as a definite head, in Miss Tarrant's curriculum. She had been told, indeed, that she must not lie or steal; but she had been told very little else about behavior; her only great advantage, in short, had been the parental example."[93] Verena's parents believed her value would lie in her ability at public speaking and not in undertaking the more traditional role of housewife. As a result, Verena will quickly discover that while she

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[91] Welter 12.
[92] Welter 4.
[93] James, *The Bostonians.* 117.

may have substantial experience at being poor, she has no experience in creating the traditional household that Basil will expect, resulting in painful difficulties for her as she will no longer be deemed as pleasing in Basil's eyes, and, therefore, in her own as well.

As a result, although Basil and Verena are determined to create a marriage that will function according to the traditional ideals, the constant intrusion of a rapidly changing society into their lives, the lack of traditional womanly knowledge on Verena's part, and a profound imbalance of love and power will all seriously undermine their efforts. Basil understands that society has begun to move away from the older system of the separate spheres. He says, "The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity."[94] Whether or not his characterization of society rings true, it reveals that he understands that society no longer holds to the same ideals to which he clings. But, what he does not understand is that for the system to work, it must be completely backed by society as a whole because otherwise even the women who still believe in the system will begin to take liberties that will eventually weaken it enough to cause its ruination. Verena and Basil's marriage risks becoming an absurd parody, an anachronism that will not be able to sustain itself under the force of change. If part of James's project in writing *The Bostonians* was as an attempt to discover whether a marriage could exist that would be unaffected by the tension resulting from the societal clashes over patriarchal ideologies, his ending deftly shows that the chances for success would be inordinately slim, which he

[94] James, *The Bostonians*. 327.

reveals most powerfully through his final comments that the marriage between Basil and Verena will be "far from brilliant" and is destined to be filled with tears.[95]

[95] James, *The Bostonians*. 433.

## Chapter 3: *The Portrait of a Lady* and the Failure of Independence

In *The Bostonians,* James explores the shifting conceptions of gender roles and of the separate spheres and their effect upon a traditional marriage from outside. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, he inverts this scheme. This time, the strain placed on the marital institution stems not from outside social forces but from the inner beliefs of the protagonist, Isabel Archer. Accordingly, James uses a writing style for this novel that better suits this new emphasis. *The Bostonians* fits neatly into the typical expectations of a domestic novel's plot until the end when James prophecies the fate of Basil Ransom and his wife-to-be, Verena Tarrant, to live 'unhappily ever after.' Even taking into consideration this reversal at the end, *The Portrait of a Lady* strays much further away from the genre of domestic novel than *The Bostonians*, primarily because Gilbert Osmond can be more aptly described as an antihero than a hero, and a domestic novel would never allow the woman to marry and remain married to an antihero.

While *The Bostonians* more strongly resembles the genre of domestic fiction, *The Portrait of a Lady* can be categorized as securely situated within the genre of realism. Olive, Verena, and Basil are fairly exaggerated versions of American types whose characteristics do not conform to realist principles; Isabel, on the other hand, can easily be labeled the quintessential American girl. Though James develops her character into that of a highly individualized young woman, her most fundamental characteristics match those of the rising new type of young American women. In order to explore how these seemingly natural, though rather recently developed, characteristics of these young

women have begun to affect the marital institution, James centers *The Portrait of a Lady* almost solely around Isabel's inner life instead of delving in a more limited manner into the minds of several characters as he did in *The Bostonians*. Furthermore, while *The Bostonians* is a plot-driven novel, James placed plot as low in priority for *The Portrait of a Lady*. He explains in his preface to the New York edition: "Trying to recover here, for recognition, the germ of my idea, I see that it must have consisted not at all in any conceit of a 'plot,' . . . but altogether in a sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman."[96] The plot existed only so that he might explore how Isabel, as the representative of this new type of woman, would react in certain given situations. Interestingly however, much of the plotline consists of a woman "affronting her destiny,"[97] and much of that destiny revolves around marriage.

The reason for the inverted chronological order of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians* in this study is partly that in this novel James not only implies that the marriage will be unhappy, but he also draws the reader directly into the unhappiness of his characters after the marriage between Osmond and Isabel occurs, thus forcefully pushing his readers to confront these threats to the marital institution more directly. In *The Bostonians,* we never get a glimpse of the marriage and so can only conjecture how the societal shifts in thought and practice will actually affect the marriage; in *The Portrait of a Lady*, James allows his readers no such luxury. Isabel may hide the unhappiness of her marriage from those whom she loves, but James reveals the full extent of her and Osmond's troubles to the reader. Then, to enhance this effect further, James refuses to

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[96] James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948). 42.
[97] James, *The Art of the Novel* 48.

bow to the conventional himself by allowing a resolution to their troubles. Joseph Boone feels that James left the ending open very purposefully: "Refusing to lay issues to rest because irresolution is part of the meaning, the open-ended text passes its tension onto the reader, who must actively struggle with the unsettling question raised but left unresolved by the narrative."[98] Robert Pippin claims that these unsettling questions that James posed revolve around "the moral issues of independence and dependence, or freedom and convention."[99] Pippin is correct in arguing that the issues of independence and freedom are at the center of the novel, but even more specificity is required. The novel focuses on freedom and independence, not for their own sakes, but in relation to the marital institution.

Isabel represents other young American women primarily through her enlarged sense of independence and freedom. Though Isabel does not actively involve herself in the woman's movement, she has thoroughly internalized many of its precepts. She believes wholeheartedly in women's rights to independence and liberty. James uses Isabel to help him discover how these liberated young ladies react to the concept of marriage and whether they are capable of engaging in a successful one themselves. However, as Donatella Izzo explains, a certain line of critical thought holds that James "condemn[s] his heroine from the very start."[100] These critics argue that James has no intention of allowing a woman with liberated views to carve out a successful life or marriage for herself, but that, instead, he saddles her with many imperfections including,

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[98] Boone, Joseph A. "Modernist Maneuverings in the Marriage Plot: Breaking the Ideologies of Gender and Genre in James's *The Golden Bowl*." *PMLA* 101.3 (1986): 377.
[99] Pippin, Robert B. *Henry James and the Modern Moral Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). 132.
[100] Izzo, Donatella. *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*. (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2001). 12.

as Priscilla Walton lists, "irrationality, submission, and passivity" to ensure her failure.[101] Indeed, James endowed Isabel with many flaws, but his purpose was not to ensure her failure; he gives her flaws in order to depict her as an everyday, ordinary character representative of real life, a necessary step if his experiment is to work. A flawless feminist heroine might be assured a happy marriage, but she would be incapable of helping him to expose the underlying tension between the beliefs of independent young women and the traditional mores of the patriarchal marital system.

Understanding Isabel's liberated beliefs towards her gender in general and marriage in particular is crucial in discovering how these beliefs affect the marital institution. Pippin argues that in *The Portrait of a Lady*, "There is plenty of struggle, but it is not 'with society' or fate, or with some identifiable objective force, but among individuals."[102] While Isabel may not struggle against 'society' or 'fate,' her struggles against other characters have important implications concerning the threat facing the larger marital institution so that we must explore where these struggles originate and which of her specific belief systems matter most in this regard. However, James warns his readers in his preface that "it was naturally of the essence that the young woman should be herself complex; that was rudimentary."[103] Isabel is an amalgamation of varying and often interrelated characteristics so that to explore fully all of these characteristics would be a task far beyond the scope of this project, which will only examine the characteristics that both directly allow Isabel to stand as a representative of a certain class of woman and directly influence her view of the marital institution.

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[101] Walton, Priscilla L. *The Disruption of the Feminine in Henry James.* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1995). 52.
[102] Pippin 16.
[103] James, *The Art of the Novel.* 52.

Isabel's trait that most obviously relates to the marital institution has to be her identification with the 'new woman' or feminist movement. In his introduction to *The Portrait of a Lady*, Geoffrey Moore describes Isabel as "the New Woman of the 1870s, perhaps the first feminist in English fiction."[104] Leaving aside his classification of this novel as English (even though the majority of the characters are Americans, albeit displaced ones), Moore points out a crucial facet of Isabel's identity. She must absolutely be classified within this new category of women even though she never so much as acknowledges the existence of the women's movement because of her firm belief in the inherent right of women to independence and freedom. In describing a typical female reformer, Barbara Welter gives a description that aptly fits Isabel: "Some of the woman's rights reformers challenged the limitations of the female role and function; most accepted the definition of a woman's nature."[105] Isabel never shies away from her femininity, but she also does not believe in a traditional system that would confine her to remain strictly within the private sphere where she would be allowed only "authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations."[106] In that sense, she is a combination of Olive and Verena, at least in her political and marital views. Like Olive, Isabel desperately wants authority over her own intellect and the independence to make her own decisions. Both also view the marital institution rather suspiciously as potentially oppressive. However, like Verena, Isabel never scorns the male gender and understands that women have a particular role to play in life in conjunction with their

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[104] Moore, Geoffrey. Introduction. *The Portrait of a Lady*. By Henry James. Ed. Moore.( New York: Penguin, 1984). 16.
[105] Welter, Barbara. *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976). 15.
[106] Armstrong 3.

male counterparts. James even attributes some of Verena's most integral characteristics to Isabel. The most important aspect of Verena's personality is her desire to please others, and the narrator of *The Portrait of a Lady* explains that "Isabel had in the depths of her nature an . . . unquenchable desire to please . . .; but the depths of this young lady's nature were a very out-of-the-way place, between which and the surface communication was interrupted by a dozen capricious forces."[107] Thus, though Isabel also has the potential for succumbing to the same all-consuming submissive desire to please as Verena does, she submerges it underneath her desire for independence, moving her to the opposite end of the spectrum so that she can present herself as someone primarily interested in a life of pleasing herself.

If Isabel's feminist tendencies play the central role in understanding her views on marriage, the main characteristic that inches her towards this sympathy would accordingly be her independent nature.[108] Isabel's independence, along with her imagination and her ego, naturally make her wary of the marital system, and James focuses on portraying how these three elements, becoming so common in many American girls, affected the marital institution. Isabel defines herself through her independent nature, and so do most of the characters who observe her. James stresses the importance of her independence from his earliest descriptions of Isabel; in the telegram Mrs. Touchett sends her husband to inform him of her immanent arrival with her niece,

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[107] James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*. Ed. Geoffrey Moore. (New York: Penguin, 1881). 88.
[108] Allen notes that the aspect of American girls that most clearly set them apart from their European counterparts in the late nineteenth century was the extent of their freedom (22-25), allowing Isabel's independence to further reinforce her status as representative of a particular version of American girl. Furthermore, by placing the action predominantly in Europe, Isabel's freedom becomes even more striking in comparison to the lack of freedom of European girls like the Misses Molyneux and Pansy Osmond.

her only description of Isabel is that she is "quite independent."[109] Isabel's independence cannot be classified as financial or even as an independence from societal constraints. Isabel tells Goodwood long before she inherits her fortune that "if there's one thing [she's] fond of . . . it's [her] personal independence."[110] She does not enjoy an independence from the mores of society either. Pippin explains that "if characters like Isabel Archer . . . do manage a kind of morally significant independence, do manage to 'break free' in some sense, it is not a heroic or romantic independence. It also involves some sort of concession to the specific requirements of modern sociality."[111] James reveals the extent of the constriction placed on Isabel by modern society in an early scene in which she desires to stay and converse with Ralph and Lord Warburton even though the rest of the house has retired, which her aunt forbids because of the social unacceptability of the act, and she forces Isabel to acquiesce to her command. The independence that Isabel holds so dear, then, can most accurately be described as a sort of mental independence. She believes firmly that "it had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast."[112] She believes in the distinct quality of her mind and longs for an independence that will allow her to act on whatever theories or whims may originate in her thoughts.

Isabel's independence stems from her faith in the quality of her own mind, a faith that perhaps even her creator does not share; this faith produces another of Isabel's defining characteristics—her ego. However, if her independence becomes her best quality, her large ego would then be her tragic flaw, and one that cannot be separated

[109] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 67.
[110] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 213.
[111] Pippin 60.
[112] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 103.

from her greatest strengths. Though Isabel's awareness of her egotism remains rather subconscious, it plays a decisive role in determining her fate and in influencing her attitude towards marriage. The narrator explains that "she had no talent for expression and too little of the consciousness of the genius; she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were rather superior. Whether or no she were superior, people were right in admiring her if they thought her so; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs."[113] Thus, Isabel characterizes her feeling, not in terms of a superiority over others, but in believing that they are correct in considering themselves her inferior. Furthermore, in this passage not only does James expose her ego, but he exposes the flaw in this ego. Her mind has 'no talent for expression' and cannot be considered on the level of genius so that any superiority lies in her mind's speed rather than its quality. Moore reveals the tragic nature of this flaw when he says, "False pride, as we have been told, brings Isabel low, having too great an opinion of herself."[114] Her false pride becomes her tragic flaw because it blinds her to many realities and keeps her convinced of her own right thinking, thus negatively influencing many decisions that she makes regarding marriages (both those she rejects and the one she accepts).

While Isabel's ego aids her independence, her imagination aids her ego. If expression and rationality cannot be found 'superior' in Isabel, her imagination certainly can, and, as we learn, it is "remarkably active."[115] Often Isabel allows her imagination to

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[113] James, *The Portrait of a Lady.* 103-04.
[114] Moore 13.
[115] James, *The Portrait of a Lady.* 103.

carry her instead of analyzing more logically. Indeed, the narrator points out that Isabel's imagination is her primary guide in decision making:

> Her imagination was by habit ridiculously active; when the door was not open it jumped out of the window. She was not accustomed indeed to keep it behind bolts; and at important moments, when she would have been thankful to make use of her judgment alone, she paid the penalty of having given undue encouragement to the faculty of seeing without judging.[116]

Thus, throughout the novel Isabel's intent to live a successful life without sacrificing her independence becomes thwarted by her flights of imagination which she allows to supersede careful analysis and the necessity of weighing facts when making decisions. Her imagination also accounts for her regular inability to explain rationally the momentous decisions that she makes throughout this novel, specifically her rejection and then acceptance of the various suitors in her life. Additionally, Isabel's imagination fosters her independence not only through its ability to factor into her decisions but also through its tendency to blind her from seeing that she undeniably reacts and is placed in various situations solely at the discretion of others who guide her with an unseen hand rather than through her own free will. Perhaps most unfortunately though, Isabel has the tendency to rely on her imagination to inform her perception of future marriages, thus blinding her to many warnings that existed before she married Osmond.

Unsurprisingly, James portrays this woman with such an active mind as having many distinct thoughts concerning marriage. As is the case with many other issues, Isabel's beliefs on marriage are somewhat of a compromise between those of Verena and

[116] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 87.

Olive. When Ralph questions Isabel on the subject of marriage, she says to him, "I don't see what harm there is in my wishing not to tie myself. I don't want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do."[117] Clearly Isabel, like Olive, does not accept the argument that a woman's fundamental purpose in life is to marry and care for a husband and children. She believes, as Olive does, that women have talents and abilities that would serve them in arenas outside the domestic sphere. However, Isabel only claims here that she does not want to marry early in her life; she does not rule marriage out altogether. Her relationship with marriage throughout the entire novel remains ambiguous and tense. In many ways Isabel sees marriage as nothing more than a loss of liberty and scorns the "horribly ignorant women"[118] whom Ralph categorizes as those who "did nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny."[119] For Isabel, these women subscribe to an embarrassingly old-fashioned philosophy, and she obviously believes that their attitude should be eradicated from its relation to femininity: "[Isabel] held that a woman ought to be able to live to herself, in the absence of exceptional flimsiness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex."[120] Isabel holds *all* women accountable to this standard; she believes every woman should have the fortitude to secure her own happiness without having to rely on a male, but Isabel would also probably concede that many women already do hold themselves to this philosophy, including her close friend Henrietta Stackpole.

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[117] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 203.
[118] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 100.
[119] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*.116.
[120] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 106.

However, the loss of liberty that Isabel associates with marriage does not stem solely from societal forces or from her observations of the marriages of others. The narrator notes that "deep in her soul—it was the deepest thing there—lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive."[121] In wholly giving herself, she would permanently renounce her independence. Marriage, then, equals submission, if not bodily, at least spiritually for Isabel, and that thought terrifies her. Of course, once she actually gets engaged, Isabel has to rescind, or at least qualify, her previous statements, and she now tells Ralph that "there's nothing higher than for a girl to marry a—a person she likes."[122] However, she falters in the middle of her statement, exposing her own hesitance to fully support her claim. Indeed, at the end of the novel Isabel reveals that her true beliefs concerning marriage remain in line with her earliest claims through her reaction to the news that the other young woman of great independence in the novel, Henrietta, has gotten engaged. Isabel thinks to herself that "it was a disappointment to find [Henrietta] had personal susceptibilities, that she was subject to common passions, that her intimacy with Mr. Bantling had not been completely original. There was a want of originality in marrying him—there was even a kind of stupidity."[123] Henrietta's prospects of marital bliss with Mr. Bantling are conclusively higher than Isabel's ever were with Osmond because of the great friendship that will serve as the foundation of Henrietta's marriage. Isabel here undoubtedly does not react against the man—she reacts against the institution. Perhaps even more so than before her marriage, Isabel has developed a keen sense of

[121] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 106-07.
[122] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 396.
[123] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 612.

aversion to a social construct that so completely strips women of their independence. Part of her increased distaste can be attributed to her developing awareness of Pansy, whose total submission to her father embodies everything that Isabel loathes about being tied to a man. James famously describes Pansy as a blank page, to be utilized in whatever manner the men in her life most desire. Isabel sees how much Osmond values this trait in his daughter, which awakens her to how much he must despise the scrawl with which she has covered her own page.

Even though James elaborates Isabel's feelings concerning both the marital institution in general and her own marital prospects in particular, readers have continuously struggled to understand why Isabel rejects Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood and then chooses to marry Gilbert Osmond. In order to understand how an independent nature such as Isabel's confronts the marital institution, exploring the offers that she rejects becomes just as important as understanding why she chooses to accept Osmond's offer. Even though Isabel remains on uneasy terms with the idea of marriage throughout the novel, as Elizabeth Allen argues, "as marriage and the assumption of a life in relation to a man seems to be the only mode of action, she attempts to control it by defining her position within her action."[124] Isabel finds herself in a position equal to or beyond the fantasy of the previously described 'old-fashioned women' in the sense that quality men regularly court her. Moore asserts that early in the novel James provides his readers with "every possible clue to her (by conventional standards) strange behavior in the matter of Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood, Ralph Touchett, and Gilbert

[124] Allen, Elizabeth. *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James.* (London: Macmillan, 1984). 73.

Osmond."[125] A discerning reader should be able to piece these clues together in a manner that will inevitably illuminate the relationship between the increasing independence of these young American women and the marital institution.

In many respects, Isabel's decision to reject Lord Warburton remains most puzzling. He seems to be the perfect candidate for a husband and certainly would be considered a fine match for most women. Lord Warburton is thoroughly good, kind, attractive, and noble. James describes him as a man with a "certain fortunate, brilliant, exceptional look—the air of a happy temperament fertilized by a high civilization—which would have made almost any observer envy him at a venture."[126] Warburton also happens to be a lord, a rich one at that, who can offer Isabel complete security and safety. One might be tempted to suspect Warburton's primary fortune of being that he has not as yet had the flaw detected in his crystal, but James never exposes a dark murkiness lingering anywhere in Warburton's depths. He appears instead to be a bona fide Prince Charming. And, he happens to have fallen head over heels in love with Isabel; his love not only is of the eternal variety, but it also is not the type that manifests itself in a possessiveness or a need to change the object of its affection.

Yet Isabel rejects Lord Warburton outright. Though she does not make the decision final for a few days, she knows before he ever proposes that she will not accept his offer. While the decision may seem shocking, even unaccountable at first (perhaps save for some random imaginative mistake), Isabel actually has very solid reasons behind her decision. The most obvious, though probably least important, reason behind her

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[125] Moore 10.
[126] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 61.

decision lies in his rushed proposal which does not assuage her fear of a loss of her liberty. A man who falls in love this quickly tends to be a man similar to those William James described as defining love as a need for possession.[127] However, even if Warburton had courted her for a few years and if she had had time to decipher for herself the needlessness of this fear, she still would have rejected him. First of all, as she explicitly states to Mrs. Touchett, though he loves her, she does not love him enough to marry him.[128] However, a lack of love alone cannot have been all that hindered Isabel's acceptance because she marries Osmond without ever really loving him, and she does like Lord Warburton immensely (perhaps even more than she likes Osmond). The problem with this marriage, then, for Isabel is that it thwarts her first attempts to move beyond the conventional. For most women, as Welter explains, "status and power" could usually be acquired only through marriage.[129] A marriage that would allow her to garner this much status and power would be a completely unoriginal and self-compromising match—and what would be the point of her proclaiming the importance of independence if only to settle for the marriage of every girl's dreams? The other major reason behind her rejection is that she feels that "Isabel" would become lost amongst the trappings of "Lady Warburton." Further, in a marriage such as this one, Isabel believes she can only gain without having a real hope of having something significant to give in return. As an independent and rather "superior" creature, Isabel longs to be able to give something in exchange for any gains that she might make in marriage. Only in a marriage based on a more equal exchange would a person have any right to retain a claim on personal liberty.

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[127] See Ch. 2 pg. 27
[128] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 191.
[129] Welter 7.

Lord Warburton, of course, does not have the distinction of being the only man rejected by Isabel; his American counterpart Caspar Goodwood finds himself getting rejected repeatedly throughout the course of the novel. Goodwood, however, remains much more persistent in his quest to secure Isabel's hand in marriage, probably because she never has the strength to offer a truly final rejection. Goodwood also belongs to the category of very good men, and Isabel always understands this about him. The narrator notes, "He was the finest young man she had ever seen, was indeed quite a splendid young man; he inspired her with a sentiment of high, or rare respect. She had never felt equally moved to it by any other person."[130] Isabel perceives all of Goodwood's strong qualities and understands that he would also be able to offer her a secure home with a comfortable living and even a certain amount of American prestige. Furthermore, James indicates that Goodwood loves Isabel more deeply than any person alive and evokes powerful feelings of sexual attraction within her. But, she only realizes at the end of the novel the extent of this love and attraction. When Goodwood comes to her after Ralph's funeral, Isabel realizes "she had never been loved before. She had believed it, but this was different; this was the hot wind of the desert, at the approach of which the others dropped dead, like mere sweet airs of the garden. It wrapped her about; it lifted her off her feet, while the very taste of it, as of something potent, acrid and strange forced open her set teeth."[131] This love is powerful and charged and terrifying, leading her to believe that it would consume her.

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[130] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 90.
[131] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 634.

So, yet again, Isabel rejects another suitor, but as Tessa Hadley notes, "it is impossible for us to imagine reading an Isabel who says *yes* to Caspar; the whole dynamic of *The Portrait* runs against it."[132] But, this time the rejection does not come so easily, and Isabel wavers a little along the way. She cannot command a strong countenance when dealing with Goodwood, partly because she feels him to be bound to her by fate.[133] In fact, Moore believes that "could she but submit to the domination she inwardly feels but outwardly shies away from, Caspar is the man for her."[134] In many respects, Isabel's relationship with Goodwood resembles that of Verena and Basil. Isabel's repeated response to the fear inspired by the forcefulness of Goodwood's nature becomes to flee from him, the same initial reaction Verena has to Basil, and for the same reason. As the narrator of *The Bostonian* notes, "We don't run away from people unless we fear them and that we don't fear them unless we know that we are unarmed."[135] Of all the characters in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Goodwood most noticeably resembles Basil; they belong to the same school of thought, and both find themselves loving in the same passionate and all-consuming manner. However, Isabel's independent nature causes her to shrink from the very attraction to which Verena succumbs, but Isabel can only resist what she describes as "an energy—and she had already felt it as a power—that was of his very nature" by distancing herself from him.[136] Because she values her independence so highly, her determination to resist Goodwood becomes her only real option.

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[132] Hadley, Tessa. *Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002). 33.
[133] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 169.
[134] Moore 16.
[135] James, Henry. *The Bostonians*. Ed. Charles R. Anderson. (New York: Penguin, 1886). 365.
[136] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 169.

While James introduces Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood virtually at the very beginning of the novel, Gilbert Osmond does not come onto the scene until the end of the first volume. He does not, then, take part in the early competitions for Isabel's affections which date from before she received her inheritance. Thus, Warburton and Goodwood cannot be considered impediments to the fated match within the novel in the same way that Henry Burrage and Matthias Pardon can in *The Bostonians.* Osmond's success in achieving Isabel's consent to marry him indicates that certain crucial differences must exist between him and Isabel's earliest suitors. The differences that Isabel finds significant begin with his status as a poor, lonely man who has devoted his life to caring for his daughter and cultivating an appearance of indifference to the cares of the world. Like Goodwood and Warburton, he has a noble aspect and is entertaining, pleasant company, but unlike the earlier suitors, Osmond is known for nothing special, except, as Ralph tells Isabel, that "he has a great dread of vulgarity; that's his special line; he hasn't any other that I know of. He lives on his income, which I suspect of not being vulgarly large. He's a poor but honest gentleman—that's what he calls himself."[137] Of course, as the reader soon becomes aware, this aspect of Osmond is a carefully calculated appearance that he maintains for the benefit of society. James foreshadows this aspect of Osmond in our earliest introduction to him through the description of his house whose "imposing front had a somewhat incommunicative character. It was the mask, not the face of the house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes; the house in reality looked another way—looked off behind."[138] Osmond too wears a mask to prevent others from

[137] James, *The Portrait of a Lady.* 299.
[138] James, *The Portrait of a Lady.* 278.

discerning the true direction of his gaze and thus his actual character. As the narrator explains, "under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world. Far from being its master as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant, and the degree of its attention was his only measure of success."[139] Osmond affects an appearance of not caring for money and titles, while in reality he desperately covets these things. Osmond's "trick," then, as Leland Person explains, is in "being the opposite of what he appears."[140] Of course, his trick does not long deceive anyone other than Isabel, yet this deception so enthralls her as to tempt her to part with her liberty.

Osmond has two significantly lucky factors that give him an edge from his very introduction to Isabel that neither Goodwood nor Warburton can claim. First, he does not meet Isabel until after she has spent enough time in Europe for the novelty to have worn off and until after she has inherited her fortune. Osmond has the further benefit of Madame Merle who understands Isabel well enough to be able to manipulate her into focusing exactly on Osmond's traits that she will find most favorable. But, as Moore contends, though "we might say at this point that Osmond has done a superb job on the poor girl; . . . it has been a soft sell. Isabel, has in fact, sold herself because what Osmond is offering comes nearest to her own idea of what she wants."[141] Regardless of Madame Merle's and Osmond's ability to manipulate Isabel into seeing only the aspects of Osmond that compliment her ideals, Moore's assertion is valid, as Isabel herself acknowledges several times throughout the novel. For instance, by their second meeting, Isabel has already conceded her independence slightly to Osmond so that during her first

[139] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 444.
[140] Person, Leland. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003). 98.
[141] Moore 20.

visit to his home, "Isabel waited, with a certain unuttered contentedness, to have her movements directed."[142] She barely knows Osmond, but she already finds pleasure in allowing him to steer her while she adopts an attitude of complicit submission. However, although Isabel may be conceding her independence in certain trivial ways from very early on in their relationship, Osmond wisely allows her to retain a complete sense of control over that independence; she believes that she can recover her full independence at any moment because it was her decision to relinquish it. Perhaps Osmond's shrewdest maneuver is his decision to allow Isabel to travel for a couple of years without any attempt to hinder her beyond his admonition for her to remember during her travels that he loves her and will remain in Italy awaiting her eventual return. He also refrains from showing any sudden or violent passions towards her; he makes her believe that the love he has developed for her stems from a more rational place than the inconstant heart, allowing her to feel more secure about his love than about Warburton or Goodwood.

Isabel's persistent attraction to Osmond in the face of the unflinching opposition that she encounters from her friends and family can be more baffling to readers than her failure to succumb to the attractions of her previous two suitors, even taking into consideration Osmond's superior courtship tactics. He cannot offer her any of the traditional incentives used to lure women into marriage. He loves her, but not passionately. He has no money and no real social status. Of course, Isabel never interested herself in conventional allurements. She has always been more concerned with creating a marriage according to her own original ideals than one along the lines of the conventional, enabling her to view the opposition of those she loves almost proudly.

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[142] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 310.

What she wants, and what Osmond alone can offer, is the opportunity to give as much or more than she gains in a match. Instead of marrying someone who seems perfect, she marries a man who is just "good enough" for her.[143] Plainly, part of her motivation is that in order to maintain her independence, Isabel has to be capable of holding her weight with her husband. With Goodwood or Warburton her independence, the one thing she cannot bear to give up, is the only gift she can bestow in exchange for all of the wonderful things she would gain. With Osmond, it is much simpler: she can give him her money, which not only should gain her a continued independence but also should relieve her conscience which found the inheritance burdensome. Osmond understands Isabel's feelings and manipulates her ego to further convince her of the sagacity of this union. James Duban points out that Osmond's strategy involves taking "advantage of her wish to appear benevolent, and he flatters her into believing that she will act virtuously by endowing him, a supposedly disinterested aesthete, with her hand and fortune."[144] As a result, "Isabel transforms 'the man with the best taste in the world' into a mirror that reflects back to her a self-congratulatory sense of virtue."[145] Thus, she gives her money, and in return she gains an enlarged sense of her own virtue and a partner whom she believes to have an outlook on life identical to her own. When trying to help Ralph understand her decision, she exclaims, "His being so independent, so individual, is what *I* most see in him."[146] She sees in him what she most loves about herself and then flatters

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[143] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 395.
[144] Duban, James. *The Nature of True Virtue: Theology, Psychology, and Politics in the Writings of Henry James, Sr., Henry James, Jr., and William James*. (London: Associated University Presses, 2001). 164.
[145] Duban 173.
[146] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 384.

herself into thinking that these qualities in a husband could only serve to enhance her own qualities.

Of course, as Isabel quickly learns after the marriage, these highly attractive aspects of Osmond only constitute half of his personality. She bitterly realizes that "he was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, any more than she. But she had seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth."[147] Though Isabel tries to believe that she remained wholly unaware of the hidden aspects of his nature until after their marriage, the deception is partly a self-willed blindness. As soon as Isabel finds herself alone after Osmond's initial declaration of love in Rome, the narrator comments that "her imagination, as I say, now hung back: there was a last vague space it couldn't cross—a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight."[148] Isabel senses the presence of something slightly treacherous, but she actively and deliberately harnesses her usually free-roaming imagination from crossing into that land of uncertainty. This tendency cannot even be considered completely subconscious because in preparing herself for facing Ralph's disappointment she tells herself, "You could criticize any marriage; it was the essence of marriage to be open to criticism. How well she herself, should she only give her mind to it, might criticize this union of her own! She had other employment, however."[149] Thus, even though she has already restrained her imagination, she must also actively employ her mind with other activities in order to prevent it from dissimulating rational criticisms

[147] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 475.
[148] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 363.
[149] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 389.

of her potential marriage. A person who believes fully in the decision he or she is making does not have to engage in such mental charades; they are the maneuvers of somebody willfully fooling him or herself. The reason behind her self-deception arises partly out of her realization that marriage, even before she meets Osmond, is already becoming more and more obviously the next inevitable step in her life, and that this particular union seems to be the perfect compromise for a liberated woman, such as herself. And, this step would possibly allow her to ignore that she is a more conventional women than she cares to admit.

If Isabel views this marriage in a rather deluded and idealistic frame of mind, Osmond's decision to pursue this match could not be more grounded in the rational and practical. He knows that he is the pursuer and she the pursued. He also remains comfortably aware that in this union he stands to gain handsomely and she only peripherally. Though he tells Isabel that he feels glad that she has money but is not marrying her because of it, the prospect of finally having a fortune dazzles him. He probably longs for it more than he even admits to himself. Osmond never loses sight of the knowledge that, as Duban points out, his "interest is, of course, self-interest; the reward a wealthy wife."[150] Whereas Isabel becomes self-congratulatory because she believes she has made a match that will enhance her virtuous qualities, Osmond's self-congratulation comes from the enhancement of his material status. However, he feels his gain to be valuable in ways that go beyond the vulgarity of cash. If Goodwood most resembles Basil, Osmond can be construed as a villainous version of Henry Burrage, both of whom have carved a niche for themselves as collectors. Osmond prides himself on his

[150] Duban 172.

exquisite taste and takes great pleasure in displaying it through his collections. He means Isabel to become his crowning piece. For instance, after he learns of her rejection of Lord Warburton's hand, Osmond "perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand."[151] Not only does he objectify his prospective bride, but he also finds her greatest value in an extrinsic quality. The important qualities in *his* portrait of Isabel are the ways in which she becomes a positive reflection of him, which James parallels to Isabel's own attitude towards Osmond. He muses that "his 'style' was what the girl had discovered with a little help; and now, beside herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble."[152] Osmond intends for Isabel to become the vessel through which he will communicate his superior qualities without regard to any qualities of her own.

Instead of self-delusion, Osmond's primary mistake in deciding to engage in this marriage is miscalculation. Isabel has many qualities that he admires and only one which he really loathes; of course the quality he despises most is her independence of thought, the aspect she herself holds most dear. In this realm, Osmond's thoughts towards women line up almost perfectly with some of Basil's and Henry James Sr.'s philosophies. Kim Townsend points out that James, Sr. believed a wife's "task is that of helping and inspiring one man, her husband; reflection and learning do not become her; she lives in the present, in the realm of the senses."[153] Osmond's agreement with this philosophy first surfaces in a discussion he has with Madame Merle, who has asked him to divulge to her

[151] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 354.
[152] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 356.
[153] Townsend, Kim. *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others*. (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1996). 62.

his initial reaction to Isabel. He explains that Isabel seems to him practically perfect with the exception of one fault—"too many ideas," but he informs Madame Merle that he has decided not to worry about this small problem because he perceives that her ideas are "very bad," making their sacrifice of no consequence.[154] Though Osmond believes Isabel's ideas to be negligible, he thinks her mind superior as a receptacle where he can deposit his own ideas and watch them emerge polished and adorned with a "decorative quality."[155] Osmond obviously misjudges the importance Isabel places on her own ideas; perhaps his underestimation stems from his long-term residence in Europe, where women do not enjoy the same freedoms as American girls do or from his belief of woman's innate knowledge of the "inherent hierarchy" of the intellect between male and females. Perhaps both. Regardless of the reason, this miscalculation proves to be a grave mistake.

For Verena and Basil, a belief in the constancy of their love could explain away a thousand misperceptions such as those Isabel and Osmond discover. Love does not play nearly the same vital role in this relationship, however. While Osmond does announce his love to Isabel, he only makes the declaration once, and it comes across as more of a tactic than a declaration of passion. For Osmond, love can be defined as an attraction that develops towards an object from which he stands to gain. Even though at the end of the novel Isabel continues to claim that Osmond was in love with her while they courted, she now recognizes that without her money the marriage never would have occurred.[156] Clearly his love was and is a conditional love. On her part, the term 'love' enters into a discussion of Isabel's feelings towards Osmond only twice and both after the marriage.

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[154] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 335.
[155] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 401.
[156] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 622.

Once she thinks that "she had loved him"[157] and the second time lets us know that she loves him no longer.[158] During their courtship she never proclaims love in her defenses to her family. For a woman so prone to an active imagination and ruminations, she thinks relatively little about love and only seems to know for sure that she does not want a relationship with a man who has passionate feelings of love for her, as that display of emotions tends to indicate a possessive nature.

However, just as their passionate love will not save Verena and Basil's match, lack of love will not ruin Isabel and Osmond's marriage. The cause of their marital strife can be summed up in one simple word—independence. While the word itself actually has a positive connotation, this novel reveals an incredible tension within the conception of independence. Pippin picks up on this issue and argues as follows:

> Understanding a free life, a life really of one's own . . . is quite attractive for a mind and spirit like Isabel's. But the paradoxical (and hubristic) tone of being powerful enough to 'choose one's fate' (or 'affront one's destiny' . . . ), her romantic images, and the specter of Osmond and his supreme irony, all suggest that something is going very wrong with this moral ideal, this putative 'duty' to live independently, not to live conventionally.[159]

Neither James nor Pippin, I think, would argue that Isabel's desire for independence and the unconventional is morally wrong. Instead, what has happened is that Isabel, and the young American women she represents, has adopted a mode of living which society has not yet accepted, and the facet of society that currently bears the brunt of the strain is the

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[157] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 476.
[158] James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. 563.
[159] Pippin 134.

marital institution. While Osmond does not actively fight against the new gender conceptions that have begun to filter throughout society, he does not know any way to structure marriage other than the traditional, and neither does Isabel, which explains why she can never shake off her fright at the thought of marrying. She knows that her attachment to the independence of her mind does not lend itself to the lifestyle expected of a woman within a typical marriage, and so she rejects all offers that even hint at the conventional. However, even so, marriage seems to be an inescapable part of Isabel's future, and so when she encounters Osmond, who appears to be the opposite of the ultra-masculine, she thinks that he represents her best chance at forming a successful marriage. She admires him for his independence and individuality and believes that he will admire those same qualities in her; unfortunately, he disregards her independence as something that will naturally diminish with the consummation of their marriage. Thus, the characters in the novel who most long for originality have become forced into the most unoriginal positions possible.

Even while depicting all the strain that this new inclination towards female independence places on the marital institution, James never blames the marital institution itself for the tensions that threaten it in this novel. Marriage, for James, remains a crucial part of the social structure. Readers have always revolted against the ending where Isabel remains trapped in her marriage and fail to understand her decision to return to Osmond. In fact, many stories have been told of readers who threw this book across the room after reading the ending. As readers we empathize with Isabel and do not want her to remain in such a horrid position. For James, however, the novel could not have ended any other way. Isabel's independence does not exempt her from her duty, and her duty remains

with her husband. James never toys with the possibility of divorce for his distressed characters (nor does breaking the marriage bond seem to be a viable option). Though James does not offer a solution for his heroine, this novel is a step in pushing readers towards finding answers on how to reconcile the increasing independence of young women to the strictures of the marital institution because of its opened-ended nature, which as Boone notes, forces the reader to actively face the issues that James addresses throughout the novel.[160] Perhaps James hoped that his readers' revolt against the ending would naturally provoke them into discovering their own solutions to Isabel's problem, forcing them to consider how women's increasing independence affects the marital institution, allowing them to arrive at some sort of solution to reconcile the two.

[160] Boone 377.

## Chapter 4: *The Golden Bowl* and the Failure of Love

Twenty-three years elapsed between the publication of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl*. It was the beginning of a new century. The world of James was rapidly evolving from the older, more social realm into a capitalistic, economic one. And James was not to be left behind. *The Golden Bowl*, James's last completed novel, moves beyond the realistic style that characterized *The Bostonians* and *The Portrait of a Lady.* When James looked back on these earlier novels in order to write the prefaces for the New York editions, he began to view them as "efforts . . . redolent of good intentions baffled by a treacherous vehicle."[161] The older style of realism no longer satisfied the needs of the swiftly changing world. While James still felt an "obligation to truth,"[162] he had become less concerned with depicting the ordinary within his pages. The cast of *The Golden Bowl* really only numbers six people, and none of them can truly be characterized as representative of a type of everyday people.[163] A distinct shift in style also occurred during the time between *The Bostonians* and *The Golden Bowl*. James's later novels are much less action oriented; Robert Pippin argues that very little "happens" in *The Golden Bowl* but "what does happen means the most."[164] In this novel, two marriages, a birth, and an adulterous affair occur, but James does not allow his readers the voyeuristic pleasure of witnessing these events; they occur offstage. Instead, James opens up the

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[161] James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948). 344.
[162] Stevens, Hugh. *Henry James and Sexuality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). 45.
[163] Charlotte Stant does belong to that category of pretty but poor American girls who need marriage to garner a social position, but she must also have qualities of the extraordinary because otherwise she would not have interested Adam Verver.
[164] Pippin, Robert B. *Henry James and the Modern Moral Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). 66.

minds of his characters so that as he notes in his preface to *The Golden Bowl*, "the whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters."[165] What the reader is invited to understand, then, is the psychological development of these "deeply involved and immersed and more or less bleeding characters."[166] However, even within this evolved style, James continues to strive towards at least one of his earlier goals—he wants to use this novel to expose to his readers certain troubled aspects of society, specifically in relation to the marital institution; within *The Golden Bowl* only the vehicle itself has changed.

The importance of the shift from the more traditional, or the 'old,' to the new reveals itself as integral to *The Golden Bowl* in ways far beyond James's shift in style. He plays with the dichotomy between the old and the new throughout the novel, especially in relation to the ongoing transition into a more economically focused society. The Ververs adhere to the new societal patterns and become representative of that way of life, not because of their vast economic wealth, but because of their total emphasis on economics in a business sense. Prince Amerigo recognizes that his way of life wherein inherited social positions ordered society belongs to the old. He realizes that without wealth, his family history and noble name will no longer guarantee his position in a society in the midst of this period of transition. He now sees himself as made up of two disparate parts—the old and the new.[167] He describes himself as "some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, medieval,

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[165] James, *The Art of the Novel.* 329.
[166] James, *The Art of the Novel.* 328.
[167] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl.* Ed. Geoffrey Moore. (New York: Penguin, 1904). 47.

wonderful."[168] A coin such as this has lost its use value as cash, retaining only its exchange value as collectible; it no longer functions as was originally intended and is decorated with signs that are no longer readable within the new world. On the whole, much of *The Golden Bowl* focuses on the transition from the old to the new, on how the new incorporates the old, and on whether, in doing so, the old has become a perverted version of itself.

The transition into this economic, capitalistic society has in part developed out of the earlier tension involving the patriarchal ideology of the separate spheres. Of course, that older tension has not entirely subsided nor has James's fascination with male versus female; in fact, the tension between the men and women in *The Golden Bowl* has become particularly explosive. Joseph Boone notes this tension and argues that "in each relationship" in *The Golden Bowl*, "the keynote most often sounded" is "the uneasy and unnatural division between the sexes, a division italicized by constantly shifting plays for power and possession of each other" which "speaks to the extent of James's critical ambivalence towards the foundations underlying the marital institution."[169] However, what Boone fails to note is that the 'plays for power and possession' have taken on an economic tint not present in James's earlier works. Though women still have to push for gender equality, they have a new weapon—material wealth. Isabel Archer had far more material wealth than Osmond, but her money did nothing to propel her into an equality with her husband. Conversely, Maggie, whose wealth stems directly from her connection

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[168] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 56.
[169] Boone, Joseph A. "Modernist Maneuverings in the Marriage Plot: Breaking the Ideologies of Gender and Genre in James's *The Golden Bowl*." *PMLA* 101.3 (1986): 379.

to a male, can embroil herself within "a battle for mastery and possession"[170] with her husband and can potentially triumph specifically because of her control over the purse strings within her marriage. Boone is correct in arguing that "all these relationships throw into question aspects of the age's marital ethos," but he does not recognize that in many ways Maggie has become the new 'new woman.' Armstrong points out that for the original 'new women,' economic freedom was not a concern; they just wanted recognition for their "qualities of mind,"[171] but Maggie lives in the rising world of capitalism where money buys both power and equality. She does not have to concern herself with Amerigo's thoughts on the quality of her mind (though she takes great pleasure in proving herself to be far less 'stupid' than Amerigo has assumed). Charlotte, unfortunately, remains completely powerless because of the compounded problems of belonging to the less privileged sex and of having no real access to money.

Not only has the focus on the tension within the marital institution caused by the questioning of the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres continued to shift throughout these three novels, so has the concept of love, which becomes incredibly complicated in this novel. Boone describes love as that "increasingly suspect emotion in the world of James's text."[172] In 1881, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, love is irrelevant, or at least barely taken into consideration, when forming the primary marriage between Isabel and Osmond. But, love is already suspect in the sense that Isabel shies away from a marriage with Caspar Goodwood in part because she fears the possessive nature of his love. By the time James wrote *The Bostonians* in 1886, he has already become skeptical towards

[170] Boone 80.
[171] Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). 49.
[172] Boone 381.

the nature of love; the marriage between Verena Tarrant and Basil Ransom promises to be disastrous. But, by 1904, James depicts a world where love has become not merely somewhat threatening in relation to marriage; it has become the antithesis to marriage. In *The Golden Bowl*, the type of love that inspires deep emotional attachment only exists outside of marriage and eventually becomes ruined by marriage. Mark Seltzer points out the controversial nature of the concept of love within *The Golden Bowl* when he says, "criticism of *The Golden Bowl* has proceeded along two essentially incompatible lines, depending on whether the Ververs are seen as innocents or exploiters—on whether, that is, they are seen as characters of love or as characters of power."[173] His solution is to combine the two so that love and power become defined as synonymous within this novel. However, the relationship between love and power here needs to be teased out a little further. Just as Maggie eventually realizes that Charlotte and Amerigo have "two relations" within one relationship,[174] James presents two opposing manifestations of love within one seemingly unified concept. The love Maggie and Adam feel towards one another and that Charlotte and Amerigo experience can be categorized as a deep emotional attachment and strong affection for another. The love that James depicts between Maggie and Amerigo and then Charlotte and Adam much more clearly belongs to Seltzer's definition of power as love, seen as the desire to possess another. While within all four relationships feelings of tenderness and a desire for possession can be located, one of these aspects of love clearly dominates each one.

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[173] Seltzer, Mark. *Henry James and the Art of Power*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984). 65.
[174] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 456.

Unsurprisingly, this complicated version of love becomes the element that upsets the equilibrium established economically within the two marriages and in the Verver family in general. Boone argues that James turns "the popular myth of complementary opposition as the basis of romantic attraction—one of the verities of the wedlock ideal" into "an object of grim parody."[175] Both of these marriages are "based on utility rather than on the love supposedly central to ideal marriage."[176] James has already revealed in his earlier novels that marriages formed on the basis of unequal gender concerns and within unequal parameters could not long uphold the marital institution, which in turn forced these new social shifts; now he has turned his attention to exploring whether or not marriages formed within a greater equality of gender and economic exchanges can sustain it. The answer is clearly a resounding 'no.' James believes that marriage needs more than an equal base point in order to thrive. Though he makes his readers aware of this conclusion, his characters operate under the assumption that "their equilibrium was everything, and that it was practically precarious."[177] Because of their belief in the importance of this equilibrium, the characters allow emotional attachments to become replaced by a drive for power. Though all four characters do care about their spouses, none is as emotionally attached to his or her spouse as to a certain other member of this foursome. Thus, the prevailing notion, so popular that it finds its way to the book jacket of the Penguin edition, that *The Golden Bowl* is James's novel where things finally turn out right for the characters must be discarded. Once readers understand that love as power has replaced affectionate love, the happy ending falls quickly to the wayside in the

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[175] Boone 380.
[176] Boone 380.
[177] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 356.

tradition of all of James's other novels. In *The Golden Bowl*, James shows that the marital institution remains in just as precarious a state after its refashioning into a more economic transaction because people continue to seek affectionate love and to place the recipients of that love higher than the spouse with whom they engage more in a struggle for power than in a relationship of reciprocal affection. Though all four main characters eventually sacrifice their 'true' loves to this economic world of marriage, they find themselves far less happy than they had previously imagined because of the vast emptiness they experience.

James's working definition of love within *The Golden Bowl* becomes increasingly complicated as the novel progresses, partly because of the impossibility of equating 'true' love and romantic love in this novel. Each person within the main foursome of the novel has one other person to whom he/she has become deeply attached and thus has devoted all of his/her tender and affectionate love. For Amerigo, this person is Charlotte and vice versa. Maggie's true love is her father, and she remains his throughout the novel as well. Though the principino could potentially undermine this neat division among the characters, James does not involve the child enough in the plot to allow the complication to present itself. Thus, both filial love and romantic love can be categorized as 'true' love. But, each character's love becomes dichotomized as the novel progresses so that their affectionate relationship becomes only the center of the emotional aspect; their love of possessing their spouses becomes the center of the economic sides. When the novel opens, each character has only truly developed his/her relationship with the person who has claimed his/her greatest affections; none has yet developed the more economic version of love because he or she has not married. But they already understand that they

want or need something beyond this affectionate relationship, and for each one that something becomes economic power.

Critics have often tried to simplify the conception of the more emotional version of love in *The Golden Bowl* by hinting at incestuous relations between Maggie and her father, and though this reading may be supportable, it is unnecessary in establishing the intimacy that exists between them. James describes the Ververs as having "no wealth of kinship," and their status as each other's entire family partially explains the intimacy that has formed.[178] Furthermore, neither Maggie nor her father has a great desire for wide social interaction, so they have learned to beautifully keep one another company. As a result, the motivation behind the majority of their decisions originates out of their love for and desire to please one another. Their affection goes far beyond economic devotion; their greatest pleasure truly is spending time with one another. Martha Nussbaum argues that "we sense in Maggie and Adam a depth and quality of love that would not, we feel, tolerate the substitution of a clone . . . . She loves *him*, not just his properties . . . . Furthermore, it is a salient feature of human life, as the novel presents it, that is only lived once, and in one direction."[179] Their love, for lack of better words, is the real thing. It is the one great passion of their lives, and no spouse could ever really inspire the same depth of feeling that they have for each other.

Thus, when Adam and Maggie, respectively, get married, as Nussbaum indicated, their marriage bonds fail to replace the established filial bonds in importance. They view their prospective marriages as a means of enhancing their own relationship, not as

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[178] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 53.
[179] Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1990). 39.

something to replace it. Today we have this traditional conception of marriage as a time when the father "gives his daughter away." Adam does nothing of the sort; in fact, he does the exact opposite. He gives Amerigo to his daughter as a present, something everyone in the novel is quite aware of. Even after her marriage, Maggie maintains what Nussbaum terms "the exclusive intensity of her love for her father"[180] so that Charlotte is correct in explaining to Fanny Assingham that Maggie thinks "more on the whole of fathers than of husbands," which Charlotte clarifies by explaining that Maggie does "adore" her husband, she just does not think of him.[181] Even Maggie herself realizes that "she had been able to marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with her past. She had surrendered herself to her husband without the shadow of a reserve or a condition and yet hadn't all the while given up her father by the least little inch."[182] The reason that Maggie can maintain both relationships even adequately well is that they have developed out of two completely separate aspects of love that are not necessarily contradictory. Potential for conflict stemming from this balancing of love remains apparent throughout the novel, however. For instance, when the principino is born, he becomes "a link between a mamma and a grandpapa" rather than the more traditional link between husband and wife.[183] However, even this potential complication does not cause a rift between husband and wife. The most dangerous aspect of the filial relationship arises out of Maggie's and Adam's desire "to be together—at any cost, as it were."[184] Later Adam admits to Maggie that he does not know "at whose personal expense" they have found

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[180] Nussbaum 125.
[181] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 221.
[182] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 328.
[183] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 151.
[184] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 152.

happiness, and he does not seem to be too concerned about those who may have suffered, a perilous attitude to maintain.[185]

Amerigo and Charlotte have found the same intensity in a relationship of their own, though their relationship conforms to the more traditional venue of intimacy—romantic love. Many readers have viewed their relationship with scorn for varying reasons, but what these readers have failed to understand is how deeply Charlotte and Amerigo care for one another, even need one another. When Fanny explains the nature of Charlotte and Amerigo's relationship to her husband, she depicts a relationship founded on a love for one another that failed to result in marriage only because a marriage was not possible. She says they would have married "if there had been a way. But there wasn't a way."[186] Charlotte and Amerigo both realize that "he *had* to have money—it was a question of life and death."[187] They could not get married, but not because of a lack of love. Even though Charlotte has not acquainted Maggie with the particulars of her past, Maggie still realizes that Charlotte "has loved—and she has lost," which Maggie explains to her father when proposing Charlotte as a potential future mother-in-law. [188] Charlotte's and Amerigo's love and their subsequent loss have become etched indelibly on each of them, and when they are reunited, it begins to manifest itself in a similarity of mannerisms, attitudes, and that speech leads to Maggie's initial suspicion. Even throughout the extra-marital affair, James describes "their

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[185] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 388.
[186] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 89.
[187] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 89.
[188] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 171. Maggie's implies here that the very fact that someone else has already captured Charlotte's heart is what makes her so suitable as a wife for Adam.

deepening unexpressed need of each other."[189] They are bound to one another by a *need*; this relationship does not develop out of selfishness or greed but out of a continuing affection and passion that, like the relationship between Maggie and her father, is the kind only experienced once.

The aspect of Amerigo and Charlotte's relationship most often cited as proof that their love does not extend beyond a superficial physical passion is their abandonment of their relationship for the sake of fiscal gain. However, James depicts this act as a true sacrifice. Fanny explicitly explains to the Colonel that had Charlotte or Amerigo had any money at all, they would have attempted a life together, but neither has any prospects for acquiring money outside of marrying into it. They gave each other up because they understood that Amerigo requires money in order to guarantee a successful future for his family line, beginning with the principino. Though he had to make sacrifices to ensure this propagation, he knows that his son will not be an object to be collected but a collector who possesses every means for being successful within this new realm, and for this Amerigo feels he would make any sacrificial act. Furthermore, Charlotte's love for Amerigo reveals itself to be honest from this very first sacrifice, and she continues to show her love in small ways throughout the entire novel, including her trip from America, which she makes to secure just one last hour with Amerigo before he marries and is lost to her forever. He grants the request for the time spent together, knowing that it goes against the agreement he has made with the Ververs, because he too loves her.

With the marriage between Charlotte Stant and Adam Verver, this intimately connected foursome has arrived in a seemingly contrived situation, one that appears to

[189] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 282.

push this novel out of realism and into what has been termed 'the stuff of novels.' However, the concept of two couples each married to the object of another's affection works for James's purposes, and in many ways, is not even a new concept to him. As Tessa Hadley argues, certain elements of *The Golden Bowl* "touch off significant reminiscences of *The Portrait of a Lady*" and often "what was exposed as spurious and faked in the earlier novel is presented at face value in the later one."[190] In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James toyed with an almost identical scenario with the possibility of Lord Warburton's marriage to Pansy Osmond. Though the differences can be easily located, they both involve the marriage of a daughter to her mother-in-law's former suitor. And, in both scenarios, economic gain constitutes the greatest incentive behind marriages, especially from the fathers' perspective. However, within *The Golden Bowl*, the idea of this material gain takes on an appeal that would have been, as Hadley noted, viewed as spurious (at least from Isabel's perspective) in *The Portrait of a Lady*. The exchanges in *The Golden Bowl*, however, are not so vulgar as to be preoccupied primarily with actual cash. The potential gains involve a complicated trade of power and possession that each of the characters finds immensely appealing and attractive. Thus, an attraction based on the inherent love of power creates a chemistry within each marriage that some critics have labeled love. And they are right, in a sense, but the love that flourishes within these marriages thrives more on the ability to possess the other person than on an emotional attachment.

The novel opens with a discussion of the upcoming marriage between Amerigo and Maggie from Amerigo's perspective, giving the reader immediate insight into the

[190] Hadley, Tessa. *Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002). 147.

groom's attitude towards the impending event. Strikingly, the prince's thoughts continuously turn not towards his bride-to-be but to his future father-in-law. He does not concern himself with vowing that he will be a far better husband than most men, but he does assure himself that he will be a better son-in-law, revealing a primarily monetary interest in this union.[191] Of course, Amerigo admires Maggie and even cares for her, but Maggie does not excite a passion in Amerigo in the same way Charlotte can. Indeed, as Leland Person claims, for the Prince, this marriage is essentially a business partnership with Adam Verver.[192] Within the confines of a marriage, the terms partner and spouse are usually synonymous, but while Maggie is Amerigo's spouse, Adam is clearly his partner. Even the engagement itself has no romantic overtones; Adam's lawyers and Amerigo's "own man of business, poor Caderoni" arrange for its finalization.[193] Amerigo does not waste his time with a romantic proposal to Maggie because she has no power or control at this time. And, after the marriage, the significance of Amerigo's relationship with his father-in-law continues. Amerigo takes comfort in knowing that Adam "relieve[s] him of all anxiety about his married life in the same manner in which he relieve[s] him on the score of his bank-account."[194] Amerigo obviously continues to construe his marriage as a financial arrangement even after the marriage has settled and the principino has arrived, and James provides no clear indication anywhere in the novel that Amerigo's feelings towards Maggie evolve into the more traditional romantic love expected within a companionate marriage.

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[191] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 44.
[192] Person, Leland. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity.* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003). 157.
[193] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 44.
[194] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 246.

Understanding Maggie's perspective towards her husband consumes the second volume of the novel, but for all of its visibility within the text, her attitude is much more complex than his. Like Amerigo, Maggie has already found her "salient" love which can only be experienced once, but while Amerigo's salient relationship is sexual, Maggie's relationship with her father has little connection to the sexual. James provides ample evidence within the text that consequently Maggie views Amerigo in a highly sexualized fashion. He explains that "she never admired [Amerigo] so much, or so found him heart-breakingly handsome, clever, irresistible, in the very degree in which he had originally and fatally dawned upon her, as when she saw other women reduced to the same passive pulp that had then begun, once for all, to constitute *her* substance."[195] Her state as 'passive pulp' originates out of sexual arousal for her husband, and she enjoys watching other women respond to his sexuality because for her, Amerigo is a sexual object. He is a possession whose merit goes beyond her title as a princess and moves into an object for satisfying desires. And, Maggie finds pleasure in knowing that others understand the value of her object, adding a materialistic element to her viewpoint as well. Though Maggie had little power in the relationship before the marriage, after their marriage, James describes Amerigo as a "domesticated lamb tied up with a pink ribbon."[196] Thus, even though Maggie explains to Amerigo that he is "at any rate, a part of [Adam's] collection," apparently she has been given the control over this particular item, a power she thoroughly relishes.[197] In fact, the day after Maggie reveals her knowledge of the affair to Amerigo, she realizes that "she was having, by that idiom, the time of her life—

[195] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 156-57.
[196] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 154.
[197] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 49.

she knew it by the perpetual throb of this sense of possession, which was almost too violent either to recognize or to hide."[198] Her relationship with Amerigo and the power it affords her has begun to offer her thrilling sensations that have slowly begun to rival the enjoyment she feels within her relationship with her father.

As Maggie becomes more and more aware throughout the progression of her marriage, however, her enjoyed power over Amerigo does not remain static. They have become involved in a complex system of maneuverings where both continually attempt to position themselves as the more powerful. As Person comments, this marriage is "almost always described in terms of the problem of possession."[199] Amerigo's problem arises out of his permanent dependence on the purse strings that Maggie vicariously controls through her father; Maggie's problem lies within her sexual desire for her husband. She needs him where he does not need her, which lends itself to jealousy and ultimately a weakness that she recognizes at different points throughout the novel. During the scene after Amerigo returns from Matcham, he repeatedly draws her close to him, and the narrator says, "He had been right, overwhelmingly right, as to the felicity of his tenderness and the degree of her sensibility, but even while she felt these things sweep all others away she tasted a sort of terror at the weakness they produced in her."[200] Her sexual desire translates into an actual physical weakness towards her husband that continuously threatens to compromise the power she holds over him. Interestingly, though her awareness of her Achilles' heel in terms of her husband never subsides, he does not ever seem to become aware of this potential power source. Merely a "single

[198] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 469.
[199] Person 78.
[200] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 345.

touch from him . . . any brush of his hand, of his lips, of his voice, inspired by recognition of her probable interest as distinct from pity for her virtual gloom, would hand her over to him bound hand and foot."[201] But Amerigo never reaches out to her. James does not provide evidence in the novel to support the assumption that Amerigo's coldness towards his wife results from an aversion towards her. He seems to feel loyalty towards his wife and a respect for her as the mother of his son; he even enjoys her company, but he also obviously does not regard their marriage as a traditional companionate marriage. His total incapability of viewing this marriage as partially a sexual arrangement becomes obvious when the narrator notes that even during Maggie's initial confrontation of Amerigo concerning the affair, "he continued very nobly to bethink himself."[202] He cannot think too poorly of his decision to indulge himself with the woman with whom he will always feel most romantically connected because in his mind, sexual arousal and romantic attachment belong in a completely different domain than his marriage and do not interfere with his proper duties as husband. Thus, love in this marriage becomes a complicated term, that, when analyzed closely, is not really adequate. Amerigo and Maggie love what their marriage provides them, but they do not seem to truly love one another in the emotional sense.

Adam, like Amerigo, regards marriage as primarily a business transaction, both in the case of his daughter's and his own marriage. Though he remembers his marriage with Maggie's mother as characterized by a deeply felt love, he has come to consider this type of marriage dangerous as it lends itself to vulgarity, which he despises. In fact, as

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[201] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 423.
[202] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 459.

Person argues, "he fears marriage . . . because he conceives of marriage masochistically as a form of 'bondage' and being held in contempt."[203] Like his 'purchase' of Amerigo, his decision to marry Charlotte arises primarily out of a desire to please Maggie. He does not need or want anything that a wife could provide, except possible protection from the truly possessive women who pester him with the intention of becoming his wife. Thus, "in remarrying, he seeks a wife who will not tax his own emotional resources."[204] When Mrs. Rance appears on the scene contriving to trap Adam into marriage, both he and Maggie begin seriously considering the possibility that remarriage might be absolutely necessary, not because they warm towards Mrs. Rance but precisely because they want to avoid her and others like her. So, Maggie thinks of Charlotte whom she feels confident would both appeal to Adam as a collector and as an emotionally closed man. Maggie does not fear that Charlotte would expect any more from Adam than the money that she so desperately needs while at the same time she thinks Charlotte would be a complementary addition to their trio. However, once the marriage takes place, Adam finds another use for Charlotte; her beauty, poise, and social capabilities allow her to ease the social responsibilities that he finds so tiring, allowing him to remain at home with his daughter and grandson. Very quickly though, as Nussbaum points out, Charlotte's usefulness to her husband places her in the position of a "fine *objet d'art*" so that she is "precious" and of "high value" but retains no personal rights in her husband's eyes.[205] He considers the money he provides her to be ample compensation for whatever he might

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[203] Person 153.
[204] Person 153.
[205] Nussbaum 131.

ask, even that she resign herself to life on a "silken" leash that he conveniently holds by the crook of his thumb.[206]

Before Adam ever attaches his silken leash to her collar, Charlotte has the fewest options and the least access to power of any of the characters. Though society no longer regards the hierarchy of the genders in the same infallible manner, as a woman Charlotte continues to have fewer rights and options than the men; she cannot establish a career for herself, so she must rely on her feminine charms to gain access to her one possible source of revenue—a marriage. Not only does her gender hamper her ability to obtain any real leverage, "she has no home—absolutely none whatever. She's extraordinarily alone," as Fanny reminds her husband.[207] Maggie's position as the only heir to her father's fortune allows her a power as a woman that Charlotte understands she will never access. Even after her marriage to Adam, she recognizes the imbalance of their relationship. His money allows her more than she could ever repay, according to the social viewpoint, and Charlotte almost immediately grasps the immovability of her position. She tells Fanny after the marriage, "It belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed—fixed as fast as a pin stuck up to its head in a cushion. I'm placed—I can't imagine any one *more* placed. There I *am*!"[208] She does seek to please Adam, and she tries to draw some of his affection towards herself using all of her feminine gifts in order to accomplish this goal. But, as she explains to Fanny, she cannot succeed because his heart only has room for Maggie.[209] As she comes to appreciate the fixity of her position, Charlotte begins to find ways to simulate the freedom that she has lost, including going

[206] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 523.
[207] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 68.
[208] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 220.
[209] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 224.

about in old hansoms rather than in her carriage and eventually becoming involved in the affair. As Lotus Snow argues, "Indeed, for Charlotte, the purely economic basis of her contract with Adam and Maggie seems to serve as a justification for her affair with Amerigo—she believes as long as she fulfills her 'bargain,' which she magnificently does (from her own point of view), she should be allowed, as Amerigo puts it, 'a certain decent freedom.'"[210]

Ironically, Charlotte often attempts to couch her feelings towards her husband in words of love, especially when describing their relationship to Maggie. For instance, she haughtily tells her, "I happen, love, to appreciate my husband—I happen perfectly to understand that his acquaintance should be cultivated and his company enjoyed."[211] Later, she even translates her feelings towards her husband into the language of the economic and power aspects of love that Maggie so appreciates. She says, "I want really to possess him . . . . I happen also to feel that he's worth it."[212] Though she truly understands that Adam completely possesses her and not vice versa, Charlotte attempts to assume some control within their relationship by establishing the outward appearance of a companionate marriage based on a more traditional romantic attachment. Clearly, however, these proclamations are nothing more than an attempted defense against the unknown elements trapping her in her cage. Adam never pretends to love Charlotte; though he does propose to her instead of working through lawyers, he does not waste time pretending a romantic infatuation. He tells Charlotte bluntly that he wants to marry her for the services that she can provide for him and his daughter, and in exchange, he

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[210] Snow, Lotus. "'A Story of Cabinets and Chairs and Tables': Images of Morality in *The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Golden Bowl*." *ELH* 30.4 (1963): 226.
[211] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 353.
[212] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 543.

will grant her a greater access to society and a limited access to his wealth. As they finalize the deal, both understand that part of its very essence is actually the lack of emotions involved. This marriage accordingly "is sexually empty," so that Charlotte does not have the sexual power over Adam that Amerigo could potentially wield over Maggie. The marriage is so devoid of sexuality that Charlotte cannot even hold out and hope that she could mother a child that would potentially steal some of Adam's affections and even perhaps bestow a little on her. In short, though Charlotte and Adam are married and both involved in very permanent love relationships, love plays absolutely no role in their marriage, except perhaps in that Adam loves the power he possesses over his wife.

When critics interpret this novel's ending wherein the two married couples separate indefinitely from one another as triumphant or as a return to a natural or moral order, they have obviously configured, as Elizabeth Allen does, the Ververs as possessing not only the economic power but also the "moral power" within the novel.[213] However, James has not created such clear moral boundaries with which to identify his characters. Adam and Maggie work just as scrupulously to maintain their relationship as prioritized over their marriages as Charlotte and Amerigo do. The difference, obviously, is that society typically does not view filial bonds with the same suspicion or scorn as adulterous bonds. Arguing that morality prevails in the ending, then, is to misread the novel. James is not restoring moral order at the end of the novel—he is revealing the victory of the new economically inclined society over the older traditions. True love loses at the end even though it makes a noble effort to exist in the midst of the economic marital arrangements in the form of a father and daughter willing to make any sacrifice to continue their

[213] Allen, Elizabeth. *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James*. (London: Macmillan, 1984). 184.

relationship and a pair of lovers indulging in their romantic affections while adhering to an economic system of marriage. As Gore Vidal so humorously put it in his introduction to the novel, the characters are attempting "the simultaneous possession and ingestion of confectionary."[214] They want love in the midst of their materialistic worlds. The Ververs belong completely to a world where emotional pleasure has become a luxury to be enjoyed only once enough wealth has been accumulated. They have devoted their lives to creating this museum which will be the monument establishing to the world their status as the foremost family within this new economic, capitalistic society. Thus, they cannot abandon their marriages which have become the crowning jewels of their economic achievements, and in many ways, they do not want to because they thrive off of the thrills that their power affords them.

Seemingly, then, the affair would be the perfect system, as Charlotte attempts to convince Amerigo, because it allows for the uninhibited pleasure of allowing each character to enjoy both relationships without interfering with one another. However, even though Maggie and her father are clearly not tenderly devoted to their spouses, the affair ruins their finely balanced equilibrium. In creating these marriages, the Ververs hardly took the happiness of their perspective spouses into consideration beyond speculating that the alliance to the Verver name and fortune would afford them happiness. They do want their spouses to be happy but only through means that they provide. The tie between Charlotte and Amerigo indicates a loss of power for the Ververs, something that they cannot abide. Furthermore, for Maggie, her sexual object

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[214] Vidal, Gore. Introduction. *The Golden Bowl.* By Henry James. Ed. Geoffrey Moore. (New York: Penguin, 1984). 12.

has become tarnished through his affair with another woman. It not only makes him less valuable from a societal perspective but also as a possession, because now she is not the only one with possessive power. Further, she soon begins to suspect her husband and his mistress of attempting to collectively gain power over her by "preventing her freedom of movement,"[215] which horrifies her. The pleasurable throb that she felt in having complete control over Amerigo threatens to vanish if the affair evolves any further. Instead of having the satisfaction of knowing that others are jealous of her, she has been placed in the unhappy position of the jealous outsider, also implying a loss of power. Thus, Maggie's unhappiness at discovering her husband's infidelity does not stem from a broken heart but from frustration at her loss of control and power.

The question of Adam's awareness of the affair never gets convincingly answered in the novel, and his knowledge that his and Charlotte's removal to American City will please Maggie is enough to prompt his return. But, regardless of whether or not Adam knows the dirty family secret, he would not be happy with it for several reasons beyond displeasure for his daughter's sake. Adam has been cuckolded, something that usually threatens a man's sexuality, but Adam would have felt a greater threat to a different realm. Person believes that "not only does Adam value everything in the same aesthetic and economic terms—for its collectibility—but economic principles govern his psychology."[216] Adam has set himself up as the patriarchal ruler of a family, controlling male and female alike with a firm benevolence; a wife who sleeps with the younger male in the family strongly threatens his power first by making him into the fool and second by

[215] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 356.
[216] Person 151.

giving power to the subservient male. The family Adam rules belongs to the new economic version of society, and in order to take back total control, he has to separate his wife and son-in-law by exerting his economic power, even at the expense of losing his greatest pleasure in life—time with his daughter (and grandson). Thus, even though the knowledge of the affair would reveal to him that his two most valuable collectibles have hidden flaws in their crystal underneath the gilded gold, Adam can accept the flaws as long as they remain hidden to the world. James explicitly explains that the importance of a work of art to Adam is that it "should 'look like' the master to whom it might perhaps deceitfully be attributed."[217] To Adam, as to that other perpetual collector Gilbert Osmond, appearances are of the utmost importance. He cannot present his wealth to the world in terms of vulgar cash, so he uses valuable and pleasing possessions, of which Amerigo and Charlotte rank very high. Thus, Adam strives to maintain the appearance of value for these possessions which represent him to the world and willingly gives up his favorite recreation in return. Of course, of all the characters, Adam's ending remains by comparison the happiest. By removing his wife from the one male she truly cares for, he virtually assures himself of her fidelity and retains his tight grip on the end of the silken leash just in case. He maintains complete control over his surroundings through his total command of the family wealth, and he has his museum project to entertain him during the empty hours that Maggie used to fill. Contrarily, Charlotte's future remains the bleakest. She stands only to retain value as an impressive but flawed piece trapped within a cage or kept on a leash. She has lost access to the one man who loves her and has little chance of gaining power over the one married to her.

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[217] James, *The Golden Bowl*. 144.

Maggie's future happiness, however, remains much murkier than her mother-in-law's. Charlotte's future and unending misery is unambiguous in the ending, but as the varied critical reactions to the ending reveal, Maggie's is much less so. Maggie's future happiness seems promising because she has accomplished all of her goals in putting an ocean between her husband and his mistress while simultaneously reclaiming him entirely to herself. However, James casts a shadow over this prospective bliss in the last two pages of the novel, beginning with the image of Amerigo's hand over Maggie's rolled dice. She learns at that moment that the power she sacrificed her greatest love for carries with it no permanent guarantee, and in the last line of the novel, James leaves Maggie with her head buried in her husband's breast out of "pity and dread."[218] The power Maggie has held over her husband derives itself directly from her closer connection to Adam's fortune, thus making her power vicariously held and much less stable than Adam's himself. What Maggie faces and is beginning to understand in the last scene of the novel is that Amerigo has become aware of her tenuous hold over her power. Not only does she not directly control the fortune that binds her husband, but now that Charlotte has been exiled to America, Amerigo's attention has become completely focused on her. He tells her right before she becomes sickened with dread, "I see nothing but *you*."[219] During the entire second volume, Maggie constantly fears that Amerigo will discover his potential power source in the hold his sexuality has over her. Now that he has lost his mistress, Maggie realizes that Amerigo will quickly learn her secret. Jeremy Tambling is correct in arguing that this ending has many similarities to the ending of *The*

[218] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 580.
[219] James, *The Golden Bowl.* 580.

*Bostonians* where a realization occurs, especially in the mind of the reader, that the sought after happy ending has become tragic.[220] This marriage cannot be a success.

In this world where economic power and possessiveness over another human being have become the primary methods of attaining happiness within a marriage, something very tragic occurs. As Nussbaum argues, "The world of *The Golden Bowl* is a fallen world—a world that is in which innocence cannot be and is not safely preserved, a world where values and loves are so pervasively in tension with one another that there is no safe human expectation of a perfect fidelity to all throughout a life."[221] Not only does innocence face extinction, tender and affectionate love (both platonic and romantic) are becoming counterbalanced by a hunger, a greed for power and possession also termed love. This type of love poses the most dangerous threat to the marital institution of all because only one person in the marriage can enjoy it; the other person must submit as the possessed or the collected. Economics has always and probably will always factor into marital decisions, and James is not sounding the alarm against this. But, he wants his readers to understand the danger in taking on a spouse with the same attitude as buying a precious work of art. In many ways, James presents these types of marriages as a quickly popularizing alternative to the more traditional patriarchal and hierarchical versions that he explored in *The Bostonians* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, but he clearly shows in *The Golden Bowl* that this alternative is just as dangerous, if not more so, than the problem it seeks to avoid. However, the marital institution never breaks down in James. His characters never, even in this very last novel, begin to seek ways out of their marriages,

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[220] Tambling, Jeremy. *Critical Issues: Henry James.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). 201.
[221] Nussbaum 133.

and James works hard to force his readers into acknowledging that the modern marital system is in a severe crisis and that the individual marriages soon will not be able to handle the strain.

Though James chose never to marry himself, he does not ever expressly condemn the marital institution in his novels. Instead, "James evolves a devastating commentary on the ideological bases underlying romantic and marital union—be the motivation of relationship economic, sexual, or conventionally sentimental—by making every stage of his counterplot[s] an opening up of the narrative assumptions underlying the fictional tradition of romantic wedlock."[222] Though Boone was referring specifically to *The Golden Bowl*, his idea remains pertinent to the entire Jamesian canon. Marriage always remains very important in upholding society from James's viewpoint, but throughout his life, he observed several societal factors interfering with the marital institution, including the crisis over the separation of the spheres, the increasing independence of women, and the encroaching importance of economics within marriages. Critics have identified these issues as crucial within James's works for years, but they have failed to agree on James's attitude towards them. The reason behind the uncertainty is that James was not attempting to condemn or to condone these issues; instead, he was just attempting to reveal how these issues have come together to create a heavy burden on the marital institution in hopes of pushing readers beyond an uncomfortable awareness and into finding a solution to these problems. Though he despairs at the widening cracks in the foundation of this venerable institution, James never gives up on marriage, and he never allows his characters that luxury either.

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[222] Boone 379.

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## Vita

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