Isabel's Resistance: An Essay on *The Portrait of a Lady*

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Introduction

In certain enigmatic scenes which we sometimes encounter in so-called "realistic" novels, freedom just seizes us. It seizes us unexpectedly with such force that we find ourselves not simply impressed but stupefied even to the extent that for a while we cannot understand what has happened. In a climactic scene of the novel, Isabel Archer, the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady*, suddenly finds herself free after delivering herself from the passionate embrace of her lover. Since she was almost reduced to the state of living death, her sudden passage from wretched despair to freedom fascinates us, but nevertheless at bottom we cannot but feel somehow baffled. This, however, can be seen as rather symptomatic of the paradoxical nature of freedom in the realistic novel. In the realistic novel, freedom appears essentially an anomaly, i. e. something that cannot be properly placed. In his famous essay "The Art of Fiction," James confidently declares that "[t]he only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life"(5). Behind his confidence in representation, there is an assumption that in principle all that there is of life can be represented. What sustains representation in the realistic novel is the causal network by means of which each effect can be referred back to its cause so that it may be properly placed. However, it is obvious that freedom cannot be possible except where such a predictable network fails, i.e. where each effect cannot always be referred back to its cause. In other words, freedom cannot be possible except where there is something that cannot be properly placed and as such cannot be represented, either.

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James seriously deals with the question of freedom in the heroine Isabel Archer, who pursues alone unprecedented freedom which no one else around her could ever understand. That she is a woman makes the question even more significant, for the unrepresentable particularly concerns women, if not women alone, in the male-dominated world where the novel is set. Though James declares in the essay quoted above that representation is what the novel is all about, he could not but confront the unrepresentable in his attempt to "represent" Isabel. The question is, therefore, how he confronted the unrepresentable, and then how he inscribed or rather failed to inscribe it in the novel.

I. Freedom and the Realistic Novel: Preliminaries

When we look at the question of freedom in the realistic novel, a simple question comes to mind: if feedom cannot be realized except where the causal network fails, how could it become possible in the first place? If the causal network is complete, freedom is simply impossible. Does this then not suggest that the causal network is somehow "not" complete? While discussing a technical problem in the preface to *Roderick Hudson,* James obliquely brings the question of freedom into focus:

> Where, for the complete expression of one's subject, does a particular relation stop — giving way to some other not concerned in that expression?
>
> Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so. (vii)

For the complete expression of a subject, he says, relations stop nowhere, but the task of the artist is only to make them "appear" to do so. This means that, though theoretically the causal network should be complete, it cannot be so in the actual execution of writing, because its infinite expansion cannot be represented within the finite means available to the artist. If the causal network as represented in the realistic novel is, as he admits, "not" complete, what, then, does this tell us about the question of freedom in the realistic novel? It tells us: freedom becomes possible, because the causal network is not complete; and it is at the point where the causal network fails that freedom makes its way into the realistic novel. Therefore, freedom is not an accident that comes up now and then out of pure chance, but it is "inevitable" because of the inherent flaw in the causal network itself.[1]

In order to follow our course of argument further on, we briefly consult a thesis on realism which seems relevant here. In the second chapter of *A Future for Astyanax*, Leo Bersani discusses the realistic novel from a formal point of view. It is interesting to note that he regards realism as essentially a "reaction" to actual social fragmentation. According to him, realism does not, as we might imagine, stem from a confidence in social order, but rather it proceeds from a consciousness that such a confidence is already difficult to sustain. It provides a form of containment which seems to reinforce the threatened social order: "The realistic novel gives us an image of social fragmentation contained within the order of significant form — and it thereby suggests that the chaotic fragments are somehow socially viable and morally redeemable" (60). The realistic novel is, he suggests, not simple representation but essentially an illusion, but this does not mean simply that it is false representation. Whereas simple representation can be judged true or false in relation to what it represents, illusion can be judged only in terms of what he calls "significant form." It gives us not false representation of the world outside but its own significant form, and so it is not an accident that Bersani reveals behind the realistic novel as the most ineradicable obsession "a commitment to a *psychological* integrity or intelligibility which has been a constant in Western culture" (57). This suggests that the realistic novel is essentially wish-fulfilment, and that its rationale is, to put it in psychoanalytic terms, the pleasure principle. This is exactly what he means when he says: "There are predictable continuities among different people's desires as well as among the desires of each individual; behavior can be interpreted, structured, "plotted" (69). In order to establish predictable continuities among all desires, there should be no errant desire that cannot be placed within the pleasure principle, i.e. within the causal network on which the realistic novel depends.

If, as Bersani says, realism can be thought of as essentially a reaction, it follows that it proceeds from a consciousness that the pleasure principle is threatened, and in the realistic novel it is the desire of the hero/heroine who tries to attain freedom that constitutes this threat. Bersani continues: "The heroes of fiction are frequently the flaws in that text, its menacing moments of illegibility." This is exactly where we left our argument about the question of freedom above, and the desire of the hero/heroine corresponds to the point where the causal network fails. Thus having said, however, Bersani finally concludes that the hero/heroine, in spite of his/her role as an intruder, does not really threaten the structure of the realistic novel:

> The hero in the realistic fiction supports a novelistic structure which includes *his* expulsion from the viable structure of fiction and of life. The novelist glamorizes a figure who exposes the factitious nature of the social and esthetic order in the name of which the novelist will sacrifice that figure. (69-70)

The structure which he describes here is no longer a simple one. The hero/heroine is finally excluded from the structure of the realistic novel, but the point is that this structure does not simply exclude him/her but "includes" his/her exclusion as its constitutive moment. He/She is not simply excluded from a structure which is inherently closed, but it is his/her exclusion that closes it. This means that his/her exclusion is taken into

account in advance, and therefore that the threat which he/she apparently poses to the structure is no threat at all. The flaw in the structure is not a flaw but the support of its closure without which it would fall apart and reveal what is behind it, namely actual social fragmentation.

Therefore, freedom is after all the constitutive moment of the closure of the realistic novel itself. The pleasure principle finally asserts itself, and the illegible desire of the hero/heroine, though it remains illegible in itself, is made legible as the "figure" of his/her exclusion, i.e. as the effect of structure on him/her. Alienated from his/her own desire, he/she is reduced to no more than the carrier of the effect which structure imposes on him/her. However, what fails to be grasped here is his/her "own" desire. As long as we discuss the realistic novel as structure, we necessarily reduce his/her desire to the effect of structure and fail to grasp his/her desire as his/her own. This surplus of his/her desire escapes structure and as such cannot be placed within the pleasure principle and remains illegible. How, then, is such a surplus of Isabel's desire represented or rather does it fail to be represented in *The Portrait of a Lady*?

II. "I can't escape my fate": Independence as a Dictate

From a formal point of view, the most apparent feature of the novel is that about the middle there is some laspe of time before and after Isabel's marriage during which we are not allowed to see what happens simultaneously as the action unfolds. Instead, we are told about it afterwards when she recalls it during her meditation. Since her marriage is obviously the most important event in the novel, that James eliminated it from the surface of the narrative cannot be without a reason. Recalling later the circumstances which urged her to marriage, she cannot really understand how she could have made such a great mistake in a choice which she believed she had made most deliberately. The omission in the narrative suggests that her mistake appeared to her so irreparable that it failed to be integrated into her self. In other words, the novel is constructed around a traumatic event which cannot be represented, and it aims, if possible, at nothing but the full integration of this event into the causal network on which it depends. Since her choice was most deliberately made, she cannot but admit that the only person who is to blame is herself, but her own desire which dictated her choice curiously remains illegible to her: "It was impossible to pretend that she had not acted with her eyes open; if ever a girl was a free agent she had been. A girl in love was doubtless not a free agent; but the sole course of her mistake had been within herself" (2: 160). Within the pleasure principle, each desire can be referred back to its meaning and as such can be placed in the causal network, but her illegible desire subverts the causal network and threatens the pleasure principle itself. Where, then, did her illegible desire come from? How could she ever entertain a desire whose meaning escapes even herself? That the meaning of her own desire escapes her suggests a certain surplus in her desire which cannot be placed within the pleasure principle. In order to examine the nature of this surplus, let us first look into the context in which she makes her choice.

From the beginning, Isabel is often described as independent, and she herself repeatedly speaks of her independence as the most important thing to her. She tells Goodwood: "If there's a thing in the world I'm fond of, . . . it's my personal independence" (1: 228). For a woman who lived in the Victorian England where the novel is set, however, independence was far from easy to achieve. When Mrs. Touchett first mentions Isabel in her telegram, she describes her as "quite independent" (1: 13), but these words strike those who receive her telegram at Gardencourt as ambiguous, because she does not make clear whether it refers to moral or finantial independence. This suggests that, as far as women are concerned, moral independence alone is not sufficient if it does not have a finantial basis. For a woman without a fortune, there is no means to achieve independence but marriage. Goodwood tells Isabel: "It's to make you independent that I want to marry you. . . . An unmarried woman — a girl of your age — isn't independent. There are all sorts of things she can't do. She's hampered at every step." When there is a fortune,

even a woman can do at least as much as it allows her as a woman, and her independence is somehow socially viable, even if she remains unmarried, for a fortune gives her a place which she does not "naturally" have. Madame Merle says: "a woman, it seems to me, has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl" (1: 280). For a woman without a fortune, nothing but marriage can provide such a place, but it gives it to her, as William Blackstone makes clear, on condition that her person is subsumed under that of her husband: "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband" (1: 442). While they are married, the husband and the wife are regarded as one person, but this means that the husband alone is a free agent. The wife, on the other hand, is not regarded as a separate being but supposed to represent her husband with whom she is inseparably united under the law. Since the institution of marriage sustains and even reinforces gender discrimination, marriage does not provide a way out of this discrimination but rather results in a deeper involvement in it.

Therefore, marriage is not a simple matter of choice but poses a sort of double bind which seems insurmountable. The point is that the choice which is regarded as essentially personal is actually constituted by the system of discriminating social codes which is not at all personal. When Goodwood tells Isabel that he wants to marry her "to make her independent," she dismisses his argument as "a beautiful sophism" (1: 228), and what irritates her is his blindness to the system of discriminating social codes which sustains the institution of marriage. Warburton also makes her hesitate to accept his offer because of the system which he embodies rather than because of his person:

> What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist — murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own. (1: 144)

Though she believes that she also has a system of her own, the system in question is not something like moral independence but "a territorial, a political, a social magnate." His system extends beyond his person to join the system of discriminating social codes which sustains the institution of marriage, whereas her system has no such social extension. Since, as Madame Merle says, a woman has no "natural" place in the system which he embodies, Isabel instinctively recoils from his offer for fear that it might force her to sacrifice all that is of her own.

Therefore, Isabel's desire to be independent does not only concern her "personal independence" as she calls it at one time, but it should be placed against the background of the system of discriminating social codes which sustains the institution of marriage. When she refuses Warburton's offer, she tells him that marriage means "giving up other chances" (1: 186), but she can mention no particular instance of these chances. She only suggests that these chances are life itself complete with "the usual chances and dangers" (1: 187), but what she really means is life beyond discriminating social codes, i.e. what of life is kept out of sight because of these codes. She also tells Goodwood elsewhere: "I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me" (1: 228- 229). She does not wish to choose simply according to accepted social codes which prescribe proper social conduct, though she does not simply ignore them, either. When she tells him that she will "probably never [marry]— no, never" (1: 222), she is not simply responding to the code of marriage by refusing it, but rather she is responding to what she calls "fate" in her interview with Warburton:

> "That reason that I wouldn't tell you — I'll tell it you after all. It's that I can't escape my fate."
>
> "Your fate?"
>
> "I should try to escape it if I were to marry you."

"I don't understand. Why should not *that* be your fate as well as anything else?"

"Because it's not," said Isabel femininely. (1: 186)

Asked for the reason that she cannot marry him, she can give no better answer than that it is not her fate. Moreover, her desire to be independent contains a surplus which cannot be placed within the pleasure principle, because she tells Warburton that she "can't escape unhappiness." Since she also says that she is "not bent on a life of misery" (1: 187), she does not simply pursue unhappiness, but rather she suggests that for her life is above the question of happiness. Both Warburton and Goodwood cannot but miss the point, because they look at her desire to be independent only in terms of happiness.

Isabel's desire to be independent is not, as both Warburton and Goodwood would believe, simply "masochistic."[2] By choosing her fate, she rather refuses the simple pursuit of happiness, i.e. of the pleasure principle, because, since it depends on the system of accepted social codes, it is not independent enough. Being independent means being a free agent, and what she calls fate is not, as we might imagine, something that is settled in advance and simply makes her follow its course, but the pursuit of unprecedented freedom. We usually regard fate not as a matter of choice but rather as something that we cannot choose nor judge, as something that we can do nothing but accept. This is not what Isabel calls fate, for she tells Goodwood: "I try to judge for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all" (1: 228). What she calls fate, therefore, is a matter of choice, while at the same time it is, as she tells Warburton, what she cannot escape, i.e. what she cannot choose. If taken in a descriptive sense, this cannot but lead to a contradiction, but what she calls fate refers to the "way" she should choose rather than the choice itself. It tells her to choose regardless of happiness so that her choice may be independent of the system of accepted social codes. In other words, what she calls fate is a dictate to be independent, i.e. to be a free agent in her choice.[3]

This dictate is constantly at the back of Isabel's mind to keep her "conscience" awake. When Ralph tells her that she has "too much power of thought— above all too much conscience," she honestly admits that it is what she cannot really understand herself:

> "You could say nothing more true. I'm absorbed in myself — I look at life too much as a doctor's prescription. Why indeed should we perpetually be thinking whether things are good for us, as if we were patients lying in a hospital? Why should I be so afraid of not doing right? As if it mattered to the world whether I do right or wrong!" (1: 319-320)

Half wondering herself, she confesses that she is afraid of not doing right "[a]s if it mattered to the world whether [she does] right or wrong!" This does not mean, however, that she is simply afraid of doing something that is not compatible with accepted social codes which prescribe proper social conduct. Rather, we should read in her confession the formula of the Kantian moral imperative: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle of a universal legislation" (142). That she perpetually asks herself whether she does right or wrong does not simply suggest her submission to accepted social codes, but it reveals her moral attitude in the Kantian sense which requires her to act according to the principle of a universal legislation.[4] Since such a principle does not correspond to accepted social codes, it is natural that Henrietta should take her moral attitude for simple idealism: "The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality — with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions" (1: 310). Her criticism, which is based on accepted social codes rather than the moral law in the Kantian sense, cannot but miss the point. Isabel answers with good reason: "What are my illusions? . . . I try so hard not to have any."[5]

Isabel's desire to be independent is essentially the Kantian moral imperative whose essence consists in the rejection of the affective side of moral experience, i.e. of the "pathological" as Kant calls it. There is nothing

that more clearly attests to this than her refusal of the simple pursuit of happiness. When she comes to know that she has inherited a large fortune from her uncle, she curiously feels afraid, because it gives her freedom:

> "Yes, I'm afraid; I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's a constant effort. I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless." (1: 320)

Before freedom which the fortune promises her, she hesitates. For her, freedom is not something that she can freely enjoy without scruple, but it keeps her "thinking" and requires "a constant effort" on her part even to the extent that she wonders if "it's not a greater happiness to be powerless." It is obvious that she desires freedom, and it is "such a fine thing" in itself, but she cannot but feel that she should "make such a good use of it" in order not to be "ashamed." This suggests that she tries to see freedom not simply as a right to be freely enjoyed but as a moral law in the Kantian sense which rejects the pathological. If she equated freedom with the simple pursuit of happiness, she would be ashamed, but she makes such a use of it that no one else could ever know how to make sense of it.

III. "a ruinous expenditure": The Death Drive and *Jouissance*

Having examined so far the context in which Isabel makes her choice, now we go on to look into the choice itself. Inheriting a large fortune, she achieves finantial as well as moral independence which those who felt at a loss as to the meaning of Mrs. Touchett's telegram at Gardencourt obviously believe is the sufficient condition of independence. Having become more independent than ever, however, she suddenly makes a most reckless choice which does not seem to agree with her desire to be independent. When she chooses Osmond after refusing more promising offers from Warburton and Goodwood, her choice strikes those who are concerned about her as disappointing and even scandalous. Mrs. Touchett, who took her up to bring her to Europe and then prides herself as her protectress, almost loses her temper, telling her that "[t]here's nothing *of* him" (2: 54). Her son Ralph describes him just in the same way: "I believed you'd marry a man of more importance. . . . I can't get over the sense that Osmond is somehow — well, small" (2: 68 - 70). What strikes them as so disappointing is that Osmond is not simply inferior to Isabel but even scandalously so, and at one time she herself describes him as "a perfect nonentity" (2: 47). Moreover, her choice is not casual as in the case of so-called love at first sight, but it is most deliberately made. When Ralph persuades his father to leave her a fortune, he tells him that he wants her to be free in her choice, even free not to choose at all: "If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support. That's what I want cannily to prevent. She wishes to be free, and your bequest will make her free" (1: 261). Since she has a fortune enough to sustain herself alone, there is no urgent need of marriage, but her resolution seems somehow urgent.

If her choice derived from a certain need, either finantial or moral, it could not be so scandalous. It is scandalous, because there is no such apparent need at all for her to make such a reckless resolution. Her resolution even makes herself wonder at her own sudden change of mind, and she attributes it to a certain "more primitive" need:

> What had become of all her ardours, her aspirations, her theories, her high estimate of her independence and her incipient conviction that she should never marry? These things had been absorbed in a more primitive need — a need the answer to which brushed away numberless questions, yet gratified infinite desires. It simplified the situation at a stroke, it came down from above like the light of the stars, and it needed no explanation. There was explanation enough in the fact that he was her lover, her own, and that she should be able to be of use to him. (2: 82)

She regards this need as something like a powerful,

irresistible instinct: coming down "from above," it "brushed away numberless questions" and "simplified the situation at a stroke"; and yet it "gratified infinite desires."[6] She emphasizes that this need is incommensurable with all other needs, and that the pleasure which it procures is so intense that it overshadows all other pleasures. For such an incommensurable need, no explanation is adequate. Though she tries to convince herself that there is "explanation enough" in the fact that Osmond is her lover, it is obvious that this is not so much an explanation as an evasion. When we love someone, we need no explanation to do something for him or her. Rather, what we do for him or her attests to our love. Isabel's course of thinking here forms a sort of vicious circle, for she tries to prove the motive for what she does by means of her love of which what she does should provide the proof. She actually uses her love for Osmond simply as a pretext for covering up the intense pleasure which her "more primitive" need procures. What need, then, can give her such an intense pleasure? She thinks: "She could surrender to him with a kind of humility, she could marry him with a kind of pride; she was not only taking, she was giving." As we can easily see, what she regards as "a more primitive need" is after all a need to give, and it gives her the most intense pleasure which overshadows even the pleasure of taking.

However, such a need is not entirely new to her. Though concealed deep behind her "independent" appearance, to give herself has been her constant desire: "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" (1: 71 - 72). This secret desire of hers is regarded as a mixture of pleasure and pain which is "too formidable to be attractive." She also suggests that it will cost her "a ruinous expenditure" to satisfy it. Her so-called theory that she "should begin by getting a general impression of life" (1: 73) does not simply derive from a sort of common sense, but it can be thought of as a defence against this intense desire. When Osmond tells her that he is "absolutely in love with" her, he unwittingly appeals to this most secret desire of hers. His confession makes him appear "beautiful and generous" and invests him "as with the golden air of early autumn," but at the same time she has a dread:

> What made her dread great was precisely the force which, as it would seem, ought to have banished all dread — the sense of something within herself, deep down, that she supposed to be inspired and trustful passion. It was there like a large sum stored in a bank — which there was a terror in having to begin to spend. If she touched it, it would all come out. (2: 18)

Her sense of this secret desire which is "deep down" within herself is ambivalent: it appears to her to be such an "inspired and trustful passion" that its force "ought to have banished all dread"; but, on the other hand, she is afraid to touch it, because it is too intense to be contained within a limit once released.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Isabel hangs back at the last moment:

> The working of this young lady's spirit was strange, and I can only give it to you as I see it, not hoping to make it seem altogether natural. 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 treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. (2: 21 - 22)

Though she tries to see, as she always does, before she chooses, she is somehow not allowed to see in this particular case. The narrator, then suddenly intruding into the narrative, tells us that the working of her spirit is so "strange" that all he can do is to "give it to [us] as [he] see[s] it, not hoping to make it seem altogether natural." He admits that at the moment she is not under the control of his imagination which is rather trailing behind her thought. This suggests that she confronts here something unprecedented, something that is not compatible with accepted social codes. In the tract before her which spreads beyond the closure of these

codes, there is absolutely nothing that safely guides her, and it would cost her "a ruinous expenditure" to venture through it. This uncertain tract which looks "ambiguous and even treacherous" is nothing but the unseen place which she imagined was beyond the condemned door of the old house where she lived as a little girl: "she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place no the other side — a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror" (1: 30). The place on the other side of the door is described as "a region of delight or of terror," just as she conceives her secret desire as a curious mixture of pleasure and pain. Whereas she "had no wish to look out" for the sake of "her theory" then, she is determined to look out at the expense of it this time.

However, what makes Isabel determined to look out, to choose this particular person, Osmond? When Ralph tells her about his disappointment at seeing her "caught," reminding her that she "wanted only to see life . . . to survey the whole field," she answers that "one can't do anything so general" (2: 65). Though she tells him that "one must marry a particular individual," her description of Osmond is striking in that it deprives him of all attributes that would make him "particular": "no property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It's the total absence of all these things that pleases me" (2: 74). Having described him as deprived of all these attributes, she then declares that she loves him, because he is destitute of them all. Moreover, he is not simply destitute of them all, but rather he pursues destitution itself, which he calls "studied . . . willful renunciation." He tells her at one time: "It was very simple. It was to be as quiet as possible. . . . Not to worry — not to strive nor struggle. To resign myself. To be content with little" (1: 381). Though he has none of those attributes which she enumerates, he does not "strive nor struggle" to get them but simply ignores them as if they were not worth having at all. What makes him particular in spite of his destitution is after all his gesture of renunciation, which invests him, as she recalls later, with "an indefinable beauty" (2: 192) in her eye.

What strikes Isabel as beautiful is that Osmond seems to stand independent of accepted social codes in his own way. As she admits later, his gesture of renunciation appears to her to be "a grand indifference, an exquisite independence" (2: 197). It impresses her so much because of its disinterestedness, because of its indifference to accepted values. In other words, it impresses her because of the aesthetic attitude involved in it, which Ralph calls "taste" elsewhere (2: 71). She recalls later:

> At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some other conscience, to some more prepared receptacle. What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world? (2: 193)

Ralph told Isabel at one time that she had too much conscience, which made her feel afraid when she inherited a fortune from her uncle. Her fortune was "on her mind" to such an extent that she wished to "transfer the weight of it to some other conscience" to relieve her own, and she tried to resolve the question of her conscience by sharing his aesthetic attitude. His gesture of renunciation is not, as she imagined, conscience, but it sacrifices conscience for the sake of the beautiful. Is the beautiful not, however, also at the bottom of what she calls "a ruinous expenditure"? Did she not choose him after all, because she knew that he embodied her most secret desire?

When Osmond confessed his love for her, Isabel found him intensely beautiful, but at the same time she had a dread which derived from her sense of a desire deep down within herself. Her impression derives from his aesthetic attitude whose essence lies in sacrificing all other interests for the sake of the beautiful, but what she imagines "a ruinous expenditure" is also a sort of renunciation. The beautiful is essentially the beautiful for its own sake, and her desire which, as we have seen earlier, "brushed away numberless questions" and "simplified the situation at a stroke" makes her sacrifice

all other pathological interests for its sake. What urges her to "a ruinous expenditure" is a desire which goes beyond all other pathological interests, beyond the pleasure principle itself, namely the death drive. According to Lacan, the human subject is constituted around a certain division which threatens the homeostasis of the pleasure principle, and the death drive derives from this division. Independent of the pleasure principle, it is essentially a blind drive which is not bound by the pursuit of pleasure, but nevertheless a certain surplus which cannot be defined in terms of pleasure is still attached to it (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 209). After all, it is this surplus, *jouissance* as Lacan calls it, that urges Isabel to choose Osmond. Though he is destitute, he pleases her even more than Warburton and Goodwood, because what really matters is not so much what he possesses as *jouissance* which she attains through him. Though she insists that his inherent qualities are enough, it is rather his destitution itself that enables her to attain *jouissance*. By his gesture of renunciation, he occupies the place of what Lacan calls the *objet a* which embodies *jouissance*, and it is in order to attain this *jouissance* that she passionately gives herself. The *objet a* is essentially a void, a pure semblance which, though devoid of all positive content, nevertheless causes desire.(7) Though destitute, Osmond none the less pleases her immensely by making himself the means of her access to *jouissance*.

Reflecting later on her resolution, Isabel tries to convince herself that what she had found in him was its sole motive, but her reflection takes a curious turn and reveals that there was something more to it: "she had loved him, she had so anxiously and yet so ardently loved given herself— a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal also for what she brought him and what might enrich the gift" (2: 192). At first, she seems to believe that she had given herself simply for her love for him, but then she feels uncertain. She cannot suppress the feeling that "[b]ut for her money . . . she would never have done it." Though she apparently gives one explanation after the other as if they were equally significant, if we follow her reflection up to the point, we have an impression that the former receives too much emphasis in order to cover up the surplus of the latter. It should be noted that she had thought that "it would be a good thing to love him." At bottom, she did not love him simply for the sake of love, but she loved him, because she thought it "a good thing." What did she need such a detour for, if she really believed that her love for him was enough? This suggests that her love for him was not, as she tries to believe, the the sole motive for her resolution but derived from a deeper one, which is the surplus of her desire to give herself, namely *jouissance*.

As we have seen earlier, Isabel's desire to be independent is essentially a dictate, namely the Kantican moral imperative whose essence consists in the rejection of the pathological. It is obvious that such a dictate cannot be placed within the pleasure principle which concerns nothing but the pathological. Her desire to be independent is, therefore, nothing but the death drive which urges her to "a ruinous expenditure." Lacan makes clear that the Kantian moral imperative is not simple renunciation. It is, as Kant defines it, the law for the sake of the law itself, but such a law is not all there is to it. Though it rejects the pathological, it procures even in renunciation certain *jouissance* which derives from the submission to the form of the law itself. Lacan provides the object in moral experience which Kant deliberately leaves in default, namely the *objet a* which embodies *jouissance*.(8) Isabel refuses the simple pursuit of happiness, but she tries to attain *jouissance* which derives from the submission to the dictate to be independent. She chooses Osmond in spite of his destitution, because, as we have made clear, he occupies the place of the *objet a*, i.e. of the privileged object of this dictate. Even after the marriage, this sustains her conviction that "she could not have done otherwise": "She had not been mistaken about the beauty of his mind; she knew that organ perfectly now. She had lived with it, she had lived *in* it almost— it appeared to have become her habitation" (2: 194). It is, however, not the beauty of "his mind" that seized her, for she actually looked for the *objet a* in him.(9) It is interesting to note that she believes that she "lived in it almost." She passionately embraces it to herself as if she had almost internalized it, but it curiously slips through her

embrace.

IV. "You were ground in the very mill of the conventional!": Authorial Judgement

After the marriage, Isabel finds that things do not turn out as she expected, but she does not reveal her disappointment which inwardly torments her. Behaving outwardly as a proper wife, she represses her frustrated desire which she so ardently tried to assert before the marriage. Seeing her the first time after a few years, Ralph is surprised to find her repression so complete: "if she wore a mask it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it; this was not an expression, Ralph said — it was a representation, it was even an advertisement" (2: 142). Perhaps, her repression might seem to be simply imposed on her from the outside by the institution of marriage which, as Blackstone makes clear, legally allow the husband to subsume the person of the wife under his own, and in fact Ralph finds that she represents Osmond. Before the marriage, he already told her that "she had too many ideas," and that "she must get rid of them," but then she took no notice of it, and it is not until she has married him that she realizes that he really meant it: "He had really meant it — he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance. . . . What he had meant had been the whole thing — her character, the way she felt, the way she judged" (2: 194 - 195). While he forces her to get rid of her ideas, he has "an immense esteem for tradition" (2: 198), of which he believes she has none. Since what he means by tradition is nothing but the system of accepted social codes which sustains gender discrimination, it soon begins to suffocate her: "When she saw this rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation . . . took possession of her; she seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay" (2: 199). Her sense of "darkness and suffocation" suggests that this system is thoroughly masculine, just as she associates Goodwood with darkness and confusion: "it was as if something large and confused, something dark and ugly, would have to call upon him . . . the Goodwood patent left her imagination absolutely cold" (1: 164 - 165). She conceives the Goodwood patent as representative of the masculine system as a whole. Osmond has a system of his own which is no less masculine than Goodwood's, but he does not wish Isabel to have her own, and all his irritation ultimately derives from the fact that she nevertheless tries to have one: "The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his — attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park" (2: 200).

Since as a wife Isabel is expected to submit herself to the will of her husband, the institution of marriage outwardly dictates her behaviour, and this alone might constitute a sufficient cause of her repression. There is, however, another cause which even more forcefully works on her from the inside. It is that she knows that her marriage is a failure, but nevertheless that she cannot bring herself to repudiate it, because it is "the most serious act — the single sacred act — of her life":

> To break with Osmond would be to break for ever; any open acknowledgement of irreconcilable needs would be an admission that their whole attempt had proved a failure. For them there could be no condonement, no compromise, no easy forgetfulness, no formal readjustment. They had attempted only one thing, but that one thing was to have been exquisite. Once they missed it nothing else would do; there was no conceivable substitute for that success. (2: 246 - 247)

Her point is clear enough: she cannot repudiate her marriage, because it is a "singular" act which cannot be repeated nor substituted. It is not an accident that it allows "no condonement, no compromise, no easy forgetfulness, no formal readjustment." Her repression, therefore, primarily derives from her inner perception of a failure which she believes is beyond reparation. Though she tries to believe that the only way to repair it is "just immensely . . . to accept it" (2: 161), a singular act cannot be repaired because of the surplus which makes it singular, and this irreducible surplus is what remains illegible of her desire, namely *jouissance*.

When she made the choice, it seemed to her as deliberate as such a choice could be, but her *jouissance* escaped her, for after all it does not belong to her.[10]

After the marriage, Isabel almost does nothing but attempt to understand her own singular act in order to integrate it into her self, but it is obvious that her *jouissance* resists such integration. However, the action takes a curious turn which gradually diverts her attention from the inner cause of her repression. It is announced when she happens to receive a strong impression finding Osmond and Madame Merle together in private. Beyond the threshold, she "stopped short" for fear that she might disturb them, because she has perceived "a sort of familiar silence" between them. The process of her perception is, however, curiously circuitous:

> What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. Then she perceived that they had arrived at a desultory pause in their exchange of ideas and were musing, face to face, with the freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them. There was nothing to shock in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected. (2: 164 - 165)

At first, she takes note of "an anomaly" in the fact that Osmond is sitting while Madame Merle stands, but "[t]hen" she takes it as the sign of the intimate communication between them. The single word "[t]hen" marks the almost imperceptible distance between the appearance of the scene and the unusual impression which it makes on her. Without its consequent impression, the scene itself is apparently innocent, for two conspicous features which she stresses are only "[t]heir relative positions" and "their absorbed mutual gaze." Since, as she admits, they are old friends, there is "nothing to shock" in these two features, but nevertheless the scene makes such an indelible impression on her that, when it later comes back to her, it sets off her intensive meditation: "What had suddenly set [terrors] into livelier motion she hardly knew, unless it were the strange impression she had received in the afternoon of her husband's being in more direct communication with Madame Merle than she suspected" (2: 188). The content of her meditation apparently has nothing to do with the scene which sets it off, and it is not until she is going to bed that she remembers it again. While her mind is most actively engaged, the scene which sets it going is curiously banished from it. As in the case of "[t]hen" above, therefore, the use of the word "unless" here seems difficult to sustain, but it is nothing but this lack of connection that characterizes the impression which the scene makes on her.

Towards the end of the novel, the intimate relationship between Osmond and Madame Merle comes to be revealed, which apparently makes up for this lack of connection. Before it comes to Isabel, her suspision of Madame Merle's involvement in the arrangement of her marriage to Osmond grows into almost a conviction. When she comes to know that Isabel, though it is not the case from her point of view, prevented Pansy's marriage to Lord Warburton, Madame Merle accuses her as if it were her own business, and Isable is suddenly convinced that she has not been a disinterested observer throughout. Her accusation seems to her to have revealed that "[her] interest was identical with Osmond's" (2: 323). Confronting her accusation, Isabel cannot but feel that "there was more intention in [Madame Merle's] past behaviour than she had allowed for at the time." Up to the point, however, there is no positive proof of her suspision, but a revelation comes from the Countess Gemini, Osmond's sister, who tells her that Pansy's mother is not his late wife but Madame Merle. Pansy issued from her adulterous relationship with Osmond, but he acknowledged her as a child between him and his late wife who had not been dead too long to make such an arrangement entirely improbable. Though Madame Merle renounced all her claim to the child, she conspires with Osmond to make his marriage to Isabel, expecting that her money would give the child a lift. The Countess Gemini's revelation apparently accounts

for "a sort of familiar silence" between Osmond and Madame Merle of which Isabel takes note finding them together in private, but it comes to her much later. How, then, could the scene make such an indelible impression on her at the moment that, when it later comes back to her, it sets off her intensive meditation? What is so traumatic of the scene as to make it come back to her later?

When Isabel happens to see Osmond and Madame Merle together in private, they face each other returning each other's gaze. While their relative positions which keep them face to face somehow alienate them from her, their mutual gaze, whether "absorbed" or not, seems to exclude her from the intimate communication between them, and it is this sense of exclusion that makes her impression of the scene so traumatic.(11) The Countess Gemini's revelation might seem to provide the lacking connection between the appearance of the scene and the unusual impression which it makes on her, but in fact it simply provides the interpretation of Isabel's impression that there is more intimate communication between Osmond and Madame Merle than she suspected, and the appearence of the scene itself remains outside the interpretive framework. However, it is rather the appearance of the scene itself that is traumatic, and she is excluded not from the supposed intimate communication between Osmond and Madame Merle but from the appearance of the scene itself in which they happen to be united. It is not an accident that she stresses their relative positions and their mutual gaze, because these two features alone are irreducible. The revelation simply covers up the irreducible, traumatic surplus of the appearance of the scene itself by providing the interpretation of the impression which it makes on her. What, then, does the appearance of the scene itself conceal? It conceals nothing but the *objet a* with *jouissance* attached to it which Isabel tried to attain in her singular act. When she finds Osmond and Madame Merle together in private, she takes the scene for the sign of the intimate communication between them, but the fact is that they unwittingly attract her *jouissance* by means of the appearance which they happen to give. They have nothing to do with *jouissance* nor know that they happen to attract it in Isabel's eye. Whether they are actually engaged in intimate communication or not does not matter at all, for this is a purely formal effect which is determined by their relative positions, their mutual gaze, "and" Isabel seeing them from beyond the threshold. The scene later comes back to her to set off her intensive meditation, not because, as she later believes, they conspired to make her marriage, but rather because they unwittingly attract her *jouissance* from which she is excluded in her position.(12)

What is irreducible of the scene is, therefore, Isabel's position in it in which she happens to find herself, but the Countess Gemini's revelation provides it with a ground which is outside the scene itself, i.e. the fact that Osmond and Madame Merle conspired to make her marriage to him. The revelation covers up the irreducible, traumatic surplus of the appearance of the scene itself, namely *jouissance*, by "grafting" her impression of the scene on the adulterous relationship between Osmond and Madame Merle. Though essentially false, this grafting works so seamlessly that all the disconnected fragments suddenly begin to fit in, and she sees with horror a tremendous vision rise before her:

> Now that she was in the secret, now that she knew something that so much concerned her and the eclipse of which had made life resemble an attempt to play whist with an imperfect pack of cards, the truth of things, their mutual relations, their meaning, and for the most part their horror, rose before her with a kind of architectural vastness. (2: 390-391)

On her way to Gardencourt, she is finally convinced that she is in the secret. The tremendous architecture of the underplot is revealed before her, and her singular act whose meaning has escaped her so far is finally placed in the causal network. She made a mistake, to be sure, but her mistake has meaning, for it was calculated by others behind her back. The Countess Gemini's revelation does not save her, but it saves instead the causal network as a whole at her expense.

This is how Bersani describes the role of the

hero/heroine in the realistic novel. The structure of the realistic novel is not inherently closed, but it is closed by means of his/her exclusion, and then he/she is included in it as the figure of his/her exclusion. When finally convinced that she has been deceived, Isabel seems to become such a figure of exclusion:

> Nothing seemed of use to her to-day. All purpose, all intention, was suspended; all desire too save the single desire to reach her much-embracing refuge. . . . She envied Ralph his dying, for if one were thinking of rest that was the most perfect of all. To cease utterly, to give it all up and not know anything more — this idea was as sweet as the vision of a cool bath in a marble tank, in a darkened chamber, in a hot land. (2: 391)

Hurrying to see Ralph on his deathbed, she envies him his dying, "the most perfect rest of all" coming to him, his "ceas[ing] utterly" from all the concerns of life. While passively carried to her destination, she is almost as good as dead, "so detached from hope and regret" that she even imagines herself as if she were simply waiting for death, comparing herself to "one of those Etruscan figures couched upon the receptacle of their own ashes." Reduced to the state of living death, she feels no desire but the desire for death itself and almost identifies herself with a figure of exclusion which negatively represents the closure of the causal network, i.e. of the novel itself. If her identification with this figure closes the causal network, then it is not an accident that she desires nothing but death, for death means the renunciation of all desire and the identification with what Freud calls "the inanimate state."(13)

In her interview with Ralph on his deathbed, Isabel does nothing but acknowledge this to an even greater extent. It is in the truth at which they look together after she feels that he is "beyond the reach of pain": "nothing mattered now but the only knowledge that was not pure anguish — the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together" (2: 414). She tells him that Osmond married her for her money, which he acknowledges with her at his last gasp. He then goes on to make the most definitive statement in the novel: "You wanted to look at life for yourself — but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional!" (2: 415). It is not only Ralph who is speaking here, but James himself through him, who writes in his notebook as follows: "The idea of the whole thing is that the poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness, who has done, as she believes, a generous, natural, clear-sighted thing, finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional" (15). Ralph's statement is as it were James's own judgement passed on Isabel from outside of the novel itself, and it definitively acknowledges her as a figure of exclusion. Looking at his suffering, she then tells him that there is "something deeper" than pain, which he names "love": "You said just now that pain's not the deepest thing. No — no. . . . It passes, after all; it's passing now. But love remains" (2: 416). He means that, while pain is no more than a passing sensation, love is a substance which never passes, but in fact love corresponds to the place of symbolic identification which is left open for her. By acknowledging love as the deepest thing in life after him, she consents to thoroughly renounce her own desire and identifies herself completely with a figure of exclusion which negatively represents the closure of the causal network, i.e. of the symbolic order as Lacan calls it. This successfully covers up the unrepresentable void around which the novel is constructed, thus repressing the traumatic surplus of *jouissance*. Ralph dies during the night, and as a result Isabel fulfils in spite of herself his prophecy made on her first evening at Gardencourt that she would see the ghost when she had "suffered greatly" (1: 64). His death closes the circle which he began to draw himself by prophesying her future, and the closed circle finally leaves her alone outside, excluded and punished.

V. "There was a very straight path": Isabel's Resistance

However, the novel does not end there, but another chaper takes over the action to tell the aftermath of Ralph's death. From a formal point of view, this seems

entirely unnecessary, for the causal network has already been closed leaving Isabel alone outside. There seems to be absolutely nothing that she could do in her position, but nevertheless she curiously remains undecided as if she were not yet finished. This suggests that the causal network does not articulate all but leaves behind a certain remnant on which it nevertheless depends. In other words, symbolic identification is not complete, and something still persists afterwards. Isabel stays on at Gardencourt, living idly from day to day, without taking trouble to decide. While aimlessly strolling about the house, she finds herself by a rustic bench, "an historical, an interesting, bench" (2: 428) as she recalls it, on which years ago she read a letter from Goodwood informing her of his comming after her and then heard Lord Warburton declare love to her. For a while, she hesitates to sit on it, but a sudden rush of emotion overcomes her with a sense of such tiredness that she collapses on it. Her attitude on the bench is a perfect illustration of her situation: "Her attitude had a singular absence of purpose; her hands, hanging at her sides, lost themselves in the folds of her black dress; her eyes gazed vaguely before her" (2: 429). With dangling hands and vacant eyes, she has no sense of purpose left in her, while on the other hand she feels that "[t]here was nothing to recall her to the house." Rushing to Ralph's deathbed, she almost ran away from Rome, but his death makes her realize that after all she does not belong to Gardencourt, either. It is no longer a refuge as she imagined it on her way there, no longer capable of giving her a rest, not even the ultimate rest of death. Rome being no refuge, either, after the failure of her marraige became apparent, she absolutely belongs to nowhere.

When the causal network is closed at her expense, Isabel is excluded from it, but the ultimate rest of death, which she envied Ralph, is curiously denied her. It is surprising, however, that she should have anticipated as much on her way to Gardencourt: "Deep in her soul — deeper than any appetite for renunciation — was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come" (2: 392). Having already come into the secret then, she knew that her marriage is a most abominable fraud, but nevertheless something in her still resists her desire for renunciation. There is nothing that makes her resist it but the feeling that she simply cannot accept the life of mere suffering: "To live only to suffer — only to feel the injury of life repeated and enlarged — it seemed to her she was too valuable, too capable, for that." She does not know where such a feeling comes from, and in her sober thought she cannot but admit that the usual course of things rather sustains the opposite case, but she simply persists in her resistance all the same. However, it is not the simple resistance to unhappiness, either. While she is still lingering on the bench, Goodwood comes to her with resolution and makes her a reckless offer:

> "Why shouldn't we be happy — when it's here before us, when it's so easy? . . . We can do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything? What is it that holds us, what is it that has the smallest right to interfere in such a question as this? Such a question is between ourselves — and to say that is to settle it!" (2: 434-435)

Though he does not actually name it, it is obvious that he is suggesting adultery. He constantly stresses freedom, not freedom in the sense of a right but such extravagant freedom as no right can ever equal. He tells her that, when there is a chance of happiness, they can take it without scruple, and even boldly declares that they "can do absolutely as [they] please." In other words, he insists on the unmitigated, absolute pursuit of the pleasure principle, telling her that the question of happiness can be settled "between [them]selves." He continues: "The world's all before us — and the world's very big." Resisting his triumphant declaration, she weakly murmurs: "The world's very small." Though apparently still opposing him, at bottom she cannot but acknowledge the truth of what he tells her. It is not that she actually believes what he tells her, but she almost wishes to believe it. When he asks her why she should go back, she answers: "To get away from you!" (2: 433) Thus having said, however, she cannot but admit that at bottom it is not what she really feels: "But this expressed only a little of what she felt. The rest was that

she had never been loved before." Whether it is love or not, what irresistibly appeals to her is the sense that he knows what she feels, for he is telling her nothing but her most secret desire.

Before leaving Rome with Ralph, Goodwood found Isabel "perfectly inscrutable" (2: 318) and asked her whether he might "pity" her. She did not admit that she actually deserved his pity, but simply asked him to "give a thought to it every now and then" (2: 320). While she was still confident enough to resist him then, her confidence has been shattered to pieces now, and his overwhelming emotion feels too much to resist:

> She had wanted help, and here was help; it had come in a rushing torrent. I know not whether she believed everything he said; but she believed just then that to let him take her in his arms would be the next best thing to her dying. This belief, for a moment, was a kind of rapture, in which she felt herself sink and sink. In the movement she seemed to beat with her feet, in order to catch herself, to feel something to rest on. (2: 435)

He offers her what she has most wanted, and it comes to her in "a rushing torrent" which she receives with "a kind of rapture." In her excitement, she almost loses herself and experiences a sort of delirium, but nevertheless she still resists him: "Do me the greatest kindness of all, . . . I beseech you to go away! . . . As you love me, as you pity me, leave me alone!" (2: 436) The next moment, however, he embraces her in his arms and passionately kisses her. His kiss strikes her "like white lightning" and instantly makes her affirm all that belongs to him, "each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence." For a moment, she lets down her defence and accepts his embrace, but the next moment she finds herself "free." Rushing back to the house through the darkness, she feels different and suddenly realizes that "[t]here was a very straight path."

Isabel's sudden revelation is enigmatic. When he revised the novel, James much expanded the description of Goodwood's kiss and stressed its powerful effect on her. The first edition simply reads: "His kiss was like a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was free." There is no obvious connection between the first and the second half of the sentence, and the revision seems to be intended to smooth over this obvious disconnectedness. Perhaps, there is some lapse of time in between which fails to be represented, and the first edition lays it bare because of its more direct, austere rendering of the scene. When she finds herself free, it does not simply refer to her being freed from his passionate embrace, but it suggests that she has successfully resisted her most secret desire which he offered her, namely the unmitigated, absolute pursuit of the pleasure principle. It is not an accident that freedom suddenly comes to her when the unrepresentable intervenes, for the unrepresentable derives from something beyond the pleasure principle. When he triumphantly declared that the world was very big, she opposed him in weak murmur and tried to suggest something diffrent, though she could not really bring herself to believe it then. For a moment, she felt that "to let him take her in his arms would be the next best thing to her dying." By refusing him at the last moment, however, she refuses both alternatives, namely both the unmitigated, absolute pursuit of the pleasure principle and the desire for death itself which has seized her ever since she was on her way to Gardencourt, and chooses still another path, "a very straight path" as she imagines it.

The next day, Isabel goes to London apparently to meet Henrietta and then the day after leaves for Rome without even informing Goodwood of her departure. Her sudden departure is, however, still enigmatic. Though she has not openly broken with Osmond, their relationship no doubt appears to her more irreparable than ever, and then the submission to his will would mean nothing but the renunciation of her own desire once and for all. There seems to be absolutely no room for reconciliation, for, before she leaves for Gardencourt, he tells her:

> "You smile most expressively when I talk about *us*, but I assure you that *we*, *we*, Mrs. Osmond, is all I know. I take our marriage seriously; you appear to have found a way of not doing so. I'm not aware

> that we're divorced or separated; for me we're indissolubly united. . . . I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!" (2: 355-356)

He oppressively speaks to her "in the name of something sacred and precious — the observance of a magnificent form," i.e. the institution of marriage. His persistent use of "*we*" and "*us*" is obviously intended to bring home to her the fact that they are "indissolubly united," and he forces her to accept this union against her will. Her return, therefore, cannot be simply to submit herself to his will, for then she would acknowledge her exclusion even to a greater extent than ever by consenting to the renunciation of her own desire in the name of this union. Is it not after all the institution of marriage that closed the causal network, the symbolic order as Lacan calls it, at the expense of her desire? If so, then the renunciation of her own desire in the name of marriage would mean nothing but the acknowledgement of her own symbolic death which she would doubly acknowledge by her willed submission to it. A more promising interpretation would be that she returns to resist Osmond, and to resist her exclusion as well as her consequent inclusion in the causal network as a figure of exclusion, of symbolic death, i.e. as a honourable wife. In other words, she returns, we should like to believe, in order to prize open the once closed causal network and assert her own desire even against his will.

After Isabel has departed for Rome, Goodwood calls on Henrietta, who tells him of her departure and then simply adds: "Look here, Mr. Goodwood, . . . just you wait!" In the first edition, he only looks up at her, and there is no further elucidation as to the implication of these words, but they are made much less ambiguous in the revised edition: "On which he looked up at her — but only to guess, from her face, with a revulsion, that she simply meant he was young" (2: 437). Drawing on James's comment in his notebook which describes Henrietta's last words as "a characteristic characterization of Isabel," F. O. Matthiessen reads them as indicative of her optimism "which refuses to accept defeat" (181). He reads the word "characteristic" as "'characteristic'of her rather than of Isabel" (James, *The Notebooks of Henry James* 18-19) and dismisses Goodwood's hope of Isabel's possible break with Osmond in the future as entirely groundless, finally concluding that her return to Rome means "her acceptance of suffering" (184).[14] Can we not, however, suppose that there are some better grounds for her optimism than simple unwillingness to accept defeat? Does it not suggest that Isabel's return does not mean submission? Though she would never come back to Goodwood, it nevertheless does not follow that she will submit herself to the institution of marriage in the name of which Osmond forces her to sacrifice her own desire. Perhaps, she might have told Henrietta before her departure that she is not resigned yet, has not yet given herself up, and then this would give Henrietta a hope, though from our point of view it is a vain hope after all, that Isabel might come back to Goodwood some day. Though this is after all no more than a matter of conjecture, it seems to confirm the sense of fascination which we mentioned at the beginning. If Isabel refuses Goodwood at the last moment in order to persist in her resistance, then her return to Rome could mean nothing less.

VI. The Jamesian Desire: Conclusion

If Isabel is not resigned yet, it follows that the action has not run its course to the end. Against the possible criticism of the ending of the novel, James defends himself in his notebook in advance:

> The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished — that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation — that I have left her *en l'air.* — This is both true and false. The *whole* of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. What I have done has that unity — it groups together. It is complete in itself — and the rest may be taken up or not, later. (18)

He stresses above all the apparent "unity" of the thing. Though he admits that it might not be the whole, he also

emphasizes that what he has done "groups together" and is "complete in itself." This, however, necessarily excludes all that does not group together. Has he then deliberately not seen Isabel to the end of her situation, because he anticipated that her return would subvert the apparent unity of the whole, thus undermining the foundation of the realistic novel itself to which he still committed himself? Though, as he says, the whole is never told, the novel constitutes a whole by excluding what does not group together, and the logic of the whole is reintroduced at the moment when it is apparently denied. Discovering the unrepresentable in the realistic novel, James pushed the realistic novel as far as possible, but he deliberately avoided seeing what is beyond it by falling back on the logic of the whole at the last moment.

James's position is, therefore, essentially ambivalent. Though he discovered the unrepresentable in the realistic novel, he tried to place it in the the whole by preserving it as a void around which the novel itself is constructed. The traumatic surplus of *jouissance* which urges Isabel to marriage constitutes such a void, but nevertheless the void, as a void as such, negatively integrates the action of the novel. When, on the other hand, she determines to perform a positive act at last, i.e. "positive" even in the sense of "subversive" sometimes, James stops short, thus leaving the action in suspense. Does his anticipative defence of the ending the novel, however, not reveal that he was actually aware of its being insufficient? Was it not actually made not simply against possible criticism but against his own suspision? What appeared to him most threatening is then not the traumatic surplus of *jouissance* preserved as an unrepresentable void which negatively integrates the action of the novel, but rather the positive act which seems to be suggested at the ending, for it can no longer be integrated even negatively into the logic of the whole. In his notebook, James apparently ignores it by making a defence against possible criticism. Should we not, however, rather see in his anticipative defence a case of negation as it is conceived in psychoanalysis? Freud writes: "the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*" (437 - 438). Afraid of what might come out of it, James repressed Isabel's positive act in the novel, but nevertheless it made its way into his notebook in the form of his anticipative defence against possible criticism. If, as Bersani says, realism is essentially a reaction, it is not an accident that it most eloquently reveals itself through negation, and the "rest" which James knew he would never actually take up announces itself through negation from behind his anticipative defence.

Moreover, Isabel's action is consistently repressed in the novel. When we closely look at the novel as a whole, we cannot but notice that, though independent enough in her disposition, she scarcely takes action on her own initiative. This is rather surprising, for we are so accustomed to see her as the embodiment of the spirit of independence, even if she does not actually achieve it. While refusing marriage, she can think of herself as more or less independent, because she mostly commits herself to seeing rather than acting, without being involved in the world outside. After the marriage, on the other hand, there is little independence in her action, even little action itself. James himself admits to this in his notebook: "The weakness of the whole story is that it is too exclusively psychological — that it depends to<o> little on incident" (15). Whether it is psychological or not, it is surprising that, though still as independent in her disposition as ever, she should not even once openly resist Osmond. Even when she leaves for Gardencourt, she does not deliberately act against his will but "had simply started" and later admits that "her coming had not been a decision" (2: 421). Her deliberate decision does not come until she finally decides to return to Rome, but then James stops short, leaving the action in suspense. Moreover, her marriage, namely her singular act in the novel, is also eliminated from the surface to be preserved as an unrepresentable void which negatively integrates the action of the novel. Therefore, all action which she takes on her own initiative is consistently repressed both before and after the marriage and then simply suspended when it is about to be realized at last.

It is not an accident that Ralph, who passes the most definitive judgement on Isabel on behalf of the author on his deathbed, dies before she finally decides

to act. Looking back over the action of the novel as a whole, we cannot but realize that his desire to see her sustains it throughout, and it is not until his death that she is allowed to act on her own initiative. His father leaves her a fortune at his request, and at the moment his sole motive is essentially to see her. He tells his father: "I take a great interest in my cousin . . . but not the sort of interest you desire. I shall not live many years; but I hope I shall live long enough to see what she does with herself" (1: 260). After the marriage, it is also his desire to see her that barely keeps him alive: "What kept Ralph alive was simply the fact that he had not yet seen enough of the person in the world in whom he was most interested: he was not yet satisfied" (2: 146). What does such a persistent desire of his derive from? It derives after all from James's own desire to see her which is revealed in his "primary question" mentioned in the preface: "Well, what will she *do*?" (1: xvii) The preface is not, as it might appear at first, a simple matter-of-fact recollection of the composition of the novel, but rather it describes how James's own desire originated in what he calls "the image *en disponibilité*" (1:viii), and then gradually took shape during the composition apparently from a technical point of view. Indeed, it is only apparently technical, for it leads up to a sort of self-revelation, i.e. to his acknowledgement of his own phallocetric desire to see her. There is nothing more Jamesian than this desire which derives from the origin of the novel itself, and the action of the novel is after all sustained by her transference to this privileged desire.

Without the fortune which Ralph persuades his father to leave Isabel, her life would have been completely different. To begin with, she would probably have not married at all, much less married Osmond, for she admits later that "her money had been a burden, hat been on her mind." Her fortune is as it were the embodiment of Ralph's desire, and he persuades his father to leave it to her, simply because he wants to be "satisfied." If so, then it follows that her marriage, namely her singular act in the novel, is not "her own" but derives from his desire, and therefore that her jouissance is also procured by her transference to James's desire which he embodies. Nothing seems more relevant here than Lacan's famous formula: "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 235). In the scene of analysis, the desire of the Other corresponds to that of the analyst. It is then not simply an accident that Ralph, who embodies James's desire, acts as a confessor to Isabel on his deathbed. When she inherits the fortune, she feels afraid, because she cannot understand why she is suddenly made rich. As she tells Ralph, a large fortune means freedom, indeed immense freedom compared with the situation in which she found herself at the beginning. When suddenly finding herself in possession of what she has not in the least expected, she cannot but ask herself what divine providence, what hidden intention of some superior being, has willed her to be rich, i.e. to be free, and attempts to answer this question by means of her singular act. In other words, she responds to what Lacan calls "the subject who is supposed to know" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 232), and this introduces transference into her relation to the fortune. The supposed knowledge does not belong to Ralph, much less to Mr. Touchett, who she believes until much later has made her rich, for it is constructed through transference itself. In her meditation, this supposed knowledge constitutes the never mentioned subject matter, and it is not an accident that in the preface James calls her meditation "the best thing in the book" (1: xxi). This obliquely suggests that transference is the hidden subject of the novel, since her meditation is, he says, "a supreme illustration of the general plan."

Therefore, Isabel's resistance can be thought of as the resistance to James's desire, i.e. to the desire of the Other, since this desire sustains the action of the novel itself. When she successfully resists it, her transference to it dissolves at last, and this corresponds to the end of analysis (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 267). If, as Lacan says, there is the desire of the Other behind the fascination of sacrifice (275), she refuses to offer herself as the object of sacrifice to James's desire by persisting in her resistance. Since her positive act which seems to be suggested at the ending cannot be placed within his phallocentric desire, he stops short. His phallocentric desire is as it were the pure desire of the realistic novel itself, and he remained faithful to it even

to the extent that he renounced it when he realized that it might undermine the foundation of the realistic novel itself. If there is something beyond the realistic novel, her positive act is it, but he refused to see it. Therefore, his position is, as we have said earlier, essentially ambivalent. Since he discovered the unrepresentable, he is not a simple realist, but nevertheless he is the most genuine realist, because he refused to see it, though he knew that it was there. In other words, he not simply "is" a realist but difnies himself "as" a realist, and this self-definition provides the complete answer to the question which we asked at the beginning. However, the "rest" which he did not take up remains beyond the reflexive movement of self-definition, and this resistant remainder for ever suspends the definitive closure of the novel.[15]

Notes

(1) Kant, whose ethics we will mention later, solves the question of freedom by positing the order of things-in-themselves beyond things as mere appearances: "if we wish still to save [freedom], no other course remains than to ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time, and accordingly its causality under the law of natural necessity, merely to appearance, and to attribute freedom to the same being as a thing-in-itself" (201).

(2) Isabel is not masochistic in the sense that Warburton and Goodwood believes she is, but the relation between masochism and the moral law is apparent, especially in what Freud calls "moral masochism." He regards the origin of conscience as the death drive which is turned onto the ego, namely the super-ego, and attributes the Kantian moral imperative also to this introjected, internalized aggressiveness (420-422).

(3) Kant regards the autonomy of the will as the sole principle of the moral law (144). On the other hand, he rejects all material principles, especially happiness, because they depend on sense and as such are essentially heteronomous: "All practical principles which presuppose an object (material) of the faculty of desire as the determining ground of the will are without exception empirical and can furnish no practical laws. . . . All material practical principles are, as such, of one and the same kind and belong under the general principle of self-love or one's own happiness" (132-133).

(4) This suggests in passing that the system of accepted social codes imposed on us from the outside is in no sense definitive. If, as Althusser says, such a system always operates through "interpellation" (162), there is no immutable, transcendental law, but there is a law only inasmuch as we internalize such interpellation.

(5) Most critics have failed to do justice to this exchange, regarding Isabel's moral attitude as simple idealism. For example, Elizabeth Allen simply endorses Henrietta's criticism in her otherwise sound feminist reading of the novel: "Believing in the ideals of her world without understanding how they are maintained in reality, Isabel cannot really challenge the process of signification which demands that she, as woman, becomes portrait rather than painter or spectator. Unequipped to recognise fully the appropriation of her self as a range of values by those around her, Isabel's freedom is indeed an illusion" (59). Repudiating Isabel's romantic view of life, Henrietta obviously represents something like the reality principle which intervenes to correct the pleasure principle, but Isabel, on the other hand, does not represent the pleasure principle which should be corrected. Rather, she subverts the simple opposition between the pleasure and the reality principle.

(6) This irresistible need is, as we will show later, the death drive, which Freud describes as "something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides" (294).

(7) Though Lacan variously defines the *objet a*, it is essentially the embodiment of a void which causes desire (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 180, 243). As such, it corresponds to the division around which

the human subject is constituted (185).

(8) About the relation between the Kantian moral imperative and its surplus of *jouissance*, see Lacan, "Kant with Sade" 61 - 63. Kant himself conceives the place which comes to be occupied by the *objet a* in Lacanian psychoanalysis simply as "vacant": "I hold open for speculative reason the place which for it is vacant, i.e., the intelligible, in order to transfer the unconditional to it" (159).

(9) Discussing the question of love, Lacan regards the *objet a* as the object of love and calls it "something in you more than you" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 268).

(10) Inasmuch as the human subject is constituted around a certain division, *jouissance* always belongs to the other: "The subject will realize that his desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the *jouissance* of the other — in so far as the other intervenes, he will realize that there is a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 183 - 184).

(11) Bersani describes the scene in question and similar scenes from James's other novels as follows: "Each of these scenes is interpreted as a betrayal, and the betrayal takes the form of an intimacy which excludes its witness. The violent, traumatic nature of these sights is not always immediately explicit (the language in the scene from *The Portrait of a Lady*, for example, is comparatively mild), but they haunt the consciousness of the Jamesian hero as images of a hidden and threatening truth from which, for what usually turn out to be sinister reasons, he has been excluded" (133 - 134). He briefly calls the essence of these scenes "a luminous blindness" (136).

(12) Lacan relates the *objet a* to the gaze. It is not the gaze of the observer but the gaze looking at him/her which is imagined in the field of the Other (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 84). As to the scene in question, it is quite to the point that he says: "if beyond appearance there is nothing, there is the gaze" (103). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the *objet a* is ultimately identified with the privileged signifier of the phallus (182), which obviously attests to Lacan's much criticized phallocentrism.

(13) Freud first conceived the death drive simply as "the instinct to return to the inamimate state" (311). Discussing Sophocles's *Antigone*, Lacan also mentions this (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 281).

(14) If, as Matthiessen argues, Henrietta's last words simply indicate her optimism, the first edition is obviously misleading. We agree that her last words express no sure promise even in the first edition, but it cannot be denied that the revised edition tells us more about the implication of these words which we cannot possibly guess in the first edition. Though James's intention might have been unchanged, the revised edition adds something all the same, for, whereas he deliberately left the implication blank at first, he provided it when he revised the novel. As a result, Isabel seems to be allowed less freedom after she returns to Rome. Is this not after all what he really meant by the revision? Did he not intend to gain more control over her desire by driving her into a more cornered position? If so, then we can think of the revision as the case of negation which we will mention in the conclusion making its way into the novel itself.

(15) In this essay, we heavily draw on theories of psychoanalysis, especially of Lacanian psychoanalysis which refined Freudian psychoanalysis in its own way, for they seem to have much in common with James's technique of fiction. Perhaps, it is not an accident that Freud founded psychoanalysis around the same period that James wrote his novels. As we have made clear, transference and the logic of the *objet a* play as important roles in James's technique of fiction — see, for example, how important roles they play in "The Figure in the Carpet" — as in Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, Lacan's phallocentrism has been much criticized, notably

by Jacques Derrida in "La facteur de la vérité." His criticism is directed particularly against Lacan's famous statement which concludes his seminar on "The Purloined Letter": "what the 'purloined letter,' nay the 'letter in sufferance [en souffrance]' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination" (72). For example, Isabel's desire which urges her to "a ruinous expenditure" ultimately derives from her transference to James's desire, and the logic of the *objet a* determines its destination. Derrida, on the other hand, suggests elsewhere that there is a different sort of giving. To begin with, he distinguishes a gift from an exchange: "There is a difference here between a gift and an exchange. If there is, from the man to the woman, or from the woman to the man, a destination of whatever kind, of an object, of a discourse, of a letter, of a desire, of *jouissance*, if this thing is identifiable as passing from subject to subject — from a man to a woman, or from a woman to a woman, or a man to a man, etc., etc. — if there is a possible determination of subject — at that moment, there is no longer a gift. Consequently, there is no gift except in that all determinations — particularly sexual determination as classically defined — are absolutely unconscious and random" ("Women in the Beehive" 198). According to him, a gift must be given by chance, and as such it is essentially incalculable. By means of the logic of the *objet a*, Lacan tries to determine the destination of desire in advance, thus making it calculable. In order to undermine such determination in advance, Derrida opposes the incalculable gift to the calculated circulation of the *objet a*. He continues: "The gift, effacing all determination, sexual or otherwise, produces the destination. Supposing that a gift has been given; that supposes that before it took place, the giver is not determined, and the receiver is not determined. But the gift determines; it is the determination, it produces the identity of the giver and the receiver" (199). He does not simply argue that there is no determination whatever, for then his argument could not be distinguished from simple neutralization and would reconstruct phallocentrism after all which it criticizes. Rather, he argues that there is no determination in advance, but that there is a determination for each gift which is in no sense definitive. Like Lacan, James also tried to determine the destination of Isabel's desire in advance, and Derrida's criticism applies to him as well. Ralph's gift is calculated behind her back and therefore is no gift at all. Can we ever find a single incalculable gift, i.e. a gift not calculated even by James himself, in his novels? If we can, it will certainly mean something.

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