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# The Tragedy of Isabel Archer in **The Portrait of a Lady**

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# ABSTRACT

The importance of classical tragedy, and Greek art in general, has been analyzed in itself and in relation to many works which were produced throughout the history of literature. The idea of "modern tragedy" is important in this sense, since it will explain the transportation of elements of Greek tragedy to literary works of diverse historical periods, with the necessary and natural transformation tragedy went through due to the differences of time, place, culture, etc. In any case, the long-lasting influence of this ancient form of art is a source of a great number of studies.

**The Portrait of a Lady**, by Henry James, published in 1881, is a modern novel which will be analyzed in this dissertation as having a tragic view of life. This can be seen through the actions of the principal character and in the turn of events which occur. The modern elements of tragedy present in the novel will be related to the classical ones to analyze the dilemma the heroine, Isabel Archer, faces, and to describe the ambiguity and contradictions this heroine deals with in judging and choosing the action she will take.

The necessity to organize the narrative patterns which indicated the tragic view in James' novel, led to a brief review of some ideas taken from semiotics, specifically those connected to the study of the polarity of signs in language. In this way, signs could be extracted from the novel to form two pairs of poles which functioned as a means of interpreting the tragedy of the heroine, Isabel, through the ambiguity present in the images used in narrative.

RESUMO:

A importância da tragédia clássica, assim como da arte grega em geral, tem sido analisada não só individualmente mas, também, em relação a muitas obras que foram produzidas na história da literatura. William Shakespeare, por exemplo, escreveu várias peças que contém elementos de tragédia, ou possuem uma visão trágica da vida. **Hamlet,** uma das obras mais conhecidas do autor, pode ser lembrada como sendo uma tragédia moderna. A própria idéia de tragédia moderna é importante neste trabalho, já que através de alguns conceitos, pode-se explicar a transposição de elementos de tragédia clássica às obras de diferentes períodos históricos, com as necessárias e naturais transformações que a tragédia sofreu devida às diferenças de tempo, espaço, cultura, etc. De qualquer modo, o efeito duradouro desta antiga forma de arte pode dar origem a inúmeros estudos.

Será analisada nesta dissertação a visão trágica do romance **The Portrait of a Lady**, de Henry James, publicado em 1881, através das ações da personagem principal e nas mudanças que ocorrem no rumo dos acontecimentos dentro do romance. Isabel Archer, a heroína do romance em estudo, enfrenta ambiguidade e contradições internas ao julgar e escolher a ação que irá tomar, ação esta que irá modificar o rumo de sua vida. Apesar de haver, também, na tragédia clássica, um herói, ou heroína, enfrentando a difícil questão de decidir qual ação deve tomar, esta decisão não só depende muitas vezes de fatores externos ( questões familiares, de estado, ou influência divina), mas pode influir nestas próprias questões. A inserção do herói clássico em sua comunidade é tão importante que qualquer decisão irá afetar não só o herói diretamente, mas também sua família e as gerações futuras. No caso de Édipo, a fatalidade o cerca muito mais por obra da profecia que o ronda, do que por erro próprio. E este mau agouro irá se estender a toda sua prole, através de Antígona; e a sua família e comunidade, através de Creonte. Mesmo ocorrendo esta diferença entre as tragédias clássicas e as modernas, podemos também encontrar semelhanças entre os heróis clássicos e os modernos. Ambos estão

frente a frente às eternas questões que se referem à condição humana, como poder decidir ou não, com liberdade irrestrita, o rumo que se pode tomar na vida; poder alcançar a perfeição divina e esqueçer o lado animalesco do homem; poder abandonar as limitações que a própria humanidade impõe ao ser humano.

No primeiro capítulo desta análise, a importância da tragédia, e suas características, tanto na forma clássica quanto na moderna, são descritas. A influência da cultura grega no pensamento e na cultura Ocidental se estende até os nossos dias e, de acordo com Werner Jaeger, o próprio termo cultura, como é entendido hoje em dia, só começa a ter sentido com os gregos. Assim, não se pode ignorar o efeito de uma forma artística tão significativa histórica e socialmente para a Grécia clássica como a tragédia. O profundo entendimento que os gregos tinham a respeito das leis que governam a natureza humana está refletido, em parte, na tragédia, surgida num momento de grande mudanças sociais e políticas na Grécia como um todo. As tragédias clássicas contêm um questionamento sobre o papel do ser humano e de seu limite de ação no universo, e o desafia a enfrentar as dificuldades, e a arriscar-se a mudar seu destino. Estes mesmos questionamentos se mantêm fortes até nossos dias, refletindo-se nas formas artísticas das mais variadas.

A definição de tragédia que Aristóteles usa em sua obra **A Poética** se torna um ponto de referência para que se possa comparar a forma em que a tragédia se mostrou para o grego clássico e como esta forma se modificou com o passar do tempo, tomando outras características. Pode-se observar que a forma em que a tragédia era mostrada ao público passou da encenação teatral para ocupar seu espaço também na forma escrita, dentro da literatura. Porém, essencialmente, suas características não se alteraram de forma radical. Aristóteles já defendia a idéia de que uma boa tragédia possui um herói, ou heroína, responsável pelos atos que comete, não podendo ser virtuoso demais, nem um simples vilão. A função da tragédia era de suscitar a piedade e terror no espectador, através de acontecimentos que poderiam recair sobre o mortal comum. Esta característica básica da tragédia se manteve em obras posteriores, porém o conflito que atormenta o homem moderno havia se modificado quanto a sua forma de expressão. Se a determinação em agir persiste tanto no herói antigo quanto no moderno, apesar do

surgimento de vários indícios apontar para o contrário, a forma em que este herói reage se modifica. O peso da herança familiar e comunitária, por exemplo, toma outro rumo nas obras modernas que possuem uma visão trágica. Enquanto o homem clássico se sente conectado aos seus laços sangüíneos e ao seu papel na comunidade, tendo que aceitar a decisão divina apesar de suas ações contrariarem esta decisão, o herói moderno já vê os desígnios do destino de outra forma. Sua arrogância em agir, apesar de sentir que as limitações sobre este agir estão atrelados a sua própria humanidade, parece um desafio desesperado a qualquer condicionamento. O ser humano moderno foi colocado frente a um mundo em que descobertas científicas e tecnológicas permitem-lhe dominar o mundo externo num grau sem precedentes, apesar da obscuridade de seu funcionamento interno permanecer como barreira ao seu entendimento e domínio. Portanto, o conflito deste novo homem é justamente ter que se conformar com aqueles aspectos humanos, animalescos, primitivos que ele havia tentado esquecer ou enterrar. Por outro lado, este herói se atormenta com não somente estas questões, mas com as possibilidades de estar agindo fora do espectro racional a que está acostumado. Os deuses de Olimpo que antes moldavam, até certo ponto, o destino do herói grego, se transformaram em deuses da razão, das novas e tentadoras teorias que se propõe a explicar a condição humana e controlá-la. O herói é tentado tanto pelos deuses antigos quanto pelos "novos" a lançar-se sobre o abismo que separa o artístico, o belo e o perfeito do imaginário humano e o real e o comum que também faz parte da condição humana.

O filósofo alemão Friedrich Nietzsche analisa estas idéias a partir de uma dualidade básica do universo da qual se desenvolve a arte trágica. Esta dualidade está contida naquela existente entre Apolo e Dionísio, deuses que representam, respectivamente, a luz, a perfeição, e a desordem selvagem que pode levar à morte e à destruição. Ambos os pólos completam o homem, e é no precário equilíbrio entre estes pólos que este mesmo homem deve agir. O terreno mais seguro para o homem está no meio-termo entre estes polos, porém este mesmo terreno é seguro apenas na ilusão do homem, sempre à procura de ultrapassar seus limites e desafiar o destino. Qualquer tentativa de alcançar a

perfeição apolínea é logo mostrada por Nietzsche como sendo uma quimera, pois as forças dionísicas, apesar de conterem o risco do exagero, da destruição, são importantes para que ocorram as mudanças naturais que a humanidade exige. Nietzsche coloca estas idéias sobre o surgimento da tragédia para questionar, em sua época de grande progresso científico, a interdependência entre mito e ritual que existe nas culturas primitivas. Analisa criticamente a ciência e a tecnologia, nas quais o homem do século XIX deposita tanta confiança. Assim, também, Henry James surge com seu romance, **The Portrait of a Lady**, já no final do século XIX, colocando sua heroína num contexto histórico que este autor conhecia bem. Isabel Archer, nascida nos Estados Unidos, uma nova nação de grande potencial diante de uma Europa já "adulta" e experiente cultural e socialmente, é a perfeita representação de uma nova mulher, orgulhosa de seus conhecimentos teóricos a respeito de qualquer assunto, e pronta para descobrir o mundo e moldar seu destino de acordo com seus desejos. Por outro lado, Isabel também demonstra ingenuidade e um grande desconhecimento a respeito dos aspectos mais sórdidos da vida.

Assim, para que esta heroína moderna pudesse ser analisada em seus questionamentos, houve a necessidade, primeiro, de descrever em que momento ressurgiu a tragédia, e como as obras que adotaram uma visão trágica a partir deste momento se comportaram. Esta nova fase da tragédia teve um forte ressurgimento a partir do século XVI, com o Maneirismo. Este termo denominou, na verdade, uma extensão do Renascimento, período no qual a retomada de formas de arte clássica como inspiração foi altamente valorizada. No entanto, já surgiam ambivalências em relação a esta retomada, pois se na forma as manifestações clássicas eram reproduzidas, ou inspiravam obras, o conteúdo destas obras eram questionadas. Os artistas não sentiam que a espiritualidade da arte clássica lhes pertencia e, assim, se empenhavam em descobrir uma solução racional para juntar a tradição e a inovação. O realismo da nova época, em que a economia estava se modificando, com a descoberta de novas terras, novos mercados e diferentes formas de enriquecer, fez com que se questionasse o lugar que a espiritualidade e a harmonia deveriam ocupar. O mesmo havia ocorrido anteriormente, quando da origem da tragédia na Grécia clássica: a crise do mundo

homérico ocorreu com o aparecimento de uma nova classe média que se sentia no direito de dividir com a antiga aristocracia o poder de decisão na pólis. A tragédia reflete este questionamento político-social. No Maneirismo ocorreu o mesmo. Havia nascido uma nova classe que criou maneiras novas de controlar o capital, tendo se aliado à aristocracia decadente para ocupar seu espaço. Porém, a segurança destas alianças era precária. Todos, do artista ao negociante, se sentiam inseguros quanto às suas posições nesta nova ordem social, econômica e política. Numa época de grande turbulência, em que vários grupos se esforçavam para tomar seus lugares, a ambivalência e os questionamentos foram um resultado evidente. O caos, que podia surgir a qualquer momento, se tornou tema nas obras de vários artistas. Shakespeare, por exemplo, via com olhos muito realistas, até pessimistas às vezes, o lugar do novo homem na aparente prosperidade das nações. Em muitas de suas obras o paraíso não reflete seu tempo de forma realista. É neste contexto que surge o herói trágico moderno: um ser que precisa lidar com seus demônios internos, suas ilusões, sua ambivalência, tendo perdido seu lugar certo no mundo.

A partir deste ponto parte-se ao segundo capítulo da dissertação, em que a heroína Isabel é apresentada como personagem de uma obra com uma visão trágica do mundo. Sua trajetória, neste sentido, é vista em três fases: a primeira sendo a fase da inocência, antes de Isabel chegar à Europa e, especificamente, conhecer Gardencourt, a casa de seus tios na Inglaterra. Esta fase descreve uma personagem ingênua, envolta apenas em leituras, sem ter tido contato nenhum com a vida, apesar de ter uma grande curiosidade a respeito de tudo, pelo menos teoricamente. A segunda fase descreve a queda de Isabel do paraíso aparente em que havia imaginado sua vida ao se casar com Gilbert Osmond, um americano radicado na Itália. Esta queda do Éden a leva à última fase, a fase de retorno a Gardencourt, onde um certo equilíbrio se estabelece. Estas fases são importantes na caracterização do trajeto do herói trágico - após ser levado a cometer um erro, o herói reconhece o erro, após o qual um certo equilíbrio, ou meio-termo, é conseguido. Assim, Isabel, tem as características da heroína trágica, orgulhosa de ser um

ser superior, acima dos simples mortais, porém pronta para cair no erro de confiar demais em si mesma.

Levando-se em consideração a necessidade de organizar os padrões da narrativa que podem indicar a visão trágica no romance, fez-se, no quarto capítulo, uma breve revisão de alguns conceitos da semiótica, em especial daqueles ligados ao estudo da polaridade entre signos na linguagem. Desta forma, signos puderam ser extraídos do romance para formar dois pares de pólos, que funcionam não só como uma maneira de interpretar a tragédia da heroína, Isabel, mas também mostram que a ambiguidade presente nas ações da heroína está expressa pelo narrador na linguagem usada, através de imagens. Estas imagens encontradas foram encaixados nos pólos mencionados acima de acordo com a simbologia encontrada em mitos, ou de acordo com o uso convencionado de associação de um significante e seu significado. Assim, consideraram-se as imagens opostas de luz e trevas, por um lado, e, por outro, as oposições movimento e inércia. Estes signos agruparam várias imagens contrárias, porém complementares. Estes signos dentro da narração são fornecidas através dos olhos de outros personagens que cercam Isabel, ou através da própria Isabel, ou através do narrador diretamente. As informações se referem à natureza de Isabel Archer e daqueles que a rodeiam, oferecendo ao leitor algum "insight" não somente a respeito do comportamento dos personagens, mas também indicando possível mau-agouro, avisando através da maneira de pensar e agir destas personagens o que está por vir. Lembramos que na tragédia clássica muitas destas indicações estavam nas palavras do coro ou de personagens que participavam da trama.

Para finalizar, com a análise desta obra tão importante para a literatura anglo-americana, pode-se colocar importantes questionamentos a respeito da constante e duradoura influência da cultura grega, especialmente da tragédia, na produção artística através dos tempos, seja esta influência direta ou não. Mesmo as produções de vanguarda, ou pós-modernas, tiveram que olhar para a herança que este passado clássico nos deixou para poder revolucionar, destruir e recriar com a qualidade que se espera de qualquer obra que queira ser considerada como arte. Da mesma forma, devemos considerar qual é o papel da literatura, analisando sua importância hoje em dia.

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"Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is - that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself - that comes too late - a crop of unextinguishable regrets ."

" ... perhaps all wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible."

Joseph Conrad, **Heart of Darkness**

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# INTRODUCTION

Greek culture has had a fundamental role in the way Western society has developed art and thought throughout the centuries. The importance of this fact has brought up the principal ideas in this work - human nature and its laws were the concern of the Greeks; the translation of this same concern can be seen in many forms in the Modern world, in its art and philosophy.

Tragedy has been one of the main influences, taken from Greek culture, on the way modern society thinks, writes, reads and understands the universe. Plays written by Aeschylus and Sophocles to mention two of the best-known Greek authors, are presented in different styles and interpretations, with their essence still there until today. Tragedy has also been reborn in the works of some of Western culture's works, such as **Troilus and Cressida** by Shakespeare, or **Bodas de Sangre** by Federico Garcia Lorca, just to mention two. The appearance of elements of tragedy in these works, and in those of other authors, brings out the importance of the tragic form very sharply, taking us back, again and again, to the origins of this form and its importance to Greek culture, as well as its weight in the modern world.

The idea of the present work is to show how **The Portrait of a Lady,** by Henry James, can be included in the group of those modern works which can contain tragic elements, in a modern revival which takes into consideration all the aspects of a society that has developed technologically and scientifically. In spite of this evolution, there remains a conjunction of human and factual elements in this novel, as in many others, that reveals a tragedy has taken form.

It is important first, however, to collect some information about the author, Henry James, and his work, specially in reference to **The Portrait of a Lady**. Henry James is considered the farthest reaching writer of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Leon Edel,[1] Jame's biographer and editor, refers to him as far-reaching not in the epic, global sense of Melville , but as having achieved great respect in the Old World and taken his place among great authors, such as Flaubert and Zola. Having come from the United States, a country whose literature was still fresh and young, James conquers, through a perfection of style and a serious dedication to literature, his importance in the closed circle of the literary world. He was not only a great novelist, but also a critic and theoretician whose studies gave us the terminology used today in novel criticism.

Henry James was born in a wealthy, intellectualized family. He did, however, make his own money from writing by the time he was twenty. He wrote extensively, being the only one, among the great American writers, to live exclusively on his literature. One can observe that Henry James' meticulous style did not alter throughout his career - in fact, his style would become a trademark for the future. His prose, however, changed from clearness and purity, in the beginning, to complex heaviness in its allusiveness, later on. James believed that the artist was like a historian , showing that side of life that goes on behind closed doors, and that a novel reflects not only human existence, but also the face of the author in his or her contact with the world.

Henry James was one of the first novelists of psychological realism of our time, and is compared to Turguenev and Dostoievsky in his innovations. These authors' characters are introspective in their motives, a point which is considered important in Henry James' work. According to René Welleck[2], Henry James was the American Goethe in his olympic view of life and literature, and in his capacity in keeping a distance from both when analyzing them.

Edel considers critics as having been somewhat unfair to Henry James' uniqueness in fiction. He was the creator of the cosmopolitan novel in English, studying man, his habits and morality in the Old and New World. However, what seems most important of all is James' ability to develop his transatlantic view as either a comedy or a tragedy. He shrewdly predicted the drama and confrontation between The United States and Europe, at a time Americans were too busy expanding their territory to notice, and Europe thought America was too far away and young to even care.

James' Americans are often as innocent as if they had just fallen from Eden, becoming easy prey outside their native land. This drama gradually turns into a problem of consciousness in James' later phases, in revealing people's more subjective, reflexive and ghostly side. His first work of fiction is a short story called "The Tragedy of Error", which shows James' talent in narrative technique, and which would later be superbly developed in novels such as **The Portrait of a Lady**, **The Wings of the Dove** and **The Golden Bowl**. Critics of that time criticized his heroes for being introspective rather than adventurous, since from the very beginning, James was more interested in writing about human behavior than about action. In this early phase, the stories took place only in The United States and portrayed the life of the rich individual in places such as Boston, Newport and New York. Henry James' influences were Balzac, Mirimée, George Sand and Hawthorne.

During 1869 and 1870 Henry James traveled to Europe and started observing the behavior of Americans abroad. From his observations came much of his inspiration for one of the central themes of his work. His critical eye noticed the contrast between American simplicity, or almost a lack of cultural elegance, and a certain decadence of the European lifestyle. While he was in England he received news of the death of his dear cousin Minnie Temple "to whom he had dedicated a deep affection" which he had never revealed . This fact would later be remembered in **The Portrait of a Lady** and **The Wings of the Dove**. In any case, his one-year stay in the Old World would define most of what later would appear in his fiction.

Between 1870 and 1875 Henry James lived in Boston and New York and wrote, among other things, a small novel called **Watch and Ward,** which tells the story of a young orphan brought up by a rich young man who has the hope of marrying her in the future. The story itself lacks any description of scenery due to James' fascination with the characters, but it is the seed which would later be used in **The Portrait of a Lady.**

In 1872, while in Rome, Henry James met many Americans artists and had the chance to closely observe the life of the old American colonies on the Tibre. In 1875, he stayed in Paris, where he visited Ivan Turguenev, whom he admired greatly. Turguenev taught James a fundamental idea which would be used in his work: to let the novel flow from the characters. The Russian writer referred to the idea of "organic novel", in which the story does not occur casually, and the characters are set free to expand their nature. James is one of the few authors who understood that action, in this way, derived from the character, and that the novel could create greater impact in its revelations when the narrative unfolded from the reflections of a character, or different characters.

In 1876, Henry James became known in London as the author of "Daisy Miller", whose plot would later echo in **The Portrait of a Lady**. While the story "Daisy

Miller" is comical in some moments, as it shows the behavior of Americans abroad, it has a tragic ending. On the other hand, **The Portrait of a Lady** takes a similar theme to much more tragic proportions. This work was the product of a great deal of planning, during which time James wrote **The Europeans**, "Daisy Miller", and **Washington Square**, among other works.

**The Portrait of a Lady** is the story of Isabel Archer, the beautiful young woman from Albany who is taken by her aunt to England and, later on, to the rest of Europe. When she arrives in England she meets her uncle, Mr. Touchett, and her cousin, Ralph Touchett, who will have important roles in Isabel's future. It is through these two characters that she receives a large sum of money, at the time her uncle dies. Ralph's participation in the inheritance is important in that it is through his suggestion that Mr. Touchett, his father, leaves Isabel enough money for her to be considered a rich and promising young woman. It is in this way that Ralph intends to see what Isabel, with her love for freedom and for doing the right thing , will do with herself. Ralph's role is similar, in a way, to that of the reader: it lies in the observation of Isabel's trajectory, with the difference that the reader has more elements than Ralph does to see tragedy take form, since he or she has the help of the narrator. With the possibility of marrying an English Lord, an American businessman or an American dilettante, she chooses the latter, a choice which has consequences she will have to deal with later on. And here lies Isabel Archer's tragedy: she thinks too well of herself, and because of this, does not see what is clearly set before her eyes - deception, evil and the crushing of the same freedom she loves so dearly. She cannot see how her bright new friend, Madame Merle, is leading her into a trap: that of marrying Gilbert Osmond, who had, in the past, a daughter with Madame Merle. With the desire of safekeeping Gilbert's daughter's future and, indirectly, see some of her ambition come true, Madame Merle sees in Isabel's money an attractive element. It is ironic, on the other hand, that Madame Merle sees Isabel so well: her vulnerabilities and dreams are

naked truths to Madame Merle's well-planned ideas. It is exactly in this point that Isabel fails. It is ironic that by thinking she cannot possibly judge wrongly what is clearly set before her eyes, she ends up a victim of her own false ideas on her competence at judging. Since she unconsciously closes her eyes to reality, she sees nothing which does not fit her theories. Consequently, Isabel's judgment is based on mere wishful thinking. It is only after a long period of suffering that Isabel realizes this.

In reading the novel, and checking some of the bibliography written about Henry James and this work in particular, one can come to the conclusion that, in spite of its importance to literature in general, not enough has been said about **The Portrait of a Lady**. Many critics have studied **The Portrait of a Lady**, developing several of its aspects, from Isabel Archer's fear and idealism, to the contradiction between freedom and judgment, and the tension represented in the power of will and that of necessity. However, when one analyzes all these works, none seem to have gone more deeply into a point which takes all these elements into consideration: a tragic view of life is the basic idea behind Isabel Archer's quest for the "right choice" and the "truth".

Isabel's "tragic choice" can be compared to the tragedy of other heroes such as Antigone, Oedipus or Hamlet. Perhaps Henry James' tragic view of life is taken to one of its greatest moments in this work.

The objective of this investigation consists in analyzing **The Portrait of a Lady** from a tragic viewpoint and, specially, Isabel Archer, the novel's main character, as the female hero of tragic choice. The trajectory of this female hero will be studied through several elements present in the main character's personality and actions, in other characters who are involved directly with Isabel Archer's tragedy, and in images

used in the narration and which reveal a great deal about how this tragedy is developed.

When reading the essays, papers and several chapters written on the subject of Isabel Archer's destiny, many points converge into the same theme: what is it that Isabel is looking for? What is it that she finds and how does she come to terms with the choice made? Some critics refer to her quest for freedom, happiness and choice of the right path. On the other hand, her ambivalence in relation to such clear desires is put into check. If it is freedom that she desires, how does one explain her choice of marrying the only man who will keep her tied down to the conventional, to the static and to the dryness of a life with no horizon?

In the introduction to the Penguin Edition (1984) Geoffrey Moore draws a comment that must be taken into careful consideration:

> The most explicit information about Isabel is given in chapter VI, in which we are given every clue possible to her (by conventional standards) strange behavior in the matter of Lord Warburton, Caspar Godwood, Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond. She possessed 'a finer mind than most persons among whom her lot was cast' and had, therefore, been accostumed to be held in some awe by them. Although her father's sister had spread rumours that she was writing a book, Isabel 'had no talent for expression and too little consciousness of genius; she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were rather superior'. ... Then comes the most telling sentence of all: 'Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem; she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature; she was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right; she treated herself to occasions of homage'. 'The sin of self-esteem' - a clear case of hubris, of pride coming before the fall: the Greek's tragic formula[3].

It is based on this comment, as well as several others which will be mentioned, that this work will develop. The "tragic formula", mentioned by Geoffrey Moore above, has components which will be essential for the analysis of **The Portrait of a Lady**.

In **The Portrait of a Lady** there is a tension which can be referred to as the tension between the power of willing, which depends on a person's free choice of what to do, and the power of circumstance, a case of necessity. Donald L. Mull mentions the naive way in which Isabel, when talking to Madame Merle about the judgment of appearances in the clothes she wears, denies the fact that any limitations or external factors might have an effect on her own free-will. Isabel defends the idea that the clothes she wears tell people very little, if anything, about her. He says:

> The self is for her autonomous, independent of its own choices, independent, if the implicit theory is taken to its extreme, of the external history of Isabel Archer, a history which is compounded by choices made. In this instance Isabel is defending the integrity of her spiritual self - a constant entity at the same time mysteriously capable of actualizing unlimited potential - from the impingement of material reality. [4]

I believe that, after carefully considering the information contained in what these two scholars have said, we have a starting point for questioning Isabel's idealization and general view on herself and her desired distance from the real, concrete world, on the one hand, and from the natural, primitive, and sometimes fragile, side of life on the other. She is, in a certain way, like Antigone who rejects the sexual and the social in herself, when she refuses to marry Caspar Goodwood or Lord Warburton. It is true that neither of these men can truly touch the essence of Isabel's soul, where along with all her energy and brightness, one can also find layers of a darker side that Isabel herself hardly knows. She then creates herself - Isabel as she would like to be seen by

others - and marries a man who buys the image and wants to keep it at that. And here, again, is where the tragedy lies: in rejecting herself, she falls into a trap set for her by others, but which, at the same time, she could have avoided. Isabel, who defends, quite bravely and innocently, the freedom of the soul, without the limitations of the body, of conventions and nature, will be bound down by a prison of contempt and humiliation in her marriage, the one she supposed would take her beyond the baseness of the common world, into a certain closeness with artistic perfection. It is the prison of her appearance before others, in this new life she has chosen, which ties her down. Here lies the paradox of Isabel Archer's situation: the life which would take her away from the common (her marriage to Osmond) is the prison of her soul, freezing her into an uncomfortable portrait she will need to deal with.

Juliet McMaster defends the idea that Isabel's ambivalence is quite the work of her own guilty feelings in relation to happiness, represented by money, love and pleasure (all having very concrete aspects she denies). Isabel sees herself as a typically romantic heroine and, so, must suffer in some way. On the other hand, as Juliet McMaster says, she sees herself as a "wild caught creature in a vast cage", and is afraid of her own "remarkable mind"[5]. She must find a way to escape all this, perhaps by marrying Osmond. At the same time, he is the person who she feels can cause her the suffering necessary to be a heroine. The irony of it all, in my point of view, is that Isabel does suffer, but in a form which is totally unromantic and different from the idealization of the suffering heroine. Besides, her desire to act on her own free-will is shattered by the realization that she had been manipulated by her husband and Madame Merle, and by the awareness of her external and internal limitations. So, once again, these ideas reinforce my initial point: Isabel's life, though wanting to imitate something refined or artistic, is at risk of being condemned to stasis, symbolized by the portrait of the lady Isabel has become.

Isabel's misfortunes are not the work of "superior beings" going against her, neither the mysterious machinations of destiny, but the devious will of the heroine, who, in denying her own nature and reality, throws herself into an arid and unproductive life.

It is a characteristic of the tragic hero to be, in a way, conscious, directly or not, of the possibilities which could save him or her from tragic action, but unable to act in time to save himself from disaster. It is as if this hero were a divided being. On the one hand, he or she wants to choose what is best, meaning that this choice must be the fairest, a choice made with all the potential of free judgement that a human being has. On the other hand, the tragic hero is tragic because he or she cannot clearly see his/her limits in choosing. He or she is not like a god who knows it all, a superior being who is protected from error. The simple judgement of a situation does not seem to follow much common sense - it is more like an impulse, a plunge into darkness but, in many cases, a necessary plunge for the final renunciation of god-like power. This characterizes a certain division in the tragic hero: he or she wishes to be a fair judge, but does no more, at times, than follow an impulse or destiny. Was not Antigone the picture of a woman in search of her tragic destiny when she defies all convention and common sense to bury her brother? Isabel's free-will and determinism is also a two-sided coin: the other side can be interpreted as power-play, a certain arrogance with the limits of one's power to mold destiny. Her will to be free to choose entraps her, the responsibility that comes along with choosing is something Isabel seems to shy away from. These are some of the numerous and rich layers of subtleness in Henry James' Isabel Archer. The necessity to analyze them can bring a new dimension to the novel and, perhaps, new studies later on.

This dissertation will be developed in three chapters. Because the tragedy Isabel Archer faces is not unlike the Greek tragedy of classic times, the first chapter of this work will deal with tragedy. Aristotle's definition of tragedy will be given as an aid to

understand the form this vision took on in modern times. In addition, the characteristics of tragedy, especially according to Nietzsche, will be shown. To the German philosopher, tragedy was a development stemming from the duality between Apollo and Dionysios. As he explains in **The Birth of Tragedy**, this division is part of human nature which is enacted in tragedy - it is the duality which occurs between the musical and the plastic, dream and intoxication. The line between these poles is very fine indeed. It is from Nietzsche that one receives the idea that tragedy is beautiful precisely because it does not lead to a final concept of man. On the contrary, man is forever torn between the pulsation of life and the limits of this pulsation. It is from the perception of how humanity can act in different, contradictory ways that the pleasure derived from tragedy lies. It does not offer us an example to live by, but exposes to what extent man's limits and potentials go. It is necessary to enquire in what ways man has an active participation in the definition of destiny, to what point he decides. Is it at all possible for man to separate true knowledge from illusion? Is it ever possible to separate Apollo from Dionysios?

This first chapter will also deal with the characteristics of modern tragedy in comparison to its ancient form. If, on the one hand there are a number of differences, on the other, there are several links which must be pointed out. These differences and similarities will be displayed in connection to the role of the tragic hero and to the action this hero performs.

The second chapter will analyze Isabel Archer, the main character of **The Portrait of a Lady**, as the female hero of a novel which has elements of tragedy. The nature of her character, the motives of her actions and of her failure will be studied in detail. At first, a definition of Isabel as a tragic character will be given. The other divisions of this chapter will serve to illustrate this characterization. These parts will be presented as Pre-Gardencourt: the age of innocence; Gardencourt: the fall from Eden; and Gardencourt: the return. In these three parts certain points of Isabel's

nature and of her way of acting towards herself, towards others and towards the world around her, will be investigated through relevant events given by the narrator directly, or by the impressions of other characters, through dialogues, descriptions and actions.

The third chapter will analyze the importance of the narrator's contribution to the feeling of impending tragedy through the use of descriptions of scenery, gestures, architecture, art and images. These images strongly evoke the web of deceit Isabel is surrounded by. As an instrument of this investigation, some ideas contributed by Jonathan Culler, in **The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction** and by Robert Scholes in **Semiotics and Interpretation** will be mainly used.

Jonathan Culler refers to reading as an act performed in relation to other texts and codes that derive from these texts and which make up a culture. It is important for critics to understand meaning through the systems and semiotic processes which create texts, according to Culler. Both Culler and Scholes describe the meaning and origin of semiotics, the study of codes, a system which enables people to realize texts through signs or images and their meanings. Besides, both Culler and Scholes analyze the role of literary works in this context, and consider that these have their own formal structures of meaning. According to Culler, the reader of a literary work goes through interpretative conventions in the effort to understand the text he or she has in hands due to the knowledge that each literary text has an openness that makes it possible for every figure to be reversed in meaning.

Henry James' narrative technique is based on an interplay in which words are significant instruments, or signs, that can be interpreted. The use of oppositions, references to Isabel's way of seeing herself and others is given through the use of symbols which portray nature and objects in descriptions, and through architectural images - all of these are resources used by the narrator directly or through the eyes of

specific characters. The use of imagery is very subtle, but gives the reader a very complete idea about Isabel Archer's nature and acts. The most important use of these signs in narration is the way they offer the reader a possibility to forsee the events at hand, leading towards a tragic outcome. This is one of the most important characteristics in tragedy - the warning signs are given, in classical forms, through the words of the chorus or by the other participants in the play. In the novel one must shift this prediction to the narrative strategies through the information the narrator can provide. It is not the intention of this paper to present a purely semiotic reading of the novel. However, some introductory ideas in Semiotics can help us to organize the text into poles of signs indicating not only information on the nature of the female hero, but also her impressions and the impressions others give. It can also help us see how these poles form the tragic view the novel holds.

## NOTES ON INTRODUCTION

[1]Edel, Leon. Henry James. Escritores Norte Americanos. São Paulo: Martins Editora.
[2]Ibid., p. 12.
[3]James Henry, The Portrait of a Lady, Suffolk, Penguin Books Ltd., 1984, pp. 10 - 11.
[4]Mull, Donald L., "Freedom and Judgment: The Antinomy of Action in *The Portrait of a Lady, The*
*Arizona Quarterly*, 27: 2, 1971, pp. 124-132.
[5]McMaster, Juliet, "The Portrait of Isabel Archer", *American Literature*, 45:1, 1973, pp. 50-66.

# I. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAGEDY

There cannot be a description of the importance of tragedy, however short it may be, without a brief introduction on the importance of Greek culture as a whole. In Werner Jaeger's work on Greek culture, **Paideia**, one can find precious information on this theme. Greece is considered, when compared to other Eastern cultures, a step ahead in relation to its views on man's role and importance in the community. The very word *culture*, which we use so freely today, only begins to have any meaning with the Greeks. Our history, when taken away from the specific origins of a nation and included in the broader world of nations, considered in the plural, is derived from Greece. Our inspiration, spiritual essence, ideas - whatever one may call it - needs to recall its origins in our Greek ancestry. This does not mean we must observe this ancient culture in constant awe, with fear of ever questioning its authority. When our society, our modern world, looks back to the past it is in search of some source, something that can fill the gap of our necessities, whatever these are.

Jaeger's main concern in **Paideia** is to analyze the importance of education to Greek culture, but we must refer to some of this author's ideas before looking into the specific elements of tragedy. The Greek essence was tied to its fundamental role

which was, ultimately, to create, without evidently realizing this role in early stages, a superior type of human being. Everything created in this society was directed to this goal, immersed in this spirit of building a higher form of social existence. This can be observed in Greek sculpture, for example, and evidently in its literary styles. It is from the ideas of the Greeks on education, art, architecture, and so on, that the term culture came into use. According to Jaeger, without the Greek concept of culture, there would not have been (what is referred to as ) "Ancient times" as a historical unit, nor would we have our Western "cultural world".[1]

Culture in our times has quite a different meaning than it did to the Greeks. In a world which steadily grows tired of novelty (as well as of the old) and, which is more than overburdened with the heritage that is carried on from century to century, culture sounds a very distant bell in our minds. It is more of a far-off concept, too unfamiliar with what is faced in everyday life to be recognized as important. We have lost the original meaning of the term in times to which we must constantly make an effort to go back and rediscover a source of inspiration and pleasure. As Jaeger says,

> (one) must look back at the sources from whence the creative impulse of our people was born, penetrate into the deep layers of the historical being in which the Greek spirit, closely tied to our own, gave birth to pulsing life which is still present today and has made the creative instant of its emergence eternal. [2]

One of the most important contributions of Greece is in its new idea on the role of the individual in society. This individual is much closer to the modern individual born in a European culture than to any type present in the Eastern world of Ancient times. The Greek man is given an importance which can be compared to the one held in our Western culture, in that each individual spirit is given independence, especially after the Renaissance period. There would not be any possibility of individual

ambition, which is so valued today, without that initial feeling of human dignity bestowed by the Greeks. The question of individuality only began to make any sense from the moment the Greeks discussed this subject and elevated it to one of the most important subjects in its philosophy.

This takes us to another point in the discussion: how the Greeks saw nature and its meaning to the individual. The elevation of this individual does not exclude the importance of nature which contains a spiritual element in its origin. Everything which surrounded man, and which was a part of man, could only reach any meaning through the idea of how nature was closely associated to life. Every part of the universe, of the natural world and of humanity was considered a part of a whole - we call this concept organic.

The most interesting point, however, is how Greek culture developed its art and, more specifically, its literary forms. Jaeger refers to this by saying that these forms appear organically in their multiple variety and structure, from the first natural and naive forms of expression to later forms which were very elaborate and considered the ideal level of art and style. Greek philosophy was very much in contact with artistic and literary forms. The Platonic idea, for instance, is essential if one wants to interpret Greek thought in other areas: the connection between Plato's ideas and Greek art's inclination towards form must be mentioned.

On the whole, the importance of Greek influence in every aspect, from the artistic to the concept on life, is unquestionable. Quoting Jaeger, we must not forget the Greek "philosophical sense of universality, the perception of those profound laws which govern human nature and from where the laws which rule individual life and the structure of society come."[3] Wherever one sees this knowledge being translated, we have a direct influence of Greek culture. In any form in which man is the center of an idea, we can see Greek thought at work. From the human forms which Greek gods took, down to the problems of the universe and man, discussed by Socrates, Plato and

Aristotle; in Greek poetry and other artistic forms, from Homer to Aeschylus in literature, it is human destiny and the hardship of living which concerns Greek culture and, is still ours today.

It is with this in mind that we come to tragedy, a Greek expression of art which had in its central theme man and his universe. Its origin and development is a much more extensive subject than can be discussed in this brief introduction, however, one must reserve special attention to some of its characterisitcs, especially those which were brought to us and developed in modern man's view of the universe around him.

## 1. DEFINITION

Aristotle's definition of tragedy in **On Poetics** is apparently simple: it is the imitation of an action of high character, complete and of some extension, in ornate language and with several types of ornaments distributed among the diverse parts of the drama. This imitation is not narrated, but acted out, and, by arousing terror and pity, has the effect of purifying these emotions.

It is certain that tragedy has changed, but it has not lost its essential idea as an art form since Aristotle's time. Moreover, it has not lost its importance in any form, since it is discussed, performed and adapted to our times as much as before . It is evident, though, that tragedy has taken on new forms and evolved in face of the complex changes witnessed since its first appearances in Ancient Greece. Tragedy has survived the development of societies in a way that can only prove its force as more than just a passing art form, but as a resisting idea in art, literature and a topic even in philosophy.

If Aristotle's definition sounds simple, it is true also that when one starts to discuss or study the subject, one sees that tragedy is everything but simple. Aristotle himself explains in some detail the form tragedy should take, the elements included, its several parts, characteristics of the tragic hero, and differences between this form and others, such as the epic narrative. It is important that we start with some of Aristotle's ideas and from there discuss the contributions of other philosophers and critics.

According to Aristotle, tragedy, as well as comedy, began in quite an improvised form with the dithyrambic soloists. It started to develop, little by little, with the growth of its manifestations. Aeschylus changed the number of actors from one to two, giving less importance to the chorus and more to dialogue. Sophocles introduced three actors and a set. However, tragedy only reached its greatness when it distanced itself from brief themes and grotesque elocution - characterisitc of satire. Its meter became trimetric iambic, which was more adequate to the natural rhythm of regular language.

The most important element in tragedy is the plot, since it is not an imitation of men, but of the actions of these men, of life, happiness, or sadness. It follows that the hero's life takes a bad turn due to his (or her) own actions. This is one of the most important elements in tragedy and will be present in many of the tragedies which are represented in contemporary literature. The fact that the hero is not a mere puppet at the mercy of destiny entitles him to a choice. With this, recognition of the error committed has a fundamental role.

Another characteristic of tragedy is what Aristotle calls the peripety, or turn of events, which is the changeabout of the successful events taking place. This peripety should occur in a credible and necessary way. The example given in **On Poetics** is about how, in Oedipus' tragedy, the messenger who arrives to reassure king Oedipus and free him from the terrible suspicions about his relation with his mother, is the very person to cause the contrary effect.

The next element is discovery, or recognition. This is the moment in which the hero can realize what error he or she has made. It is a passage from ignorance to knowledge, from not seeing, or judging, adequately to opening his eyes to reality. We cannot consider the hero as being absolutely blind to what he is doing, when he himself must choose which is the best way to go. Nevertheless, he has been unaware of many facts due to a certain type of "blindness" which does not allow him to perceive or judge in a correct mannner.

According to Aristotle, the greatest form of discovery is the one that happens at the same time the peripety, or turn of events, takes place. It is a moment which will not only provoke terror and pity by showing us that tragedy is the imitation of those actions which arouse such feelings, but will also reveal that good or bad fortune are the natural result of the actions of the hero.

Classical tragedy is composed of the following parts: the Prologue, the Episode, Exode and a choral portion, which is divided into parode and stasimon. The Prologue is a complete part of the tragedy and preceeds the entrance of the choral portion. The Episode is a complete part between two choral portions, while the Exode is a complete part which is not followed by the choral portion. Between the choral portions we have the parode first and then the stasimon, representing every moment the chorus enters the stage again.

Another important element of the tragedy is the hero, who, according to Aristotle, cannot be either too good or extremely bad. If he is very good, his ill-fortune will only cause disgust , whereas if he is evil, no pity or terror will be aroused. The ideal hero is not too virtuous or too great a judge; his ill-fortune will be due to an error committed. It is important that this person be greatly considered among his peers, and have some type of fortune, which was the case of Oedipus, who represented a well-known family. In this way, the hero will be expected to perform in a special way, and is observed by those around him. Neither the characteristics of

wealth or being well-considered will give the hero the quality of being extremely virtuous, but they help in making him act as if he were. Perhaps, good intentions are often associated to a person of such high consideration and, consequently, the hero should have the capacity to judge more serenely because of this.

The structure of a good tragedy is the one described above. Aristotle was referring to a tragedy which could be shown on stage and, accordingly, considered it impossible to show several parts at the same time, due to the limitations of space. However, he finishes by saying that tragedy is a superior form to that of the epic narrative because of its use of Melopoeia and the scenery which enhances the narrative either on stage or in reading. Besides that, the effect of this imitation, being in a more condensed form, is stronger.

## 2.CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAGEDY

There are many different types of tragedy - perhaps as many as have been written. However, there are basic ideas that are present, in some way or the other, in all tragic narrative. First of all, one must recall certain characterisitics mentioned by Werner Jaeger in the **Paideia**. One of the most important points is that even in the more ancient forms of tragedy, the public followed the chorus' laments as a way of understanding the god-sent destiny which produced a terrible commotion in the hero's life. Gradually, as one of the persons who were a part of the chorus stepped out and became a separate speaker, the role of this speaker, along with the chorus, became essential for the development of action. The speaker's part eventually developed into the role of the main actor. All of this was basically the means by which action, as a

reflection of human suffering caused by divine power, could take place. This was the principal idea in tragedy - the enactment of human destiny in the mystery of pain which the gods had sent down to mortals. Aeschylus, for instance, maintained another important characteristic in his tragedies: damnation was a family burden, carried down from generation to generation, often from the generation of those who were guilty to that one of those who were innocent of any error. The whole atmosphere of Aeschylus' tragedies was weighed down by suffering and opression from the very first scene, emphasizing the force of disaster which hung over the family household.

The power of the gods in forging the hero's destiny and, at the same time, the hero's guilt in defying his fate and, consequently, bringing disaster upon himself, is a central question in classical tragedies. In this form of art there is the development of gradual awareness on the hero's part, of his role in forging his own destiny. The determination to act, in spite of the knowledge the hero acquires about his error, is crucial - it places responsibility in the hero's hands. This responsibility of the hero changes the role of divine power - it actually places a crucial question about the line drawn between the power of the gods, as the guardian of world justice, and the power of mortals to decide. The question Jaeger draws is implicitly placed in the tragedy - to what extent can man really know what the gods have designed for him? One can also ask why good fortune is given to man when it will frequently turn out to be the instrument of his disgrace. It is typical in tragedy to see happiness escape as easily as it had been there before - the hero's sometimes naive, and often arrogant, trust in the preservation of good fortune is certainly a way for this same luck to vanish. He will often trust too greatly his good fortune and feel that disaster is not in his path. Actually, it is through this fault that the hero has brought misfortune upon himself.

All this sorrow is not totally lost in the sequence of perverse events in tragedy: pain can bring on knowledge, especially the knowledge that humans are limited, earthly creatures. Pride is never rewarded - the blindness brought on by pride

conducts man to an abyss, to punishment. The gods seem to have provoked man into making the mistake of believing too highly in his own unlimited power. Sophocles' tragedy turns to this point in a slightly different way, and shows the spectator the right measure for living. This is the principle of being - the recognition of a form of justice which is part of every thing in existence. Man's wisdom and maturity stem from this awareness. Consequently, the cause of all evil is lack of good measure. In **Antigone,** this lack of measure is always present - the chorus is forever referring to it as one of the causes of misfortune in the destinies of Creon and Antigone. In any case, the hero's consciousness of his pain, and the reasons which cause it, are essential in bearing the pain of this recognition. To the very end, the hero will have a companion in awareness - the mysterious and miserable knowledge he has is often something he cannot share with others.

This tragic representation of the struggle of man in bringing two poles into harmony is described in various forms, but they seem to be all related. Steiner, in **Antigones: the Antigone myth in Western literature, art and thought,** refers to this polarity through George Eliot's comment, as "the outer life of man (being) gradually and painfully brought into harmony with his inward needs"[4] This inner duality, which can be described also as the conflict between the power of free-will and the power of circumstance and necessity, is present evidently in such a tragedy as **Antigone** by Sophochles. In any case, the hero feels the presence of contrary forces inside or outside himself - this is fundamental for the tragic conflict to be established.

For Nietzsche, in **The Birth of Tragedy,** the concept of opposite poles stems from the very development of tragic art: he refers to the origin of this as stemming from the duality between Apollo and Dionysios, and analyzes how this duality is connected to the difference between the musical and the plastic. The two gods are essentially intertwined and are symbols of the two sides man deals with.

In his work, Nietzsche explains that Apollo is the god of light and of perfection. He represents everything which orders and limits the wild disorder of Dionysios. Nietzsche quotes, when speaking of Apollo, Schopenhauer in **The World as Will and Idea:** "Even as on an immense, raging sea, assailed by huge wave crests, a man sits in a little rowboat trusting his frail craft, so, amidst the furious torments of this world, the individual sits tranquilly, supported by the principium individuationis and relying on it"[5] Humanity tries to ignore the vast chaos which the world, in its attempt to organize and civilize, is tied to. Behind the light is darkness - pleasure and pain must be accepted together. The idea of darkness is also in the excruciating doubt man feels in relation to his civilized world and the explanations he has created to order it. Darkness threatens his individuality and the fortress of the beliefs he once had.

Is it ever possible to find an equilibrium in this conflict? This seems to be an important point in the resolution of tragedy. According to George Steiner's interpretation of the different Antigones enacted throughout history, Sophocles defends what is called the middle ground. Jaeger explains this by saying that to Sophocles this even measure, or middle ground, is interpreted as the awareness of a sense of justice and balance inherent to all things. By understanding this, one displays wisdom since evil comes from the lack of limits. As man tests his limits and, by doing this, he tests those limits the gods impose on him, he becomes the vulnerable creature who might fatally destroy everything that represents him. The middle ground is the place of action for man, and it is on this that he must find the art of living. Whatever proximity he tries to have with the gods is destructive.

The connection between the gods and man is very important to consider in tragedy. At the same time the gods should not mingle with men as equals, men should not be lured into considering themselves god-like. Steiner quotes from **Iphigenie:** "the race of mortals is far too weak not to grow dizzy upon unaccustomed heights"[6]. Nevertheless, Steiner also mentions, in connection to this quotation, the awareness

that such a contact can bring: the abyss between man and the realm of the gods is immense, but the attempt to cross that boundary is what leads to consciousness, to action. This action might implyu in the very death of the hero, symbolically or not, and can bring balance to the hero's life or to the community. Again, it is here that the fine balance of the middle ground lies: humans must deal with natural destiny even while attempting to reach the gods through the qualities found in themselves. Man is aware of the fragility of the human condition and human institutions, of his animality and of the whole fabric of existence. But, on the other extreme of this spectrum lies the divine, the superior level of existence. It is man's innermost desire to reach that point and leave behind what is considered most base and monstruous in him.

In **Antigone,** for example, the female hero is insistently provoking the order of an institution and, indirectly, of her role in life. In this form, she distances herself from any chance of conciliation with the way things were, or should be. This is natural if one considers that Antigone cannot endure the logic of Creon and the status quo he represents. She questions the norms of the State in the name of the importance of family rituals and fraternal love and places herself at a terrible risk to bury her brother. However, one can perhaps see that her acts contain contradictions. In her pious behaviour there is a defiance to everything that could lead her to conciliation. She defies the rules in an insistent way, leaving her no measure of limit. Is her real desire, implicitly or not, to die and, by dying, to reach a lastingness which might be similar to divine immortality? On the other hand, Creon also suffers this same action. He does not give in, in spite of all the recommendations that he give up his idea of putting Antigone to death. His feeling of power in deciding that the law of the polis must be obeyed is overwhelming. Thus, he pays a high price for not admitting he might be making the wrong decision, for considering himself beyond human error.

What Sophocles shows is how action is also a decision, a choice made on the part of the hero. It is not enough to consider oneself wise, or special or observant.

Choosing does not arise from what is merely there, visible to the naked eye and to the first senses, but might contain multitudes of possibilities. Fulfilling only one's needs is not always the best way to choose something - it can actually be a perverse mistake to take this direction. Neither is the best choice made by closing one's range of posibilities in life, as Antigone does by practically forcing death upon herself. And this is one of the most interesting ideas in tragedy: it shows the hero acting on his fate, frequently deciding based on false premises. It is he, or she, who thinks and can logically ponder, choose or decide. It is he who brings misfortune upon himself, by losing sight of his limits. One can ask if true appreciation of tragedy is based on this perception of the different forms of action, and on how the hero can also define his destiny by defying the gods or not?

Nietzsche's work refers to the appalling discovery, by man, that there is nothing he can do to make everything work in quite the "right" way. Being both Apollinian and Dionysiac, man is eternally struggling to set the limits of his individuality. There is a pull in both directions, which is a reference to the conflict mentioned before: man is between the civilized world he has desperately created, and the truth of his natural condition. He is torn between the necessity of his human nature and the will to be and do more, to push against this nature. When he loses touch with reality, he faces tragic forces. However, once having seen some of the chaos and darkness of the world, he is similar to Hamlet. Acting becomes deeply painful since nothing can change the actual condition he is in. He understands too well that to live in the middle ground is to create illusions of action. It is in this contradiction that Nietzsche's tragic man lives. Wisdom seems to be a cursed thing.

The imagery offered by the figures of Apollo and Dionysios is very strong because it causes us to continuously think in terms of conflict, opposite poles, contradiction. It is here that one of modern tragedy's ideas lies. Apollo and Dionysios embody contraries: the first representing the principle of individuality; the second

"opening a path to the maternal womb of being"[7]. Nevertheless, it its Dionysiac art that cruelly reminds man of how everything is made to desintegrate, and that one must always be prepared for this destruction, however painful it may be.

To Nietzsche, tragedy lies in this: man, with his theories, begins to unfold what is, in fact, reality - that nothing is disconnected from its primitive form. However, at the same time, his theory must serve to hide this same fact and, so, optimism is his opium. To admit that there is any illogic, uncivilized side in such a cultured world threatens to transform science into nothing. In Nietzsche's analysis, according to Raymond Williams in **Modern Tragedy**, "the cause of the disappearance (of tragedy), in Greek culture, was ... the rise of the 'Socratic spirit', which 'considers knowledge to be the true panacea and error to be radical evil.' Ever since Socrates, 'the dialectical drive toward knowledge and scientific optimism has succeeded in turning tragedy from its course' "[8]. When science faced its reality, admitting it could not have universal validity, tragedy was reborn, in its several forms.

We must analyze, after the above consideration, the historical moment in which one can find Henry James producing **The Portrait of a Lady.** He began to write the text in 1880, having negotiated contracts for several publications with *Macmillan's Magazine* of London and *The Atlantic Monthly* of Boston. It was a time of immense progress: science and technology had transformed the conditions of living or, at least, was showing the possibility of this transformation. The development of capitalism, was characterized by the opening of markets, a tremendous increase in the mechanization of industry, greater competition and the birth of labor organizations. One must remember that it was in the nineteenth century that Karl Marx foresaw the establishment of communism as a consequence to capitalist development. Workers created new ideas and fought for a new role in the order of the industrial world. Freud was researching into the mysteries of the unconscious. The limits of human condition seemed open, with no boundaries, either external or internal. Imperialism forced the

penetration of capital in every country and divided the world among the richer, more powerful nations. Markets and technology opened the outer world, science did the same externally but, principally, delved inside man. The United States was a young country, however, full of the potential that would transform it into one of the most important nations in this new order being created.

From this brief description of what Henry James world was in the very progressive nineteenth century, one can observe the euphoric yearning, which naturally pervaded the nineteenth century individual, of reaching for the sky. It is obvious that this chance to progress was not in everyone's reach, especially if we consider the still miserable conditions workers lived in, but the general atmosphere of unlimited action was there. Science could do it all, technology was the solution - if one had knowledge and economic power, one was practically invincible. It is true that this would turn out to be a double-edged knife, as the twentieth century came around with its wars, starting with the First World War which dealt with quite different strategies and weapons than those ever used before; with uncontrollable epidemic diseases, poverty, injustices and an ever-increasing feeling of despair, eventually represented in different artisitic forms.

It is this savage, optimistic and uncontrolled world that modern tragedy is aware of, and that Henry James represents in his work. He does this through descriptions of scenes or characters in the very subtle way which became his trademark. The illusion of total control over one's future and, especially over how others will behave towards us, is discreetly dissected in Isabel Archer's proud, almost naive, escapist way of seeing things. Isabel believes, as any hero of tragedy, that there is only one possible result for her actions: success. The tragic conflict stems from the slow recognition that she has not seen the signs that indicated that her convictions were blinding her in the way to self-knowledge and, consequently, in achieving more human action. The intention is not a moral one, since it shows the several possibilities a person could

have decided on, and the choice based on wrong premises. The art of tragedy may be contained exactly in the revelation of this truth: man's limits, as well as his potentials, are before him.

## 3.MODERN TRAGEDY

The rebirth of tragedy occurs in Europe around the XVI century, during a period which came to be called Mannerism. The perfect balance of classical art, which had been obtained at least apparently during the Renaissance, had become strange to most artists, though they did not feel it was possible to totally give up this form of art. The growing ambivalence in relation to the Renaissance movements to rescue classical art was a direct reflex of the unsteadiness of the times: Italy, which had been the cultural and economic center of the time, had lost its economic supremacy. In the religious sphere, also an aspect centered in Italy, the Catholic Church had suffered a great blow with the appearance of Luther's Reformist ideas. Besides all this, Italy had been invaded by Spaniards and French alike - nothing seemed to indicate that any stability would come around soon enough. Mannerism reflected this feeling: there

continued to be an imitation of classical forms, but there was a constant and growing feeling that this imitation did not bring about the spirituality of classical times any closer - these were new times in which spirituality was being questioned. Mannerism, according to Arnold Hauser in **The Social History of Literature and Art**, may be the first style of modern times which consciously considers the connection between tradition and innovation a problem to be solved rationally. The dilemma for many artists of the time was in attempting to set some order in chaos, by frequently imitating classical art. However, there was the constant fear that art could become a mere expression of beauty without content, especially in a time in which spirituality, and a concern for the lastingness of values, did not reflect the same importance as it had in the past.

The crisis of this specific time in history is present in the attempt to join the Middle Ages' spirituality and harmony, which had been left behind, and the realism of the Renaissance. Mannerism had to deal with the conflict between the spiritualist and sensual tendencies of the time, with religious and scientific ideas that were in conflict, with the growing, but not very smooth, union between the old aristocracy and the middle class.

It is interesting that at a time of questioning and turmoil, tragedy makes a comeback, even if in quite a different form. In Greece, in the V century, the Homeric world was in crisis; a new order was established in which the old aristocracy had given room to the new, more rational middle class which wanted some of the power of this old class. Apparently, according to Arnold Hauser, this power was only partly shared by the new and the old classes. Aristocratic rule continued to have a great influence over the new democracy. Tragedy reflected this political-social situation in that its creators were either a part of the aristocracy, or identified with its values. Externally, it was a form of art directed to the people; its content, however, was aristocratic, with its heroic- tragic point of view.

In Modern times, besides the fight among Italians inside their own country and the sudden invasion by the French and Spaniards, there were other factors which were changing Europe. New economic powers were being forged with the development of overseas discoveries that brought on the conquest of new worlds, the introduction of precious metals in the economic order, the growing interest in expansion of markets. Free competition ended with corporative organizations and new economic activities were more and more distant from production. Bank transactions and new forms of investments made people feel they had less and less control over the way money could be made. The lower classes, and a large part of the middle class, felt insecure, having lost their influence over guilds. On the other hand, the new capitalists also felt this insecurity: they were being drawn into areas they were not familiar with. Spain and France went bankrupt at several moments, causing general instability in large and small businesses alike.

The Reform was socially important in that it grew within an atmosphere of constant anger against the Church's corruption and the greed of the clergy. However, what started out as a popular movement became more and more associated to local leaders and the middle class, which had a growing financial power that the lower classes, especially poor farmers, would never have. Evidently, the reaction to this new influence came in the Counter-Reform, which censored and limited many manifestations, especially artistic ones. Another important influence over the way people thought (especially among rulers) was Machiavelli, who developed the theory of political realism. Hauser considers Machiavelli's ideas central for an attempt to understand Mannerism and its context. One can summarize Machiavellian thought as the separation of practical politics from Christian ideals - a reflex of what was already going on in the Modern world of leaders such as Charles V, patron of the Catholic church and destroyer of Rome, Christian capital of the world. Machiavelli's

importance for cultural aspects of the time is in his defense of double morals, which divided man intellectually and in his basic moral principles as well.

Ambivalence seems to be the constant word present in this new manifestation called Mannerism, especially in Hauser's analysis. He refers especially to erotic ambivalence, and ambivalence in the trust in authority or in individualism. Besides this, the artist of the time is as insecure as the businessman, having lost his solid status in society and in the Church. For this same reason, the principles of authority and security take on a new importance to the middle class as a guarantee of their economic stability. Chaos is threatening, consequently, the dissolution of the Universe becomes a central theme to many artists of the time, such as Shakespeare. This author's realism about his time is not, however, reflected in an optimistic point of view at all times. Shakespeare's constant use of a tragic view of life, at a time of growing national prosperity, is a clear sign that paradise was not the real picture of the time.

Tragic elements are present in Modern drama as representative of a new period: the modern tragic hero is alone in his conflict with personal gods and illusions. His actions stem from his internal processing of thoughts and ideas about himself and how matters should be. This is different from the tragedy of classical times - whereas in ancient tragedy the hero, striving though he may be with his consciousness, is more attached to his fatal destiny through the consequences of his actions in a determined community, the modern tragic hero is totally alone in his acts, alone with his consciousness.We can observe this, for instance, in **Hamlet** by Shakespeare. Hamlet's individual conflict is that of modern man facing his personal ghosts. The question Hamlet poses is crucial to Western man: should he act or not? Should one follow reason, acting after careful thought, or follow one's first feeling, coming from passion, or spiritual impulse? Hamlet, representing the modern tragic hero, has a feeling of personal guilt. Pain can be seen as anxiety, whereas before, in ancient tragedy, pain was more related to sorrow. Modern tragedy is, more than before, the responsibility

of the hero. And as the story reveals itself, one can feel tragedy unfolding step by step, brought on either by the blindness of the hero, or by the pathetically foolish acts the hero performs.

This may lead to another important characteristic in tragedy, which might have not been observed before: ambiguity. If the hero is greatly responsible for what he brings upon himself, it is due to the very ambiguous feelings of this hero in relation to his own fate. It is fundamental here to question the hero's motives, the force that makes the wheel turn. If basically the power to decide for the best lies in the hand of the hero, the power to bring unhappiness to his life is his also. This does not mean at all that the hero can be similar to the "gods" in deciding his fate independently from circumstance, but that the faculty of decision is given to him to use in the best way possible. His error is in the choice he makes, in the pride he sustains, in trying to convince himself and others, naively, that nature cannot have any strength against his reasoning. In the case of the modern hero, the one point we must make is that this reasoning has been backed up by a rationalized culture which he feels he has created.

When tragic action is analyzed, one can observe that the basic difference between this action, in ancient and modern tragedy, lies in its effect over the community or over the tragic hero. Action taken by the ancient tragic hero has a great effect on the community, principally due to the very important role this hero has in this community. For example, in **Antigone**, Creon's actions are born very much in connection to his important role as leader of his city. His power of decision cannot be contested. On the other hand, Antigone's feeling derives from her strong sense of family duty, of the necessary ritual which must be performed to honor the gods and her family. The resulting tragedy of these actions is connected to the irreversibility of destiny. Fate must be suffered until the end; it is something greater than the hero, a responsibility this hero has towards a whole community, culture and people.

The modern tragic hero stands and falls more influenced by his own acts, involved as he may be in the blinding circumstances that surround him. Such acts are rooted on personal decisions; the conflict is basically internal, not affecting the community around the hero - this is significant since it reveals how little modern man is in this ever-growing and complex world. From the sorrow of the ancient hero, who suffers along with those around him, we come to the anxiety of the modern hero, who decides and acts alone. The central concern of this modern tragic view of life often lies in the very conflict of deciding since, after having realized one's action was based on false premises, the tragic hero suffers the pain of awareness, realizing that his decision, though apparently having all the elements of being serious and well-based, was nothing but the result of a sort of trick played on his rationality. This hero cannot blame his pain on family fate, cannot be merely sad because he or she had no other way out. His or her acts are his/her responsibility. Though modern man is a creature in search of others to keep him company, to share the burden of living, and to define his place in the world, he realizes, once he stops enough to think more deeply about it, that he is basically a creature alone. Kierkegaard's words, according to Steiner when analyzing **Antigone**, are that "ours is at once an epoch of individual isolation and frenetic gregariousness ... In comparison with ancient Greece our age is more melancholy and, therefore, is more deeply desperate."[9]

However, even as tragedy changed from its ancient to its modern form, one can observe that many links remain. There is a greater emphasis, in modern tragedy, on the behavior of the heroic man or woman acting alone. However, one must remember that Aristotle's idea of the tragic hero is that of a man not virtuous or just in any exaggerated way, but whose misfortune befalls him due to an error. This is the main link between classical tragedy and modern tragedy. The tragic hero is a man who can still be considered noble and dignified, even after having comitted an error. As Raymond Williams says in his study on **Modern Tragedy,**

> What we find in the new emphasis is an increasingly isolated interpretation of the character of the hero: the error is moral, a weakness in an otherwise good man, who can still be pitied. This progressive internalisation of the tragic cause is still held, however, within the concept of dignity. We can see, in this respect, why the formula of 'pity and terror' was so often changed to ... 'admiration and commiseration'.[10]

An interesting point is made when Hegel takes the concept of tragedy into his hands. In his ideas, tragedy turns to a more spiritual than moral action. He considered any work dealing with morality as social drama and not tragedy. Besides, according to Raymond Williams, Hegel was concerned with the cause of suffering in tragedy, not with simple suffering in itself:

> Just as 'ordinary morality' has been rejected, as a tragic process, so now ordinary fear, of 'the external power and its opression', and ordinary compassion, for 'the misfortunes and sufferings of another' are distinguished from the tragic emotions. Tragedy recognizes suffering as 'suspended over active characters entirely as the consequence of their own act', and further recognizes the 'ethical substance' of this act, an involvement of the tragic character with it, as opposed to 'occasions of wholly external contingency and related circumstance, to which the individual does not contribute, nor for which he is responsible, such cases as illness, loss of property, death and the like.'[11]

To Hegel, tragedy is more characterized as being an ethical conflict. This means it takes form only in certain periods in history and does not relate to all cultures. He says,

> To genuine tragic action it is essential that the principle of individual freedom and independence, or at least that of self-determination, the will to find in the self the free cause and source of the personal act and its consequences, should already have been aroused.[12]

When one analyzes Aristotle's ideas on tragedy and those of modern times, the true role of the hero does not seem to have changed radically. It is true that the hero of ancient tragedy is in a community and his decision affects this community. However, the decision, both in ancient and modern tragedy, essentially belongs to the hero. Tragedy seems to be greater the more this is evident in the story - that tragedy, especially in modern times, is about responsibility and accepting one's guilt. And the resolution occurs when the individual's fall brings back balance and unity, a feeling of reconciliation in spite of the realization of the difficullty and pain in the world. This resolution through reconciliation occurs in modern tragedy within the character, and can be represented differently from the tragic outcome of most ancient heroes destiny - these face public death, or exile.

## NOTES ON CHAPTER ONE.

[1]Jaeger, Wener. *Paideia: formacao do homem grego.* São Paulo, Martins Fontes Editora Ltda., 1979.
[2]Ibid., p.8
[3]Ibid., p.12.
[4]Steiner, George, Antigones: The Antigone myth in Western literature,art and thought, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p.5.
[5]Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956, p. 12.
[6]Steiner, George, *Antigones: The Antigone myth in Western literature, art and thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 46.
[7]Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1956, p. 97.
[8]Williams, Raymond, *Modern Tragedy*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 41.
[9]Steiner, George, *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western literature, art and thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 55.
[10]Williams, Raymond, Modern Tragedy, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 26.
[11]Ibid., p. 32.
[12]Ibid., p. 33.

## II. ISABEL ARCHER AS THE TRAGIC HERO

It is particularly meaningful to refer to Henry James' "Art of Fiction" to introduce the novel **The Portrait of a Lady** itself. In this essay, published in 1884, James reflects on the craft of writing, on the tricky and difficult question of teaching younger writers how to go about their job. Art, says James in this text, should arise from discussion, experiment and curiosity. The only justification for the existence of art is that it is the greatest opportunity to represent life in all its aspects, to show humanity in all its immensity and also reality's many forms. The novel should never show its workings, revealing to the reader it is mere make-believe. After all, the novelist's main purpose is life is to look for the truth.

The novel which is full of incident and movement does not necessarily offer more to the reader. James is careful to warn the young novelist about the freedom of creating in the form of fiction. The freedom of writing, of doing whatever he or she wishes with a text, is evidently an advantage, but it is also the cause of anxiety because of the great responsibility that is placed in the writer's hands. It is an immense burden to give the novel the right tone, "to catch the color, the relief, the expression,

the surface, the substance of the human spectacle"[1]. The process that leads to good writing involves the close observation of how to express human reality in fiction, how to produce the "illusion of life"[2]. It is here that lies the strength and weakness of any novel.

To James, the novel should not distinguish dialogue from description, description from narrative. All the elements of the novel are interlinked, as if they were part of an organism, helping the novel to be a "living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism ... in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts"[3]. It is in this aspect also that the novel is a work of art and, at the same time, contains a moral sense. The work of art is a product of feeling, observation and vision, which includes the pleasant and the unpleasant sides of life. In addition, according to James, the quality of a work of art reflects the way in which the artist thinks. The essay ends by saying that the art of fiction offers innumerable opportunities for the writer to work on. It does not matter if he or she shows life's positive or negative side: what really matters is to show life in all its dimension.

Decades later, José Ortega y Gasset, in his essay "Notes on the Novel", refers to the interest that moves "from the plot to the figures, from actions to persons"[4] in contemporary novels. To the philosopher, this is a strong indication of a greater interest in classical elements in fiction. According to Ortega y Gasset, "the essence of the novel ... does not lie in 'what happens' but precisely in the opposite: in the personages' pure living, in their being and being thus, above all, in the ensuing milieu"[5]. However, this display of the character's living is the display of the internal reality of the novel, in which "true-to-life elements"[6] involve the reader. The novel will, in this way, evoke all sorts of symbolical meanings which the reader "constructs ... from without when musing over ... impressions of the book"[7].

When one looks at Isabel Archer merely as the character of a novel in which no special events take place, we may not see, if we do not look carefully, what it is that the sequence of events, the characters, the setting or the dialogues represent. As readers, we have come upon Isabel in a period of her life in which she faces certain entanglements and must attempt to live through them. As readers, we will see her experience, observe how she endures it, not only through Isabel herself, but, also, through the view other characters have of the main female hero. This is a very important point in this work: Isabel must be known in as many aspects as possible before one attempts to analyze the tragic turn her life takes. It is essential that Henry James have exposed Isabel's character to us through several points of view to try to make us realize the reasons of her fall. It is from within the Jamesian novel that we can see the "art of fiction" at work. It is from within Isabel that one sees her plight, from the eyes of others around her, and from the narrator himself. When Isabel fails to give us information, other sources will, until the picture of a destiny is shown to us. The modern tragic hero is a piece in a puzzle, perhaps he or she is the puzzle itself, in need of revelation of motives as to why his or her destiny leads toward downfall.

If one considers Schopenhauer's idea on man as a creature sitting in a small boat on a raging sea, trusting, in pure confidence, that he will overcome everything victoriously, we have a clue to understand the female hero of **The Portrait of a Lady.** We shall also see that this is a feature present in several other characters at different moments of the novel. The forces in the story are a struggle between Apollinian and Dionysiac elements, also represented in the conflicting images of light contrasting with dark, and movement with stasis. This allows a specific contrast between the energetic and the devious, obscure happenings which are at work in influencing the fate of Isabel Archer and, indirectly, of those around her.

In many aspects, Isabel Archer is the typical representative of a young America trying to prove itself to the world, and showing signs of being too self-confident. She has not lived certain experiences in life yet - Isabel is starting out her life naively trusting her judgement, based on mere theory, will carry her on. It is important to realize this aspect of the main character, for it will be fundamental in Isabel's fall. She has the righteousness and excessive self-confidence of Creon when deciding what is best. Isabel, like Creon, does not see the signs of a wrong choice, does not listen to those around her. This is crucial to understand Isabel's nature.

What Isabel chooses to do with her life is tragic basically because of her proud nature - the choice of marrying one man or another in Isabel's case is representative of her proclaimed free-will. It is an act of importance when one sees it as the impulsive move of a young woman who believes too much in her good judgement and does not see this judgement is impaired. Isabel's actions are an extension of what she considers will match her image before herself and others. They are also a reflection of her having to choose one way and, necessarily, losing out in others which could be finer. In addition, these actions represent her trust in reason when, in fact, she barely uses this faculty when deciding on the course of her life. Although she extols the virtues of her investigative nature, she is a romantic, wanting to act on impulse, while ambiguously defending rational thought as the answer to decision. When she refuses Lord Warburton, who she sees as the hero of a romance, for example, she feels that she will be missing out on something greater if she settles for living with him. Refusing Caspar Goodwood is more complex a matter - one does not know if it is out of fear of the sexual passion that Goodwood may bring out in Isabel, or if she sees in Goodwood something too coarse for her aspirations, something that does not fit her ideal of rising to higher ground. These might all be authentically good reasons, but when she does choose, Isabel marries a man who is evidently below those she has refused already, for several reasons which will become more evident as this analysis

proceeds, and, what is worse, who is quite below her own real aspirations and potentials. It is simply that she does not see (or maybe she wants to be temporarily blinded) the character of those around her and what they are leading her into.

Perhaps, one of the most important points is that Isabel is, in her core, a fearful person. She is uneasy with the whole deal of living life as it presents itself. She imagines her life as if it could be frozen into static moments of joy and enlightment - not realizing that practical experience teaches, sometimes in the hardest way, that the risk of loss, unhappiness and suffering is a part of the whole. Behind her brave appearance lies an unprepared soul - unprepared for deciding, unprepared to face her own animality, her own darkness, unprepared for the fall ahead.

## 1. PRE-GARDENCOURT: THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

At the start of the narration, Isabel Archer is a young woman full of the certainty of success in life, of pride in her capacity to clearly judge those around her, and sure of her limitless freewill. She seems destined to "soar far up in the blue - to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men"[8], as her cousin Ralphs says to her.

However, it is also from the beginning that one sees the first signs of tragic destiny. Isabel Archer has the perfect spirit for success - and for falling very low. She represents, in the first part of the narrative, the very essence of Apollo: bright, good, heroic even, ready for action, but trying to avoid unpleasantness at all cost.

When Mrs. Touchett decides to help her orphaned niece, who lives in America, by taking her to Europe, the first activity she finds Isabel doing at home is reading, which she fully enjoys, being a creature of great imagination and desire to learn as much as she could. The house where she lives has an air of melancholy, and this kept her imagination going as a child. The so-called office in the house has a musty smell, old furniture is deposited there, being "a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of furniture whose infirmities were not always apparent (so that the disgrace seemed unmerited and rendered them victims of injustice)" (p. 78). One cannot ignore this reference might also be made to situations which turn up in life and which will be associated to Isabel, whose "infirmity" will appear as the story moves ahead.

There is a bolted door in the house's office, which gives it a special air of mystery, being "condemned" - this door leads to a stoop, the pavement and the outside world. To Isabel, in keeping with the mystery she so loves, and which will cause a great amount of suffering in the future, this door leads to something else. She would not even look out and see what the other side really contained, "for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side - a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror" (p. 78) - this tells us how Isabel wants to know all there is, but at the same time does not. She will not see what is not contained in her many theories.

It is "the vulgar street (that) lay beyond" (p. 79) which Isabel shies away from. She had been a protected child, since "the unpleasant had been even too absent from

her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest and even of instruction. Her father had kept it away from her - her handsome, much-loved father, who always had such an aversion to it" (p. 87). The experience of the unpleasant aspects of life are "interesting" enough when they are part of a text, of literature. It is ironic that as long as truth and experience can be contained in theory, everything is manageable, grand. Isabel, with all the keen observation she pretends to have, is easy prey to deceit, and to deceiving. Her experience about life is practically inexistent - or perhaps it is better to say that she derives it basically from her readings. It is from this theoretical basis that she derives any information to decide, to judge or choose. Her judgement will occur under the premises of her romantic theories, taken greatly from those texts she has always been encouraged to read.

Romance and theory are ever present in Isabel Archer's life. Her family situation says it all: Her father was "too generous, too good-natured, too indifferent to sordid considerations" (p. 87). Having wasted away a fortune, and owing money to many, Isabel's father is far from a down-to-earth type of man. His relation to money, a "sordid" enough question, is conflicting. His daughters' (there were two other sisters, Lilian and Edith) education had been irregular, having been passed on to French governesses. The elopment of the girls' maid with a Russian nobleman on their stay at Neufchatel was thought of as a "romantic episode" in Isabel's imagination. This fantastic, romantic and abstract mind, covered by layers of rationality, will accompany Isabel throughout much of the narrative of **The Portrait of a Lady.** She wants very much to be surrounded by only the most beautiful and graceful thoughts, and "had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action: she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. she had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong" (p. 104). Error is something to

be avoided, not having anything to do with life. Delight is not seen as the other side of terror.

However, Isabel is only mortal - in spite of her ideal in wanting to be more than just that. Her principal flaw, presented in this first part of the narrative, is the "sin of self-esteem" (p. 104), associated, evidently, to the idea of *hubris* mentioned in the beginning of this analysis. She considered her judgements usually right, having a tendency of closing her eyes to those aspects in her nature, and in that of others, which were unpleasant. Isabel is presented to us as a young girl, barely experienced enough to express an opinion, however enthusiastic for knowledge she may be. This is a curious contrast to the way Isabel presents herself before others - evidently trying to cause the best impression possible by showing herself as knowledgeable. In this way, she reveals to others how naive she is in fact. When Isabel meets Mr. Touchett, he likes the girl almost immediately - he also perceives how very young she really is. He sees Isabel as any other young American woman, a little more open to knowledge perhaps, but still similar in many ways to other American girls. She had been encouraged to express herself, even when her opinions were not based on anything very sound, but this was, to Mr. Touchett, very praiseworthy if one considered that it signified a sense of feeling and thinking freely. Isabel does have this potential for freedom of choice, being the product of a culture which proclaims its greatest asset in high-spirited individual choice.

Yet, Isabel's negative side is there also - the one she will not face. There is a fear in this negative side, as if the more she tappped it, the darker it might get. And maybe it would be best if she did fear it - for, unaware as she is at this point, her high spirit will bring her down. The narrator reveals Isabel's "darker" side, or maybe it would be better to say her more human side, when he says "the danger of a high spirit was the danger of inconsistency - the danger of keeping up the flag after the place had

surrendered" (p. 105). This is revealing also of Isabel's behavior when facing her own errors - her difficulty in admitting to herself and to others that things have gone wrong. The importance of an appearance of total harmony in one's life makes Isabel want desperately not to show any flaw, or any lowness in her character. The portrait is beginning to take form: by the time Isabel realizes all this, however, she will have turned her life into the exact opposite of the harmony she desires.

The theory of Isabel's life is to live things in a way in which others will look and admire. If difficulty is a part of life, she will even admit having some, as long as it represented an opportunity to show others how heroic she could be. The heroes of romance fill her imagination; she has a very scanty idea of what it really means to face trouble and sorrow. Her theory on being an independent woman is also detached from some of the harder aspects of this condition, especially at a time when independent women were scarce. To Isabel, independence was a state of enlightment, a situation to be cherished. She is not wrong in this point, however, she will not admit that being independent also means loneliness, depression and responsibility. Isabel does not have the habit of looking at things in their whole context - it is far too difficult for her to face the truth of life.

There is a character who will serve as a counterpoint to Isabel: Henrietta Stackpole. This woman is the prototype of the new American woman who is being born. She is a journalist with a very practical and critical view on whatever she observes. It is true that at times Henrietta presents too many preconceived ideas, especially later on, when she visits England, but she is a down-to-earth type. To Isabel, Henrietta is living proof that "a woman might suffice to herself and be happy" (p. 106). This brings us to Isabel's theory on marriage, which, in her opinion, is a subject a person must never think about too much, without the risk of being vulgar. She was terrified at the idea of ever being vulgar, especially when this involved the

subject of men. To many men, Isabel was seen as too cool and distant - hardly the type one would want for a wife. To Isabel, most of the men she saw were not worth any consideration at all. To Isabel's romantic mind some light would fall on her and reveal the right man, the soul-mate she desired. She does not consider, in her hazy dreams, that any pain or suffering could mar the picture. As the narrator says: "She was too young, too impatient to live, too unacquainted with pain" (p. 107). Her theories were supposed to save her from having to dwell too long on this thought. After all, Isabel was sure that when she had a sufficient number of impressions about life she would be an experienced enough person to avoid pain, or any bad feeling others had to face. It is precisely in this aspect that Henrietta Stackpole is an opposite pole to Isabel - where our heroine is idealistic and a bit reckless, Henrietta is practical and down-to-earth.

It is in this protected and imaginative state of mind that Mrs. Touchett finds Isabel. Mrs. Touchett, a woman who will only see things as they are, since she lacks any form of imagination whatsoever, brings up some very practical questions for Isabel to decide on. For example, she questions Isabel on how much she would sell her old house for. Not being accostumed to this kind of thought, Isabel reveals to her aunt how little she can master the idea of money, or any other practical matter. The house where she has lived is a source of affection to her, not something that could bring her some income. It is a place where things "have happened", as Isabel says. It is especially interesting as a house because people have had experiences; they lived and died there. When Mrs. Touchett mentions Florence as the right place for Isabel, since the houses there are full of this kind of experience, she says it quite sardonically: "You should go to Florence if you like houses in which things have happened - especially deaths. I live in an old palace in which three people have been murdered; three that were known and I don't know how many more besides" (page 81). This immediately

calls Isabel's attention - the idea of going to Florence excites her imagination as a place where things can happen

## 2 GARDENCOURT : THE FALL FROM EDEN

When Isabel arrives at Gardencourt she predictably causes an impression on those around her. She is a high-spirited young woman, full of wonderful ideas on how to go about living the life she has. In spite of wanting very much to cause one type of impression on those whom she meets, it is often another, quite different conclusion about her that people come to. One of the first persons to make observations about her is her uncle, Mr. Touchett, who, as he says, "got [his] information in the natural form. [He] never asked many questions even: [he] just kept quiet and took notice" (p. 109). This older man sees Isabel as a typical American girl, very likely to express her opinions on any subject. Of course, "many of her opinions had doubtless but a slender value" (p. 108), however, Mr Touchett sees in her a naturalness he enjoys. He also sees a great potential for success, which is the same opinion Ralph has of his newfound cousin.

This success is mentioned very frequently in this first part of the novel. How could Isabel be anything but successful? Isabel has a naive, fresh nature which can only recall the best future possible. However, it is also mentioned that Isabel was very young and inexperienced with pain. She was not only unfamiliarized with pain, but also had the notion that suffering was quite unecessary in one's life. As she says to Ralph Touchett, her cousin, "The great point's to be as happy as possible" (p. 102), making the situation of being happy sound easy and practical, as if it could be taken out of a manual. And she adds: "that's what I came to Europe for, to be as happy as possible" (p. 102). Ralph can only wish her all the success in the world. Isabel impresses people precisely because she demonstrates she is so sure of herself, as if she knew exactly where she was going and what she intended to do. This is the impression she wants to cause - that of the decided and independent young woman who holds her destiny in her hands. However, Ralph does not fail to tell Isabel about the ghost of Gardencourt - an image which strikes the young woman's romantic fancy. She wants to know if she will ever see the ghost, but Ralph sadly remarks that the ghost will only appear to those who have suffered greatly and gained some "miserable knowledge" (p. 101) from the experience. Isabel responds that if it is knowledge that will enable her to see it, she might since she loves knowledge so well. Ralph replies that it is "pleasant knowledge" that she is after and hopes she will never have to suffer at all. Isabel again assures Ralph of her intention of being happy - she was not made to suffer.

The truth revealed in this first part is that all the grand ideas Isabel has are a cover for another side which is fearful, uneasy with the unexpected, with experience and feeling, and is unwilling to show herself as she actually is. On the one hand we must analyze the idealism, romanticism and illusion Isabel represents; on the other, one must try to see what it is that lies underneath the surface of everything, of her

nature. Acting boldly and, at the same time, greatly out of fear, one can observe Isabel does not want to see and accept her more human and flawed side.

It is important, at first, to see how well Isabel defends doing what she pleases, how she defends her freedom of choice. This is one of the high points of this part of the novel, since it contrasts so well with her fall in the second part. Right from the start, Isabel wishes to show Mrs. Touchett that she must know the conventions of what is proper not because she wants to obey, but because she wants to choose what is best for her. On a certain evening in which Isabel has the company of Ralph and Lord Warburton, a neighbor of Gardencourt, she defies Mrs. Touchett in her wish to stay up late when Mrs. Touchett would like to retire and considers it unproper for Isabel to be alone with the gentlemen. Isabel ends up giving in, but makes a point in showing Mrs.Touchett that she has not obeyed out of a sense of convention, but because she has decided to get to know the customs "so as to choose" (p. 121). There are two sides to this situation: first of all, Isabel is not as independent as she wants to show - she actually cares about what others think, and this will be clearer later on. This takes us further on: Isabel is not as free as she desires. She has the illusion that in her life everything will be a matter of choice, of deciding for the best. She is unaware of how her acts are controlled by certain human and conventional limits.

At another point, after having refused Lord Warburton's marriage proposal, Isabel has the feeling that there is no easy decision; one's choice will always imply in a loss. She feels she has made the right decision in refusing, but it also means knowing, or at least sensing, that she has said no to all "the peace, the kindness, the honour, the possessions, a deep security and a great exclusion" (p. 188). This is the beginning of awareness of the price one pays for living up to one's freedom of choice.

When Caspar Goodwood, Isabel's American suitor, goes after her from America to England to propose to her, she asserts her freedom of choice by refusing him and

saying " I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honorable than not to judge at all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me" (p. 214). It is not a worry for Isabel, she thinks, what others consider appropriate for her life, but that she can exercise her right to judge and choose. This takes on a greater importance, it seems, than the choice itself. Caspar Goodwood is quite ready to give her all the freedom she desires, but fails to see how complex Isabel in fact is. To Goodwood, if the problem is a mere question of freedom, Isabel can have it - she can travel and know as many countries and people as she likes, if this will make her happy, if this will make her feel apart from the ordinary crowd. However, Isabel is not as simple as that, and this is what she shows him. The direction Isabel is taking already seems to indicate the dark, Dionysiac side of the tragic hero she carries within. She sees no easy way out for herself, not through marriage, at any rate. What she desires, Isabel says to Goodwood, is to be far away from him, as far as possible. To this comment. Goodwood exclaims, "One would think you were going to commit some atrocity!" , to which Isable replies, "Perhaps I am. I wish to be free even to do that if the fancy takes me" (p. 215). Her proclaimed self-sufficiency and unlimited freedom is characteristic of the tragic hero's arrogance. To Isabel, it would be best if she could exercise this self-sufficiency in a world not tied down to anything concrete or real - perhaps in the abstract world she will create for herself in her marriage to Gilbert Osmond. However, one will see that along with this bold, even brash, behavior lies the fear of looking deeply into the dark corners of existence, of facing her personal ghosts.

To Isabel choosing is crucial, evidently. But it is more than simple choice. She sees it as the highlight of her life, the real symbol of an independent spirit, no matter what it may cost her in terms of happiness. Isabel is no ordinary character, of course, but she is not the free goddess she wants to be either. The choices Isabel makes

depend solely on how she sees things, situations and people around her. This seeing is Isabel's real choice: she sees what she wishes to see, perhaps out of fear of admitting she does not really know what is best, out of fear of looking more closely. So, she decides not with the pondering of experience (how can she, if she has none yet?), but based on fancy. However, her fanciful choice will take her to commiting an atrocity, if not of horrendous proportions, one that will take her to great suffering and awareness.

When Isabel meets Gilbert Osmond, who will be her husband, her choice is also a matter of how she sees him. Isabel chooses without looking more closely at the object at hand, without listening, almost as if there were no real choice. In this matter, Isabel is like Creon in relation to his decision about Antigone: a decision once taken is the one to stick to, no matter what others seem to be trying to tell us about the risks of an action done without further thought. Isabel is warned about Osmond, about his flawed character, of how beneath her he seems to others; however, she is decided to do as she wishes, or more important, to show others she will do as she wishes. And so she marries him. But we will return to this part of Isabel's trajectory briefly.

Isabel's initial assertiveness at choosing is connected to how her fate turns out. One must remember that the tragic hero is not simply a puppet - he or she will have options. Such is the situation of Isabel Archer. There are several signs throughout this first phase in which her fate is mentioned. If success is what Isabel expects (and some others expect this from Isabel also, such as Ralph), there are also feelings expressed throughout the narrative that are more ominous than bright. Isabel herself feels this, for example, when she refuses Goodwood's proposal. The "atrocity" the young man mentions makes him see something terrible in Isabel that he cannot quite reach. Through Goodwood, among others, one can foresee a turn of events in the story later on. Goodwood has an uneasy, but unexpainable feeling of how easily Isabel will be

led to a mistake. He says to her: "You'll marry some one else, as sure as I sit here ... there are a certain number of very dazzling men in the world, no doubt; and if there were only one it would be enough. The most dazzling of all will make straight for you. You'll be sure to take no one who isn't dazzling" (pp.210 - 211). The comments Goodwood makes are revealing of Isabel's attraction to the luster of those around her. This does not indicate mere superficiality on Isabel's part, as if she were totally unaware of the great possibilities in life, but a shying away from going beyond the surface of things, of delving into those disagreeable spots that situations and people can present.

This characteristic is observed by Henrietta Stackpole, though quite differently from the way Goodwood perceives it. She senses Isabel's romantic, unrealistic nature when, after discovering Isabel has refused Goodwood, she asks: "Do you know where you're going, Isabel Archer?" - a question to which Isabel answers frivolously by saying that she is going to bed. However, Henrietta insists on the question. Isabel then answers: " No, I haven't the least idea, and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see - that's my idea of happiness" (p. 219). Isabel's answer contrasts directly with her heated defense on choosing her way, on being the independent woman she would like to be. She is not totally aware of the price of independence and choice: the responsibility of knowing exactly where you are treading. This other more inconsequent side of Isabel's reminds one of Emma Bovary in her frantic search for the unattainable happiness only to be found in the romantic novels she read. Curiously enough, there is a famous scene in Flaubert's novel in which Emma does roll over cobbled streets in a swift carriage with her young lover, even though, in this case, the heroine does not have any awareness of her ill-fated future. Henrietta, as a friend who observes Isabel and worries about her, makes a comment that will annoy Isabel, but which predicts a great

deal about the direction being taken: "You're drifting to some great mistake ... You're a creature of risks - you make me shudder!" (p. 219).

The greatest shift in Isabel's life occurs when Mr. Touchett dies and leaves her enough money to make her a rich young woman. The events that take Isabel to this are absolutely unknown to her at this point: Ralph Touchett, her cousin, has decided to give Isabel's future potentials a small push by convincing his father to place part of the fortune that would have been destined to him, Ralph, in Isabel's name. Ralph's role in Isabel's fate is one of the most interesting points in the novel. It is almost as if Ralph were a reader who could participate in the sequence of events - up to a certain point. Events, of course, do get out of hand to Ralph's consternation - after all, he has tried to help Isabel in her pursuit of happiness by investing in her future. It is important to say that Ralph tinkers, in a certain way, with Isabel's trajectory by helping her out with the inheritance money. The same tinkering, though quite differently, in Isabel's future, is done by another character whom we must place in contrast to Ralph Touchett: Madame Merle.

Madame Merle's appearance in the novel occurs a while before Mr. Touchett dies. Isabel's first impressions of Madame Merle, who is presented as a friend of Mrs. Touchett, is that of one of the most interesting women to have ever crossed her path. She is the widow of a Swiss businessman who had died many years before and seemed to have no other occupation but to pay her friends visits on different occasions. Their friendship quickly develops and, to Isabel, the initial image she has of the older woman settles in, especially with the comments Mrs. Touchett makes about Madame Merle's mysteriousness. To the eyes of the reader, this information might sound off an alarm, especially since Mrs. Touchett, in her very practical spirit, considers this point quite a fault. However, to Isabel this only adds to the curiosity she has about Madame Merle. With her typical haste at judging those around her, Isabel

has decided that Madame Merle is simply superb. The fact that Ralph and Madame Merle do not get along is where the contrast lies. These two forces give very important pushes to the story in very different ways. While Ralph has some very good intentions with the money he secretly passes on to Isabel, even if with a touch of selfishness at playing the role of god/observer/gambler with another person's future, Serena Merle's intentions, once she discovers Isabel has become an heiress are quite personal and will bring on serious consequences to Isabel's chances at being happy. Madame Merle, in Ralph's slanted comments to Isabel is someone to be wary of. Isabel senses this resistance Ralph has towards Madame Merle, but brushes it off as merely a resentment due to his having been in love with her in the past. Isabel will still need to discover the important roles these two people had in the way events turned out in her life - one, by granting her financial means; the other, by placing her in the position of "savior" of a young girl's future in promoting Isabel's marriage to Gilbert Osmond. The young girl is M. Merle and Osmond's daughter, Pansy - a secret kept away from the eyes of the world.

Madame Merle is a woman who has learned very cunningly to hide her origins under a mask of mystery. She "knew how to feel" (p.240), according to Isabel's observation, and seemed to have learned some lessons through life on the problems of feeling certain emotions. To Isabel this sounds perfect, since feeling is a crucial dilemma in her life. Isabel is, again, drawn to Madame Merle's appearance of worldly charm, she is "dazzled", in the words of the narrator, with this experienced, seemingly aristocratic woman. Isabel's judgement fails greatly in relation to Madame Merle, as it will more and more as she becomes involved with this woman's intentions to "guide" her in her acquaintances in Florence, where they will soon be traveling with Mrs. Touchett. What one can observe of Madame Merle is how little she wants to have any contact with those people she has no use for. This is an essential characteristic of this woman: she is a "social animal" (p. 244), polished to the core, knowledgeable of

every move she can make to attract those who can be of any use to her. Isabel becomes one of these people when she suddenly inherits money.

In the meantime, Ralph, as the eternal observer, lies in watch of this friendship that has developed. The bad weather that is a part of the English scenery keeps him indoors most of the time, since he is a man of poor health. From the windows of the house at Gardencourt, with a "countenance half-rueful, half-critical" (p. 241), he watches the two women in their daily walks in the rain. Perhaps Ralph's main fault is that he will be shaken out of his "half-states" into an openly critical position too late in the sequence of events. However, his ever-observing eyes will be crucial to the description of Isabel's nature - they see through the heroine in ways which will be important for the development of this analysis.

With Isabel's first contacts with Madame Merle a great deal of precious information is given to the reader about the nature of these two women and about what will occur in the near future. It seems that it is here that much is said and decided about Isabel's fate. Madame Merle's way of thinking contrasts with Isabel's naive, proud opinions. It is at this point that Madame Merle has a chance to see what "material" she has in Isabel Archer. Madame Merle has a great number of ideas she presents in conversations with her young friend. In one she skeptically refers to the unaturalness of Americans being out of their native land. Being in Europe transforms them into "mere parasites, crawling over the surface; we haven't our feet in the soil" (p. 248). She goes on to say that ä woman has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl." To this, of course Isabel protests, since it is so directly against everything she has ever proposed to do with her life. Madame Merle, nevertheless, ironically says: "You protest my dear? you're horrified? you declare you'll never crawl?" (p. 248). It is a

very ironic comment: crawling, an animal's movement, is not in Isabel's vision of her future.

Another revealing conversation takes place when Madame Merle mentions the fact that Ralph does not like her. To this comment, Isabel replies that one must have a very good reason for not liking her.

> "You're very kind", answers Madame Merle. "Be sure you have one ready for the day you begin."
>
> "Begin to dislike you? I shall never begin." is Isabel's answer.
>
> "I hope not; because if you do you'll never end" is what Madame Merle says to this.(p.250)

However, Isabel is a little curious, not directly about this enigmatic comment on the chance of not liking such a wonderful woman as Serena Merle, but about the reasons for Ralph not liking her. Her curiosity, though, does not take her to investigating exactly where this antipathy stems from. Again, Isabel sees what she chooses to see, and ignores the rest, the possible unpleasantness that can result from looking carefully at Madame Merle's character. "With all her love of knowledge [Isabel] had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance"( p. 251).

This becomes even clearer in the following exchange of ideas between Isabel and M. Merle - bitterness is present in Madame Merle's remark: "I'd give a great deal to be your age again ... If I could only begin again - if I could have my life before me!"(p.251). M. Merle can barely disguise her anger at not having the opportunities which seem to be before Isabel in all her youth and freshness. Isabel is a bit surprised at this outburst, and gently answers that she does still have a life before her. To this,

M. Merle says: "... what have I got? Neither husband, nor child, nor fortune, nor position, nor the traces of a beauty that I never had" (p.251). Again Isabel refers to M. Merle's "graces, memories, talents". She is interrupted by M. Merle with the following: "What have my talents brought me? nothing but the need of using them still to get through the hours, the years, to cheat myself with some pretence of movement, of unconsciousness ... " (p. 251). To all this Isabel reacts with amazement, not having ever expected M. Merle to express, even if in an indirect way, her frustation with her life. M. Merle sees in Isabel some very naive purposes for life, but also sees some very fine qualities which have long been missing in her life. There is bitterness and anger at seeing such youthfulness and openness.

Isabel fails to see this in the light she should, even when M. Merle confesses to being very ambitious, but not having, up to that moment, fulfilled these ambitions. Isabel, idealistically, reveals to M. Merle that her ambition is to see her youthful dreams come true. Madame Merle asks then if these dreams did not include that of a young man with a moustache going down on his knees to propose to her. Isabel's vehemence at denying this as a dream makes M. Merle realize that it is a dream, and perhaps a reality in some way, though unconfessed. She then jokes that if Isabel has had this young man she should have run away with him to his castle. Isabel says that he has no castle (perhaps in reference to Goodwood) - a touch of realism that M. Merle does not fail to observe:

> "What has he? An ugly brick house in Fortieth Street? Don't tell me that ; I refuse to recognize that as an ideal."
>
> "I don't care about his house,"said Isabel.
>
> "That's very crude of you. When you've lived as long as I you'll see that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up

> of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us - and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for *things* ! One's self - for other people - is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps - these things are all expressive" (p. 253).

In Madame Merle's philosophy one can observe, again, the very essence of this mysterious woman, the system by which she functions and sets her plans to work. However, what we must in fact keep an eye on here is how this appears as a counterpoint to Isabel's very romantic and idealistic view of life. To all that M. Merle has said, Isabel responds that "Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one" (p. 253). M. Merle can only laugh at such a naive comment, and she is right to find this so amusing. Isabel, in trying to place herself above everything material that can represent a person, above those aspects which are also a part of a person's lifestyle, is blind to those very material and natural limits that are part of life. She does not want to take all the circumstances into account, those very circumstances about people and situations which could help her see the traps set for her. M. Merle herself is observing Isabel and will make use of these observations to try to make her ambitions come true after discovering Isabel will inherit money from Mr. Touchett. Isabel, who has always scorned money as unimportant, will find herself stuck to the amount she inherits. M. Merle will see in Isabel the possibility to place the only people she might care for into contact with that money, if she can play her cards right. These people are Gilbert Osmond and his daughter Pansy.

One of the first comments made to Isabel about the man whom she will marry is through M. Merle, of course. It is ironic that this first reference to Gilbert Osmond and his lifestyle does not leave a mark in Isabel's mind later on, when she meets him,

except in a very vague feeling of having to keep a certain distance in an attempt to preserve herself. The comments, made before M. Merle finds out about Isabel's new fortune, are unquestionably unfavourable to Osmond's image. He is portrayed by M. Merle as being "delightful", certainly, but also as being a man without a project, without a purpose in life. M. Merle says he is clever, but has "no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" (p. 249). The only activity other than "living in Italy" that Osmond is involved with is painting - in water-color, a reference to the very light and uninvolved stance this man takes towards most everything he cannot take advantage of. However, even his painting is considered bad by M. Merle, who also refers to him as an indolent being, having perhaps made a career out of that. These comments are made at intervals to Isabel, whenever M. Merle speaks of Florence, where she, Mrs. Touchett and Osmond lived.

Nevertheless, Isabel's mind does not appear to register this early information - it is too soon for any evaluation on her part. Still, one wonders how much these characteristics about Gilbert Osmond influence Isabel one way or the other. To an observant person he sounds like the kind of person whose life is so much without a real purpose that one should be wary of him. But, surprisingly, Isabel will prove to everyone that these very characteristics make Gilbert Osmond sound very much like the romantic creature she is so attracted to. He is indolent, yes, but this can be interpreted as being simply unattached to the crazy drive towards material success that rules the world. He simply lives in Italy, and that is his position in life. To Isabel, this will shortly be the greatest position for a person to have - she sees in Osmond a possibility that no one else will be able to see: to create a portrait to live by - a work of art in life. Though curiosity is Isabel's real force, she hides a real fear of touching too deeply into the mystery of living, of having her humanity tested by the challenges life can set before a person. However, living life as if it were art is magnificently attractive to Isabel, and unconsciously, perhaps, she senses Osmond has the right

elements in his life to offer her the "portrait" of a life. She will disappoint everyone she knows, especially Ralph, who had such a great influence in giving her one of the material instruments to grow.

Isabel is pleased at the opportunity that money has given her: she is able to travel, eat, dress and do anything she desires without owing a favor to a soul. Her aunt wishes to help her now that she is a young woman of fortune and help her to "play the part well" (p. 262). This sounds fine to Isabel, but in her future she sees opportunities that are quite different from those money can offer. The principal advantage money can offer her is the possibility of action. This chance to act and be a person of power is contradicted at every moment by the recklessness of Isabel's decisions when it would be necessary to maintain a great dose of common sense. After meeting Osmond, Isabel seeks out Ralph's opinion about him. Ralph defends the idea of judging for oneself and not giving too much attention to what others think. Isabel decides to get her own impressions about Gilbert Osmond, an action that will later on seem apalling to Ralph when he sees what impression she has drawn from the dilettante. When Isabel and Ralph talk, later on in the novel, after she has gotten engaged to Osmond, the tone of their conversation is quite different. They fall into an argument about how each one sees the engagement, and while both are strong in their arguments, Isabel's whole posture and reaction to Ralph's protests are contradictory. She is calm, but anger shows in her eyes; she has faith in her future with Osmond, but feels more than knows, deep in her soul, she is somehow wrong about him. Her only virtue, though twisted, is that she feels she must be consistent with what she has said about Osmond, and with her defense of freedom of choice, no matter what this would cost her. "It was wonderfully characteristic of her that, having invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honors. Ralph remembered what he had said to his father about wishing to put it into her power to meet the requirements of her

imagination. He had done so, and the girl had taken full advantage of the luxury" (p. 398-9). It is in this moment that Ralph has lost his influence, and worse, Isabel's confidence in him. She ends the conversation by saying that she would never complain about any of her troubles to him - partly because she must defend her pride by not ever admitting error, partly because Isabel's troubles will be only and exclusively her concern.

Even before Isabel meets Gilbert Osmond, the narrative introduces him to the reader through a subtle, but very precise picture. He appears as "a gentleman who studied style", but one who "studied it only within well-chosen limits" (p. 280). The chapter in which we find this description is a fine example of the narration's eliptic way of revealing important information about characters and their motives. Pansy, Osmond's daughter, is returning home after having spent a considerable number of years under the protection of nuns at a convent. In Osmond's talk with the nuns, one can perceive what his intentions for his daughter are. He has brought her up to obey, not to be anything but the extension of his desire. As he himself says, he "prefers women like books - very good and not too long" (p. 282). Pansy is the perfect daughter for Gilbert Osmond, absolutely molded and submitted to his wishes, to his authoritative and exacting voice - a mere observer of what he wishes for her future. In this aspect, he and M. Merle are one of a kind: they see, each in their particular way, what can be done to others to please their wishes. However, while M. Merle is ambitious and will act to get what she wants, Osmond's indolence will only allow him to act upon whatever falls his way. He reacts characteristically to M. Merle's visit and to the decision of introducing Isabel to him. To attract his curiosity, she presents Isabel as a prize object on a tray. The marriage M. Merle dreams of will mainly be a product of her action, since Osmond's interest in the affair, at least initially, derives from the movements M. Merle makes to get them together. By the time Isabel meets

Osmond, he has been challenged enough at least to see what there is about the young woman that could be of any interest to him.

Isabel is unaware of many facts when she meets this other very mysterious character that is Gilbert Osmond. She sees a degree of melancholy, a listlessness that is intriguing, if initially not very attractive, and a loneliness in the life he leads with Pansy. Isabel wonders at the ties that bind Osmond and M. Merle, but nothing at all is hinted at by the older woman. However, a certain mystery covers the exact relationship between Gilbert Osmond and M. Merle, and this will be hinted at frequently throughout the novel. At any rate, when Isabel meets Osmond for the first time, she maintains an observer's posture, keeping quiet most of the time. She sees M. Merle's attitudes as rehearsed; she feels she must step back and try to get an impression of her new acquaintance, Gilbert Osmond. Obviously, Isabel has felt something to be aware of in these two people's way of acting, but she does not follow these impressions through. The rationality of her theories protect her from the unpleasantness that could be there. She feels in her first contact with the man she will marry a fineness and sophistication that should not be interfered with: "his utterance was the vibration of glass, and if she had put out her finger she might have changed the pitch and spoiled the concert" (p. 298). There is something holding her back from interfering in the life of Osmond - her future decisions in relation to him will contradict these impressions. At the same time, her "finger" might spoil the perfection of the picture - the quality of perfection is in the stillness of Osmond's life, and this will prove to be very attractive to Isabel's ideals.

Ralph's insinuations about Osmond and M. Merle should also be warning signals to Isabel's mind and sensations: he sees neither in a very favorable light but, as was mentioned before, he trusts Isabel's judgement - he wants to see what she will do for herself. Ralph knows, nevertheless, that M. Merle's ambitions have been great and

that she had not yet accomplished what she really yearned for. In any case, he trusts that the relationship between M. Merle and Isabel will soon wane due to the superior, but opposite, natures that these two women display. Ralph's judgement fails also at supposing that Isabel would not be harmed by her friendship with M. Merle; by the time he realizes his misjudgement, harm has been done.

Another character who will eventually play an important role in Isabel's discovery about the great error she has committed by marrying Gilbert Osmond is Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini. This woman's (at times) scandalous behavior will give Isabel no reason to believe in a word she says or hints at about the connection between Osmond and Serena Merle. Married to an obscure Italian count by her mother, her attitudes are that of a superficial and, even, unintelligent woman. Isabel's impression of her is not at all positive - it is only natural that Isabel is not motivated by the Countess' attempts at friendship since they are very different people. However, ironically, the Countess is the retainer of many of those secrets about Gilbert and M. Merle that Isabel is not aware of yet. The Countess' discourse is charged with insinuations and double meanings that are not without importance. In her comments about Pansy's convent education she says to Isabel: "Oh, the convents, the convents! ... You may learn anything there; I'm a convent-flower myself. I don't pretend to be good, but the nuns do. Don't you see what I mean?" (p.307). Isabel is not at all sure what this strange woman means. The Countess is ambiguity itself, revealing the perverse turn which even a "convent-flower" can take, which even the best intentions can present. Isabel thinks this superficial woman cannot bring her any interesting intellectual exchange - and this is true. However, the Countess is more clear-minded than Isabel can suspect when she states that "there are very good feelings that may have bad reasons ... and then there are very bad feelings, sometimes, that have good reasons" (p. 307). The Countess follows her instincts perhaps a little too far, but she has a feeling about reality that Isabel has not developed yet. All of

Isabel's rationality will not be an aid in her decisions and choices. Instead of following her deeper feelings about people, not based on romantic ideals but on common sense, she runs away by hiding into her intellect.

The reasons behind M. Merle's interest in Osmond's marrying Isabel are more apparent in the talk this woman has with the Countess Gemini in the garden of Gilbert's house, while Isabel and Osmond are left to talk alone inside the house. The two conversations run parallel and contrast in every way. While Isabel is forming another impression of Gilbert, which is quite different from the first, the Countess tells M. Merle that she knows exactly what Isabel's function will be by marrying her brother. In one conversation there is a lack of clear judgement, since Isabel's impression is taking on a more favorable turn; in the other the revelation of the danger sparked by the connection between Gilbert Osmond and M. Merle. As the Countess says: "You're capable of anything, you and Osmond. I don't mean Osmond by himself, and I don't mean you by yourself. But together you're dangerous - like some chemical combination" (p.318). To this comment M. Merle simply reacts by warning the Countess to stay away from them - she does not fear the Countess. She has observed Gilbert and Isabel from where she is seated and shrewdly realizes that her plan is already succeeding: Isabel is falling in love with Gilbert.

Similarly, Isabel also sees M. Merle and the Countess Gemini strolling across the garden, all the while listening to Osmond's comments about his sister, her superficiality and her unhappy marriage to the Count. He also shows her several of his treasures: pictures, cabinets and several works of art on which he makes comments and offers information. Isabel tries to draw some sort of conclusion about this strange man, but is unable to classify him under any of those categories she is so used to having for those she has met. She feels that this new acquaintance is somehow different and it is necessary to further uncover him in order to find out more about

him. This possibility of uncovering something special is what sparks her imagination - Osmond is a gentleman of fine manners. She sees him first physically, with his "dense, delicate hair, his overdrawn, retouched features, his clear complexion, ripe without being coarse, the very evenness of the growth of his beard, and that light, smooth slenderness of structure which made the movement of a single one of his fingers produce the effect of an expressive gesture..." (p.312). She also observes that he is probably very critical, impatient of common problems with so much to think about in terms of art, beauty and the more refined aspects of life. Osmond's life has the aspect of harmony, one which is very interesting to Isabel's refined spirit. Her curiosity has been touched very deeply; in fact, she has been "dazzled" by Gilbert Osmond. The words Caspar Goodwood used with a certain despair when he realized he would lose Isabel, fit this scene. Everything about Gilbert Osmond is precious: his possessions (of which his daughter is a part) and his manners. Isabel finds herself trying to please this man, trying to be what she supposes is adequate to fit into the picture of Osmond's life. The attraction of living a life surrounded by apparently perfect beauty and abstraction is a temptation to Isabel. It is a chance, though unconscious, to flee from smallness, from ugliness and chaos, and especially from growth.

The scene is dense with the glow Isabel sees in this abstract, beautiful life Osmond leads. The narrative shows the intoxication that has affected Isabel - "she was oppressed at last with the accumulation of beauty and knowledge to which she found herself introduced. There was enough for the present; she had ceased to attend to what he said; she listened with attentive eyes, but was not thinking of what he told her ..." (p. 313). And, what is more important, she is worried about causing that right impression, contradicting everything she has ever said about being independent and not losing time with the opinions of others: "[Osmond] probably thought her quicker, cleverer in every way, more prepared, than she was ... A part of Isabel's fatigue came from the effort to appear as intelligent as she believed Madame Merle had described

her, and from the fear (very unusual with her) of exposing - not her ignorance; for she cared comparitively little - but her possible grossness of perception" (p. 313). Her "grossness of perception" is showing - not to Osmond, but to the reader who can already see beyond what Isabel sees (an advantage given to the reader through the narrative). We can also see Isabel closing her eyes once again, drifting into the unknown and throwing any ability to judge out the window.

Isabel fails to realize, in this exchange with Osmond, that he has no real respect for people - he would actually prefer that they were more like art objects. His opinion of a woman's "natural mission" is that she should be "where she's most appreciated" (p. 314), considering also, that for a woman to find out where that would be, she would have to be told plainly by someone else. Isabel falls to this charming man like an innocent schoolgirl. She responds that "such a matter would have to be made very plain to me" (p. 314). This sounds nothing like the very self-sufficient woman who wants to decide for herself what to do in life. It sounds more like a foolish act of giving in to the one person she should be wary of. The irony of it all is that Osmond does not really lie about himself: he is a man of sophisticated manners, but, as he himself says, he has adopted a posture in life which is affirmed by indifference, by the renunciation of trying hard to live (perhaps a full life), and he explains this quite honestly, to Isabel's puzzlement :

> "...I could do nothing. I had no prospects, I was poor, and I was not a man of genius. I had no talents even; I took my measure early in life. I was simply the most fastidious young gentleman living. There were two or three people in the world I envied - the Emperor of Russia, for instance, and the Sultan of Turkey! There were even moments when I envied the Pope of Rome - for the consideration he enjoys. I should have been delighted to be considered to that extent: but since that couldn't be I didn't care for anything less and I made up my mind to not go in for the honours. the leanest gentleman can always consider himself,

> and fortunately I *was*, though lean, a gentleman ... the things I've cared for have been definite - limited" (p. 315 - 6).

Osmond's envying, limited nature is all there - he is telling Isabel that he has a number of limitations (though these are not limitations at all to Osmond - they are a sign of a superior nature) which stem from a lack of energy to be anything at all that is lower in importance than the position of an emperor. Since he evidently cannot be an emperor, he will not attempt to be anything at all - others can try to get the things he wants for him, which is what M. Merle attempts to do, and which is what Osmond will try to do with Isabel later on when they are married. Osmond's description of himself is dry and to the point, however Isabel had refused to believe a word, "her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting" (p. 316). The romantic imagination of the schoolgirl is at work and will blind her enough to go ahead with her involvement with Osmond. Isabel has the capacity of prettying up any picture presented to her; her fantastic imagination is able to see great beauty in decadence. Osmond's pretensions are what really attract Isabel - he is associated to beauty, scenes of graceful tranquility and superior motives. Despite this lovely picture, the Countess is more accurate in her evaluation of Osmond: to her he is certainly a gentleman, but nothing else can be said about him, except that "he has always appeared to believe that he's descended from the gods" (p.322). This is a key to Isabel's interest in Osmond, his apparent proximity to the gods, to whatever is superior and unreachable. To Isabel this is magical, a way to leave behind any association with the earthly, possible baseness of humanity. The more she gets to know Osmond, the more she feels she can live up to those images of romance she has read about, to the picture she wants to build.

Osmond sees more and more of Isabel at Mrs. Touchett's house in Florence - and as Ralph observes, it is certainly not because of the others in the house, especially himself, or because of his mother and M. Merle, that Osmond has become a frequent

visitor. Through Ralph's eyes, one sees Osmond as "a student of the exquisite" (p.323), his whole interest was in the rare quality Isabel showed herself to have: she was close to becoming an art object to Osmond's eyes. Mrs. Touchett, on her part, finds her niece's connections to Gilbert Osmond very odd - his pretensions of marrying Isabel "would have an air of almost morbid perversity" (p.324), since she had refused an English lord, and any association with "an obscure American dilettante, a middle-aged widower with an uncanny child and an ambiguous income" (p.324) did not seem like any success to Mrs. Touchett's eyes. In this woman's practical view, marriage was a political contract, not something to trifle with. She hopes that Isabel will not be influenced by Osmond's charms. Ralph finds it all entertaining; he does not believe Isabel will stop at a third proposal - after all, she is made for so much more. Mrs. Touchett seems to see much more than Ralph at this moment. She defends the idea that marrying Osmond requires Isabel to simply "see" him in a particular way and be interested in his beautiful opinions. Isabel's aunt gets no clear information from M. Merle, but having seen through her, feels there is a great interest on M. Merle's part that this marriage take place, though she does not know about the past connection between Osmond and her old friend. Mrs. Touchett sees Osmond and "his pert little daughter" not very favorably (to say the least) and expresses this to M. Merle. The latter, in her turn, tries to defend Osmond as discreetly as she finds it necessary in order not to arouse suspicion. However, Mrs. Touchett has touched her old friend's ambition, if not totally aware of this yet. "Having no fortune [Pansy] can't hope to marry as they marry here; so Isabel will have to furnish her either with a maintenance or with a dowry" (p.326). Here, we have the truth of M. Merle's interest that such a marriage be made: Pansy's well-being, more than Osmond's, is at stake.

The truth of the relationship between Osmond and M. Merle is unveiled to the reader through the several comments, conversations and references in the narrative. The twist is that the principal person who would be interested in all of it is too blind

to be aware of the trap she is stepping into. Isabel is quickly becoming enchanted by the image she has of Osmond, "of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man" (p. 327), by the "picture" she has painted with its

> lowness of tone and the atmosphere of summer twilight ... It spoke of the kind of personal issue that touched her most nearly; of the choice between objects, subjects, contacts - what might she call them? - of a thin and those of a rich association ... of a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but that had an element of nobleness; of a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated together that the career appeared to stretch beneath it in the disposed vistas and with the ranges of steps and terraces and fountains of a formal Italian garden... (p. 327).

Osmond is steadily and surely gaining ground and exchanges ideas about this with M. Merle at an informal reunion at the Countess Gemini's house. M. Merle rejoices at Osmond's conquests; Osmond complains of how hard he must "work" for M. Merle's idea. He also thinks "the fine creature", in M. Merle's words, Isabel is, is not at all unpleasant to his taste. He finds her worth the labor of being so charming but, in fact, sees she has "too many ideas" - fortunately, all very bad ones which can easily be thrown away. All in all, Osmond is demanding of the *objet d' art* he is bargaining for, while M. Merle makes a comment that, in the future, will prove to be exactly where Isabel has been placed. She says: "I'm frightened at the abyss into which I shall have cast her" (p.335).

In this scene described above, it is not so much the exact words uttered that show the reader the intimacy of the connection between Osmond and M. Merle, as the easy flow of these words between two people who can reveal exactly who they are to each other. Isabel is the prey, although not the poor lamb of a romantic novel, of two very equal souls. However, what one must be attentive to is the manner in which

Osmond and M. Merle behave with each other. M. Merle finds it important, at all moments, to keep those appearances that will not speak of the truth to others - she criticizes Osmond for having moved when she moved to get her carriage. Osmond replies that he has forgotten, that he is "out of the habit" (p.335). What they have created together is a careful study of how to act, by showing others they are not so close. Surely, they have been very close in the past - but what does it matter when both have ambitions that go beyond feeling? This "habit" comes more naturally to M. Merle than it does to Osmond, who has a much more indolent nature. Nevertheless, if there is anybody who could know how little Osmond will make Isabel happy, this person is M. Merle - she has had the experience personally.

The reappearance of Lord Warburton at this point in the novel is essential to the later sequence of events. It is when Isabel, Osmond, Ralph and Henrietta Stackpole are all enjoying a visit to Rome, that Lord Warburton makes a first comeback into Isabel's life. It is here that Osmond discovers how wealthy Lord Warburton is - valuable information which he will use later on. At present, Osmond simply envies Warburton's fortune and, what is more important, decides that Isabel is worth the effort of winning over. After all, he has found out, through his observations, that she was once proposed to by Warburton and - amazingly - refused him. He "was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior and the exquisite; and now that he had seen Lord Warburton, whom he thought a very fine example of his race and order, he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand" (p.354). Osmond has seen in Isabel something very appropriate for a woman he would consider marrying; she has done something, by refusing a nobleman, that has made her become more valuable to his eyes. And she has reinforced those qualities Osmond believes are so present in her nature: a special love for artistic beauty and wanting to live life only in this light.

Osmond's marriage proposal to Isabel follows more or less the same pattern as the other two - basically, she does not know exactly what to feel and so distances herself from the whole scene. She hears herself speaking and sees herself in the role of "a woman being proposed to", but dreads the moment when she will have to decide about Osmond's declared love. His confession is felt, on Isabel's part, as more of a necessary relief to Osmond than an utterance full of the usual expectations of a lover. Isabel feels there is something amiss here, even though this man has had the most beautiful and gentle display of affection one could expect at such a moment. However, there is something finer that she cannot avoid feeling: "The tears came into her eyes: this time they obeyed the sharpness of the pang that suggested to her somehow the slipping of a fine bolt - backward, forward, she couldn't have said which" (p.360). She steps back, as she has done before. She does not know what she is feeling, but deciding on what to do is a must - the very thing she has always thought could be done easily by her rational mind. The point is, deciding rationally is not the answer in a situation such as this one. Isabel knows that there is a force missing in herself that could have made any indecision disappear, but that this force can only show when one begins to spend it. The power of love, and simply living all there is to life, requires a renunciation of oneself, a certain giving that Isabel fears. She feels this as "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" (p.360). Isabel fears herself and losing control over her life once deeper feelings were tapped. It is as if she needed to keep herself whole, fearing a complete desintegration if she gave herself up to a person or to life in its fullness. Osmond is certainly not the person to tap this resevoir, neither is it anyone else Isabel knows - it is in her own power to open her feeling to the world and to people around her.

Osmond's proposal is the very study of propriety combined with effect - he has touched Isabel more because of his studied, abstract posture than because of any loving feeling she might have for him. He evidently ignores the internal confusion he has provoked in Isabel. When he leaves her, after slyly suggesting she visit Pansy before she depart from Florence on her tour to other countries, she is described as being in a strange spirit. She could not see what was in store for her - the vagueness of the road ahead could not be reached by her imagination. She only feels it is "a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. But she was to cross it yet" (p.363). Isabel's destiny has not completed itself - she will need to cross that abyss which separates unawareness from awareness, and will suffer in the process.

Isabel's engagement, which closes this part of the novel, is given to the reader through the perspective of Isabel and Caspar Goodwood's reencounter. Predictably enough, he reacts with a great deal of sadness but, also with a certain dull stubborness in relation to his feelings for Isabel. To Goodwood, Isabel is as good as dead; she herself is startled with the way he feels about her engagement: "... you must have felt as if you were coming to bury me!" (p.378) she exclaims at seeing him. Symbolically, Isabel does face a certain death with the choice of marrying Osmond. This has not been totally disclosed yet (in spite of all the indications), but Isabel has chosen a path that will freeze her into the beautiful, abstract world of Gilbert Osmond. Goodwood is right: she is dead.

To all of Goodwood's questions about Osmond, Isabel can only answer with negatives - he is nobody, does nothing, comes from nowhere. And he has done nothing at all to deserve marrying her - except, perhaps, and this is the crucial point of her acceptance, not touched her personal, intimate "bank account". Isabel's favorable economic situation is a blessing since that is something she can give away easily. But

herself, that is quite a different story. Osmond does not want Isabel as she is - he wants what he sees in her, as part of the furniture, the precious bibelots and paintings he has on his walls. Isabel can be just that. In any case, when Goodwood is about to leave her, her feeling of desperation at her choice makes her want more than anything that he criticize her deeply, so she can have the chance to defend herself, arguing as well as she has always done.

To all those whom she talks to - all extremely amazed at her choice to marry Osmond - she gives this feeling of having done something not worthy of her. And at every moment she must defend her choice, she feels a deeper ambivalence than ever. Mrs. Touchett's reaction is the expected one - she feels Isabel has made an extremely bad deal when she refused Lord Warburton to accept Osmond, of all men. The man Mrs. Touchett considers the right choice is irrelevant. However, her direct and sharp perception of who Osmond is and, what is more interesting, of how Isabel's engagement came about is worth mentioning. To begin with, Mrs. Touchett refers to Osmond as "M. Merle's friend", much to Isabel's annoyance. Nevertheless, there is a reason, clear even to Mrs. Touchett's narrow-minded way of seeing things, that he should always be talked about in relation to M. Merle. As Mrs. Touchett says to Isabel: "If he's not her friend he ought to be - after what she has done for him!" (p. 384). Mrs. Touchett has seen M. Merle's sneakiness in having arranged this connection between her niece and Osmond, even though she does not know for sure what is the real relationship between Osmond and M. Merle. It is enough for Mrs. Touchett that Isabel is marrying a man with nothing to say for himself - no possessions, no name, no prospects. The reason for loving such a person does not even cross her simple mind. However, again, Isabel herself cannot explain to her aunt the reason why she is marrying Osmond. Furthermore, she is confused at trying to defend M. Merle from her aunt's questionings: how could M. Merle have decieved her (Mrs. Touchett) so? Why didn't she mention her interest in having Isabel marry

Osmond? To Mrs. Touchett's way of thinking perhaps Ralph could have interposed and warned Isabel in time.

Ralph's shock and sadness at Isabel's choice modifies the relationship of these two people. To Ralph, Isabel's marriage to Osmond has the effect of a cherished character's rebellion against the maker. Ralph had been the person who most gave Isabel opportunities in life - he was also the most likely to feel her fall as his own. He is likened to a small boat, drifting in a "rocky stream" (p.390), not knowing what to say to Isabel in order to "reclaim her". His reappropriation of Isabel would be similar to getting her to take the path to that imagined future he had in mind for her. In this sense, Ralph has acted too much like a god, mistakenly overevaluating his power to change her destiny, proudly looking from afar at his creation. He did not, in all his considerations, realize the great potential of being wrong in his judgement about Isabel - she has shown him, and all others, that she is the real owner of her destiny - whatever this might imply.

When Ralph decides to speak to Isabel about her engagement, he starts out by explaining his reluctance at congratulating her - after all, he did not expect to see her, of all people, "caught" by Osmond's "cage" (p.392). Ralph is astounded at Isabel's willingness to give up her freedom, her passion for knowledge and life. He does not really know how Isabel's mind has worked to get where she is: she has sought after this cage and has now obtained one. As she says to her cousin, "one must choose as good a corner as possible" (p.392) and then be quiet about it. Ralph argues for her to wait until she has thought things over in a better light. He does perceive that Isabel's mild manner hides a great turmoil, a clear sign of not having pondered enough over the choice she has made. Ralph, who has seen Isabel as going far beyond her actual state, and had amused himself with considering how she would go about this, receives as a reply from his cousin: "... it's too late. As you say, I'm caught" (p.394). Ralph

then realizes that Isabel has created a safe terrain to walk on. With all her ambivalence about what she has always defended in life and what she has decided to do now, he sees a consistency in her dilemma. Isabel's imagination has gone far beyond what Ralph could ever think of - even if in a direction he never supposed she would take. She has had constant signs, though most of them consist of "chills", impressions or feelings, of her fall into disgrace. Nevertheless, this is the choice that will take Isabel to cross the abyss, the darkness of existence, into something greater. It is not a crossing Isabel wants; wanting is a mere detail here. It is the necessary step into awareness for the heroine, which is essential to Isabel now. For now, she needs to hide from her more basic instincts, to close her eyes to those uneasy feelings desire stirs up in people. However, this need will make her feel she has crawled, that she has been the puppet not only of trickery, but of her own self-deceiving mind.

## 4. GARDENCOURT: THE RETURN

When we find Isabel again, as a married woman, it is after a lapse of four years - the early years of her marriage to Gilbert Osmond. The reader receives the first

glimpses into this new life Isabel has been leading through M. Merle's conversation with Edward Rosier, who had been introduced earlier in the novel as being another American brought up in Paris, and whose father had been a friend of Mr. Archer, Isabel's father. It is through Edward Rosier's eyes that the reader will have his/her first view of Isabel in this part.

In any case, M. Merle's comments about the Osmond family are of great interest to Rosier since he has fallen in love with Pansy Osmond during a trip to Saint Moritz. He feels that M. Merle could intercede in his favor by talking to Gilbert Osmond about his interest in Pansy. M. Merle denies having any influence on the subject of Pansy's marriage, to which Rosier replies that Mrs. Osmond, then, might favor him. M. Merle's response is curious: "Very likely - if her husband doesn't" (p.411). Rosier is surprised at this and wonders out loud if Mrs. Osmond always opposes her husband's opinions. M. Merle answers that they are completely different in everything. Here we have the first hint of the opposite forces inside this marriage. Isabel and Osmond have not had children - the little boy Isabel had given birth to had died after six months. Theirs had become the most sterile relationship, in more ways than one.

Edward Rosier's first impression of the Osmond house - in Rome, where they now live - is that of a palace containing a dungeon. This image is especially important when one considers the life Isabel has inside its walls: the house was "a dark and massive structure overlooking a sunny *piazzetta* ... a palace by roman measure, but a dungeon to poor Rosier's apprehensive mind ... It seemed to him of evil omen that the young lady he wished to marry ... should be immured in a kind of domestic fortress, a pile which bore a stern old Roman name, which smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence... " (p.415). His first view of Isabel is positive: the years have made her more beautiful, but the description is impressive. Where Edward Rosier stands he sees her "framed in the gilded doorway", and "she struck our young man as the

picture of a gracious lady" (p.418). The portrait of Isabel has been made: she has been frozen into this static frame, apparently serene and beautiful, but totally void of her energetic personality. It is an "evening" at the Osmond's (a social event in which a number of acquaintances and friends get together for an evening's entertainment) and the setting is perfect for an observation of all those in the Osmond family, and of those who are in some way connected to them.

Pansy and Rosier start a conversation soon after he arrives, contrary to M. Merle's recommendations to Rosier, especially considering Osmond's predictable distaste for the young man's lack of a grand fortune. In this initial exchange between Pansy and Edward one finds out, though, that his love for Pansy is reciprocated. This event will prove to be very important, since later on it will be one of the facts that will bring Isabel to open her eyes about her relationship with Osmond. In the meantime, Osmond and M. Merle have been talking during the social event about Rosier. Osmond expresses his coldness in relation to the whole affair. He is not very concerned with what Pansy feels for Rosier - he rarely cares very much for what anybody feels - and has other grander plans for his daughter. M. Merle, on the other hand, has thought that maybe Edward Rosier could still prove useful to the two of them - one must remember that she sees only what people can be used for. Isabel does not take part in any of this, she seems to be totally alienated from any form of action or thought about those who are considered her "family". In the beginning, Isabel wants little to do with the whole affair between her step-daughter and Rosier. She knows that her interest in the case will surely cause more cracks in her already shaken marriage.

Lord Warburton's reappearance at this point is essential also. Osmond has set his eyes on the treasure he has always coveted: Warburton's position and fortune are ideal for a perfect marriage with Pansy, and perfectly suited to Osmond's ambitions.

And, since he needs the right instruments to get what he wants, he will need to use Isabel and the feelings Warburton used to have for her - this can be the way for Isabel to influence Warburton. What Osmond proposes is unbearable to Isabel. She has sensed that Warburton still has some sort of hidden feeling for her and, though he authentically enjoys Pansy's company, will only marry the young girl in order to be close to Isabel. Therefore, Isabel would be manipulating Warburton's feelings in order to help her husband. Furthermore, Isabel would hurt more than Warburton if she followed Osmond's desires- she would have to step on Pansy and Rosier's feelings, besides her own. The trap is closing in on Isabel - she had never bargained for this kind of role when she married Osmond.

One must analyze, also, a certain change that has come over Isabel in these four years of living with Osmond. To those who have not known her well before, it can be translated into the transformation from an impetuous young girl to a mature and wise woman. However, to the people who knew Isabel very well before, this change is not as positive as it seems. Through these people's impressions the reader can realize what an effort it is for Isabel to lead the life she has now.

Ralph is the first person we must refer to for he is the one who most feels the distance that has been kept between himself and Isabel. Since their last conversation Isabel has kept the promise she made: she has never troubled Ralph (or anyone) with her disappointment. This makes Ralph regret having ever mentioned his dislike towards her marriage to Osmond - Isabel has the proud nature of one who will avoid giving in at all cost, and never confesses her deepest sorrow. Ralph feels that "he had lost the game. He should see nothing, he should learn nothing; for him she would always wear a mask" (p.442). He senses in Isabel a serenity which is too elaborate, too much of a show to be real. In this initial part of the second phase, Isabel is described again and again as being a painting, or a part of a picture, a portrait to be

admired, but not more than this. Ralph also observes that in the daily routine of the Osmonds there is "the hand of the master" (p.443) - Gilbert himself has become the owner of all of Isabel's movements. That is, he has in fact apparently transformed her into the treasured art object he wanted. Isabel is being held down by a mediocre man: all her love for knowledge and people is being suffocated by her husband's deep distaste for anything that is out of his control.

Osmond is revealed now as being a mere slave to convention, to the mediocrity of a life ruled by the meanest motivations. "He kept all things within limits" (p.444), his god-like control never wavered. To the rest of the world he would show a certain disdain for the vulgar life everyone led - it was essential to show how original and above the ordinary crowd he and his family were. "Everything he did was *pose - pose* so subtly considered that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse" (p.444). It is this picture of perfection that Isabel has bought with her money: a life in which, in spite of the effort to show the contrary, the attention of the world was hungrily sought after. Osmond's marriage with Isabel was another one of those things Osmond had done to amuse himself - to see how the world would react to his marrying such a precious object. Isabel was the prize and the very "gullible world" itself - "she had been mystified to the top of her bent" (p.445). And, in the same way Osmond despises the world and its lowness, he had begun to despise his wife and her worldly side. This is the side she made such an effort to not give importance to, although it is present under all the gloss of her posture.

And yet, Ralph has not seen it all. Ralph's role in the novel seems to be the eternal observer of the tragedy of Isabel Archer. When, at last, Isabel gives in to the horrible reality her life has become, Ralph's health will be at its last. Isabel's slow awareness has in fact begun already, though it does not begin with one special fact. Probably the disappointment with her marriage has begun to pave the way for the

revelations of the future and their effect on Isabel. In any case, she does not have the same feeling for M. Merle - Ralph and Mrs. Touchett had predicted correctly on the subject of their seemingly eternal friendship: Isabel does not see M. Merle in such a favorable light anymore. The transformation of this connection occurs very subtly, and begins by M. Merle's slow withdrawal from the Osmond's life. From the moment Isabel has ceased to be of any use to M. Merle, since she has now obtained the means (through the girl's marriage) that can guarantee Pansy's entrance to a better world, she sees no further interest in her old friendship. Nevertheless, the reason M. Merle gives to Isabel, for her distance, is very noble, though strange: "I *must* be on my guard ... I might so easily, without suspecting it, offend you ... I must not forget that I knew your husband long before you did; I must not let that betray me" (p.453). M. Merle explains her withdrawal to Isabel as protection against any possible mistake made which might be misinterpreted by Isabel or those around them. M. Merle, being the careful woman she is, protects herself from Isabel's possible suspicion of the intimacy of her relationship with Osmond in the past.

Isabel, on the other hand, had thought many times of Mrs. Touchett's comment about how M. Merle had arranged the marriage between herself and Osmond. She feels she does not know anymore why she has married Osmond - it is all a mystery to her. She feels that all her arguments, those she so proudly faced everyone with before her marriage, are empty of any meaning to her now. She did not know her own feelings when she decided to marry Osmond and has discovered many other angles to her husband's character. She now has less and less to thank M. Merle for, especially if this woman has had a hand in arranging her marriage. Isabel also feels that there is even a touch of irony in the older woman's tone of voice. There is too much care in M. Merle's excuses for not visiting the Osmond household as often. In her state of confusion about her marriage, Isabel begins to question the reasons for M. Merle's distance: was the older woman perhaps jealous of her married life? but why? To be

jealous of happiness was understandable, but of the miserable life she was leading with Gilbert - Isabel felt at loss for an explanation. Her disappointment with her marriage is more and more evident, but Isabel is still reluctant to associate this in any way to M. Merle's workings - she feels this would be unfair. This attitude, in a certain way, is right, since soon enough Isabel will start to become bitterly aware that the source of her unhappiness was caused by M. Merle only because she, Isabel, let this woman influence far more than would be considered wise. Basically, the origin of her unhappiness was her own doing: after all, she could have had the chance to avoid marrying Osmond if she had taken a closer look at her feelings about the situation. With all M. Merle could have done, it was Isabel who had stepped into the "cage" before her. With this in mind, Isabel decides to take the only attitude she will maintain until the end, even after she finds out more and more about the mistake she has made: she will accept her fate.

One of the most revealing moments for Isabel's awareness comes in a scene which describes Isabel returning home from a drive with Pansy. As she passes the drawingroom of her house, she has a strange feeling, "she had received an impression", one of many that would become more and more frequent to Isabel and very important in her slow discovery. The importance of this particular impression is not in any action that can be seen, but exactly in the odd, cold feeling it has on Isabel's spirit. She has seen Osmond and M. Merle talking to each other, nothing surprising in the act itself. However, in this particular scene she has sensed a certain familiarity she had never perceived before between her husband and their friend. The atmosphere of intimacy in the scene is so intense that Isabel feels strangely that she would interrupt something if she entered the room at that moment, almost as if she would intrude on the intimate exchange between lovers. The perfection of the scene lies in the fact that not a word is being uttered by any of the characters - and that is precisely what causes the biggest impact on Isabel's soul: the pair acted with "the freedom of old friends

who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them" (p.458), not strange if one considers only the scene, but still, a certain chill has descended on Isabel, quickly and almost unperceptibly, a perception she cannot shake off.

This first impression is the beginning of many others that will come to Isabel, more and more frequently, throughout the rest of the novel. She begins to see, as she gradually comes out of her blind stupor, visions of M. Merle in dangerous combination with her husband. Isabel feels a terrible sensation of dread at these thoughts about the woman who has always been seen as a friend, but cannot close her senses to them anymore. Her rationality is of no use to her at this point - her emotions and feelings are at work to help her in the process of awakening.

The interest in Pansy's marriage to Lord Warburton can be noticed in M. Merle also, in spite of the discreet manner in which she tries to shows it. Edward Rosier's feeling had indicated, for some reason, that M. Merle should be the first person to contact about his affection for Pansy. Isabel sarcastically comments to M. Merle that, though she (M. Merle) firmly states she is indifferent to the Pansy-Rosier affair, she is more than a little interested in the pair. This is confirmed after Isabel refers to Lord Warburton's declared interest in Pansy. M. Merle impetuously asks why Isabel has not told Osmond. This impetuousness is quite uncommon on the part of M. Merle. Isabel, more attuned to her feelings than before, has caught on to M. Merle's lack of discretion - the older woman "had spoken more quickly than usual, and the reflection brought the colour to her cheek" (p.461-2). What Isabel has not understood yet is why M. Merle need have any feeling at all for Pansy's future.

Meanwhile, Isabel's unhappiness with Osmond is a continuous source of questioning for her. She feels "she should play the part of a good wife" (p.464), and try hard to do whatever he wishes. However, at every bend she sees how much it offends her personal ideals and beliefs to please Osmond in any way. There is no form

of usual amusement (perhaps something that any other dutiful wife would find to escape from despair) that can eliminate the sensation of being in the wrong: arranging Lord Warburton's marriage to Pansy would be such an amusement, but it strikes Isabel as the oddest thing to see Warburton pleased with mild Pansy when he was once so infatuated with her, Isabel. In addition, there was no denying that Pansy was as much in love with Rosier as he with her. The solution to peace in Isabel and Osmond's marriage would be quite simple: she should use her influence over Pansy to convince her to please her father with the connection with the much older Warburton and, on the other hand, encourage Warburton that he would be more than welcome to propose to Pansy. It became a matter of being as cynical as her husband desired her to be. Nevertheless, something holds her back. It would be a great action to Osmond's eyes if Isabel were of assistance, even if in a contriving, small manner, in setting Warburton up for Pansy Osmond, but there was something that does not allow Isabel to take Osmond's view. She simply cannot see with his eyes.

When Osmond and Isabel talk about this, Osmond shows his usual contempt for his wife and her connections with the past. Osmond needs Warburton desperately, but will only show how he despises the need: "It was Gilbert's constant intimation that for him nothing in life was a prize; that he treated as from equal to equal with the most distinguished people in the world, and that his daughter had only to look about her to pick out a prince. It cost him therefore a lapse from consistency to say explicitly that he yearned for Lord Warburton, and that if this nobleman should escape his equivalent might not be found ... " (p.469). Isabel will simply not help Gilbert express his feelings, she would not put into words what he wanted until he himself admitted the need. Osmond's single desire is that his wife "glide over the point", but now that Isabel is face to face with her husband she simply cannot be "accomodating, would not glide" (p.470). One can compare Isabel to Antigone in her resistance and need to restate her values when facing a wall of convention so opposite to her beliefs. Her

resistance has the effect of humiliation to Osmond, as well as his admittance to the need he had of Isabel's past connections to make his wish come true. However, she has already felt how much he can humiliate her without regret - and so she does not give in to his plan. Isabel's self-respect has suffered too much already; it is action that is required now, action she has not taken in any moment in her marriage - and the type of action she is not sure she is ready for. It is becoming more and more evident that if she will not do as her husband says, she must, consequently, do otherwise.

Osmond's reaction is evidently that of trying to humiliate Isabel by playing with her feelings and with her past. He reminds Isabel of how once Warburton had courted her and how her refusal had given her a special power over him. In other words, he does not hesitate to use his wife's feminine seductiveness to lure Warburton into his trap. In spite of the offensiveness of all Osmond says, Isabel cannot help feeling this is exactly how her husband would act in such a situation - it is natural with him that he would not show respect for anyone else's feelings.

There is something in the conversation about Pansy and Warburton that touches Isabel deeply: Osmond has seen Warburton's interest in his wife and has not hesitated to use it in order to get his daughter married according to the standard he finds only fitting. Isabel is once again startled at the way certain truths are revealed to her. What she had not put into words, until that moment, is there: Warburton was still in love with her. Again, the question was if she could be as cynical as her husband wanted her to be and encourage Warburton to marry Pansy in the hope he would always be in Isabel's company. This is more than enough to make Isabel feel a deep repulsion at the whole affair. And more: Isabel cannot hide from certain impressions. She sees Osmond and the way he spoiled everything he touched; she sees the way he has put her into a dark world of mediocrity and suffering. But, she also sees how his disappointment has been almost as deep as hers. Isabel had showed Osmond a picture

of something she was not. Now that the mask has fallen off, Osmond has an advantage over her. He had never really lied to her, but she had never wanted to see him as he truly was. On the other hand, Isabel "had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was" (p. 475). Osmond has sensed this and feels no better with the idea of having a wife who despises his mind and way of being.

Isabel sees no way out of the dilemma she is in. In spite of the terror she feels in relation to what has been done with her life, she sees her future taking on no better form. "Between these four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond's beautiful mind indeed seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her" (p. 478). Isabel suffers the pain of a horrid situation, in no way less horrible than that of any other tragic hero: she is aware of her dilemma, of her wrong step and see no way of repairing the error except by accepting what the "gods" have reserved for her. More is in store for Isabel, but this strong wave of despair is one of the most crucial moments in realizing her error. For at this moment, she also feels, more deeply than before, the loss of the only friend who had come the closest to uncovering her soul, though not quite close enough: Ralph. He is the only one she would like to go running to, but feels too ashamed to even think of sharing her trouble with. Ralph's generosity and wisdom make Isabel feel even more humiliated than before - she could not drive herself to ask for his help. Evidently this is a sign of the great pride Isabel has inside her - her spirit has been broken in many parts, but her essence, the core is that of a proud woman.

Ralph has been in Rome during this time, having had the company of Lord Warburton to travel from England to Italy. Henrietta Stackpole and Goodwood are also, once again, around Isabel; the spectators who might interfere if necessary. At a

moment of deep trouble in Isabel's life the people most interested in her welfare are set together in the novel, in spite all their personal differences. Even though Osmond is very displeased with any contact Isabel might have with Ralph, knowing "perfectly well that Ralph was an apostle of freedom" (p. 510), while he was the very opposite, Isabel does visit Ralph. Once again, on her visit, Isabel confirms the concealed truth of Lord Warburton's apparent interest in being around Pansy - he cares for no one else except Isabel. Ralph does not really reveal what Warburton thinks, but he hints at this feeling because he considers it might break down some of the barrier between them, Isabel and Ralph. Isabel finally does express a wish for some help, even if it sounds as if it were only to discover what she should do to help Pansy - but it is the first time she has ever referred to needing any help at all. Ralph is touched by the truth behind the plea - maybe she has given in and will talk about all her unhappiness. However, when he mentions this, Isabel immediately pulls herself together: it is not the moment for her total confession.

Isabel's final action in relation to Pansy's future is a triumph of her more positive side over the one which pulled her towards weakening and taking Osmond's side. Warburton finally leaves Rome without having proposed to Pansy. Osmond loses no time in trying to humiliate Isabel but, by this time, she has lost any painful sensation that his insults could bring. "He was going down - down; the vision of such a fall made her almost giddy: that was the only pain. He was too strange, too different; he didn't touch her" (p. 529). Osmond's fall from the pedestal where Isabel had always seen him is crucial for Isabel to see herself also as humanly responsible for the decisions she makes. She does not regret having helped Pansy - for that is what she has done by not persuading the young girl, in any way, to do what would not be natural and right. Even when Pansy is locked away in the convent again, as if she were an object that must be protected from too much handling, Isabel sees, by Pansy's serenity, that she could not have acted differently. The young girl herself knows there

is nothing which will change her feelings for Rosier and feels no revolt against her future.

There is one person to whom Isabel confesses, for the first time, the mistake she has made by marrying Osmond: Henrietta Stackpole. This old friend of Isabel's had of course sensed the trouble and, in her practical and frank manner, suggests that Isabel leave her husband. Here Isabel retreats by responding: "... I can't publish my mistake, I don't think that's decent. I'd much rather die" (p. 536). She defends her idea of accepting the fate cast for her - she feels a certain moral duty in living her life in consideration of the error committed. On the other hand, "publishing" her mistake would reveal it to the world, the world of convention she had despised so openly before, but which she cannot get away from now. Her role is to keep her pain to herself as much as possible, to try to understand her dilemma as well as possible and live with it.

Caspar Goodwood was quite another matter altogether. They did meet occasionally on the street, until, on one occasion, he was invited to the Thursday evening encounters held by the Osmonds at Palazzo Roccanera. With everything Goodwood could have against Osmond, the American's honest, straightforward nature was more keen to acknowledging other people's qualities than not - Osmond's company was not at all unpleasant to Goodwood.

The worst is yet to come - this is how Henrietta says her goodbyes to Isabel before departing to England with Ralph, by this time terminally ill, and a reluctant Goodwood. Isabel is sincerely relieved to see them all go - she feels too much under their scrutiny, as if her personal tragedy had the presence of an audience. To Ralph she says she might still see him in England - a surprising statement to Ralph who knows very well how Osmond would react to her traveling to see him. Isabel confesses her fear is precisely the reason she will not leave with all of them now.

"Afraid of your husband?" asks Ralph. Isabel enigmatically answers: "Afraid of myself!" (p. 550). To fear Osmond would not be the problem, but Isabel still fears what is ahead of her - the choices she will have to make and the true possibility of again making a mistake. It seems clear to her now that it was fear, though, that made her choose wrongly in the first place: fear of showing herself to others, fear of the soaring and fear of failing to soar also. Her fear has placed her in the very spot she has always despised: the mediocrity of having no life of her own.

M. Merle, who had been away from the scene for quite a while, returns and can hardly conceal her disappointment with the failure of having Pansy engaged to Lord Warburton. Isabel sees clearly that M. Merle is sincerely disconcerted with the whole affair - she should have no particular interest in Pansy's marriage to the nobleman, but showed exactly the opposite. M. Merle becomes insolent and suggests that Lord Warburton had possibly changed his mind due to Isabel's lack of initiative, or worse, because she had recommended him to leave. This makes Isabel question the reasons for such a reaction on M. Merle's part:

> More clearly than ever before Isabel heard a cold, mocking voice proceed from she knew not where, in the dim void that surrounded her, and declare that this bright, strong, definite, worldly woman, this incarnation of the practical, the personal, the immediate, was a powerful agent in her destiny. She was nearer to her than Isabel had yet discovered, and her nearness was not the charming accident she had so long supposed. The sense of accident indeed had died within her that day when she happened to be struck with the manner in which the wonderful lady and her own husband sat together in private (p. 561).

Isabel has sensed it again - the feeling of betrayal is stronger now that she is able to see the parts of the puzzle going into place. There had been a plan all along on M.

Merle's part and, what was more, her interest was the same as Osmond's in most everything.

Isabel responds to M. Merle's attack in a shocked state. She is not offended with her mere insolence - this cannot touch Isabel very much anymore. She sees the deliberateness with which M. Merle is using this insolence to hurt her. Isabel sees only the horror of it all when she asks "Who are you - what are you? ... What have you to do with me?" (p. 563-4). The answer is short, but sharp: "Everything!" (p. 564). Isabel has had the confirmation of one of her worst suspicions - Mrs. Touchett, who looked so simple-minded in her opinions, had been right in warning her that her marriage was all M. Merle's doing. Isabel feels her world is starting slowly to crumble around her - all her worst suspicions are taking form. She, who had thought herself so much wiser than the rest, had not looked carefully enough at the evidence of the connection between M. Merle and her husband. She had not given any heed to people who, though not wise in any exceptional way, were able to see what she had not: she was a naive, inexperienced young woman who was ready, in all her pride, to be placed in a trap. And yet, she could only feel that the worse was still ahead of her.

It is only when Isabel decides she must see Ralph on his deathbed, after receiving a message from England, that she must finally affront Osmond in his oppositon to her desires, represented at this point by her going off to Gardencourt. Predictably, Osmond is as ungenerous as ever in his reasons for Isabel not to go - he knows what a wife should or should not do. And one of the things she should not do is disobey her husband. However, there are some words that do reach Isabel more directly: "... I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!" (p. 583), says Osmond in reference to the fact that he takes his marriage seriously, even if Isabel does not. To Isabel, he has spoken of something very sacred, precious even. He is wrong in thinking Isabel has no

consideration for the vow they have taken - it hurts her to think of breaking any promise she has made, even if it has gone wrong. Her strong resolution of going to England is shaken and she is indecisive again.

This undeciseveness lasts, that is, until the moment the Countess Gemini and Isabel talk. The Countess, of all people, has a secret to share with Isabel, one she can barely wait to tell. If she has decided to tell Isabel at precisely this moment, it is, as the Countess says, because she has been bored with Isabel's not knowing. Isabel senses something horrible is about to be revealed to her:

> "My first sister-in law had no children." [says the Countess to a bewildered Isabel. She does not fully understand what her sister-in-law is trying to tell her until the Countess says]:
>
> "The poor little woman lived hardly three years and died childless. It wasn't till after her death that Pansy arrived."
>
> Isabel's brow had contracted to a frown; her lips were parted in pale, vague wonder. She was trying to follow; there seemed so much more to follow than she could see. "Pansy's not my husband's child then?"
>
> "Your husband's - in perfection! But no one else's husband's. Some one else's wife's. Ah, my good Isabel, " cried the Countess, "with you one must dot one's i's!"
>
> "I don't understand. Whose wife's?" Isabel asked.
>
> "The wife of a horrid little Swiss who died - how long? - a dozen, more than fifteen years ago..." [the Countess replies]. (p. 588)

She then goes on to explain how M. Merle and Osmond arranged it so their daughter could appear to have been born from the first Mrs. Osmond. Without having heard the name of M. Merle, Isabel knows this is the woman her sister-in-law is

talking about. Isabel must now face the worst: all the blindness she had acted with was now coming back to haunt her. The Countess, with all her superficiality, shrewdly observes how absolutely ignorant Isabel has shown herself to be. Isabel cannot defend herself from this - she admits that certain suspicions had formed in her mind, the origins of possible truths she could not put into words for they represented how ignorant she had been. This ignorance appears to be even greater when the Countess expresses how little illusion M. Merle had had in relation to Osmond's possible intelligence - the very characteristic Isabel had thought was so evident in her husband when she became enchanted by his manner. M. Merle had never seen Osmond as the god, the emperor that Isabel had so foolishly imagined. In the end, Isabel must be told to her face what to make of this revelation: the Countess tells her she is a woman who has been used.

Isabel takes a train to England, not before visiting Pansy at the convent where her father has placed her. Her impressions are sharp, her senses open to different tones and sounds - she meets M. Merle there by chance, and not a syllable of the woman's bright conversation is lost on Isabel. She is finally not impressed by the words M. Merle pronounces, by her gift of gab. Isabel is listening to this woman's voice for the first time, it seems. M. Merle notices Isabel's change and gives in - for once her voice ebbs and, finally, fades away, as if it could not reach Isabel's ears anymore. To Isabel, everything is crystal clear now: because of her blindness she had become an instrument in the hands of this woman. All the crudeness of the reality of their relationship has made an impact on Isabel's mind. When M. Merle departs, she is planning to go back to America, probably the only place where she could feel the necessary isolation and distance from the critical eyes of Isabel Archer.

Pansy's talk with Isabel is marked by the girl's repeated pleas for Isabel not to desert her. The trip Isabel plans to take to England seems like a cruel punishment for

Pansy who has seen Isabel as a woman to identify with. If Isabel has fallen from very high, to Pansy's eyes, she is admirable for the flicker of courage and energy that can still be noticed in her. Isabel sees that poor Pansy has been submitted very much to her father's wishes and, perhaps, in an attempt to comfort her, she promises not to abandon the girl. In spite of this, Isabel feels very much in doubt as to what she can really do to help Pansy.

Gardencourt, which had been Isabel's starting point is also the point to which she returns in the most painful hours of her existence. This return does not represent relief from pain, but it is the final stage in Isabel's trajectory. From the moment Isabel has become aware of her blindness, the life she will lead can probably follow a certain pattern of balance in which the forces of light and darkness find a middle ground in her soul. She has suffered and so, also sees the ghost of Gardencourt, exactly as Ralph had explained would happen if she ever acquired the unpleasant knowledge coming from suffering. At his deathbed, Isabel envies Ralph's chance to die. Death would be a relief, giving up and not facing any reality. However, Isabel knows that her destiny will be to live with her error for a long time to come. The reality of Isabel's existence is cruel, but ever present in her mind and soul. She will always have a nagging thought at the back of her mind that she could have done more in her life but, at the same time, knowing that there was nothing extraordinarily special in her existence that could ever change her fate. Besides, even if people do have special gifts and talents, what could that ever represent in the vast confusion of the world? "When had it ever been a guarantee to be valuable? Wasn't all history full of the destruction of precious things? Wasn't it much more probable that if one were fine one would suffer? It involved then perhaps and admission that one had a certain grossness ... She should never escape; she should last to the end" (p. 608). Isabel's feeling takes us back to the description used in the introduction of this paper: she is the human being dragged here and there by the waves that violently shake her small boat. Only that, at

this point, Isabel has lost the optimism of the figure in the image - she has seen one dark side of human existence that she had been protected from. And what is more, she has drearily obseved that life is also much less dramatic than even this dark side could prove. It is also dingy, dull and full of stupidity - more made of common stuff than of the original.

Consequently, Caspar Goodwood's final stubborn reaching out to save Isabel is tempting, but fails to hit the mark. She returns to Rome without any goodbyes, as if it were her only solution. She sees Goodwood's masculine power, but also his naive hope in easy solutions. She knows that Goodwood is of much better stock than Osmond. He is offering her the Apollinian light of a world of hope and promise. There is nothing beyond solution or acceptance to Goodwood - it meant only looking at it in the right way. To Isabel, this is one of the most tiresome aspects of Goodwood's character: his unnerving stubborness in retreating in face of what has no remedy. But he cannot ever understand what Isabel has understood - she has been drawn far into the darker, losing side of her nature. If before she was on a pedestal of high aspirations, and proud of not being part of the common crowd, it was only to cover up her enormous fear of falling into a bottomless pit - a place she had no idea could be so real. If Isabel had kept her head clear of all the false ideals she had harbored so mindlessly, she would, perhaps, not have faced such a fall. But, that is the destiny of the tragic hero: he/she does not intend to live on the middle ground, among common men. It is his/her intention to fly.

## NOTES ON CHAPTER TWO

[1]James, Henry, "The Art of Fiction", *The American Tradition in Literature*, Vol. 2, New York, W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1962, p. 663.
[2]Ibid., p.662.
[3]Ibid., p.663.
[4]Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Dehumanization of Art and other essays on Art, Culture and Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968, p.67.
[5]Ibid., p.87.
[6]Ibid., p.92.
[7]Ibid., p.95.
[8]James, Henry, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1986, (Penguin Classics), p. 395. All further references to the text are taken from this edition.

## III. IMAGES OF TRAGEDY

The necessity to organize the more specific elements present in the novel, such as its imagery, and which enhance **The Portrait of a Lady** 's tragic aspects, led me to the field in which I could get some of the support I needed: Semiotics. Gradually, as apparently different images were placed under similar or contrasting functions, depending on their role in the narration, some narrowing down to specific oppositions could be done. Semiotics works in the revelation of the importance of the search for signification, which was especially useful once the importance of tragic vision in the work was defined. The signification of the imagery becomes a tool in this sense, since it could establish a basis for the organization of the figurative language in groups of oppositions which reflect those contradictions present in a tragic work. Thus, such ideas as one's outer life, or necessity to follow limits, on the one hand, and the inward pull, or need to exercise free-will, on the other, appear. Other ideas which can be included here are that of mortality (or humanity, animality) and divinity; order and chaos; awareness and blindness - all these ideas appear in tragedies of several types, and are supported by similarity and contrast in signification. The importance of this connection of ideas, or of meaning, is part of the study of Semiotics.

There has been much research done in the field of Semiotics by important intellectuals and scholars, however, basically two specific authors' works will be used to help in the task of organizing the literary work under study - these are Jonathan Culler and Robert Scholes. Both have written important works which focus on the importance of Semiotics for literary analysis and give the reader valuable information that can lead to further studies in the field.

Culler, in **The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction,** defends the importance of understanding literature through the conventions of a "mode of discourse"[1]. He says that, besides the necessity of analyzing literature's relation to other discourses, we "need a more sophisticated and apposite account of the role of literature in the psychological economies of both writers and readers ... "[2]. Culler poses interesting questions when he asks about the role of fiction, about the relationship between the real and the fictive, between art and life. Ultimately, perhaps, can this take us to questioning the importance of literature throughout history, and, especially, what it means to us today? The necessity of this question is never exhausted, especially in contemporary discussions on literature and the different movements we are part of.

Semiotics can be defined as "the study of codes; the systems that enable human beings to perceive certain events or entities *as* signs, bearing meaning"[3] in Scholes words. The area of humanistic sciences is part of a system with "gaps, redundancies, special relationships and indeterminacies"[4], according to Culler, and the introduction of a discipline that can give this area some focus could only be welcome - even if, in the process of ordering and establishing its method, it suffered from the effects of its own criticism.

Culler mentions Ferdinand Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, one a linguist, the other a philosopher, as the predecessors of Semiotics. Saussure, as a linguist, discussed that linguistics should be included in a broader science that "would study

the life of signs within society"[5], bringing us to consider what specific rules govern these signs. Semioticians could easily use Saussure's program on linguistics in other areas by revealing and explaining the system (langue) which makes up for meaning (parole). The main concern is with the system as a whole or, in other words, with its synchronic analysis. The researcher or scholar, must concentrate on either the oppositions between signs, which is called the paradigmatic relations, and/or the possible combinations of signs into larger units, the syntagmatic relations. This summary of Saussure's basic ideas can give us a notion of what kind of instrument the semiotician uses in analysis.

Peirce was considered a genius in philosophy and studied what he termed "semeiotic" - the science of sciences. To Peirce "the entire universe is perfused with signs if it is not composed entirely of signs"[6] and, what's more, man himself was considered a sign. This could bring scholars to ask what types of signs there were and what differences could be made between signs. Peirce established that signs were classified into ten trichotomies which could subdivide into an enormous number of classes of signs. The most important contribution here, however, should be taken along with Saussure's theory. Saussure presented us with a practical program of semiotics, based on the linguistic model. Peirce, on the other hand, could only have his work understood after semiotics had advanced many of its questions. Nowadays, his ideas are considered acceptable in spite of their radicalism. On the whole, both scholars reach similar conclusions through different perspectives: images, signs or symbols are conventional in the way they are represented. Semiotics must deal with the description of those conventions that are behind "even the most 'natural' modes of behavior and representation"[7].

There are others who also contributed in one way or the other to transforming semiotics into a science. Among these one should mention Ernst Cassirer who analyzed the importance of the rise of linguistics as a science that changed the whole

perspective one had of the physical world. He considered linguistics "revolutionary" because of "the primacy granted to relations and systems of relations"[8]. The revolutionary impact of lingusitics was only felt, though, because of its influence as a model of the way we could think of the universe socially and culturally. Culler states that "now that semiology exists it is easy to see that Cassirer's statement implicitly predicts what semiotics explicitly does: that we come to think our social and cultural world as a series of sign systems, comparable with languages. What we live among and relate to are not physical objects and events; they are objects and events with meaning: ... not just physical gestures but acts of courtesy or hostility. As Peirce says, it is not that we have objects on the one hand and thoughts or meanings on the other; it is rather, that we have signs everywhere, 'some more mental and spontaneous, others more material and regular.'"[9].

Some of semiotic's ideas stem from other sources such as the works of Marx, Durkheim and Freud who gave focus to what Culler refers to as social facts: "human reality cannot be described as a set of physical events, and in focusing on social facts, which are always of a symbolic order, Marx, Freud and Durkheim dramatically showed that individual experience is made possible by the symbolic systems of collectives, whether these systems be social ideologies, languages or structures of the unconscious"[10]. Semiotics must also consider the contribution coming from such areas as structural anthropology with Claude Levi-Strauss, "neo- Freudianism of Jacques Lacan" and the "grammatology of Jacques Derrida"[11]. However, for the purpose of this paper, one must refer back to semiotic's specific role in literature.

Culler refers to literature as "the most interesting case of semiosis"[12], offering none of the directly practical uses which other forms of communication have. Moreover, "the potential complexities of signifying processes work freely in literature", and "the difficulty of saying precisely what is communicated is here accompanied by the fact that signification is indubitably taking place"[13]. Literature

places us face to face with the diffculty of determining the meaning of what is being said - precisely an important characteristic of Semiotics. As Culler says, "literature is itself a continual exploration of and reflection upon signification in all its forms: an interpretation of experience; a commentary on the validity of various ways of interpreting experience; an exploration of the creative, revelatory, and deceptive powers of language; a critique of the codes and interpretative processes manifested in our languages and in previous literature. In so far as literature turns back on itself and examines, parodies, or treats ironically its own signifying procedures, it becomes the most complex account of signification we possess"[14]. Literary criticism has set its eyes on exactly this field of possibilities and can gain from the experience.

It must be made clear, however, that if literature does not limit the signifying process, it does establish "the existence of a semiotic system which makes literature possible"[15]. It is the role of literary criticism, in part, to analyze the systems which are at the core of the metaphors, parodies and ironies used by different works, and to attempt to describe the organization of these systems. The main focus here is not to simply interpret the phrases used in a work, but to explain the rules according to which these phrases, or words, combine or contrast to produce meaning in the narrative. This purpose was defined principally by the studies of Tzevtan Todorov, Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette. Nowadays, the work done in this area is not exclusively a French concern; there are several groups in the United States and Europe which are organized in order to carry the project ahead.

One can say basically that the semiotics of literature is "governed by the assumption that a systematic theory of discourse if not of literature (for one of the effects of semiotics is to question the distinction between literary and nonliterary discourse) is possible, though there may be little agreement about precisely what 'languages' (information theory, semantics, systems theory, psychoanalysis) will be most useful in establishing the categories and identifying the codes of the discursive

systems at work in texts"[16]. The most important thing to have in mind, though, is that literary works are not "autonomous entities" but "intertextual constructs". This means the texts have meaning in relation to other texts - actually, they can only be read in these terms, "made possible by the codes which animate the discursive space of a culture"[17].

One of the most important discoveries for the development of Semiotics was that of the role of the reader. According to Culler, Barthes referred to the event of the "death of the author" as simultaneous to the discovery of the importance of the reader. The reader becomes central in literary studies as a function: it is through him/her that one can analyze the codes which enable the text to have any meaning. The communication between the text and the reader is an important point to discover if we are to understand our role socially and culturally. However, Culler points out an interesting paradox which is part of semiotics:

> to account for the signification of, shall we say, a metaphor is to show how the relationship between its form and its meaning is already virtually present in the systems of language and rhetoric. The meataphor itself becomes not a radical or inaugural act but a manifestation of a preexistent connection. Yet the value of the metaphor, the value of our experience of the metaphor, lies in its innovatory, inaugural force. Indeed, our whole notion of literature makes it not. a transcription of preexisting thoughts but a series of radical and inaugural acts: acts of imposition which create meaning. The very conventions to which we appeal in explaining literary meanings are products: products which, it would seem, must have acts as their source.[18]

It is in the statements above than one can perceive the contradiction which semiotics must deal with. There is an element of deconstruction in this as it "brings about a reversal" in Culler's words. He refers to this by saying that the idea above explains "meaning not by prior conventions but by acts of imposition. However, the first perspective also deconstructs the second in its turn, for acts of imposition are

themselves made possible by the situations in which they occur, and meanings cannot be imposed unless they are understood, unless the conventions which made possible understanding are already in place"[19]. The antinomy which is present in our language makes it impossible to reach any synthesis in the dialectics of oppositions.

Thus, semiotics faces risks, some of which (as the one mentioned above) are inherent to the structures which it aims at studying - this is the case of language and specifically literary language. Other risks are, as Scholes says, that "the semiotician's interest in collective structures - genres, discourses, codes, and the like - will cause the uniqueness of the literary text to be lost " or "that, by entering the domain of 'reading' as such, the critic will so fall under the weight of interpretative practice or the spell of personal response that any consistent *semiotic* methodology will be lost in the exegetical triangle"[20]. Some other "temptations", in Scholes words, that can present themselves to semioticians are terminology, the use of logical or algebric symbols and the adoption of complicated diagrams. Scholes mentions, however, the usefulness of certain terms created by Saussure (signification and value), Peirce (icon, index and symbol), and, for literature, Roman Jakobson's diagram of the six features of communicative acts, namely, sender, receiver (at opposite ends of the diagram), context, message, contact and code.

The usefulness of Jakobson's diagram to literature is highlighted by Scholes in the manner in which the semiotics of literature finds itself established on the work of this scholar. The scheme created by Jakobson in its adaptation to Scholes' description of the reading of a literary text replaces the term sender for author, and receiver for reader. The message is the text, while the contact is referred to as medium. While some critics emphasize the intention of the author in the text, which gives the author a certain superiority over the reader, others seek to give importance to the reader as being the makers of any possible meaning. According to Scholes, this causes a great deal of disorder since it totally ignores the possibility of the reader misinterpreting the

text. Besides, the freedom of such a view is soon perceived of as false. Perhaps, Scholes defends that the middle-ground between these two sides lies in Jakobson's ideas, in which the text is given a greater priority.

On the whole, semiotics sees the author as an individual inserted in a specific culture, having "attained a human subjectivity through language". The author's production of literature is done under certain "constraints of generic or discursive norms"[21]. Readers, on the other hand, are not completely free to interpret once we consider the cultural codes that each one must refer to in the process of reading. It is important for readers not only to learn to interpret what they read under cultural codes, but to see these forms of interpretation as codes. The text is not self-sufficient, neither is it at the mercy of an "anything goes" rule in critical reading. Furthermore, it can be regarded as open or incomplete, and reflect other texts in many ways. Finally, another point to remember is that once specific choices are made in relation to interpreting a text, other possibilities of interpretation are displaced.

In order to organize the images, or signs, present in **The Portrait of a Lady**, and to expose oppositions of these images in the making of the narrative, two basic groups were created. These two sets of opposite ideas reflect the contradictory forces present in the tragic events of Isabel Archer's life, as much as they are the poles on which the narrative rests, in combination, to give the reader a perspective which is tragic. To say that the novel has a tragic view of life, through the events which Isabel Archer must face, requires the study of the codes that the narrator used to pass on this impression. Therefore, in this work one group will focus on the combination of light and darkness; the other will be based on those images which can be associated to movement and stasis. These are the oppositions which Isabel encounters in herself and around her - they are representative of the oppositions encountered in tragedy in general. Evidently, there are other possible groups that can be formed. However, for

the purpose of this study, it is necessary to limit the scope of possibilities and attempt to present the above groups as clearly as possible.

The portrayal of Isabel Archer's tragic destiny is made evident once we see the description of places, diverse types of objects and people, and different signs in general, placed under the above mentioned classifications. At times, the reversability of these poles is brought about to indicate the ambiguity present in situations or in the principal character's contradictory behavior. Another point is that we can see the images of light and movement working together; similarly, darkness and stasis move closely. It is also true that the light of Apollo can frequently disguise the stillness of posed perfection; while under the darkness of Dionysios lies wild movement, almost imperceptible, but uncomfortably present. However, it is important to remember that the cultural, conventional and "natural" way in which one sees these images as positive or not, as superior or not, as representative of awareness or blindness, for instance, is exactly that: it is what one has culturally received through time, in myths and in uses one frequently does not know the origin of.

# 1. IMAGES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS

When one begins to analyze the poles of light/darkness, the awareness of these two signs' inseparability becomes evident. This is true of every pole of signification one studies, and it will be true also of the poles movement/stasis. This basic characteristic present in the working of signs is essential when one sees how the natures of light and darkness, though very distinct, are two sides of the same coin. This can also bring us to the reversability of the pole.

Light is present with darkness as it symbolizes the two sides of evolution: a lighted period is the natural development of a dark one. It is a representation of coming out of the darkness of the earth (or death) into the regeneration of light, similarly to what happens to a new plant. This idea gives darkness a certain value, even when it is associated to decadence or decomposition: the unbalance of this period makes human condition vary in its solutions, potential and freedom to act. Human nature can freely explore experience, without those boundaries that had been set before, to find new light, a necessary phase in the recovery of balance. These ideas are present especially in the cultures of the Eastern world.

Light and darkness represent a universal duality, inseparable correlatives, which in the Western world is often translated as the opposition between angels and devils or, more generally speaking, the opposing forces between heaven and earth, between spirit and body - the principles that are contained in the same being.

The evolution between light and darkness can be seen more fully in the concept of unity: from the principles of light and darkness, one must go beyond and find unity. The light which originates everything, and which will eventually carry life into a

period of darkness, is not the light of full understanding. Understanding derives from the visualization of unity that should emerge from having gone through a period of symbolic light and symbolic darkness. In other words, wisdom tells humans that the deep realization of their natures lies in the recognition that knowledge (light) and ignorance (darkness) have the same fundamental qualities, and that one needs the other to exist.

In the beginning, in one of the many myths about the creation of the world, there was light (God's word) which originated action. This gave origin to movement and to heat. Light is also analogous to the image of water when one relates it to fertilizing forces or to creative power. On the other hand, Christian tradition differentiated itself from other religions by refusing the idea that God could be associated in any way to either the sun, the moon, the stars, or, on the other hand, to any dark power. In this way, we have the distinct separation between light and darkness as follows: life, salvation, happiness, goodness / death, ruin, unhappiness, evil.

Light is also connected to divine beings, or to a divine being. The symbolic meaning of light took form in the contemplation of nature. Several mythical systems refer to the luminous nature of divinity. Every ancient culture refers to this characteristic of light, from Plato to the Stoics. Ascension and elation are often linked to images of light, in which there is the harmonious flourishing of a being through ascent. Darkness, or images of shadow, are more often associated to fear and fall into disgrace, or feelings of anxiety. In Egypt, for example, light is the force which gives life, but which can also take it away. The nature of the life being led depends on the force of light given.

There is no doubt that the several descriptions given above contain ideas which are not totally at random - on the contrary, there is a definite importance in starting out at one point in the opposition between light and darkness and basically returning

to the same point with the addition of varied concepts that can unite these poles. The images, or signs, associated to the duality of knowledge, fertility, productivity, action, movements, heat and life are necessarily included here. With the introduction of Christianity, light became as separated from the idea of dark as possible, moralistic values being behind each association made.

In **The Portrait of a Lady,** we shall begin with an important image that is referred to throughout the novel - there are several references to "garden". Gardens of several types are mentioned, some in descriptions of marvelous scenery, but the word will include a varied assortment of properties, not all having a traditional garden-like form. Our main concern here is the idea of the garden Isabel sees when she starts out her trajectory, and the one she returns to by the end of the novel. This garden may be the same apparently, but is quite different. The arrival at Gardencourt will be significant in many ways. England is a marvelous surprise to Isabel's curious mind, but the special quality of her uncle's house is not lost upon her senses: "Gardencourt at once revealed a world and gratified a need "[22], this is one of the first descriptions the reader has of Mr. Touchett's house, which definitely includes the superb property and garden which surround it. It is "a place where sounds were felicitously accidental, where the tread was muffled by the earth itself and in the thick mild air all friction dropped out of contact and all shrillness out of talk - these things were much to the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions" (p.108). While the reader is given, through the narrator's description, a soft image of Gardencourt, similar to that of Eden, Isabel's emotions are described as being attuned to the place through the refined taste she feels for the estate, but not through her feelings. When one observes Isabel's naive theorization on any topic, basically taken from her only source of information - her readings, we can see how little she has felt the real nature of this garden.

The garden Isabel sees as a mild place no hard sounds can touch, is a place in the open light, a place where, in her theory on how life should be lived, there is no space for smallness or lowness of character, or darkness. To Isabel, one must move among the best feelings, "in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic" (p. 104). It causes her a great deal of shame to recognize she has made a mistake in a world she considered "a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistable action: she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong" (p. 104) This side of the garden is real, it is the one we can see. However, there is another which is under the surface, often ignored.

The image given with the word "garden" is essential when one begins to analyze Isabel Archer's character and the tragic outcome of her promising life. If, as was said before, the "garden" can be unfolded into other images of open spaces of light and shadow, one can observe many references to Isabel which should be mentioned. Isabel refers directly to her preference for "the great country stretching away beyond the rivers and across the praires, blooming and smiling and spreading till it stops at the green Pacific!" (p. 147) Her imagination sees no limits - the world is a vast lighted place of exploration. This is mentioned several times throughout the novel. However, the clearest reference to Isabel's "garden-like quality" is given to explain, indirectly, a certain flaw in her personality. The narrator reveals Isabel's arrogance through her perception of the garden as a territory which can only contain light and open space. The comparison between what Isabel considers worthy of dealing with in life, and the lighted, beautiful aspects of a garden, shows the reader the other side of this arrogance. In her perception one can see her difficulty in looking under the cover, under the earth, into much darker and, often, decaying spots than the surface will show - in other words, the "earthiness" of the garden/life is an aspect Isabel prefers to ignore. In the narration we have the following description of the way Isabel sees

herself: "her nature had, in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one's spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses" (p. 107). It strikes one as almost too naive to consider going into "the recesses of one's spirit" and coming back with nothing more than "a lapful of roses". Introspection is usually done with the purpose of gaining some insight, or knowledge, on a subject. It can mean one will have at least a feeling of discomfort at having to look so closely into those darker corners of one's soul - it can mean pain at certain revelations. It will bring us back to the surface with a certain amount of knowledge. This is exactly the point Isabel is missing in these early stages of her trajectory.

The dark, mouldy dampness of the earth is a part of any garden. There is movement under the earth, necessary for any form of life to survive. This activity is in the dark and it does not depend on our surveillance. Isabel is often uncomfortably reminded of this "other side" which she refuses to look at too closely, but only sees it in relation to other people whose souls were not as "remarkable" as hers: "there were a great many places which were not gardens at all - only dusky pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery" (p. 107). The ugliness of the world is evidently there to be seen - no one can escape it. There is an ugly side to any person's character, at different degrees. This blindness in relation to the baseness and "humaness" of living is a sure sign of difficulty for Isabel Archer. Pain, suffering, desire, evil and low ideas were not a part of Isabel's "garden". She is not ready yet to see the importance of some of this unpleasantness in her life. She is too young and unexperienced to have any idea about the world - it will be the crossing through the darkness, the same darkness she fears, which will enable her to reach some wisdom in this sense.

The direct association between light and knowledge has several references in the novel. It is interesting, though, to see these images also closely connected to darkness. The movement Isabel is making towards the darkest period in her life is seen by Ralph. He warns her about the possible error she is making by marrying Osmond by telling her "wait a little longer ... for a little more light" (p. 393), to which Isabel replies that she "might have struck a spark or two". The whole point Ralph is trying to make is that "striking a spark" is not being in the light, face to face with the possibilities of pondered choice. A "spark" seems too little for Isabel's potential for expansion. However, Isabel has shrunk without noticing - her desire to live a life of beauty is crippling because it will mean submitting to petty convention, her lack of vision on the real greatness of humanity will make her go lower than she knows it yet.

Isabel, who is "as bright as the morning" (p. 291) in Madame Merle's words to Osmond, will need the shadow and darkness of her life with Osmond to realize how much she has fallen. Curiously, it is when she reaches Europe that literature turns into a "fading light", enabling her own real-life experiences to take over and give her the necessary knowledge. The loneliness of her early years at home with her family in the United States, among books and ideas, will be over. The loneliness of having to face reality will be harder, more painful. The feeling of impending disaster is given in the same scene in which Ralph tries to convince Isabel to wait a while before getting married. The "Florentine sunshine" contrasts directly with the "the lurking chill of the high-walled court" (p.399), making Ralph shiver. It is Isabel's destiny he shivers for also - there is something she will have to go through that he is beginning to understand. Isabel has already told him that she would never trouble him with her dilemmas - a prediction of the loneliness to come.

Another curious image associated to this one of light is that of the "key". While these two words are not usually connected, it is especially important to delve into their association as a metaphoric meaning in construction in the narration of **The**

**Portrait of a Lady**. The key, referred to in the novel, is always an instrument of achieving some sort of deep knowledge into Isabel's character. The narrator uses this sign through Ralph's first impressions on his "brilliant" cousin, whom he feels he will take a good deal of work to get to know better. In the novel, there are references of Ralph's seeing Isabel as an "edifice", of his looking "in at the windows", but always having the feeling that he has not "stood under the roof" yet. The element which he lacks is the right "key" to open the door: "the door was fastened, and though he had keys in his pocket he had a conviction that none of them would fit" (p. 116) The same image is used with Osmond who considers himself "as rusty as a key that has no lock to fit it", and tells Isabel he would not "venture to pretend [he] can turn that very complicated lock" (p.308-309), which he feels holds Isabel's intellect behind closed doors. Isabel herself wonders at the possiblity of sharing any knowledge about herself with anybody, either intellectually or emotionally. Her intellectual knowledge was not naturally static - it had the openness of generosity and curiosity. Her emotions were not easily understood even by herself - their nature was contradictory and, at times, frightening to face. Any knowledge into Isabel's nature would require intimacy, an aspect of knowledge she was not sure she could deal with, either in herself or in others. Her ideals on friendship, relationships and feelings got in the way when offering anybody the "key to her cabinet of jewels" (p. 239) Whenever she had the feeling she had given any precious information about herself, she drew back in alarm at her openness. She felt it would be necessary to protect her deepest feelings from too much exposure.

Soon enough, in the sequence of events of the novel, the scenes in which Isabel appears are more and more touched with darkness. The house she and Osmond live in is suggestively called Palazzo Roccanera. Seen through the perspective of Mr. Rosier, it is "a dark and massive structure overlooking a sunny *piazzetta"* (p.415), where once again the contrast between light and darkness can be observed. The house's name

evokes crime and violence, besides its representation of Isabel's paralysis, which will be analyzed further on.

However, even before Isabel lives the darkness of Palazzo Roccanera, there are many signs of shadow associated to Isabel's future. Shrinking away from reality had been a constant in Isabel's life even before she moved to Europe. When she arrives at Gardencourt, Isabel asks Ralph if she can see the pictures hanging on the walls in an insufficiently lighted gallery of the house - she will not wait for the more revealing light of the morning to see better. Her eagerness at being presented to these marvelous pictures does not allow her to wait to see in a better light. In any case, if information or clarity is lacking, Isabel's fantasy can provide the rest. This attitude will be a constant in Isabel's behavior in the novel - fantasy will provide the information that the truth of experience can provide more realistically.

On the other hand, the acquaintance she makes with M. Merle is not tainted by any special event, except that the latter tells Isabel she, M. Merle, "was born under the shadow of the national banner" (p. 227) when giving her information about her place of birth. The "shadow" in which M. Merle lies can be analyzed as her fondness for "mystery", which is the word Mrs. Touchett uses to refer to her old friend. These references to M. Merle's mysteriousness are not perceived very clearly by Isabel, and will actually take her to wanting to be friends with this older woman, who sounds so mysteriously special. The narrator reveals an important point about Isabel on this aspect: "with all her love of knowledge she had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance" (p. 251). Once again, Isabel's almost conscious closing of her eyes in relation to certain possible truths about people around her and herself will not allow her the courage to look carefully into those dark corners. This is the case with M. Merle, it will be the same with Osmond and, especially, it will be true in terms of avoiding her own difficulties.

Once Isabel has traveled to Italy, now a rich, young woman, the references to shadows becomes more frequent. On one of her first visits to Gilbert Osmond's house, which is located on a hill-top, the impression of an imposing location is very strong. Isabel has the feeling of imprisonment as soon as she enters the place where Osmond lives: "it looked somehow as if, once you were in, you would need an act of energy to get out" (p. 304), which in no way stops her from wanting to advance. The images of shadow are romantically set - the sun's low light is often associated to Osmond and whatever is around him. This romanticism of low light together with a certain inactivity is fatally attractive to Isabel's idealism. She has an idea of gracefulness associated to "twilight" in a picture she has imagined of Osmond's life. This melancholic atmosphere also begins to take over in Isabel's view of what life in Italy would be like. When Isabel and Osmond are out in the garden preparing to have tea, "the sun had got low, the golden light took a deeper tone, and on the mountains and the plain that stretched beneath them the masses of purple shadow glowed as richly as the places that were still exposed" (p. 314). The balance between the places in the light and those surrounded by shadow is pronounced. However, this situation will soon be unbalanced for Isabel as she gets closer to knowing Gilbert Osmond's lifestyle.

It is symptomatic that Lord Warburton, on visiting Rome, sees Isabel among the images of antique marble statues in the Capitol as shadows are cast over them. The shadows "made them more mildly human" (p. 353), offering a possibility of ambiguity. If, on the one hand, shadows are being thrown over Isabel's future, these are perhaps the prenunciation of the arisal of a more human side in the hero. In another scene, in which Osmond proposes to Isabel, all the inner turmoil Isabel faces is summarized at the end of the chapter with the narrator's direct appeal to the reader's understanding - he is, after all, only telling us what he "sees". In any case, the narration has given us an intimate moment in Isabel's emotions in which the feeling of having yet to cross a

vastness she was not ready for is evident. Isabel perceives "a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland in the winter twilight" (p. 363). The impending darkness is closing around her - she will need to cross this abyss before reaching another point in her destiny.

Another important point to remember is the sort of light Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood are placed in. Goodwood is described as a man of energetic spirit, present in "his clear-burning eyes", or, when he visits her after knowing she will marry Osmond, in "the dull dark beam in his eye". This burning or dull light is a weight on Isabel's desires and idealisms. It is a light which tears into her too sharply, or burns too coarsely. By the end of the novel, Goodwood has offered himself to Isabel as her savior, though "the quiet harbor" (p. 276) of the beginning is transformed when she senses his kiss as "white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again and stayed ..." (p. 635-6). This image of light associated to Goodwood is so bright and powerful it pushes Isabel back into the shadow, into the darkness again and again, not so much as a form of blindness this time, but as a sort of refuge against his heaviness and eagerness.

On the other hand, Lord Warburton's brightness "seemed to emit that radiance of good-feeling and good fare" (p. 155) which is troublesome for Isabel to deal with. She senses a specific light in Lord Warburton which she will never be able to face, especially once she has fallen into the darkness, into the knowledge about one's limitations. Lord Warburton "loomed up before her, largely and brightly" (p. 156) in an orbit which she cannot follow. Her own orbit is far from being made up of only brightness, as she will slowly discover. Later on in the novel, Isabel's reaction to Lord Warburton's unaltered interest in her is translated into a change in the subject on both his and her part, which, in Warburton's case, curiously makes him dip "again into the shallower and safer waters" (p. 341) - he probably feels this will be saner for him. Lord Warburton's offering to marry Isabel, in the first part of the novel, recalls

"strange gardens" (p.162) she is not familiar with. She admires him, but "managed to move back into the deepest shade ... even as some wild, caught creature in a vast cage" (p. 162). Here again we have the strange ambiguity which darkness reveals in relation to Isabel Archer: on the one hand, it is a step into unconscious behavior (though, at the same time, this will be the step before awareness); on the other, it is representative of the subtle wildness and human side of her character. On the other hand, there is one association of Lord Warburton to failure, in a special reference to the statue of the Dying Gladiator in the Capitol who, like him, is a vanquished swordsman, which in Warburton's case refers to his defeat in love. In short, the possible protection of these two men is not felt as being real - neither see her the way she really is.

Her awareness of reality and fear begins to dawn on her very strongly in her marriage with Osmond. The images of light becomes more revealing, more associated to feelings and less to idealism. Her strange impression on seeing M. Merle with her husband, though not in any specifically embarassing situation, lasts "only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light" (p. 458), which will open doors to more and more revelations. Slowly, Isabel becomes bitterly aware of the other side of life, which her blindness had not allowed her to perceive. She sees her marriage to Osmond as a fall into some horrible dead end - an ironic fall once we consider all the expectations she had in relation to this marriage. She sees her life as "a dark, narrow valley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression ..." (p. 474). The fall into darkness is again referred to as a gathering of "shadows", as if her husband "deliberately, almost malignantly, had put the lights out one by one". In the sequence of this description of Isabel's mood, we have one of the most important use of images,

showing the gradual darkening of life: "The dusk at first was vague and thin, and she could still see her way in it. But it steadily deepened, and if now and again it had occasionally lifted there were certain corners of her prospect that were impenetrably black. These shadows were not an emanation from her own mind: she was very sure of that; she had done her best to be just and temperate, to see only the truth". (p. 474-5)

Though Isabel feels she has tried to be fair in her choice, and has tried to choose the best, she senses that this alone has not allowed her to escape from being thrown into a darkness she had never imagined. However, this awareness of her predicament puts her into a state of fever - and though where she sits, "the lamp had long since gone out and the candles burned down to their sockets", (p. 486) she does not need the superficial light she had before to begin to see the truth more and more clearly. The higher places she could have reached - lighted as they were - did not mean anything real to Isabel at this point. The only feeling left is that the fall has been greater since the expectation was so much beyond any reality. Picking up the pieces to see what is left will be Isabel's task.

While Osmond is associated to extinguishing the possibility of light for Isabel, Ralph is remembered for having shown a great deal of wisdom. Though not totally alert to Isabel's real possibilities at first, Ralph had tried to throw some light on her way of seeing things when she became engaged; he continued to be a source of light in his meagre contacts with Isabel after her marriage. The light emanating from Ralph is very different from the one Isabel sees in either Goodwood or Warburton. She senses in Ralph a glow of wisdom, a perfect balance of light and darkness. His irony, generosity and spirit are not dulled by his fatal illness: "his face was like a lighted lantern patched with paper and unsteadily held..." (p. 388). His presence is referred to as being "a lamp in the darkness" (p. 483), a mysterious, but realistic, display of wisdom which she only begins to understand after having felt that both light and

darkness can be two sides of a unit, perhaps, the unit of knowledge. This combination of dark and light into one is the necessary balance of life: if there is excessive light, one is blinded with an unreal picture of perfection; if darkness overcomes everything, one cannot see the possibilities that lie ahead. Experience has given Isabel this hard, but realistic, lesson.

With this in mind, one can see both light and darkness as two sides with inumerous nuances, subtle tones of shadow that give life a more realistic dimension. Isabel's sadness at having discovered the darker side of existence is softened - the scenary she is in is described as "dense, warm light, the far gradations and soft confusions of colour ... the hills where the cloud-shadows had the lightness of a blush" (p. 565). Evidently, this scene is still too idyllic - the final blow on Isabel's heroic pose will be given with the revelation that M. Merle is the mother of Pansy, Osmond's daughter. The revelation, which comes in the Countess Gemini's straightforward words, shows all Isabel's past blindness - after all, as the Countess herself says, Isabel has succeeded in not knowing, being innocently ignorant. Isabel had seen intelligence, a form of light, where there was none, in Osmond's figure. M. Merle had never had such illusions about Osmond.

The return to Gardencourt represents a synthesis between light and darkness - finally, Isabel has reached some sort of understanding on the signification of the garden: both light and darkness are necessary elements for its balanced survival. In life, a likewise balance is due. The Gardencourt household is also quite the opposite to the one she has left in Rome, the Palazzo Roccanera, where she and Osmond live. Gardencourt is the necessary protection before she returns to face the rest of her life. The only other element necessary to complete the synthesis is the appearance of the ghost of Gardencourt - the ghost Ralph had wished Isabel would never see, since it represented the suffering a person had gone through. The reference to the ghost in the beginning of the novel is remembered through Isabel's insistence on seeing it, to which

Ralph replies that Isabel will have to have "gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it" (p. 101); and he adds that he had seen it himself long ago, referring to his knowing that he would face death still in his youth. Though Ralph could never wish Isabel's bright, innocent soul to go through any pain, he cannot prevent her from making the choices which will take her to suffering. Now, on her second stay at Gardencourt, she feels "a spirit was standing by her bed ... a vague hovering figure in the vagueness of her room. She stared for a moment; she saw his white face - his kind eyes ... She was not afraid; she was only sure" (p.624). Isabel is certain that Ralph has died in this moment, however, the meaning of this apparition does not cease here. She feels, more than ever, that she is now totally open-eyed. While Ralph is being buried, Isabel has "tears in her eyes, but they were not tears that blinded" (p. 625). Her newly-acquired awareness of life goes beyond the feeling of pain. As she said to Ralph the night before he died, "In such hours as this what have we to do with pain? That's not the deepest thing; there's something deeper" (p. 622). The depth can be understood in wisdom, in the knowledge that life is much more than either pain or euphoria singly. The ghost also synthezises this by being a creature symbolically coming out of the darkness into the light to reveal, warn, or, in this specific case, appear as a sign of acquired knowledge obtained and not to be feared.

## 2. IMAGES OF MOVEMENT AND STASIS

The poles of movement and stasis are deeply connected to those of light and darkness - perhaps, some of the images mentioned below will overlap those already referred to. However, it may now be the moment to remember that light is not necessarily only associated to movement, neither is stasis connected only to darkness. If one can understand the possibility of reversing the poles created, combining the oppositions to form wholes, the analysis of these signs will complement each other rather than collide.

In mythology, if one observes the characteristics of the gods linked to movement and stasis, one can see the possiblity of associating light with stasis; darkness with movement. Dionsysios is more associated to darkness in his imperfection, madness and, according to mythology, to the many murders he committed in his wanderings throughout the world. He was brought up "in darkness" , which is explained in Robert Graves' **The Greek Myths**, as being reared in the woman's quarters. According to Graves, "one of his titles was *Dendrities*, 'tree youth', and the Spring Festival, when the trees suddenly burst into leaf and the whole world is intoxicated with desire, celebrated his emancipation"[23]. The god's association to movement is present in the several transformations he went through, from serpent in the winter, to lion in the spring, to the form of a bull or a goat. Besides this, his reckless traveling, marked by death and conflict, is part of the Dionysiac myth.

Apollo, on the other hand, according to myth, after having arrogantly and vainly defied Zeus' power, was punished and only then did he learn a lesson in modesty. His motto, from then on, became moderation in all things through such phrases as "Know

thyself!" and "Nothing in excess!". Everything associated to him is through ideas of formality and pose, since he became an enemy to barbarism. In any case, both gods recall certain oppositions that are important contributions in this analysis.

First, if we analyze the signs connected to movement, we will find that they present both positive and negative aspects. If we include such words as "soaring", or "flying", we find these refer to movements towards harmony. Similarly, "wind" is a word which brings us the image of spirituality and vastness. Symbolically, the wind was born from the spirit and gives birth to light. It is essentially linked to action, though sometimes this action can be turbulent, as change usually is. On the other hand, this change is also present in the image of the bridge, of a crossing from one state of being into another - ideally, from an inferior stage to a superior one. This change of state recalls the risk and difficulty of the passage, sometimes referred to in myth as a passage over hell (darkness, hardship). In any case, the solution to the difficulty must be found, despite anxiety. There is an obligation to choose a way out, no matter how hard it is.

Water is another image connected to movement, as the source of life, as purification and regeneration. It is ambiguous in that it represents development, but also the danger of reabsorption, especially when it refers to a return to one's origins. Nevertheless, its closeness to ideas of energy, fertility (through words such as "rain", necessary for the soul to quench its thirst and end dryness), knowledge and duplicity is important. It is also related to the idea of the middle ground present in Sophocles' tragedy: it offers the right measure to dissolve strong wine, even when wine means knowledge. As we have seen before, even knowledge requires a great dose of wisdom to have any effect. Another important aspect is the strong symbolism of water as a force of movement between life and death. This can be easily understood when we recall the risk of returning to one's origins as a form of death.

The reference made to fertility is an interesting point to go back to - water is essential for fertilization in any culture, hence its universal value. Though it can present a destructive force, bringing on death and chaos when in excess, the main emphasis is on the positive force of life, of destruction of the old. According to Hesiod, love is the necessary mediator between the feminine, sweet, still water of the lake and the masculine, fertilizing force of the ocean. The pleasant sensations recalled by the German romantics are connected to this, in the nocturnal images of the lake, with its milkiness. The river and the ocean are also connected to the course of life, to its changes in feeling, to the risks of navigation and the diverse ways one can lead life.

The images mentioned above play an important role in **The Portrait of a Lady:** the signs which refer to movement represent changes in Isabel's moods, in her possibilities in life, her nature, and the feelings of those whom she has contact with. Along with stasis, or paralysis, which will be referred through images in opposition to those of movement, the complementary forces will stress actions from blindness to awareness, from stagnation to action. In this aspect, Apollo and Dionysios will complete each other as the two necessary sides of life. The poles, having both positive and negative connotations are, at the same time, neither totally positive or negative. They will complete each other - balance will come in the use of both forces in equality.

Though there is a prevalence of action in the first part of the novel, it does not mean there is any movement towards understanding, or towards the great possibilities which Isabel is always after. In the same way as references to light in this first stage were only connected to wisdom and reconciliation in a very theoretical, superficial manner, movement here is not yet the movement to some superior level. Isabel does want to move in the direction she finds will take her away from the lowness of life, though, at this point, she does not yet know that this passage will take her across darkness, into a stage of temporary stagnation.

Caspar Goodwood's image of Isabel is very idealistic, though not totally untrue. He sees her, without doubt, as a woman with "wings and the need of beautiful free movements", a characteristic which his own movements of "long arms and strides" (p. 214) is not afraid of. Throughout the story, Goodwood's own optimism is often the only parameter he uses to evaluate Isabel and her possibilities in life (especially if these possibilities include him). Though he is distressed with her incomprehensible behavior, his faith in the success of overcoming any "small difficulty" is kept. Goodwood, and some of the other characters as well, have a special role in the contrast they show in relation to Isabel's nature, or in the chance given to the reader to have more information about Isabel. The constant presence of Goodwood, who follows Isabel's actions either closely or from afar, is an important representation of the steady faith in action as something necessarily positive, bright and free from any constraint.

On the other hand, Lord Warburton's opinion of Isabel, though making reference to the vastness of her projects, seems to be less favorable. He touches on a certain formality in her as he says "you can't improve your mind, Miss Archer ... it's already a most formidable instrument. It looks down on us all; it despises us" (p. 134). His comment alarms Isabel, who does not see what Lord Warburton is predicting, though not consciously: the superiority Isabel shows people is already a form of stasis, since her "formidable mind" wants to be far above the rest, of any mortal mind. It is running the risk of freezing into a position which does not include any flexibility, any chance of admitting error or ignorance. Isabel's mind is a formidable instrument; it does search for the best - and this is not a negative characteristic. However, the movement forward can be the cause of her isolation from life because it does not include the necessary wisdom (a combination of knowledge and feeling) to curb its desire for unlimited action, for beauty and abstraction..

This takes us to soaring, or flying, more directly mentioned in connection to Isabel throughout the novel. When Isabel is visiting Rome for the first time, St. Peter's cathedral echoes its greatness in Isabel's spirit in its domes, marble and bronze: "her conception of greatness rose and dizziily rose. After this it never lacked space to soar" (p. 343). It is with wondrous awe that she admires the vastness of the world, and it is right that she do so. However, the soaring permitted in the beauty of art is only a reflection of the desires any mortal has of reaching for the sky. He/She must be cruelly reminded that, though he/she can elaborate and imagine greatness, his/her mortal self is full of limitations.

Soaring is also what Ralph sees for Isabel's future. Acting on her destiny as a semi-god would, he feels he has given her a chance to spread her wings and fly by sharing his inheritance with her. His disappointment at seeing she will marry Osmond is expressed directly to her: "You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue - to be ~~sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men~~ ... ~~It hurts me~~ ... ~~as if I had fallen~~ myself!" (p. 395). Ralph has perhaps missed an important point in his pleasure in visualizing Isabel's future: she will act entirely on her own judgement, even if this means acting in error. He also knows his cousin very little, too little to know under what influences she behaves. Ralph cannot see, since Isabel does not show this side to anyone, her fear, the way in which she despises the human quality of life, her lack of wisdom - everything only experience can give. He had told her, when she visited Gardencourt for the first time, she had been made only for happiness, not realizing (or maybe realizing too late) Isabel would need to acquire experience through suffering to live her life.

Disappointment is in every person who observes Isabel's actions: Goodwood is at a loss to find an explanation for her actions, though this is especially so because she will not marry him, a refusal he cannot understand. He senses a strangeness in her, but will not give in, even when she defends the possibility of moving freely: she will even

commit "some atrocity" to defend her freedom, "if the fancy takes me" (p. 215). When he discovers she will marry Osmond, he expresses all his anxiety in reaching her, perhaps to see if she will change her mind, by saying that the train he traveled on went at the speed of "an American funeral". To this, Isabel, half jokingly, half uneasily replies: "That's in keeping - you must have felt as if you were coming to bury me!" (p. 378). The images of funeral and burial are contrastive to the freedom, the movement of flying that had been associated to Isabel before. She herself uses an image of complete stasis - death - to refer to her future.

On the other hand, Henrietta Stackpole's irritation with Isabel is connected to exactly the opposite: she does not see Isabel exactly in paralysis, she sees her "drifting", a sign of movement, but of purposelessness, a blind movement, in which one does not really look to see where one is treading. Isabel only confirms this by saying she had no idea where she was going and found "it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see - that's my idea of happiness" (p. 219) If Isabel Archer's desire for freedom of movement, especially that which will take her above the rest of humanity, is a strong point she defends, this same movement can be reckless, without measure, in no way an expression of sound judgement, in consideration of one's limitations. It is also romantic, unrealistic, a clear sign of lack of experience.

Similarly, Isabel is mentioned, through M. Merle's comments, as incoherent. Her trip through Europe was a sign of this, since she "travelled rapidly and recklessly; she was like a thirsty person draining cup after cup" (p. 374). Isabel is in fact trying to get away from deciding about marrying Osmond, since her feelings in relation to him are not very clear. When, after her return, she announces she will marry Osmond, Isabel tells Ralph that "it's too late" for her to go back on her promise; she has been "caught" (p. 394), in this way showing absolute inconsistency with her theory on the importance of knowing where one is going. Ralph is amazed at this, he constantly

refers to the danger of what she is about to do through the images of light and freedom of movement she had always been associated to. He says: "You were the last person I expected to see caught", and adds that she will "be put in a cage" by marrying Osmond. Curiously, and to Ralph's despair, Isabel says, "If I like my cage, that needn't trouble you" (p. 392). This ambiguity in Isabel's behavior is present as a sign of unbalance between the freedom she professes to have and the prison she is so easily stepping into. The image of being caught in a cage becomes more and more evident the more Osmond and M. Merle's web closes in on Isabel. Both serve as counterpoints to the images of movement used in the narrative.

Isabel is gradually described as being "trapped", in a "box", a "snare" or "prison", the more her relationship with Osmond develops. The constant reference to objects, especially those of art, porcelain, ivory, silver, an ornament, drapery, etc. are all signs of the inertia and "marble stillness" Isabel's life is taking. She will need to form the picture-perfect image of her life with Osmond in front of others, and especially to her own mind, before she breaks down and realizes her necessity to take an active role in life, even if this implies suffering. One must not associate all these images to simple paralysis - under the apparent stasis of her life, Isabel has begun to uncover what her marriage really is, and what she has done with herself.

The moment of stasis that Isabel Archer's life will be in is just the prelude to the passage from the first stage in Gardencourt to the necessary return. This prelude will portray the main character as leading a life not exactly her own, but will be a necessary phase for the crossing to greater awareness. Perhaps a better image is expressed in M. Merle's words to Osmond: "I'm frightened at the abyss into which I shall have cast her (Isabel)" (p.335). The abyss in which Isabel will lie, buried, imprisoned under the heaviness of her husband's lifestyle, is not a simple gap she has fallen into. It will be much more consistent with the idea of return if one remembers that this abyss is "a last vague space [her imagination] couldn't cross - a dusky,

uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight" (p.363) - an observation the narrator makes on Isabel's peculiar mood after having been proposed to by Osmond. This comment is also significant when we analyze it as an indication that her destiny is not really centered on her acceptance (or not) of Osmond's proposal. Her business will be to live life to its full, crossing that space which will take her to more understanding about human condition. The fear M. Merle feels, even if momentarily, must be overcome by Isabel if she is to cross the "uncertain tract", however threatening this is to the image she has created about herself. The narrator completes this thought with the following: "But she was to cross it yet" (p.363).

Isabel's fear at being surrounded by anything which was not beautiful, happy or wise, of being caught in some error, made her feel that even her simplest mistakes, when she realized them, were terrible, giving her a feeling of having "escaped from a trap which might have caught her and smothered her" (p. 104). This early reference to her fear at being trapped contrasts greatly with her statements to Ralph about liking the "cage" she would be put in by marrying Osmond. However, the images of being trapped become more and more present as the novel progresses to her union with Osmond. His house is a place that offered little "communication" with the world; its description, given by through Isabel's eyes, is striking: "this antique, solid, weather-worn, yet 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" (p. 278). Further ahead, the description of the house's windows is also given: "their function seemed less to offer communication with the world than to defy the world to look in. They were massively cross-barred, and placed at such a height that curiosity, even on tiptoe, expired before it reached them" (p.279). The symbology here is evident: Osmond's house is a reflection of Osmond himself, his rigid incommunicative nature will place Isabel's mind in a box, on

a shelf, in the same manner he has placed his paintings, porcelains and other objects. It is the way he has dealt with Pansy, his daughter, and it is how he sees the world: a mere possession to be frozen into what his mind can accept, or can understand.

From here on, there are countless images associated to the house and to Osmond's character: the house contains "arrangements subtly studied", "a variety of those faded hangings of damask and tapestry", brass and pottery relics, chests and cabinets, "pictorial art in frames as pedantically primitive" (p. 279). Also, besides the already mentioned quotation of how his house looked as if "once you were in, you would need an act of energy to get out" (p. 304), it contained "some horrors", according to the Countess Gemini, who recommends that Isabel not sit on a chair which was "not what it looks". In fact, the whole life Osmond leads is not what it appears to be, and the misreading of this message is mostly Isabel's own fault. She has created, as has been mentioned before, an image of a sublty beautiful and abstract life with Osmond, ignoring the signs of deceit. Osmond's life is nothing but a "mask", as Isabel will discover. However, she will have to admit that she herself has worn a mask before marrying him, pretending to be what she was not: "He had discovered that she was so different, that she was not what he had believed she would prove to be ... and now there was no use pretending, wearing a mask or a dress ..." (p.475). She had deceived him when they met, this is her conclusion. Isabel must face the fact that having worn a mask, both Osmond and Isabel will have to pay a high price for it. Symbolically, the mask-wearer tries to trick others, but can also be caught in his own trick. The mask represents appearance, but no substance. Masks are immobile faces, rigidly frozen into what one wants to show others.

Isabel is also shown as being boxed. One of the references to this is at the opera, where Lord Warburton sees Isabel and Osmond seated, "partly screened by the curtain of the box" (p. 349). It is from this position, a place which can be seen as a symbol of false protection, the box being a secret place of irrational illusion where one

thinks desires will be fulfilled, that Isabel coyly flirts with Lord Warburton, causing a great deal of confusion in this man's feelings. It is from this immobile "box" that Isabel feels "free" to play games of seduction with a man who was in love with her. The illusion of staying in this position without having to move is shattered when Isabel finds she has married the one man who will not respect her mind - on the contrary, Osmond has started to hate it, for it has contrasted with his own mediocrity too directly, it has tried to question his system of living. She sees the "rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken took possession of her, she seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay" (p. 480). Her neat, little box proves to be too narrow and limited for any comfort.

Her marriage to Osmond is also the symbol of infertility - Isabel's connection to water has turned into a stagnant pond here. The "summer rain" (p. 96) she was compared to by Mrs. Touchett; the "quickly-moving, clear-voiced heroine" who was agreeable to old Mr. Touchett's senses "as the sound of flowing water" (p. 109); all this seems to dry out in her marriage. Their only son died six months after being born - the union is condemned to total stasis and will not bring about anything fruitful. The deceptive image of impulse that Osmond gives, which Isabel reads as a sign of greatness of character, is nothing but pose, "pose so sublty considered that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse" (p. 444). It is precisely because Isabel has not looked carefully that she has made a mistake. Her possibilities have been cut by the root.

Restraint, immobility and rigidity is what one can see in Isabel's life, even before she is caught in the marriage with Osmond. She is seen, a while before her enagagement, in a "glorious room, among the shining antique marbles ... resting her eyes on their beautiful blank faces; listening, as it were, to their eternal silence" (p.353). Through Ralph's eyes, after she has become Mrs. Osmond, we see "her light

step drew a mass of drapery behind it; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament" (p.444). Isabel herself, after her marriage has gone stale, feels there must be an advantage to acting like M. Merle, of making "one's self a firm surface, a sort of corselet of silver" (p. 452), to live one's life in a more static form, trying to supress those unquieting thoughts on how life could have been different. However, Isabel feels there "had been no plot, no snare" (p.455), that she had had the chance to judge on her own before her mistake. It is only fair that she consider this, in spite of the turn of events, in which she discovers the secret that exists between M. Merle and Osmond, namely that Pansy is their daughter and that Isabel has only served as a way of guaranteeing the young girl's future. This does not remove the heroine's responsibility.

Isabel's fear of passion, of authentic feeling for life, even its pettiness and chaos, is greatly responsible for the portrait created, the portrait of a lady, not a real woman. Passion is necessary when one chooses - not blind passion, but the sense of having given in to what is before us. On the one hand, once having chosen to marry Osmond, Isabel sticks to her decision all the way. On the other, she feels, only vaguely, but uncomfortably at first, that she has chosen something not totally in tune with life's real pulses. It is precisely when Isabel must choose which way to go that her passion is supressed, the surge of feeling which would crush any doubt, the necessary action which would make living a business to be in awe of. She feels

> the dread of having ... to choose and decide. 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 (p. 360).

The power of acting requires the force of an inner nature, of the passion for life in all its aspects. Isabel's greatest fear is in this: she will have to give herself to life in

all its greatness and misery, accepting that action requires, among other things, renunciation of illusions and acceptance of reality; it requires measuring one's mortality and renouncing godness; it asks us to accept the concrete, common characteristics along with the abstract, noble principles of man. When Isabel realizes her mistake can also be considered as having tied herself to a life with nothing more than convention and pose, she feels "she was in a fever" (p. 484), a necessary stage which preceeds action. The deliriousness of fever is important for Isabel's awareness - it is at this moment she remembers a "vision - that of her husband and M. Merle unconsciously and familiarly associated " (p. 484). Slowly, but surely, the visions and signs will fall into place and start to make sense to her.

Before this passion can be transformed into action, Isabel has been transformed into a static picture of herself - present, though only slightly reminding people of what she had been - not quite herself. Osmond's way of life has momentarily contaminated her. Isabel's first impressions of Osmond are right, even though they are practically nothing, only "something in the air, in her general impression of things" (p. 306). She is right when she feels she should not, at first, expose herself to the kind of person Osmond is. However, impressions, though they are active signs of warning, are not rationally accepted in Isabel's way of thinking - the picture she sees of the future is more enticing. She begins to feel involved in the image of a painting,

> strolling on a moss-grown terrace, above the sweet Val d'Arno ... The picture had no flourishes, but she liked its lowness of tone and the atmosphere of summer twilight. ... It spoke of ... the choice between objects, subjects, contacts ... of a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated together that the career appeared to stretch beneath it in the disposed vistas and wiht the ranges of steps and terraces and fountains of a formal Italian garden... (p. 327).

Isabel has found the perfect garden of her illusions; its image in her mind is simply too tempting to pass. Its immobility is a mere detail in Isabel's mind - in this portrait, she feels safe enough.

Isabel gives in to this life in order not to give in to something real, pulsing and finite. Osmond has touched a weak point, perhaps without being totally aware of it. He says, "don't you remember my telling you that one ought to make one's life a work of art? You looked rather shocked at first; but then I told you that it was exactly what you seemed to me to be trying to do with your own" (p. 358). Isabel has put on a mask for Osmond's pleasure, and voluntarily for her own comfort. She has tried to show Osmond that the one thing she most wants in life is to pose, to turn into a statue, a wallflower, a piece in his collection, an ornament. Finally, she will achieve this. After some years of marriage, Isabel is seen by Edward Rosier as "framed in the gilded doorway", leaving him with the impression that she was "the picture of a gracious lady"(p.418). Ralph has seen it too: he is observant of the mask she is wearing, but "if she wore a mask it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanic in the serenity painted on it; this was not an expression ... it was a representation, it was even an advertisement" (p. 443).

It takes Isabel some time to see the picture herself, only this time from a distance. She has faced the truth of her marriage and her life and crosses the abyss into greater knowledge. She sees her husband not so much as a person with reasons and feelings, but as a man who only puts "a thing into words - almost into pictures - to see himself, how it would look" (p.578). Isabel then begins to really observe, "she gave an extreme attention to this little sketch" Osmond is presenting her. It is a sketch on the way he truly thinks, on the way he plays "theoretic tricks" on his daughter's future, on the way he sees their marriage, and on how he sees Isabel herself. Isabel observes that there are more persons involved in this tragedy: Pansy has become one

of them, since her life does not have any meaning after her father has set his control over it. She is yet to recognize fully the tragic turn her own life has taken.

Thus, Isabel's passage from blindness to awareness is represented in these signs of light, darkness, movement and stasis. Her "seeing" is connected to these poles - they are the indicators of change or paralysis in the heroine's trajectory. The drifting, almost romantic movements of the beginning, go through stasis and back to movement again - only this time to action. Isabel decides she will lead her own life: she has fallen, and will only recover through recognition of her error. However, this recognition will not take her back to the initial arrogance and naivité; on the contrary, she has begun to see things "in the crude light of that revelation which had already become a part of experience" (p. 598). The revelation of the connection between Osmond and M. Merle is only significant in that it gives her the light of experience, which enables her to push forward and keep on living. Isabel has learned that in spite of having been "an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron" (p. 598), this bitter piece of truth will allow her to be more aware and, perhaps, avoid becoming someone's tool again. And, even though Isabel wishes she could die, since the stillness of dying would take her beyond any feeling, any necessary decison of action, she must recognize that living will still be her "business for a long time to come" (p. 607), even if she realistically knows there is no guarantee that she will ever be happy again. In fact, Isabel has the sensation that life can be truly dreary; there is probably little hope ahead that she will be rewarded for her awareness.

In the end, Ralph's death will bring the ghost to Isabel - the ghost which had been saved for her final vision of the life she has ahead of her. It is comforting to have Ralph tell her she has been punished unfairly for wishing to live life as well as possibly; however, she knows that the pain of this punishment is nothing. The promise of a better life is not in her future - it is too late for this illusion. The fact that she is so

intelligent and wanted so much from life will not bring any reward - the world is now presented to Isabel as being far more complex than this. Life's complexity is greater than pain, greater than her illusions and ambitions - it has crushed her very soul. Reaching this wisdom on the ways of the world is an ironic reward since it does nothing but take away one's peaceful and naive dreams.

## NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE

[1]Culler, Jonathan, *The Pursuit of Signs:Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction,* New York, Cornell University Press, 1981, p.5.
[2]Ibid., p.6.
[3]Scholes, Robert, *Semiotics and Interpretation,* New Haven,Yale University Press, 1982, p. ix.
[4]Culler, Jonathan, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction,* New York, Cornell University Press, 1981. p.20.
[5]Ibid., p. 22.
[6]Ibid., p. 23.
[7]Ibid., p. 24.
[8]Ibid., p. 24.
[9]Ibid., p. 25.
[10]Ibid., p. 26.
[11]Scholes, Robert, *Semiotics and Interpretation,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, p.xi.
[12]Culler, Jonathan, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction,* Nre York, Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 35.
[13]Ibid., p.35.
[14]Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[15]Ibid., p. 37.
[16]Ibid., p. 38.
[17]Ibid., p. 38.
[18]Ibid., p. 39.
[19]Ibid., p. 39.
[20]Scholes, Robert, *Semiotics and Interpretation,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, p. xi.
[21]Ibid., p. 14.
[22]James, Henry, *The Portrait of a Lady,* Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1986, (Penguin Classics. All further references to the text are taken from this edition.
[23]Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths:1,* London, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 107.

# IV. CONCLUSION

A question to be asked at this point might be the same George Steiner asks at the end of his book, **Antigones: the Antigone myth in Western literature, art and thought**: why do we go back again and again to those Greek myths of Antigone, Oedipus and Prometheus, to mention a few, and why do these tragedies still influence modern works and, more, the manner in which thought has developed in the last two centuries? This question can bring about a varied number of other reflections and ideas about the objective of this dissertation, about the purpose of any analysis in literature - and, what's more, a reflection on literature and its role in the past and today. It is not part of this conclusion to extensively discuss the role of literature in the history and culture of humanity throughout the ages, but to touch some ideas which might make us think about the importance of artistic work and the importance of interpreting, accepting or criticizing artistic production, especially, in this case, literary production.

We can begin with Ortega y Gasset's essays on art and culture, in which he makes a curious comparison, saying that thought cannot be considered as natural to man as swimming is to fish. For one, "man is never sure that he will be able to carry

out his thought"[1], which is significant in that it makes humanity have the constant task of elaborating itself, through thought and, consequently, through action. Thought has continuously been evolving throughout history, and even when humanity has achieved a certain "history of thought", there is the ever-present risk of losing a great part of the thought already gained. At certain moments, humanity must question itself on whether it is losing touch with its own human quality of thought - perhaps this moment is presenting itself again to us. We seem to be facing a degradation of human qualities which include the "simple" task of thinking, of pondering and consequently of producing art as a reflex of humanness.

In the history of man we can observe decadence is present at several points, which can bring us to the conclude that culture, knowledge, civilization and all its works do not guarantee the survival of humanity. In spite of our pride at having reached levels of development which we could never have imagined centuries ago, we must insistently go back to the idea of how fragile we are, to that image of a small boat being tossed on a turbulent sea. One cannot simply suppose that humans are safe in technology and in science - at least, one must remember that the state of being human includes much more complex elements than science can ever control. And, human condition includes much more than any science can ever explain - thus the importance of ideas and questionings on man and his actions which art, in its several forms, has the power of facing. It is in this aspect that we can see the importance of Greek culture, in which we must include tragedy, and all its contributions to our modern world.

It is through tragedy, for instance, that man is placed in touch with his essential humanness, and with those characteristics which constantly refer to his greatness and smallness. It is through a tragic view that Shakespeare realistically portrayed the discomfort of living, the anguish of contradiction of his time, through a work such as **Hamlet.** It is in the progressive nineteenth century that similar contradictions arise: in

the enthusiasm of self-sufficiency and pride, brought on by scientific and technological development, man is placed face to face with his limits and possibilities through a view such as the one given by Henry James, an alert view of his optimistic era. As Ortega y Gasset says. "the progressivist idea consists in affirming not only that humanity - an abstract, irresponsible, nonexistent entity invented for the occasion - that humanity progresses, which is certain, but furthermore that it progresses necessarily"[2]. One is easily impressed with the fact that progress is inevitable, and so, one can stop worrying about the responsibility of humanity in this process. This responsibility consists of not only being aware of the limits of mankind, but also, in observing over and over again, what humanity has done in the past, of taking the marvelous along with the horrible.

Ortega y Gasset also warns us of the double side of Greek influence on our culture. Though we should be grateful to our Greek past for the cultural weight we can now carry on, we cannot fall into the error of simply intellectualizing our world, treating thought as if it were the main occupation of man, or as if it were a god-like entity. This would be to go against the same principles exposed in tragic works in which humans are forever being warned against pushing towards the extremes. There is a balance, defended by Sophocles himself in his works, between contemplation and concrete action.Humanity is challenged to reach that balance.

What we can see in our world today is that it has transformed culture into a mere product of consumption, as if it were a thing to include in one's life, an abstract element that had no connection with the act of living itself. There is, again, an unbalance in this separation, where we have abstraction on the one hand, and active living on the other. Art cannot be apart from living - it is the product of life itself, of experience, of contemplation on experience, of reaction towards the limits of reality, those limits which hold us down physically, but are not a part of our imagination. The error in Isabel Archer's case is very much connected to this - throughout the novel we

see her views on art, beauty and culture as things to acquire outside experience, distanced from living itself. It is here that the importance of this work by Henry James lies: in the way it can show us its art in the exposition of life in its contradiction between action and contemplation, or abstractness, an idea, we must remember, Henry James himself developed in "The Art of Fiction".

However, going back to our initial statements, one must make an attempt to remember that Greek culture, specifically its mythology is a constant source of inspiration and reference in culture and thought throughout history, even though our perplexity at living today is comparable to the feeling of perplexity man has had at all times in history. It is in stories, in simple statements and in the symbols and images that we use in our stories that myth is always present, directly or not, especially Greek myth. We use those figures and images, which we recognize through our memory and through civilization's past, to make references that can be identified until today. It is this which enables us to interpret modern works in the light of classical forms.

This has been the attempt of analyzing **The Portrait of a Lady** as a work containing a tragic view of life, since it includes in its elaboration tragic elements which can be found in classical works, and which occurs in a similar way in Shakespeare or in Lorca, and, even nowadays, in movies such as the contemporary director Schlondorff's **The Voyager.** As the novel was being studied under the concept of tragedy, more and more questions began to appear. These questions included the ideas exposed above, which can be summarized in the the very importance of tragedy in modern times. However, the most important question was yet to arise: what could literature possibly contribute to culture today? Are we to eternally feel the need to create new forms, to destroy whatever had been already established, or, perhaps, to re-elaborate those traditional forms into innovative expressions of art? Or, taking the whole question to a more pragmatic turn, should we simply let progress take its course, and let art follow its pattern, which today is

translated as a product of easy consumerism, more valued for its effect than for its quality?

Evidently, none of these questions is easily answered. Nevertheless, one can attempt to, at least, meditate on their meaning in the world of literary criticism and production today. Ferreira Gullar, Brazilian poet and critic, placed similar questions as those posed above in a recent interview. To him, "art is, and will always be, impasse and questioning. Impasse is the source of creation"[3]. The function of art is to question, or create from the questioning it has brought up. However, according to Gullar, this does not mean art can lose touch with its principal objective: to reach people with its ideas. "Art," says Gullar, is a language and has its own, autonomous form of knowledge ... Before you can create art with this or that purpose in mind, you must, above all, effectively create art"[4]. This takes us back to James' ideas on art in the form of fiction. To him, art cannot be attached to rules, or to a function of virtuous teaching or to its ever-present quality of not being "for real". Art, and he is especially referring to fiction, will reflect the creator's impression on life, on the truth he, or she, sees in life and which, in some way, can touch those who read the work created.

Gullar himself refers to the atmosphere prevailing in the last part of the nineteenth century in which intellectuals felt that the past was dead and forgotten, immersed as they were in the euphoria of new inventions and technology. Art's function was to "cooperate in this change, in fact, change itself, free itself of tradition and express the transformations of the new age"[5]. Immersed in this enthusiastic feeling which called for action more than contemplation, is the work of Henry James, and other intellectuals of the time, which pointed at man's shortcomings and brought people to reflect on their essential humanness, not pessimistically, but through the constant reminder that, in its essence, human condition does not change very much. The questionings of our Greek ancestors are basically the same as the ones we have

today, and will continue to be so for as long as people can think about living and its purpose.

Thus, if art had one function, and only one function, its most important role would be "a way for the artist to construct him/herself outside his/her being, giving permanence and objectivity to his/her fantasy. Objectivity transforms it (artistic creation) into something social, a donation to others, an addition to the cultural universe"[6]. The work of the artist is difficult in this manner, since it can be compared to "instilling spirit into matter, incorporating elements of the meaningless natural world into our human world"[7]. The artist's work is also difficult in the sense that he/she must give the normal, even unoriginal, aspects of life, a touch of poetry, of the unexpected, in short, of art. The actions of the hero or heroine in a novel can be routine or banal, but it is the touch of the creator which will give those actions meaning, which will find the essential interest that arises continuously from human thought and action.

In this aspect, the narration of Isabel Archer's actions and nature contains no adventure, no novelty to the reader who is not attentive to the human quality present in the novel. The possibility of referring to tragedy as an active component in the narration's description of Isabel's life gives this novel one of its special artisitc qualities. On the other hand, the possibility of attempting a varied number of readings of the novel, which can contribute to deeper and, at the same time, more flexible interpretations, is a gift of freedom given to the reader. It is a gift, on the part of the artist, to the alert appreciator of art.

## NOTES ON CONCLUSION

[1]Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Dehumanization of Art and other essays on Art, Culture, and Literature,* Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 188-189.
[2]Ibid., p. 191.
[3]Gullar, Ferreira, "O Cadáver das Vanguardas", *Folha de São Paulo,* São Paulo, 28/08/94, Caderno 6, p. 7.
[4]Ibid., p. 7.
[5]Gullar, Ferreira, "O Fim da Arte", *Humboldt*, Bonn, Ano 34, no. 66, 1993, p. 42.
[6]Ibid., p. 42.
[7]Ibid., p. 42.

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6.Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths: 1,* London, Penguin Books, 1960, pp.76-82, pp.103- 111.

7.Grene, David and Lattimore, Richmond (ed.), *Sophocles I: Three Tragedies,* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1954, (The Complete Greek Tragedies).

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9._____, "O Fim da Arte", *Humboldt,* Bonn, Ano 34, no. 66, 1993, pp.40-45.

10.Hauser, Arnold, *História Social da Literatura e da Arte,* São Paulo, Editora Mestre Jou, 1980, pp.121-131, pp.471-554.

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12.James, Henry, "The Art of Fiction", *The American Tradition in Literature, Vol. 2,* New York, W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1962, pp. 655-672.

13._____, *The Portrait of a Lady,* Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1986, (Penguin Classics).

14.Mc Master, Juliet, "The Portrait of Isabel Archer", *American Literature,* Vol.45, no. 1, March, 1973, pp. 50-66.

15.Mull, Donald L., "Freedom and Judgement: The Antinomy of Action in *The Portrait of a Lady, The Arizona Quarterly,* vol. 27, no.2, 1971, pp. 124-132.

16.Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Dehumanization of Art and other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968.

17.Scholes, Robert, *Semiotics and Interpretation,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982.

18.Steiner, George, *Antigones: the Antigone Myth in Western literature, art and thought,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984.

19.Williams, Raymond, *Modern Tragedy,* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987, pp. 13-120.