TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

The Reification of Female Self in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*

A thesis submitted to the Central Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

By

Badri Bahadur Tamang

University Campus, Kirtipur

January 2010

Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

University Campus, Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Badri Bahadur Tamang has completed his thesis entitled The reification of self in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* under my supervision. He carried out his research from October 2009 AD to January 2010 A D. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

……..

Shankar Subedi

Supervisor

Date…….

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

The thesis entitled, The Reification of Female Self in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* by Badri Bahadur Tamang submitted to the central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the research committee

……

Supervisor

…….

External Examiner

……..

Head

Central Department of English

Date…….

Acknowledgements

I remain highly indebted to Mr. Shankar Subedi, lecturer at the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. He has paved an approachable path and let me walk along, providing me adequate scholarly suggestions and invaluable guidance for the finalization of my dissertation. In fact, the concrete existence of my dissertation has its root in the relentless inspiration and motivation of various well wishers.

Similarly I deeply owe my honourable and candid appreciation to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, head of Central Department of English. Along with this I express respectful thanks and acknowledgements to Dr. Beerendra Pandey, Mrs. Anju Gupta, Dr. Sanjib Uprety, Mr. Arun Gupto and all the professors and lecturers of Central Department. I am also indebted to Mr. Yubaraj Gautam for his assistance and inspiration in completing the thesis in this form.

I can never forget my parents Mr. Rifal Tamang and Mrs. Saili Tamang who always inspired me to complete the thesis on time. I also remember dear friends Mr. Rajendra Neupane, Mr. Baburam Bayalkoti, Maji Tamang and Temai Tamang. I also thank Mr. Asok Gautam for error free digitization of this thesis.

Abstract

Isabel's commoditization begins when she falls in love with and marries the sinister Gilberr Osmond, who wants her only for her money and who her treats as an object, almost part of his art collection. Osmond regards her from the point of view of her exchange and sign exchange value. The novel's central attraction lies at the ownership of human beings.

The ownership does not mean the literal possession of a man or a woman but rather the denial or suppression of another's autonomy by using that person for purposes of one's own. Understood in this way, proprietorship in persons is the constitutive element of social relations generally as they are portrayed in the novel.

Contents

Chapter- 1 Literary World of Henry James

Henry James, American essayist, critic and author of realism portrays Ishabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* as a character doomed to reification, despite her effort to remain independent, her attempts to flee from marriage, the conjugal slavery. James, the author of international theme uses the relationship of Europe and America and also assesses an American's interaction with Europe. As a novelist, short-story writer, and critic, James was particularly interested in Europe's history and traditions and the formal manners of its upper class. His tales of independent, yet naive, Americans encountering the cultivated, subtle influences of European society made him famous, although his work was not fully accepted until years after his death. This very depiction can be seen in Ishabel's projection.

James was born on 15th April 1843 in New York City, New York State, United States, the second of five children born to theologian Henry James Sr. (1811-1882) and Mary Robertson nee Walsh. Henry James Sr. was one of the most wealthy intellectuals of the time, connected with noted philosophers and transcendentalists as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Carlyle, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; fellow friends and influential thinkers of the time who would have a profound effect on his son's life. Education was of the utmost importance to Henry Sr. and the family spent many years in Europe and the major cities of England, Italy, Switzerland, France, and Germany, his children being tutored in languages and literature.

Noted American-born English essayist, critic, and author of the realism, James wrote *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). James's works, many of which were first serialized in

the magazine *The Atlantic Monthly* include narrative romances with highly developed characters set amongst illuminating social commentary on politics, class, and status, as well as explorations of the themes of personal freedom, feminism, and morality. In his short stories and novels he employs techniques of interior monologue and point of view to expand the readers' enjoyment of character perception and insight. Often comparing the Old World with the New, and influenced by Honore de Balzac, Henrik Ibsen, Charles Dickens, and Nathaniel Hawthorne of whose work he wrote "too original and exquisite to pass away" James would become widely respected in North America and Europe, earning honorary degrees from Harvard and Oxford Universities, in 1911 and 1912 respectively (Merryman 6). He was acquainted with many notable literary figures of the day including Robert Browning, Ivan S. Turgenev, Emile Zola, Lord Alfred Tennyson, and Gustave Flaubert. American-born and never married, James would live the majority of his life in Europe, becoming a British citizen in 1915 after the outbreak of World War I. Many of his works have inspired other author's works and adaptations to the stage and screen.

Henry James writes in an elegant, leisurely style and deals in the smaller subtleties of moral life. He wrote relentlessly, copiously, and almost all of his work is first rate. His stories and novellas are just as good as his better-known novels; and he was also a major theorist of the novel and a perceptive critic. In his later work he begins to explore the interesting possibilities of 'unreliable narrators' - that is, people telling stories who may not know or reveal the whole truth. It is interesting to note that for all James' interest in the psychology of his characters and his avoidance of overt action as the mainsprings to his plots; many of his novels have been very successfully translated to the cinema screen. And more

> ironically still, for all the dramatic tensions which exist between his characters, "his attempts to write plays were regarded as a complete failure - by himself as well as by his critics" (51). James was an experimenter in the craft of fiction. He explored new ways of seeing and shaping life through new ways of telling a story. James preferred not to render events, but rather someone's impression of events. In his late fiction especially, the story is told through the eyes of an interested, usually perceptive observer. James felt this made the work more compelling since the reader sees only what the observer sees and follows the workings of the observer's mind as he or she tries to understand the meanings of various appearances in the outside world. Typically, these appearances are misleading. The "action" in the novels consists of the observer gradually penetrating appearances and comprehending the truth (5).

James well explores reification, a Marxist notion of regarding persons from what they can give from monetary or status's point of view. Reification, defined by Karl Marx in terms of commoditization, gets further elaboration in similar as well as in a departed fashion by other Marxists like Lukacs and other. Reification used, in albeit derogatory fashion, becomes an important theoretical concept in literary analysis. Many writers, either supporting or condemning prevailing ideologies, make the use of this tool in their writing.

The Portrait of a Lady (1881) is regarded as the masterpiece of James's middle period. Isabel Archer, a young American woman with looks, wit, and imagination, arrives to discover Europe. She sees the world as a place of brightness, of free expression, of irresistible action. Turning aside from suitors who offer her their wealth and devotion, she follows her own path. But that way leads to disillusionment and a future as constricted as a dark narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. James

explores here one of his favourite themes - the Old World in contest with the New. In a conclusion that is one of the most moving in modern fiction, Isabel is forced to make her final choice.

Many critics have given their views about the novel. When The Portrait of a Lady was published, James was a well-known and respected author whose story Daisy Miller was enjoying great popularity. *The Portrait of a Lady* was widely reviewed, and most reviews, including those in the leading American publications, were positive.

Horace E. Scudder reviewed *The Portrait of a Lady* for Atlantic, in which the novel was serialized before its book publication. Scudder's review focuses almost exclusively on what he calls the story's "consistency," by which he means that the novel's "characters, the situations, the incidents, are all true to the law of their own being." Scudder's single complaint is that he does not like the novel's ending. Simply put, he objects to James's “sending Isabel back to Gilbert”. (Scudder 2). In the same way, Roth Jelley remarks on the setting of the novel to be reflective and calm.

> The novel opens and closes at Gardencourt, the Touchett family’s gracious English country estate. This place is particularly significant to our characters, and to our understanding of the novel as a whole. By framing the dramatic events of Isabel’s European adventures with the two Gardencourt sections, James makes this space reflective and calm. (4)

Many critics have stressed on various aspects of the novel. Many other critics have stressed on James's depiction of matrimonial misery in *The Portrait of a Lady*, but they have generally overlooked the novel's treatment of divorce. Most notable is James's ambivalent feelings about the permanence of the conjugal bond. At the same

time that the novel insists upon the sanctity of marriage, it highlights the costs of remaining in a miserable union and it reaches toward a remedy for Isabel. At many moments the novel imagines the possibility—indeed, desirability—of dissolving the marriage tie. Although the novel ultimately backs away from the idea that Isabel leave Osmond, it articulates some of the central arguments in favor of liberal divorce. In close examination of both sides of the divorce debates, *The Portrait of a Lady* occupies an important place in the tradition of American divorce fiction. Despite having got innumerable critiques, the novel's Marxist analysis especially related to Isabel's knowing, provoked reification remains an unexplored issue which this researcher wills to dig beneath.

The Portrait of a Lady concerns a young American woman, Isabel Archer, who comes to England after her father dies. Archer is ardent, vibrant, hungry for experience, and committed to her personal freedom. She forms a friendship with an older woman, Madame Merle, who introduces her to Gilbert Osmond, the man Archer marries. Archer believes Osmond to be a man of impeccable taste with whom she can share an intense but liberated life. Instead he turns out to be a cynical dilettante and totally conventional. Eventually Archer learns that Osmond and Merle have been lovers and have plotted her marriage to get hold of her fortune.

The Portrait of a Lady is the story of a spirited young American woman, Isabel Archer, who "affronts her destiny" and finds it overwhelming. She inherits a large amount of money and subsequently becomes the victim of Machiavellian scheming by two American expatriates. Associating Isabel's commodification with the real life situation, the novel treats in a profound way the themes of personal freedom, responsibility, betrayal, and sexuality (Brownell 102).

This researcher longs to probe how the reification of the concept of self - esteem has been achieved discursively in the novel. It investigates how the concept of self - esteem has been developed over time and how it operates in the novel in the projection of Isabel Archer, the heroin doomed to be sold in the form of marriage, which she always wants to escape from.

II. Reification: Marxist Perspective

Reification, the error of regarding an abstraction as a material thing, and attributing causal powers to it or the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is an important term in Marxist theory; it is linked to “people's alienation from work and their treatment as objects of manipulation rather than as human beings” and was popularized by György Lukács (Marshal 54).

Marx uses the concept of reification to describe a form of social consciousness in which human relations come to be identified with the physical properties of things, thereby acquiring an appearance of naturalness and inevitability. Marx's concept of reification is taken as the model for a general theory of ideology. This theory of Marx can be used to analyze the emergence of new forms of reification in capitalist society, including those that are based on the growth of technology, the spread of bureaucracy, and the rationalization of occupational selection. In Marx's theory, the concept of reification specifies the dialectical relationship between social existence and social consciousness in a society dominated by commodity production. It describes a situation of isolated individual producers whose relation to one another is indirect and realized only through the mediation of things, such that the social character of each producer's labor becomes obscured and human relationships are veiled behind the relations among things and apprehended as relations among things. In this manner a

particular historical set of social relations comes to be identified with the natural properties of physical objects, thereby acquiring an appearance of naturalness or inevitability – a fact which contributes, in turn, to the reproduction of existing social relations.

Marx's analysis addresses both the nature of the social structure and the nature of social consciousness, as well as the reciprocal relations between these two levels. By contrast, as appropriated by mainstream sociology, the first of these dimensions disappears and reification, like alienation, reduces to a psychological characteristic of the abstract individual. This tendency is apparent in the writings of Peter Berger, the theorist most responsible for introducing the concept of reification into American sociology. In Berger's construction, reification is interpreted as a state of amnesia in which the individual "forgets" the human origins of the social world. Social phenomena are apprehended instead "as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will" (Berger and Luckmann, 89). This "forgetfulness" is explained, in turn, as a defensive reaction by which the individual seeks to establish psychic stability in the face of "some fundamental terrors of human existence, notably the terror of chaos" (Berger and Pullberg, 56). The analysis of reified consciousness is thus separated from the analysis of the particular social relations that are reified, and translated into a cultural and historical universal.

Several critics have noted, for example, the emasculation which the concept of alienation has suffered at the hands of empirically oriented sociologists. In this instance, it is precisely the most crucial and distinguishing features of Marx's theory that are lost in the translation to mainstream sociology: the multi-dimensionality of the concept of alienation, the insight it provides into the inner structure of capitalist

work relations, and the unity it forges between empirical analysis and radical critique. For Marx, the concept of alienation describes the situation of the individual worker, but also implies a theoretical conception of capitalist society as a whole. It offers an analysis of objective social relations which is also a critique of the false or "inverted" nature of those relations. By contrast, as appropriated by mainstream sociology, the descriptive elements of the concept of alienation have been separated from Marx's critique of capitalism, and the focus has been narrowed from an analysis of “capitalist production relations to the study of individual attitudes” (Seeman 57).

For Marx, alienation is above all a scientific category whose value is to be judged by its capacity to lay bare the internal dynamics of capitalist society. He is always careful to distinguish himself from those who would reduce the analysis of alienation in its various concrete forms to mere criticism in the name of “some ethical ideal or abstract conception of human essence” (Marx and Engels, 56).

Paradoxically, there are similarities in the manner in which the term reification most often appears in the Marxist literature. Although opposite in many respects, the use of the term is similar in the extent to which the discussion of reified consciousness tends to take place independently of any analysis of the underlying social relations producing such reification. Just as the concept of alienation is frequently employed in a merely critical or polemical fashion, the concept of reification is likewise restricted to a polemical role – in this case as a derisive term for a recurring form of ideological mystification in bourgeois social science. "Reification" in this context becomes a derogatory label, ritualistically applied to any theory that uncritically takes existing social relations and institutions for granted and elevates these to general principles of social organization. While such polemics are often well-founded and directed against theories that are indeed mystifying, as ideology critiques they are also subject to

definite limitations. To the extent that they operate only at the level of critique, they remain, in Marx's words, merely "interpretations of interpretations," and therefore unable to penetrate to the root of the matter (41). Too often we are left with the impression that reified conceptions are merely the result of some willful distortion or interest-induced blindness on the part of the social theorist who imposes interpretations on the world which are at odds with the way things really are. No doubt this sometimes happens, however it is important to point out that this is a quite different situation than Marx has in mind in his analysis of reification. For Marx, reification is not merely an illusion foisted upon consciousness from the outside, but derives from the objective nature of social institutions; hence the critique of reified theories is never more than a preliminary to the analysis of the social relations which produce such reifications.

The necessary starting point for an examination of Marx's theory of reification is the famous section in Chapter One of Capital entitled "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof. The notion of commodity fetishism which lies at the heart of Marx's theory of reification is introduced in the following passage:

> A Commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. This is the reason why the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses [. . . .] A definite social relation between men [. . .] assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic

> form of a relation between things [. . . .] This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx 72)

In this passage, Marx notes that the relations of interdependence between individual commodity producers are not manifested as social relations as such, but appear instead in the fantastic form of relations between things. This fantastic form is the relative value (exchange value) which commodities assume in the process of exchange. What is mysterious here is that, as a value, the commodity exhibits a property which cannot adequately be explained by any material or perceptible attribute of the object. The mystery is solved, however, once we recognize that value is an expression, not of any physical-technical characteristic of the object, but of the social relations with which it is connected in the commodity economy. Value is the "social form" which objects acquire as a consequence of the "peculiar social character of the labor that produces them" (72).

The point to be stressed here is the precise nature of the illusion or mystification which commodity fetishism implies. This illusion is not, as some have suggested, that human relations take on the appearance of relations between things. This, Marx makes clear, is nothing but an expression of the real nature of social relations in a competitive market economy. Individual producers do not confront one another directly as social beings, nor is their collective labor regulated by any common plan. Each contributes to the total social product solely on the basis of private calculations of individual advantage. Consequently, it is only through the relative values which are established among their products in the act of exchange that each individual's labor is coordinated with that of the rest. Thus, social relations

among individual producers not only take on the appearance of relations among things, they are in fact realized only through the relations among things.

As a general rule, articles of utility become commodities, only because they are products of the labor of private individuals or groups of individuals who carry on their work independently of each other. The sum total of the labor of all these private individuals forms the aggregate labor of society. Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labor does not show itself except in the act of exchange. In other words, the labor of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labor of society, only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labor of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things (72-3).

Neither does the illusory nature of commodity fetishism lie in the fact that human relations appear subordinate to relations among things. This too is an expression of the real nature of social relations in a competitive market economy. Since individuals do not enter into productive relations with one another directly as social beings, but only as owners of particular things, the possession of things becomes a condition for and determines the nature of each individual's participation in the productive relations of society. Persons are thus reduced to functioning as representatives or "personifications" of the things in their possession, while productive relations among them become dependent upon the market relations that are established among those things (Harry, 2).

The subordination of human beings to things and the relations among things follows directly from the privatized nature of social production in the commodity economy. Individual producers, each privately concerned with the quantities of commodities which he or she can obtain in exchange for his or her product, experience their own activity as conditioned by the ratios of exchange which prevail in the market. These ratios are merely an expression of social character of each individual's labor – that is, of the mutual dependence among individual producers – as manifested through the dynamics of the market. Yet, because of the privatized manner in which production takes place, this mutual dependence is not manifested as a direct and explicit social relation, but necessarily asserts itself "behind the backs" of the producers, confronting each of them in the form of quantitative relations among the objects of their production over which they have no control.

> These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and action of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them. (Marx 72)

Commodity fetishism thus implies a condition of alienation similar to that described by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: "the object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer" (122). This alienation is not merely an illusion or appearance, but is rooted in the actual nature of commodity production.

The illusion implied by commodity fetishism is thus neither that human relations appear in the form of relations between things, nor that these relations between things appear, in turn, to dominate their human producers. These are both

expressions of the real, albeit distorted and inverted, nature of human relations in the commodity economy. Marx refers to these twin phenomena respectively as

> "[…] materialization of productive relations" and the "personification of things. Implicit in the commodity, and even more so in the commodity as a product of capital, is the materialization of the social features of production and the personification of the material foundations of production, which characterize the entire capitalist mode of production (880).

By the "materialization of productive relations" Marx refers to the fact that productive relations in the commodity economy are realized only through the mediation of things, and that these things, by functioning as the material entities by which and through which people enter into particular productive relations, acquire, as a consequence, a specific imprint or "social form." Historically, these social forms become sedimented as fixed and stable characteristics of the material elements of the production process. By the "personification of things" Marx means that the existence of things with such a determined social form enables, indeed compels, the owners of those things to enter into a determined form of productive relations with one another. Hence, as things acquire human form, humans are reduced to executing or "personifying" the social characteristics of the things in their possession (Lucio, 18). These twin processes constitute the underlying dialectic through which the reproduction of commodity relations takes place.

What Marx describes as the illusory aspect of commodity fetishism is the distorted manner in which this dialectic is experienced and apprehended from the standpoint of the individual producer. At this level, historically determined social relations of production take on, in the process of their materialization and

personification, an appearance of naturalness or inevitability. Productive relations, to the extent that they are manifested not as relations between persons but relations between things, appear to be rooted in the inherent properties of things as natural objects. The subordination of the commodity producer, to the extent that it takes the form of subordination to things rather than directly to other persons, appears therefore as subordination to the immutable laws of Nature. In short, under commodity fetishism the social form of things as commodities is equated with their natural existence as material objects, with the result that the particular social and historical relations which are mediated by those things acquire an illusion of permanence. In Marx's words:

> [F]etishism . . . metamorphoses the social, economic character impressed on things in the process of social production into a natural character stemming from the material nature of those things. (Marx, 225)

This collapsing of social characteristics into natural ones is a form of mystification which pertains not only to the commodity, but to each of the other material elements of the capitalist mode of production. The fetishism of commodities is merely the most abstract and universal instance of a more general and pervasive fetishism encompassing all aspects of capitalist relations of production. In Volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx applies the concept of fetishism to an analysis of the "Trinity Formula" of capital, land, and labor. Just as commodities acquire a specific social form in becoming values, so do the means of production acquire specific social forms as capital and landed property, and productive human activity a specific social form as wage-labor, as a result of the historically specific social relations in which they are embedded.

> [C]apital is not a thing, but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society, which is manifested in a thing and lends this thing a specific social character. . . . Wage-labor and landed property, like capital, are historically determined social forms; one of labor, the other of monopolized terrestrial globe, and indeed both forms corresponding to capital and belonging to the same economic formation of society. (814-16)

As in the case of commodities, these social forms which attach themselves to the material elements of the production process are, at once, a consequence of a determined form of productive relations, and, at the same time, a precondition for the reproduction of those productive relations. Here again, we encounter the dialectic of the "materialization of productive relations" and the "personification of things" – the mutual reproduction of material objects with a determined social form and social relations with determined material conditions.

> The capitalist process of production is a historically determined form of the social process of production in general. The latter is as much a production process of material conditions of human life as a process taking place under specific historical and economic production relations, producing and reproducing these production relations themselves, and thereby also the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence and their mutual relations, i.e., their particular socio-economic form[. . . .] Like all its predecessors, the capitalist process of production proceeds under definite material conditions, which are, however, simultaneously the bearers of definite social relations entered into by individuals in the process of reproducing their

> life. Those conditions, like these relations, are on the one hand prerequisites, on the other hand results and creations of the capitalist process of production; they are produced and reproduced by it. (818-19)

Marx thus distinguishes between the material existence of capital, land, and labor as elements of production in general and their historically determined social form as elements of capitalist production. From the fetishistic standpoint, however, this distinction is not apparent. To the individual confined within capitalist relations of production, the latter appear identical with the former, so that capitalist relations are apprehended as natural and inherent properties of the material elements of production.

To those in the grip of capitalist production relations wage-labor does not appear as a socially determined form of labor, but rather all labor appears by its nature as wage-labor.

> If labor as wage-labor is taken as the point of departure, so that the identity of labor in general with wage-labor appears to be self-evident, then capital and monopolized land must also appear as the natural form of the conditions of labor in relation to labor in general. To be capital, then, appears as the natural form of the means of labor and thereby as the purely real character arising from their function in the labor-process in general. Capital and produced means of production thus become identical terms. Similarly, land and land monopolized through private ownership become identical [. . . .] Their definite social character in the process of capitalist production bearing the stamp of a definite historical epoch [appears as] a natural and intrinsic substantive

> character belonging to them, as it were, from time immemorial, as elements of the production process. (824-25)

This identification of the social form of productive elements with their concrete material existence obscures the exploitative nature of capitalist relations of production. From this standpoint, profits, rent, and wages appear to grow directly out of the material role played by capital, land, and labor in the process of production. Each of these elements of production appears to generate, out of its own intrinsic nature, a corresponding form of revenue: capital produces profit; land produces rent; labor produces wages. The non-human means of production are thus endowed, no less than the human agents of production, with the generative capacity to produce value, and the distribution of value into the various forms of revenue appears simply as an expression of the material contribution of each element to the total product. In this manner, the social relations of surplus appropriation appear to inhere within the material nature of the production process, acquiring thereby an illusion of naturalness and inevitability.

> In capital-profit, or still better in capital-interest, land-rent, labor-wages, in this economic trinity represented as the connection between the component parts of value and wealth in general and its sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the conversion of social relations into things, the direct coalescence of the material production relations with their historical social determination [. . .] This formula simultaneously corresponds to the interests of the ruling classes by proclaiming the physical necessity and eternal justification of their sources of revenue and evaluating them to a dogma. (830)

Bourgeois political economy, which bases itself uncritically on the everyday conceptions of those entrapped within capitalist production relations, merely systematizes these ideological notions and perpetuates them within its conceptual framework. Marx's theory of commodity fetishism provides a critique of bourgeois ideology by penetrating the "estranged outward appearance" of capitalist social relations in a manner which reveals their underlying internal structure and which also accounts for their "inverted" appearance at the phenomenal level (831).

Most Marxist (and many non-Marxist) studies of social consciousness have been based on an instrumental conception of ideology. These studies have made important contributions to our understanding of social consciousness by documenting the manner in which the media, schools, advertising and other institutions of intellectual production are controlled by ruling groups and employed for the purpose of ideological domination general theory of ideology, however, this model has serious limitations. First, it presupposes a degree of unity and class consciousness among the ruling class that is empirically questionable. Second, it fails to explain why particular forms of ideological mystification occur rather than others. By treating ideologies as simple rationalizations of ruling-class interests, it tends toward a voluntaristic conception of ruling ideas as the freely created product of the ideologist's imagination. Third, it does not account for the receptiveness of subordinate classes to the ruling ideology, but tends to reduce the members of these classes to passive objects of manipulation. The instrumental theory is therefore subject to Marx's own critique in his famous *Theses on Feuerbach* of all theories which disregard the active element in human subjectivity or which restrict it to a privileged stratum of society (Marx and Engels, 107-109). Finally, the instrumental theory denies the "relative autonomy" of ideological practices by exaggerating the extent of ruling-class control over the means

of intellectual production. A degree of autonomy from direct and visible ruling-class control is, in fact, essential to the maintenance of a stable and effective legitimating ideology. Such autonomy confers upon the dominant ideology an appearance of neutrality and objectivity without which it would be neither effective as a means of mobilizing and "vindicating ruling-class action, nor resistant to delegitimation through the unmasking of its underlying instrumental basis" (Randall 45).

The theory of reification contained in Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism provides the necessary elements which are lacking in this instrumental conception of ideology. It accounts for "the illusory quality of social consciousness in a way which does not depend solely upon the deliberate actions of certain individuals to manipulate the ideas and beliefs of others" (Stuart 4). It locates the existence of specific forms of ideological consciousness in terms of their organic relationship to the social order which they represent and from which they derive. It preserves a dialectical conception of human individuals as simultaneously the subjects and objects of ideological mystification. And finally it illuminates the hidden structural dimensions of ideology formation which generate illusory representations of social reality while presenting an appearance of neutrality and objectivity. In this sense, Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism provides the basis for what may be described as a structural theory of ideology.

Consciousness, for example, Lukacs argues that fetishistic forms of consciousness are not restricted to commodity production, but that reification has become a universal characteristic of social consciousness in capitalist society. In a famous essay, Lukacs dissects the forms of "consciousness associated with bourgeois science, law, and philosophy and shows how each of these exhibit tendencies toward fetishism similar to those which are found in the sphere of commodity production"

(Lukacs 222). What is lacking in Lukacs account, however, is any analysis of the structural relationship between these specific forms of fetishism and their underlying existential basis. Arguing largely by analogy, Lukacs fails to show how these broader forms of reification are linked to the underlying social relations of capitalist society in a manner comparable to Marx's account of the origins of commodity fetishism. Instead, they are treated as purely derivative forms of reification – the product of an ill-defined "diffusion" of reification from commodity production to other social spheres. For Lukacs, capitalism is conceived as an expressive totality with reification as its essence. Within capitalism, reification functions as a "universal structuring principle" which "penetrates society in all its aspects," including human subjectivity itself.

> As the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man [. . .] It stamps its imprint on the whole of consciousness. (Lukacs, 93 and 100)

As the master principle of social and cognitive organization, ingrained upon the very structure of consciousness, reification is progressively extended to all spheres of social experience. The medium of this diffusion is described by Lukacs as a distinctive form of "rationality" which emphasizes abstract, quantitative calculability to the exclusion of other forms of human sensibility. At times this universalization of reification is equated with the extension of bureaucratic rationality as described by Weber. Elsewhere it is identified with the ascendance of positivism in modern science as criticized by Dilthey, Rickert, and Windelband. Apart from identifying these broad socio-cultural correlates of reification, however, Lukacs provides little analysis of the

concrete relationship between reified modes of consciousness and the specific social relations which produce and are reproduced by them. In order to move beyond this impressionistic application of the concept of reification, it is necessary to reaffirm Marx's notion of the structural basis of reification, conceived as a determinate relation between specific patterns of social organization and their phenomenal expression at the level of social consciousness. Using Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism as a model, two structural causes of reification can be identified. The first is a generalization of Marx's notion of the materialization of productive relations. Implicit in this notion is a distinction between two types of social relations. Social relations which are realized directly through communicative interaction (action which is oriented towards the reciprocal actions and expectations of other participants within a shared intersubjective framework) can be distinguished from those which originate in the instrumental actions of isolated individuals and are constituted as social relations only indirectly through the relations that are established between their technical means and objects.

Social relations of the first type presuppose a practical cognitive interest in the discursive validation of consensual norms of behavior. Social relations of the second type presuppose no such cognitive interest, but are grounded instead in the instrumental orientation of isolated actors who confront what appear to them as technical problems of selecting and applying appropriate means to individually defined ends. In the first instance the humanly constructed nature of the social relations is implicit in the action orientation of the participating subject and is therefore open to reflection, while in the second instance it is relatively obscured. The organization of social relations independently of communicative interaction thus

establishes the objective precondition for the reification of those social relations as beyond human control.

A second and related cause of reification is suggested by Marx's notion of the personification of things. With this notion Marx draws a direct connection between alienated forms of social practice and reified forms of social consciousness. Reified consciousness, like all forms of consciousness, is determined by the concrete life-activities of which it is a part. For Marx, knowledge of social relations is constructed in and through the actions which produce, maintain, and transform those social relations. To the degree that human agent's exercise autonomy over the production and reproduction of their social relations, the humanly produced nature of those relations will be readily accessible to them. On the other hand, when social actions are determined heteronomously, as an adaptive response to forces and circumstances over which the individual has no control, the dependence of social institutions on the ongoing constitutive actions of human subjects will be less accessible to consciousness. Reification can thus be viewed as a characteristic form of social consciousness under conditions of alienation and powerlessness.

Marx is not the only theorist to see a connection between powerlessness and reified forms of social consciousness. Piaget in his studies of child development notes the extreme reification of the young child's conception of the social world and attributes this to the underdevelopment of the infant's sense of autonomous subjectivity. Confronting a system of pre-existing, external, and frequently coercive social institutions, the infant views the ontological status of these as equivalent to that of natural objects. Names, for example, are understood as belonging to the intrinsic nature of things and emanating from them. Moral norms are projected onto the objective realm and understood as categorical imperatives. Such reification declines

as the child becomes increasingly autonomous of adult constraint and gains a stronger sense of his or her own subjectivity. Evidence for this view is provided by his finding that lack of control in the work situation is associated with the adoption of a fatalistic world view.

Combining these two elements, it can be said that reification should be most pronounced when social relations are an indirect product of the instrumental actions of isolated individuals and where the autonomy of the acting subject is severely constrained by social and material conditions which are beyond its control. Conversely, the humanly constructed nature of social relations should be more immediately present to consciousness where the social relations in question are realized through an explicit process of communicative interaction and where human subjects exercise some autonomy over the means and conditions of their actions. “The social relations of commodity production and exchange within an unregulated market economy provide the archetypal model of reified social relations” (Randall 55). As I shall argue in the following section, however, there are other spheres in contemporary capitalist society which exhibit similar characteristics and can also be fruitfully analyzed in terms of Marx's concept of reification.

The concept of reification used by Marx to describe a form of social consciousness in which human relations come to be identified with the physical properties of things, thereby acquiring an appearance of naturalness and inevitability gets a systematic reconstruction with an emphasis on the social-structural dimensions of the concept with his followers. This reconstruction differs both from the conceptions of reification that are found in non-Marxist sociology and from the interpretations of some of Marx's followers.

III. Textual Analysis

The Reification of Female Self in James's *The Portrait of a Lady*

The Portrait of a Lady explores the conflict between the individual and society by examining the life of Isabel Archer, a young American woman who must choose between her independent spirit and the demands of social convention. After

professing and longing to be an independent woman, autonomous and answerable only to herself, Isabel falls in love with and marries the sinister Gilbert Osmond, who wants her only for her money and who treats her as an object, almost as part of his art collection. The conflict between an attempt to reify a human being and regard her only from her exchange and sign exchange value culminates with Isabel's acceptance of this reification. Isabel's resistance cannot persist for a long time and very soon she succumbs to the created atmosphere of domination, commodification and alienation. The central interest novel resides in why Isabel, despite being a woman with a strong, independent and revolting will, succumbs to the societal norms and values and let her be commodified by Osmond.

In order to escape the conjugal slavery, a new cultural form of reification and a society's material reality that makes her surrender with it, the main character of The Portrait of a Lady is the tension between an individual's struggle to remain aloof from marriage the selling of the will and succumbing to the harsh reality of the society. The novel commences with the ultimate social custom, describing a bourgeoisie setting, the English tea ceremony, set amid a genteel landscape populated by good-natured, affectionate members of the high upper classes.

> […] there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not—some people of course never do—the situation is in itself delightful. (2)

This well-ordered and familiar scene, which has obviously been acted out by the three men involved a hundred times before, is then disturbed by the appearance of Isabel, who arrives amid a chaos of barking dogs and ruffled expectations. At once, Isabel is

at odds with the calm traditions of social convention, and the novel's thematic exploration is off to a strong start.

As the title of the novel indicates, Isabel is the principal character of the book, and the main focus of the novel is on presenting, explaining, and developing her character. It is the story of a spirited young American woman, Isabel Archer, who affronts her destiny and finds it overwhelming. She inherits a large amount of money and subsequently becomes the victim of Machiavellian scheming by two American expatriates.

James uses his creative powers to ensure that Isabel's conflict is the natural product of a believable mind, and not merely an abstract philosophical consideration. In brief, Isabel's independence of spirit is largely a result of her childhood, when she was generally neglected by her father and allowed to read any book in her grandmother's library; in this way, she supervised her own haphazard education and allowed her mind to develop without discipline or order. Her natural intelligence has always ensured that she is at least as quick as anyone around her, and in Albany, New York, she has the reputation of being a "formidable intellect" (36). Her understanding is shaped with a material credo: money which is

> […] a horrid thing to follow, but a charming thing to meet. It seems to me, however, that I've sufficiently proved the limits of my itch for it: I never in my life tried to earn a penny, and I ought to be less subject to suspicion than most of the people one sees grubbing and grabbing.(624)

This is the charm of money that helps make commoditization possible and helps shape her large legacy. The large legacy commences when Isabel travels the Continent and meets an American expatriate, Gilbert Osmond, in Florence. Although

Isabel had previously rejected both Warburton and Goodwood, she accepts Osmond's proposal of marriage. She is unaware that this marriage has been actively promoted by the accomplished but untrustworthy Madame Merle, another American expatriate, whom Isabel had met at the Touchetts' estate.

After she travels to England with her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, however, it becomes clear that Isabel has a woefully unstructured imagination, as well as a romantic streak that suits her position as an optimistic, innocent American. For James, throughout The Portrait of a Lady, "America is a place of individualism and naïveté, while Europe is a place of sophistication, convention, and decadence". Isabel often considers her life as though it were a novel (Robert L. 37).

She also has a tendency to think about herself obsessively and has a vast faith in her own moral strength—in fact, recognizing that she has never faced hardship, Isabel actually wishes that she might be made suffer, so that she could prove her ability to overcome suffering without betraying her principles. When Isabel moves to England, her cousin Ralph is so taken with her spirit of independence that he convinces his dying father to leave half his fortune to Isabel. This is intended to prevent her from ever having to marry for money. Her marriage to Osmond effectively stifles Isabel's independent spirit, as her husband treats her as an object and tries to force her to share his opinions and abandon her own. The reification that she wants to escape from hovers round her.

Her

> […] real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his-attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional

> nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching. (770)

This brims the thematic background of The Portrait of a Lady, and James skillfully intertwines the novel's psychological and thematic elements. Isabel's downfall with Osmond, for instance, enables the book's most trenchant exploration of the conflict between her desire to conform to social convention and her fiercely independent mind. Osmond's reluctance to regard her as an independent being and his will to take her as a property conflicts with Isabel's desire to lead a vibrant life. This conflict marks the central tension of the novel.

> He didn't wish her to be stupid. On the contrary, it was because she was clever that she had pleased him. But he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour, and so far from desiring her mind to be a blank he had flattered himself that it would be richly receptive (770).

It is also perfectly explained by the elements of Isabel's character: her haphazard upbringing has led her to long for stability and safety, even if they mean a loss of independence, and her active imagination enables her to create an illusory picture of Osmond, which she believes in more than the real thing, at least until she is married to him. Once she marries Osmond, Isabel's pride in her moral strength makes it impossible for her to consider leaving him: she once longed for hardship, and now that she has found it, it would be hypocritical for her to surrender to it by violating social custom and abandoning her husband.

> He had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences; and Isabel was obliged to

> confess that this was no great insolence on the part of a man so accomplished and a husband originally at least so tender. (770)

Most writers in the 19th century were concerned with the real world. Henry James felt that they sometimes concentrated too much on the surface of life. His own aim was to portray life from the inside. It is not but photographic realism that we find in his work. James also intertwines the novel's settings with its themes. Set almost entirely among a group of American expatriates living in Europe in the 1860s and 70s, the book relies on a kind of moral geography, in which America represents innocence, individualism, and capability; Europe represents decadence, sophistication, and social convention; and England represents the best mix of the two. Isabel moves from America to England to continental Europe, and at each stage she comes to mirror her surroundings, gradually losing a bit of independence with each move. The reification is in every running brook, every strata of the society. Eventually, she lives in Rome, the historic heart of continental Europe, and it is here that she endures her greatest hardship with Gilbert Osmond. The purpose of his novels is to explore the ways in which people see and relate to each other.

The International Theme was James's most famous subject- the meeting between America and Europe. Compared with Europe, America was still a new, innocent country. European subtleties of manners and morality evolved over many countries, baffled the visiting America who was accustomed to directness of behavior and simple notions of right and wrong. An unusual feature of the International Theme in his best novel, The Portrait of a Lady, is that the innocent American heroine does not find herself up against an assortment of sophisticated and corrupt Europeans; “she is deceived by corrupt Americans who live in Italy.” (Tonita 4)

James's method of telling Isabel Archer's story is to make her the central figure of the novel in which only her character is to be clearly shown. All other characters would

remain to some extent dim, undefined, obscured. The other characters are there to interact with her. Their function is to bring out her nature and provoke her mind to activity so that her qualities are revealed. James uses many of his most characteristic techniques in The Portrait of a Lady. In addition to his polished, elegant prose and his sedate, slow pacing, he utilizes a favorite technique of skipping over some of the novel's main events in telling the story. Instead of narrating moments such as Isabel's wedding with Osmond, James skips over them, relating that they have happened only after the fact, in peripheral conversations. This literary technique is known as ellipses. In the novel, James most often uses his elliptical technique in scenes when Isabel chooses to value social custom over her independence—her acceptance of Gilbert Osmond's proposal, their wedding, her decision to return to Rome after briefly leaving for Ralph's funeral at the end of the novel. James uses this method to create the sense that, in these moments, Isabel is no longer accessible to the reader; in a sense, by choosing to be with Gilbert Osmond, "Isabel is lost" (6).

While everything in the novel is aimed at the central situation, James moves toward the centre by exploring all the related matters. The structure could be best described by a series of circles-around the centre. Each circle is an event which illuminates the centre, but highlights only a part of it, the reification of Isabel. Each circle is then discussed by a series of characters. For example a character notices something and then goes to other character to discuss his observation. By the end of some conversations, the writer has investigated all of the psychological implications inherent in this particular situation. Whatever, might the confrontation bring the main concern is Isabel. Thus, by the end of the novel James has probed and examined every moral, ethical, and psychological aspect of the central situation, the reification of Isabel and the causes that provoke it.

Isabel is seen to spend a great deal of time thinking about herself and generally

accepts the idea that she is smarter than everyone around her in the opening section of the novel. James describes her as “remarkably active” (6). She has a powerful self- assurance and an extraordinary faith in her own goodness. She often wishes for hardship, so that she could demonstrate her ability to overcome it without losing her moral essence. Isabel often compares herself to her friend Henrietta Stackpole, who is even more independent than Isabel—she is a journalist for the New York *Interviewer* and professes not to believe in marriage.

> Her tendency, with this, was rather to keep the Interviewer out of the way of her daughters; she was determined to bring them up properly, and they read nothing at all. Her impression with regard to Isabel’s labours was quite illusory; the girl had never attempted to write a book and had no desire for the laurels of authorship. (83)

The main thematic conflict of the novel, the struggle between social convention and independence in the life of Isabel Archer, comes to a miniature climax when Isabel and Mrs. Touchett argue about whether Isabel should stay up talking to Ralph and Warburton without a chaperone. Isabel rebelliously wants to disregard custom and stay downstairs, but to Ralph's surprise, she docilely obeys Mrs. Touchett.

The implication is that for all that Isabel considers herself independent and seems independent to those around her, she also has a desire to fit in and will not routinely thwart social convention even when it grates her. In fact, Mrs. Touchett, who enforces social convention in this scene, is in many ways far more independent and rebellious than Isabel—after all, she is separated from her husband and lives alone in Florence, making her own decisions and forming her own opinions.

Lockleigh provides Isabel with her first glimpse of an upper-class European existence, and though she is frightened by Warburton's obvious romantic attraction to her. Isabel is always frightened by romance, since its end result—marriage—would curtail her independence and reify her, she is strangely attracted to the sedate and conventional life at the manor house. “She had often heard that the English are a highly eccentric people, and she had even read in some ingenious author that they are at bottom the most romantic of races” (138). Warburton's sisters, the Misses Molyneux, are not even individual enough to obtain first names in the novel; they are simply the height of conformity and convention, seeming placid, submissive, and thoughtless—exactly the opposite of what Isabel seems to want out of life. And yet Isabel likes them and even envies their lives.

While she is independent in her own mind, something in Isabel's character seems to crave stability, safety, and order—after all, the source of her independence, the anathema to reification, is her disorganized childhood, when she was given the run of her father's library but was largely neglected by any authority figure. This may have been a mixed blessing for Isabel: it made her intellectually independent, but also made her yearn to be cared for and protected. In a sense, the conflict Isabel experiences between independence and social convention is really an outward manifestation of this inner conflict between the freedom of self- confidence and the desire for security. Social independence is a manifestation of Isabel's self-confidence, but her general tendency to accept social convention is a manifestation of her desire for security.

For all her life, Isabel has thought of men not as social opportunities, but as moral creatures, whom she admired or disliked based strictly on their personal

qualities. With Lord Warburton, however, after having been attracted by the lives of the Misses Molyneux, Isabel suddenly has a powerful awareness that to marry into the English nobility would represent an extraordinary social opportunity. Of course Isabel eventually rejects this thought and then rejects Lord Warburton.

Henrietta's solution to this problem is that Isabel should marry Caspar Goodwood, the symbol of the American character. For all her commitment to independence, Isabel cannot seem to escape the tendency of those around her to conceive of her destiny in terms of marriage and romance: who Isabel is, even to the fiercely democratic Henrietta, is to some extent a question to be answered based on whom she chooses to marry. This trend is further exemplified by Mr. Touchett, who is glad that Isabel did not marry Warburton, and Mrs. Touchett, who wishes that she had decided to marry him. Despite regarding to Mr. Warburton as a good personage, an instinct, not imperious, but persuasive

> […] told her to resist—murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own. It told her other things besides- things which both contradicted and confirmed each other; that a girl might do much worse than trust herself to such a man and that it would be very interesting to see something of his system from his own point of view. (176)

She has already rejected Caspar once and then rejected Lord Warburton, but where those past experiences left her feeling confused or sad, this one leaves her feeling exultant and powerful, as though a weight has been lifted from her shoulders. Though Isabel is never entirely clear about what independence means to her exactly, clearly it implies a kind of personal autonomy that would be incompatible with a conventional marriage, in which the wife is expected to be

reified by her husband. By warding off three successive proposals, Isabel has demonstrated her commitment to her personal autonomy, even if she has only a vague idea of what she wants to do with her life.

Isabel's wealth and Merle's scheme to marry her to Gilbert Osmond becomes more and more obvious just as it remains entirely opaque to Isabel, who believes that Merle is her friend and that Osmond is the wonderful and brilliant man Merle says he is. To virtually every other character in the book, Osmond is unremarkable, pretentious, and selfish; Ralph dislikes him very strongly. But Merle presents Osmond to Isabel as one of the finest gentlemen in Europe, who has cast off the bonds of society and chosen to live for his art. Because Osmond also seems cleverer than Isabel, her romantic side is deeply drawn to him.

Osmond treats people as objects, or reifies them; he allows Merle to remain in his life because she is so useful—manipulating Isabel into marrying him, for example. This is why Merle worries about what she will have done to Isabel's life by causing her to marry Osmond: she is not entirely without conscience, and she recognizes Osmond's cruelty to others better than anyone. However, she is still subject to her feelings for Osmond and is willing to endure the guilt to help him acquire his fortune.

> Mr. Osmond, in his walk, had gone back to the open door again and was looking at his daughter as she moved about in the intense sunshine. ‘What good will it do me?’ he asked with a sort of genial crudity. Madame Merle waited. ‘It will amuse you.’ There was nothing crude in this rejoinder; it had been thoroughly well considered. (419)

The extent to which Merle is willing to go to control her social schemes is evident especially by the deft way in which Merle manipulates her friend and patroness, Mrs. Touchett. Mrs. Touchett would protect Isabel from Osmond if she could, but because Merle, whom she trusts, promises to dissuade Osmond from pursuing Isabel, Mrs. Touchett does nothing. As a result, Merle is able to keep Mrs. Touchett from disrupting her scheme while making Mrs. Touchett believe that Merle is doing her a favor.

Isabel's trip to Rome brings about a moment of romantic entanglement, as she encounters Osmond, the man she is falling in love with, while sightseeing with Warburton, the man who loves her. This entanglement has no direct consequence, but serves the larger purpose of keeping Warburton in Isabel's life and allowing the reader to see that he still loves her.

Isabel's primary romantic hangup has been her desire to protect her independence from the social constraints of a marriage. Both Goodwood and Warburton have wanted something very specific from her—marriage—which has left her terrified. But Osmond cleverly declares his love to Isabel without proposing to her. He tells her that he does not want anything from her; he simply wants to tell her how he feels to relieve the pressure of keeping his passion a secret. By presenting his love for Isabel in such a way as to leave her freedom unthreatened, Osmond circumvents Isabel's usual defensive reaction against any man attempting to win her heart.

Though she feels slightly troubled after their conversation, and though she cannot immediately fathom giving herself to Osmond, Isabel does begin to conceive of that as an end goal, thinking that if only she could cross the difficult

country before her, she could love him. Isabel has been defined by her love of independence throughout the novel.

Interestingly, Ralph is one of Isabel's staunchest defenders during her courtship with Osmond, during which every other character worries that Isabel will fall in love with him. Ralph always insists that Isabel is too intelligent to be taken in by Osmond's arrogance and narcissistic charm. Though he is always right when judging other characters, the great love Ralph feels for Isabel gives him something of a blind spot with regard to her; he simply has too much faith in her at this stage of the book.

Ralph's great hope is for Isabel to remain independent, and he believes that that is her primary goal as well. But Ralph has overlooked Isabel's latent romantic streak, which has been apparent to the reader throughout the novel—she tends to imagine her life as though it is a story, and she loves to imbue the people and places around her with the qualities of a novel or a play. As a result of this overactive imagination, she is able to construct a façade of Osmond in her own mind that she comes to believe in, essentially ignoring Osmond's real character. Ralph thinks too highly of Isabel to imagine her indulging such naïveté, and as a result he commits one of his only significant lapses in judgment in the novel, refusing to speak to Isabel about his suspicions of Osmond and Madame Merle.

When Isabel was being courted by Lord Warburton, she was attracted to the life of his sisters, even though it seemed to contradict everything she claimed to want. The Misses Molyneux were docile, thoughtless, and passive, where Isabel wanted to be independent, intelligent, and active, and yet she admired them and even envied them. Here, she has exactly the same response to Pansy, Gilbert Osmond's stifled daughter.

Osmond has monstrously limited his daughter's education, squelched her independence, and essentially imprisoned her in a convent for many years solely to make her the person he wanted her to be—someone who was slavishly loyal to him and whose first thought was to his comfort and happiness. Pansy is a sweet-natured, passive, and tragic figure who is barely able to conceive of life outside her father's opinions and desires. But Isabel is drawn to Pansy, and though she will later come to pity and protect her, in this section she is basically attracted to the security and apparent normalcy of her life. Again, we see that Isabel's scattered upbringing, her patchy relationship with her own father, and her haphazard education, while they may have contributed to her desire for independence, also left her with a repressed inner yearning for the kind of security and comfort she sees in the lives of Pansy and the Misses Molyneux.

After Osmond declares his love for Isabel, the narrative begins to break up slightly, skipping over sections of the plot and jumping ahead through short intervals in time. Because Isabel's relationship with Osmond seems to cause a kind of disintegration in her own life, this narrative disintegration is appropriate to its subject matter. It also finds James beginning to employ the elliptical method he demonstrated in Isabel's first conversation with Caspar Goodwood, skipping over certain events and periods of development in Isabel's life.

Isabel talks to Osmond about Warburton's interest in Pansy and then thinks deeply about her strained relationship with Osmond, we finally see Isabel's painful marriage through her own eyes. Essentially, Isabel has realized what Ralph, Henrietta, and the reader realized from the beginning, that Osmond would force her to conform to social convention at the expense of her independent spirit; she has at last seen through the romantic façade of Osmond that she created for

herself and realized that his life is defined by social posing, a desire for other people to confirm his high opinion of himself and a desire to extract servitude and pleasure from everyone he can with no regard for their feelings.

Despite this realization, Isabel remains committed to her marriage and to the idea of being a good and dutiful wife. This may be hard for many readers to understand; having already seen the positive example of Mrs. Touchett, readers may be inclined to think that Isabel should just leave Osmond and live happily. There are essentially three reasons why the circumstance is not so simple.

> It seemed to Isabel that if she could make it her duty to bring about such an event she should play the part of a good wife. She wanted to be that; she wanted to be able to believe sincerely, and with proof of it, that she had been that. Then such an undertaking had other recommendations. It would occupy her, and she desired occupation. (739)

First, despite the example of Mrs. Touchett, the idea and ideal of marriage in 1873 was far more rigid and powerful than it is today; divorce was looked upon as a scandalous disgrace, and marriage vows were treated as sacred oaths to be taken literally. Isabel entered into her marriage with this understanding of it; she did not consider, as most people do today, that if her marriage went poorly, she would end it. Second, Isabel has always prided herself on her moral strength—remembers that earlier in the novel; she wished that she would encounter hardship in her life, so that she could prove to herself that she could overcome suffering without losing her moral identity. Now she has found hardship, and her pride insists that she confront it and not shrink from it. To leave Osmond would represent a kind of moral capitulation to Isabel, and she cannot imagine making

such an admission of defeat. This is what makes her commodify her self. Isabel legitimately loves and pities Pansy and considers it her duty to remain with the Osmonds to try to help Pansy in whatever way she can.

The difficulty of her current entanglement, then, is that her desire to help Pansy is directly at odds with her commitment to become a dutiful wife for Osmond, no matter how much she hates him. In a sense, Isabel's moral identity has fractured into two competing sides. One side says that Warburton wants to marry Pansy for the wrong reasons and that Pansy and Rosier love each other; therefore, Isabel should discourage Warburton and help Pansy and Rosier. The other side says that her duty is to do whatever her husband desires, and therefore she should help Osmond marry Pansy to Warburton, regardless of Pansy's feelings and Warburton's motives.

Marriage is a social contract, and this conflict represents a severe recurrence of the struggle within Isabel between individual desire and social convention: Isabel's personal conscience tells her to help Pansy, but her social conscience tells her to help her husband. The individual Isabel stands with independence whereas the social custom stands as its anathema, in order to reify her. As a result, Isabel oscillate first promising Osmond that she will help him and then discouraging Warburton and promising Rosier that she will help him. Almost at the end, Isabel seems to be acting based on her personal feelings at the expense of her perceived social duty; whether this state of affairs will hold, however, remains to be seen.

Osmond has emerged as a sinister, even monstrous character, treating other people (especially women) as objects, stifling his wife, shamelessly using Madame Merle for his own benefit, and even basing his daughter's upbringing on

his desire for her to be devoted and obedient only to him. He has exhibited bizarre and unsavory ideas, such as his claim to Isabel that married women all lie and cheat on their husbands, as his sister does.

Osmond's self-absorption and ominous quality of mind come out in a new way: his increasing paranoia. Deeply threatened that his wife, rather than being a reflection of him, seems to have ideas of her own—and possibly recognizing that Isabel is more intelligent and charismatic than he is, and furthermore that his social status is based on his access to money that belongs to her—he begins to harbor dark fantasies that she is consciously working against him and that her goal in life is to thwart his desires.

In a sense, this paranoia is the flipside of Osmond's desire for other people to admire him; he assumes that other people are as obsessed with him as he is obsessed with himself, so that when they do not adore him, he suspects that they are working against him. Isabel's love for Pansy comes to the fore when, at the height of Gilbert's paranoid rage, she walks coolly out of the room, not feeling sorry for herself, but feeling deeply sorry for her stepdaughter.

And so, in the end, social convention seems to win out over American individualism and independence: Isabel returns to her agonizing marriage with Osmond, and even Henrietta decides to marry Mr. Bantling. Isabel's decision to return to Rome and to her husband is based on a variety of factors, each of which has been set up by the preceding chapters: her devotion to Pansy, her pride, her moral commitment to doing her duty even in times of suffering, her fear of the emotionally overwhleming Caspar Goodwood. They all succumb to a soiciety’s red teeth, the reification. Ralph and Henrietta have been the staunchest champions of her independence and her freedom, and they each lose their voices—Ralph

because he dies and Henrietta because she decides to give up her own independence in order to marry Bantling.

The novel solves its driving mysteries, then definitively resolves its main conflict—social convention defeats individual freedom by means of reification in a way that is not quite tragic and not quite morally inspiring—and then puts its story to rest. James's remarkable portrait of Isabel Archer has shown her development from an innocent, independent, optimistic young girl to a mature woman who has suffered and learned to commit herself to be reified.

IV. The Commoditization of a Woman's Self

The novel focuses on the fuzziness of Isabel's thinking about her own independence, especially about the lack of direction she seems to experience and her confusion about how to treat her own autonomy. After rejecting Warburton, for instance, Isabel decides to do something remarkable with her life, but she never decides what it will be, and instead simply goes on a vacation with Mrs. Touchett and Madame Merle. Isabel can not escape from the tradition, and submits herself to the society's convention.

The novel explores the conflict between individualism and social convention; James ensures that Isabel has a conscious commitment to individualism, but an unconscious desire for the comfort, safety, and stability of social custom. Isabel's upbringing was haphazard, and her father often left her to herself; this gave her a sense of intellectual independence, but it also made her long for a more secure environment. Additionally, Isabel's active imagination was nourished by her self-directed education in her grandmother's library. When she meets Gilbert Osmond, Isabel is attracted to the stability and direction his life seems to offer her, and her imagination enables her to overlook his obvious flaws—his arrogance, his narcissism, and his cruelty—and to create her own idyllic picture of him.

James presents with a tragic tale of a woman choosing her own destiny and learning to live with it despite the consequences. Isabel, who at the beginning of the book is referred to by her aunt as a clever girl – with a strong will and high temper, is a young woman of enormous possibility like the modern America for which she is a metaphor. Isabel desires nothing more or less than freedom. By the

conclusion of the novel, Isabel has come to the realization that freedom and maturity are perhaps best defined as the acceptance of one's destiny.

Written at what many critics consider the zenith of James's career, the novel deals with profound questions such as the extent to which Isabel's situation can be viewed as tragic; and the emotional cost of simply living one's life. These ideas are embedded in moments of true feeling, such as in the final scene between Isabel and the dying Ralph, where the emotional restraint Isabel has shown throughout the better part of the story explodes in a sudden redemptive and cathartic moment. Despite her effort to remain an independent lady, Isabel eventually submits her self to a male. This reification marks the excellence of the novel.

Works Cited

Berger, Peter and Stanley Pullberg. "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness." *New Left Review.* 1966.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. , New York Garden City. 1966.

Blackburn, Robin. (Eds.), *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action* Penguin. Penguin. 1969.

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books. 1976.

Braverman, Harry. *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 1974.

Colletti, Lucio. *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 1972.

Collins, Randall. "Functional and conflict theories of educational stratification." *American Sociological Review*, 1971.

Geras, Norman. "Marx and the Critique of Political Economy." In Robin Blackburn (Ed.), *Ideology in Social Science*, New York: Vintage. 1973.

Gordon Marshall. "Reification *A Dictionary of Sociology*. *Encyclopedia.com.* 10 Jan. 2010.

James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979.

Leibowitz, Naomi. "Magic and Metamorphosis in The Golden Bowl" (1965). In Tony Tanner (ed.), *Henry James: Modern Judgements*. London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1970.

Lukacs, Georg *History and Class Consciousness*. London: Merlin. 1971.

Marx, Karl *Early Writings*. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1964.

- - - *Capital*, Vol. 1. New York: International Publishers. 1967.

- - - *Capital*, Vol. 2. New York: International Publishers. 1967.

- - - *Capital*, Vol. 3. New York: International Publishers. 1967.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers. 1970.

Michael T. Gilmore. “The Commodity World of *The Portrait of a Lady*”

The New England Quarterly, 1986.

Seeman, Melvin "On the meaning of alienation." *American Sociological Review*, New

York 1957: 3

Vanspankeren, Francis. "The Portrait of a Lady". New Statesman, 2nd February 1968: 24.