

**Tribhuvan University**

**Culture Commodifying Human in Henry James' *The Spoils of Poynton***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the**

**Degree of Masters of Arts in English**

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**March 2016**

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## **Acknowledgements**

**I am much indebted to my honorable Prof. Dr. Ram Chandra Paudel of Central Department of English, who as my advisor provided perpetual guidance and scholarly suggestions to give the final shape to this thesis. Without his constant supervision and intellectual guidance, this project never has been appeared in its present form.**

**Similarly, I would like to express my cordial gratitude to Pro. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, Head of the Central Department of English, for providing me the working area. My sincere thanks to all respected teachers of English Department for their good suggestion whenever I approached.**

**Additionally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my respected teacher Mr. Krishna Sapkota and Mr. Shankar Subedi for their special guidance while preparing thesis proposal and advice while writing this thesis. I owe many thanks to Tika Chalise who helped me to search the related materials in library and computer.**

**I am much indebted to my Parents, for their financial support, love, encouragement and environment they have created for my study. Finally, my sincere thanks go to all those friends who helped directly or indirectly to prepare this thesis.**

**Jagadeesh Bhatta**

**March, 2016**

## Abstract

This research looks into Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton* from the perspective of Neo Marxism. The late capitalism is essential to address the exploitation of capitalism as mode of oppression is also changed in the society. Human emotion and sacred social institutions like marriage are commodified in the era of late capitalism. Economic concern and other pragmatic consideration have become so pressing and overpowering that people are almost bound to forget sanctity of human feelings and sentiments. Both Owen and Mona treat marriage as commodity which can be trade and transacted with money. They count it in monetary terms. It is just a tool to make money and create solid financial prospect in their lives. In the novel Mona is dismissive of her mother-in-law's aesthetic pursuit and passion. Her mother in law had spent lots of her energy and youths to collect different types of artifacts and artworks. Her dedication to artistic pursuit and passion is memorable. But her daughter in law is highly dismissive of her dedication to art, and aesthetics. Mona sees only the utility in the objects of aesthetic works. She goes to the extent of burning Mrs. Gereth's souvenirs assuming that they have no practical and pragmatic worth. The commodified interest of both Owen and Mona match. So they live. Before they decide to live together, they had made up their mind to avoid sexual entanglement. But as their nuptial life continues, they violate all such terms and conditions.

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#### **IV. Crisis in Human Relation in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton***

This research examines how social institutions like marriage and human emotions and affections are increasingly commodified in the late capitalistic society. Henry James' *The Spoils of Poynton* is illustrative of this sort of harsh reality regarding to the shifting nature of human emotions and social institutions in the late capitalistic society. This project focuses on James' *The Spoils of Poynton*, the story of love and romance in general and commodification of marriage in particular. The novel seems to be dealing with the theme of love, romance and marriage in its surface, leaving space for a Marxist literary analysis. In particular, this project exposes the issues of commodification culture. The late capitalist era has commodified humans in terms of monetary value devoid of spirituality. In spite the fact the Owen is the son of Mrs. Gereth, Mrs. Gereth plots a conspiracy to acquire the property through Fleda.

Fleda and Mrs. Gereth are friends and she wants Fleda to get married with Owen so that she will be able to achieve the property which likely to get transferred in the name of Owen. Fleda gets commodified in the hand of Mrs. Gereth and Owen for the property. Drawing upon Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's idea on Dialectics of Enlightenment. This study claims that the main characters of the story are influenced by contemporary capitalistic society. Commodification of human relation, theft, greed, disharmony and detachment with society are the result of capitalism.

This project makes significant contribution in the field of critical concern. Firstly, this study analyses the capitalistic features in *The Spoils of Poynton*, people's attachment with material culture, unbalanced in their passionate and lastly this study makes a significant theoretical representation of commodification, disharmony and detachment with society of capitalistic discourse.

Social life and politics are everywhere increasingly market-driven. This is in part the result of “the impersonal pressures of the global economy; in part the outcome of political policy-making inspired by neo-liberal ideology, encouraged and assisted by such bodies as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund”(87). It has been well said that neoliberalism’s ascendancy has been associated with the political construction of markets. It coupled with the deliberate extension of competitive logics and privatized management into hitherto relatively socialized spheres.

Non-market areas of social life are transformed into markets. This involves commodification and profit-making. This marketization involves a series of transformations. Goods or services are reconfigured so that they can be priced and sold. People are induced to want to buy them. The motivation of the workforce producing or providing them is redirected from collective aims. It is orientated to the service ethic to profit-seeking and market discipline. But if politics is ever more market-driven, the market is, in turn, politically driven. Neo liberalization is itself state-sponsored when capital moves into a previously non-market sphere.

This research analyses social complexities in capitalistic culture through the theoretical framework of Neo-Marxism developed by the Neo-Marxist like Theodore Adorno in his book, *Negative Dialectics* In the book, it is stated that "The self-destruction of western reason as grounded in a historical and fateful dialectic between the domination of external nature and society" (34). They argue that a certain ambivalence concerning the ultimate source or foundation of social domination.

Marxist notion of commodification is therefore also about political goals and action. Obviously very few people in western society today accept this second set of ideas. Most seem to think capitalism is desirable; most do not want to see it destroyed and most do not

like the idea of revolution or communism. Terry Eagleton throws spotlight upon the doctrine of Marx. Eagleton's view is mentioned in the following way:

Society is not completely helpless against the potential destruction of land, labor, and money caused by liberal forces. Despite Polanyi's diagnosis that the historical transformation of western societies into market systems is complete, he also claims that the concept of a self-regulating market was utopian, and its progress was stopped by the realistic self-protection of society. Two forces were clashing. For a better tomorrow Polanyi was betting on the protective movement formed against the forces of liberalism, fighting for the preservation of the social interests imperiled by the market. (169)

In a capitalist society, capitalists own and control the productive resources, workers own only their labor and work for capitalists, who then own the product and sell it at a profit. The key to understand a society at any point in history is to focus first on the mode of production. In a feudal society, land was the crucial productive factor and the feudal lords owned and controlled it. In capitalist society capital, machinery, mines, factories etc. are the key productive factors and these are owned and controlled by capitalists.

The primary objective of the study is to explore disharmony and negative effect of capitalism on human relation through critical analysis of characters Mrs. Gereth, Owen, Fleda and Mona in the novel, *The Spoils of Poynton*. Similarly this study also aims to show people's attachment with materialistic culture in the western world. By doing so, this study explores the true picture of capitalistic society where people do not care about family relation, spirituality and longs to boost their fondness for luxury and physical comfort.

This dissertation seeks to answer the questions like why does James emphasizes on the strong dispute between Mrs. Gereth and her son Owen regarding Poynton park. The present researcher assumes that James's *The Spoils of Poynton* portrays commodification of

human in capitalistic culture. It also presumes that, the writer tries to show the relation among people of contemporary society is highly influenced by capitalistic culture which commodifies the human emotion. The graceful norm of human beings is devoid of spirituality.

Lewis Dabney praises James's novels in terms of subject matter and method of treatment. According to Dabney, the most important thing about James's style is the use of discursive style in which various sentences are embedded. Dabney expresses the following view about *The Spoils of Poynton*:

Beyond his fiction, James was one of the more important literary critics in the history of the novel. He argued against rigid proscriptions on the novelist's choice of subject and method of treatment. He maintained that the widest possible freedom in content and approach would help ensure narrative fiction's continued vitality. James wrote many valuable critical articles on other novelists which has been the subject of critical debate. (27)

Notion of individual freedom is manipulated in most of the popular works of James. This aspect of narrative stylistic is emblematic of James's struggle with Hawthorne's influence, and constituted an effort to place the elder writer at a disadvantage.

Victoria Coulson is interested in James' portrayal of female characters in his novels in general and *The Spoils of Poynton* in particular. She is of the opinion that almost all the female characters are portrayed vividly in *The Spoils of Poynton*. Coulson briefly throws light of James' mode of character portraiture in the following excerpt:

Women were hugely important to Henry James, both in his vividly drawn female characters and in his relationships with female relatives and friends. Combining biography with literary criticism and theoretical inquiry, James explores human relationships with three of the most important women in *The*

*Spoils of Poynton*. Their affinity for a certain form of literary representation seems to be ambivalent. *The Spoils of Poynton* draws on a diverse range of sources from fiction, autobiography, theatre reviews, travel writing, private journals and correspondence. (4)

The unknown and unexamined aspects of human relationship are presented in *The Spoils of Poynton*. Only in the known and normal atmosphere, the reality about human relationship can be known. When different context can condition arise, the ethos of older relationship begin to fall apart. The emotion and norm that bind human relation tightly begin to falter when situation takes a dramatic turn. In the novel, *The Spoils of Poynton*, this reality is probed with a great deal of critical awareness.

Joseph Wiesenfarth demonstrates the basics of a Jamesian novel in *The Spoils of Poynton*. The following extract adds more clarity to this aspect of the novel:

It harbors a butler who quietly in the dead of night drinks himself unconscious in the wine-cellar. This novel of lights and shades, impressions and trepidations is simply unusual. Nevertheless, it ends with a beautiful flavor, ripe and rare, rich with opulence, hanging diminuendo. Needless to say, this rare and ripe flavor diminishes and dies away. It has nothing to do with fresh bread or juicy oranges. (57)

Wells's assessment of James is based on the actual content of the novel. James's own professed notion of what fiction is and how it works is tested and transformed. It is the literary practice that can test the relevance and reliability of literary theory. Wells's defense of life at the expense of art is a bit unacceptable to readers of James' time.

Leon Edel is of the conviction that Europe and America coexist in some of the representative novels of James. The reason behind the process of juxtaposition is not clear.

The issue of expatriation is foiled by the choice of this narrative technique. Edel clarifies his view in the following citation:

More important for his work overall may have been his position as an expatriate and in other ways an outsider, living in Europe. While he came from middle-class and provincial he worked very hard to gain access to all levels of society, and the settings of his fiction range from working class to aristocratic and often describe the efforts of middle-class Americans to make their way in European capitals. He confessed he got some of his best story ideas from gossip at the dinner table or at country house weekends. He worked for a living, however, and lacked the experiences of select schools, university, and army service, the common bonds of masculine society. (16)

As claimed by Edel, James's tastes and interests are not in keeping with the prevailing standards of Victorian era Anglo-American culture. On the contrary, it is rather feminine. It is shadowed by the cloud of prejudice. It is accompanied suspicions of his homosexuality.

Susan Gunter dwells upon James's style which suits the didactically orientated message and content. Gunter clarifies the following point in connection with the style of James:

James' evolving literary style and artistic intentions mirrored the transition from the Victorian to the modern era in English literature. His early fiction followed the realistic conventions of the French and Russian novelists he admired, while his later work became notoriously complex. James was one of the first major novelists to utilize modernist, stream-of-consciousness techniques, and he perfected an aesthetic approach that eschewed a conventional omniscient narrative voice, arguing that the novelist's craft

required a revelatory process of showing rather than a didactic act of telling.

(23)

As contended by Susan Gunter, *The Spoils of Poynton* is also a masterly technical achievement by James, as it follows the title character from earliest childhood to precocious maturity. It is not surprising from the book's title that knowledge and education form a major theme in it. Her keen observation of the irresponsible behavior of almost all the adults she lives with eventually persuades her to rely on her most devoted friend.

James is taken by James Kraft as the leading voice of trans-Atlantic literature. This voice serves as the guiding principle in the time in which the dominating influence of European culture had gained upper hand. Kraft gives expression to the following view about James:

James is one of the major figures of trans-Atlantic literature, which is to say that his works frequently juxtapose characters from different worlds—the Old World (Europe), simultaneously artistic, corrupting, and alluring; and the New World where people are often brash, open, and assertive—and explore how this clash of personalities and cultures affects the two worlds. He favored internal, psychological drama, and his work is often about conflicts between imaginative protagonists and their difficult environments. (31)

The act of writing to James was a highly delicate operation. Though *The Spoils of Poynton* is not a perfect book, it is filled with James' elaborate literary feats. The novel is also a thoroughgoing condemnation of parents and guardians abandoning their responsibilities towards their children. James saw English society as becoming more corrupt and decadent. *The Spoils of Poynton* is one of his harshest indictments of those who cannot be bothered to live responsible lives.

Paul Lauter makes an extensive study of Henry James's representative novels. In these novels of James, characters suffer due to their exposure to wickedness and vices. When characters are irreparably trapped in the piles of wickedness, James proposes corrective measures. Lauter's cursory view is presented below:

James novels are a repeated exposure of this wickedness, a reiterated and passionate plea for the fullest freedom of development, unimperilled by reckless and barbarous stupidity. His earlier work is considered realist because of the carefully described details of his characters' physical surroundings. But, throughout his long career, James maintained a strong interest in a variety of artistic effects and movements. His work gradually became more metaphorical and symbolic as he entered more deeply into the minds of his characters. In its intense focus on the consciousness of his major characters, James's later work foreshadows extensive developments in twentieth century fiction. (17)

James uses this dichotomy to advance the plot making *The Spoils of Poynton* a mystery. Since the main character is a child trapped between two divorced parents, this book also becomes a tragedy and elicits a meditation on how the adult world must confuse children making it hard to distinguish between manipulation and genuine caring.

The nature of prose in *The Spoils of Poynton* is examined and evaluated by Allan Wade. James's prose, according to Wade, is tainted with the quality of digression. Wade contends that James uses every style except plain prose. Wade rejoins:

The prose of James's later works is frequently marked by long, digressive sentences that defer the verb and include many qualifying adverbs, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses. James seemed to change from a fairly straightforward style in his earlier writing to a more elaborate manner in his later works. Biographers have noted that the change of style occurred at

approximately the time that James began dictating his fiction to a secretary.

Henry James was afflicted with a mild stutter. (16)

James believes that good writing should resemble the conversation of an intelligent man. The process of dictating his works may perhaps account for a shift in style from direct to conversational sentences. The resulting prose style is at times baroque. He overcame this by cultivating the habit of speaking very slowly and deliberately.

Rosella Mamoli postulates that James's *The Spoils of Poynton* adopts dialogic mode apart from narrative and reflective mode. The fusion of most of narrative pattern gives extra appeal and allure to this novel. Mamoli's view is cited in the following extract:

Sometimes James's dialogue is just awful. Especially when he falls back on the form of one person saying something vague but slightly ominous, his dialogue tends to be complicated. The next repeats the same thing in the form of a question, usually asking who it was directed. The first then repeats the phrase, perhaps making it even vaguer, but adding a pronoun at the end with emphasis. The second person, the repeats the sentence again, but changes the pronoun. He does this shit again and again, and it gets old and tiresome. (19)

As postulated by Mamoli, *The Spoils of Poynton* is plotted after the motif of the education and moral development of one character. Prose is in keeping with the character development. It puts his other works to shame for their ambiguity. The narrator is in every scene from the beginning where James portrays her observations.

Robert Bernard reveals the hidden theme of the double consciousness of those women who are unknowingly conscious of the growing effects of passionate upsurge. *The Spoils of Poynton* is a case in point. Due to the excessive sobriety of James, the doctrine of humanity can hardly be used in the analysis of *The Spoils of Poynton*. The narrator has lost the grace

and benefit of coherent consciousness. She is prone to double consciousness. Bernard opines the following views:

*The Spoils of Poynton* addresses unexamined and unexplored dimension of human relation in the wake of irresistible materialistic forces. The protagonist may be intelligent and educated, but he can also be terribly immature and irrational. In allowing himself to be overwhelmed by greed and his mistress' whim, he forgets his minimum filial duty. He is seemingly irrational. There is no stability and integrity in the entire gamut of endeavors and thoughts. (37)

Bernard traces the similarity proximity between authorial life and the individual life of protagonist. Extreme self-centric and egoistic consciousness harms his conscience. *The Spoils of Poynton* is obviously an example of fiction which is tainted with naturalistic fever.

Although all these critics and reviewers have examined this novel from different points of view and then arrived at several findings and conclusions, none of them has noticed the issue of commodification. In Henry James' *The Spoils of Poynton*, how human emotions, affections and sacred tie of feelings are commodified. In the society where commercialization and industrialization have gained massive foothold, the fate and future of financially weak people remain bleak. Even the prosperous people are devoid of any affection, emotion and grace of humanity. Everything is cast into the mold of monetary values. It is the adverse situation created by economic hardship that compels people to exchange feelings and emotions with monetary worth. The financial concern lies behind the rapid commodification of human feelings and sentiments. Even the sacred social institution like marriage becomes the means to secure financial stability and prosperity. The impact of low pay, job dissatisfaction, exploitation and various other evils of mercantile capitalism has spoiled the emotional strength and vitality of characters. Since, the topic of the

commodification of human emotions, affection and subjectivity is untouched and unexplored; the researcher claims that it is the fresh, new and original topic.

The researcher makes use of the theory of Marxism and neo Marxism to probe into the issue of proletarians as others. Marxism has had its main influence among workers and intellectuals in capitalist countries. In the Western countries, even non-Marxist intellectuals, particularly sociologists and historians, have drawn considerable insights from Marx's writings. In the Third World, Marxism—considerably modified to deal with their special mixture of primitive and advanced capitalist conditions—has clarified the nature of the enemy for many liberation movements. Terry Eagleton says that “Marx’s dialectical approach to it insures that his fuller subject is always capitalist society. The actual changes that occur in history are seen here as the outcome of opposing tendencies, or contradictions”(54). Marx's dialectic is materialist. Marx was primarily concerned with capitalism as lived rather than as thought about, but people's lives also involve consciousness.

Marx's materialism puts ideas back into the heads of living people. In this interaction, social conditions and behavior are found to have a greater effect on the character and development of people's ideas than these ideas do on social conditions and behavior. Lukacs contends that “Marx's specific theories are best understood as answers to his pointed questions about the nature and development of capitalism. In the theory of alienation, Marx gives us his answer to this question. Workers in capitalist society do not own the means—machines, raw materials, factories”(37). These are owned by the capitalists to whom the workers must sell their labor power or ability to do work, in return for a wage.

This system of labor displays four relations that lie at the core of Marx's theory of alienation. The worker is alienated (or cut off) from his or her productive activity. The capitalist also sets the conditions and speed of work and even decides if the worker is to be allowed to work or not. According to Marx, “The worker is alienated from the product of

that activity, having no control over what is made or what happens to it. The worker is alienated from other human beings, with competition and mutual indifference replacing most forms of cooperation”( German Ideology 213). This applies not only to relations with the capitalists but also to relations between individuals inside each class as everyone tries to survive as best he can.

The worker is alienated from the distinctive potential for creativity and community. Through labor which alienates them from their activity, workers gradually lose their ability to develop the finer qualities. The worker's products “pass from one hand to another, changing form and names along the way—value, commodity, capital, interest , rent wage—depending chiefly on who has them and how they are used”( *The Reflection on Marxism* 141). The worker has constructed the necessary conditions for reproducing his own alienation. The world that the worker has made and lost in alienated labor reappears as someone else's private property. Marx's main examples of alienation are drawn from the life of workers. Other classes are also alienated to the degree that they share or are directly affected by these relations.

Concerning how Marxist critics apply the perspective of Marxism in order to interpret literary text, Lois Tyson says “Marx thought that the system of production was the most basic fact in social life. Workers created the value of manufactured goods, but owners of the factories reaped most of the economic rewards. In order to justify and rationalize this inequity, a system of understandings or ideology was created”(85). Capitalists justified their taking the lion's share of the rewards by presenting themselves as better people. Since literature is consumed the most part, by the middle classes, it tends to support capitalist ideology. Marxist critics interpret literature in terms of ideology. Writers who sympathize with the working classes and their struggle are regarded favorably. Writers who support the ideology of the dominant classes are condemned. Theorists of the Marxist school differ in

breadth and sympathy the way other critics do. Some Marxist interpretations are more subtle than others.

This thesis will have three chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher introduces the topic, elaborates the hypothesis, and quotes different critics' views regarding to the text. In the same chapter, the researcher shows the departure also. In the second chapter the researcher makes a thorough analysis of the text, *The Spoils of Poynton* by applying theoretical nuance and subtlety of Neo-Marxism. The last chapter contains the conclusive ending of the research.

## II. Commodification Culture in Henry James' *The Spoils of Poynton*

This research examines how aesthetic value, artistic pursuit, genuine fellow feeling and grace of human relationship fall apart due to the extreme materialistic hunger and hankering of modern people. This issue is examined in James' novel, *The Spoils of Poynton*. Mrs. Gereth spends significant portion of her life in collecting artifacts, precious things and objects of time worth. To her, these objects in her artistic hoarding are dearer than her own life. She can sacrifice her life for the sake of protecting these things. In addition, she brings up her only one son, Owen following her husband's death. She expects natural sense of love, care and attention from her son in her own age. She expects that he could marry a girl of her choice and be responsible to things that she gives top priority. But contrary to her expectation, her son marries Mona, a girl of calculative and commercial disposition.

Human emotions and feelings are commodified in the novel. The confrontation between sacred human emotions and overwhelming corporate capitalism is obviously represented. In front of the importance of money, human and sacred social institutions like marriage have become tradable, transactional and exchangeable. Mona rudely dismisses things valorized aesthetically by her mother in law. She goes so far as to goad her husband to sell those precious objects hoarded by her mother in law. Having seen Mona's blindness to the worth of artistic objects, Mrs. Gereth is shocked and silenced. She does not feel any sense of responsibility to her mother in law. She just throws her eyes on only the materialistic side of things. Resultantly, the unique and pristine aura of the home disappears. Only the materialistic side is regarded. Over the issue of inheriting things of material values, family disintegrates mother-son relation shatters, betrayal and disloyalty blossom.

The researcher makes use of the theory of Marxism as the major theoretical perspective. On this methodological basis this research will be conducted. Marx, Lukacs, Adorno, and other leading neo Marxist theorists are quoted in the course of expounding upon

the theory. The researcher assumes that the theory of Marxism is pertinent for this research because even the text *The Spoils of Poynton* deals with the problems of economic deprivation and exploitation. Since the novel is fraught with the issues of economic exploitation, dispossession and other forms of injustice, the theoretical perspective of Marxism is highly applicable.

Terry Eagleton throws spotlight upon the doctrine of Marx. Eagleton's view is mentioned in the following way:

But society is not completely helpless against the potential destruction of land, labor, and money caused by liberal forces. The historical transformation of western societies into market systems is complete. He also claims that the concept of a self-regulating market was utopian, and its progress was stopped by the realistic self-protection of society. Two forces were clashing. The one opting for marketization in the form of economic liberalism is the same one trying to protect society against the market. For a better tomorrow Polanyi was betting on the protective movement formed against the forces of liberalism, fighting for the preservation of the social interests imperiled by the market. (169)

In a capitalist society, capitalists own and control the productive resources, workers own only their labor and work for capitalists, who then own the product and sell it at a profit. The key to understand a society at any point in history is to focus first on the mode of production. In a feudal society, land was the crucial productive factor and the feudal lords owned and controlled it. In capitalist society capital, machinery, mines, factories etc. are the key productive factors and these are owned and controlled by capitalists.

Marx is the dialectical materialist. He is known widely as the originator of the theory of historical evolution. The conflict between classes regarding to the ownership of productive

forces of society paves the way for the evolution of human history. Marx gives us a theory of society. This theory gives an explanation of how society works and how and why history unfolds. This theory is an account of the nature of capitalism. These are of great value for the task of describing what is going on in the world and for understanding the problems and directions of our society today. But Marx also regarded capitalism as extremely unsatisfactory. He was very concerned with getting rid of it, via violent revolution. He is in favor of the establishment of a communist society. Marxism is therefore also about political goals and action. Obviously very few people in western society today accept this second set of ideas. Most seem to think capitalism is desirable; most do not want to see it destroyed and most do not like the idea of revolution or communism. Terry Eagleton throws spotlight upon the doctrine of Marx. Eagleton's view is mentioned in the following way:

Marx argued that the economic situation, the form of the productive system, is the most important determinant of all other aspects of the society. Matter has sovereign role in the determination of consciousness. Matter exerts pressures on the mind. Marx hardly imagines about the transcendental or autonomous consciousness. Hence Marx is said to be a materialist. Marx rebelled against Hegel's philosophy in which ideas were taken to be the important determinants of history. Marx argued that dominant ideas are the result of material or economic conditions. (54)

The main types of society Marx distinguished are primitive, slave, feudal and capitalist. In a capitalist society capitalists own and control the productive resources, workers own only their labor and work for capitalists, who then own the product and sell it at a profit. The key to understanding a society at any point in history is to focus first on the mode of production. In feudal society land was the crucial productive factor and the feudal lords owned and

controlled it. In capitalist society capital, machinery, mines, factories etc. are the key productive factors and these are owned and controlled by capitalists.

Waterbath is the country house of the Brigstock family. Mrs. Gereth meets Fleda Vetch. She is immediately drawn to her. It is natural for them to get attracted. The basis of the attraction is a mutual sensitiveness to beautiful things. Each guesses that the other possesses a genuine feeling. They meet one morning while obviously trying to escape the house and the rest of the party. Their disliking emerges because Waterbath is very ordinary. The house and the garden might have been quite attractive. The Brigstocks had had everything done over to fit the very latest fashion. It is this air of fashionable conformity to which Fleda and Mrs. Gereth object. They recognize what the estate would have been naturally. By nature, they are inclined to give value to aesthetic of things. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

Mrs. Gereth's horror of Waterbath is particularly acute because of the comparison she inevitably makes between it and her own home at Poynton. Everything at Poynton is exquisite. She and her late husband had gradually furnished it after years of scraping and saving so that they might have the best. Every article in the house had been carefully chosen during their travels in various parts of the world, and she rightly considers their home the most beautiful place in England. Unfortunately, the estate had been left to her son Owen, and she knows that she will have to give it up, along with her beloved treasures, when he marries.(33)

Gereth's secret dread is that Owen will marry a woman with as little a sense of the beautiful as he himself has. She therefore spends much of her time at Waterbath. She does her best in trying to turn his attention from Mona Brigstock. Mona is vicious. She is enemy to aesthetics and cares only for the utilitarian.

Fraser implies that markets are not a problem if they are embedded into a society that prohibits an absolute commodification of land, labor, and money. He makes the following view:

In other words, as long as only products are commodified and not the conditions of production themselves, marketization does not lead to imbalances and crises. It is not easy to show why land is or should be a condition of the market altogether, but it is possible to show why it is a necessary condition of possibility for economic production. One way of doing this is—without having to go back to the outdated concepts of the commodification. (67)

The craving for commodification is throughout all the later development of his thought is prominent. In the practical level, it is innate in both their critique of the modern world and their strivings for the way out of it. In this sense, to understand Fraser's theory of commodification correctly is of great help for us to find the right way to the whole tradition of western Marxism.

Marx saw the relation between these two factors as the main determinant of the type of society existing and of social change. The forces of production may be loosely regarded as the type of productive technology the society has. The relations of production refer to the social organization of production; basically who owns the productive forces, or how they are controlled. For instance in a slave society masters force slaves to do the work, and in a feudal society serfs are obliged to work for the lord a certain number of days each week. In capitalist society capitalists own society's productive resources and employ workers to operate these for a wage when capitalists think profits can be made. David Riazanov is the ardent supporter of Marxism. He makes the following utterances about Marx's doctrine of social progress and historical evolution:

The new social relations of production begin to hinder the full development and application of the new forces of production. For example in the late feudal era it was not in the interests of the lords to allow land to be sold or laborers to sell their labor freely to any employer. These practices were inhibited although they eventually became essential in the capitalist mode of production and therefore in the increase in production and benefits that capitalism brought. That is, the relations of production take a form in which control over the application of productive forces is in the hands of capitalists. (65)

This is a major contradiction in contemporary capitalist society. Such contradictions have been intrinsic in all class societies. Each has developed its contradictions have become more and more glaring, to the point where they lead to revolutionary change. So the relation between the forces and the social relations of production and the consequences this generates is the major dynamic factor in history, the primary cause of social change.

Mrs. Gereth invites Fleda to come to Poynton as a friend and permanent companion. Fleda has no real home of her own. She readily accepts. To the anger of both women, Owen soon writes that he is planning to marry Mona. He brings Mona bringing within a week to see the estate. Mona approves of the home. She fails to appreciate its beauty. Mona immediately begins planning certain changes. She does realize that every article in the house has some value. she insists that Mrs. Gereth leave all but her personal belongings as they are. Mrs. Gereth is to be given the smaller, but still charming, estate called Ricks.

The Gereth residence at Poynton Park contains a priceless collection of art and furniture. They are mostly obtained and maintained by Mrs. Gereth. When Mr. Gereth dies and their son Owen inherits the estate, a subtle battle over the fate of these objects is waged between mother and son. The following extract depicts the situation faced by Adela Gereth:

Adela Gereth dedicated her life to the acquisition and arrangement of beautiful art and artifacts, with which she has carefully decorated her grand estate at Poynton Park. Her marriage was not the most passionate or dedicated, but this side project gave her purpose and pleasure. But when her husband dies, the estate, with all its carefully curated possessions, passes to her son Owen. (34)

Owen is not as aesthetically aware as his mother. Adela knows how ignorant her son can be. She tries to find him a wife who shares her own artistic sensibilities. She enlists the help of her new friend, Fleda Vetch. Vetch is an intelligent young woman who understands her plight. Adela does not seem to realize Fleda would be a perfect choice for Owen. Needless to say, she is in fact already in love with him.

George Lukacs' theory of totality is of vital importance both to his own thought and to the following development of western Marxism. In his early works which were written before his conversion to Marxism, the craving for totality was already there. In the famous book, *History and Class Consciousness*, it is both clearly articulated and taken as the center of the whole book. The conception of totality is revived as the kernel of both Hegel's methodology and that of Marx's. Lukacs himself says that it is necessary to be cautious while dwelling upon the notion of the Marxist sense of revolution. He puts forward his view straightforwardly in the following citation:

And the orthodoxy Marxism is interpreted by him as nothing other than the historical dialectic with the conception of totality as the core. What's more, the craving for totality is never a pure theoretical issue; it means the standpoint of proletariat and the transformation of this reified world. Just because of this, the craving for totality is throughout all the later development of his thought. It is in his later discussion of, for example, realism. (67)

What is more important, his theory of totality, especially that articulated in *History and Class Consciousness*, has become the core clue in the history of the development of western Marxism. In the theoretical level, the understanding of it is vital to later western Marxists' interpretation of both the metaphysical tradition and Marx's philosophy. In the practical level, it is innate in both their critique of the modern world and their strivings for the way out of it. In this sense, to understand George Lukacs' theory of totality correctly is of great help for us to find the right way to the whole tradition of western Marxism.

For Adela, her careful scheming produces precisely nothing. Owen simply takes matters into his own hands. He ends up marrying Mona Brigstock. Mona can only observe the monetary value of the estate. She is exactly the kind of crass woman Adela feared. She would end up with control of Poynton Park. Mona is no fool. She insists to Owen that his mother leave before she agrees to go through with the marriage. Owen complies and his mother leaves Poynton. Mona is outraged and demands their return. Owen is caught between his mother and future wife. She asks Fleda to act as arbiter. Fleda is still in love with Owen. She is emotionally torn in her own way. But she agrees to help. The following extract dramatizes the tension that appeared in mother-son relation due to the presence of Mona:

Only after Fleda comes to negotiate does Adela finally grasp that Fleda is in love with her son. Knowing that Owen might share that sentiment, she uses this information to get Fleda and Owen to declare their true feelings. Fleda, though, is too honorable to force Owen to ditch Mona, and politely waits for Mona to realize that she's lost and back out on her own. Adela also thinks the battle is over and prematurely returns all the "stolen" items to Poynton Park. Mona takes advantage of this and immediately forces the malleable Owen to marry her. (43)

Fleda and Adela are devastated. They console themselves with their shared residence at a nearby estate. While on his honeymoon, Owen writes to Fleda to give her permission to go to Poynton. He also demands that she allows Mona to take a special item of her own choice. When she arrives, she discovers to her horror the house. All its precious antiques are already devoured by flames.

Lukacs' theory of totality is Hegelian. *History and Class Consciousness* has opened the way of Hegelian Marxism, which has constituted the main part of western Marxism. There are two important reasons supporting this viewpoint. One is that western Marxism originated from the early western Marxists' reflections on the experience of the defeats of the proletariat revolutions in the early 20th century. The other is that it is clearly stated in *History and Class Consciousness* itself. It is true that the experience of the defeats of the proletariat revolutions in the European world in the 1920s is one important reason for the forming of western Marxism.

Lukacs, together with other early western Marxists, aims not only to point out the basic mistake of the official Marxism, but to disclose the basic crisis of the modern world and to transform it thoroughly. That is, the reason for those early western Marxists to open the way of western Marxism does not only lie in their dissatisfaction with the official Marxism, but mainly in their discontentment with the present world. It is just because of the latter that they finally convert to Marxism. Lukacs said this clearly in his 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness*:

I have never succumbed to the error that I often noticed in workers and pretty-bourgeois intellectuals who despite everything could never free themselves entirely from their awe of the capitalist world. The hatred and contempt I had felt for life under capitalism ever since my childhood preserved me from that. The key issue is that Lukacs has not only recognized Hegel's hatred to the

capitalist world, but has seen clear that classical German philosophy is doomed to be unable to fulfill their mission. (81)

This is the basic meaning of the so-called antinomies of bourgeois thought. Thus classical philosophy finds itself historically in the paradoxical position. It does not manage to do more than provide a complete intellectual copy and the *piori* deduction of bourgeois society. So far, it is quite clear that the relation between Lukacs's thought and Hegel's thought is of tensions. Hegel's philosophy is the most important resources for Lukacs, in its critique of the bourgeois society.

As Fleda will later remark, "Mrs. Gereth has no imagination about anybody's life save on the side she bumps against no perception of anybody's character has only one question about persons" (56). To be clever in Mrs. Gereth's sense means "to know the marks which means to be able to recognize and appreciate good taste to have a passion for the exquisite" (6). Fleda knows the marks by "direct inspiration and a warm recognition of this is tribute to her character" (138). Mrs. Gereth notices that Fleda is the one member of the Waterbath party who is as horrified as she by the vulgarity of their surroundings.

Fleda is extremely imaginative. Dragged into the drama by Mrs. Gereth, she becomes an illustration of James preference for "the particular attaching case plus some near individual view of it; that nearness he adds quite having thus to become an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed painter's or poet's—however avowed the 'minor' quality in the latter" (12). As he says later in the same preface, Fleda is both highly individualized and highly intelligent. She demonically both sees and feels, while the others but feel without seeing. Fleda is a free spirit, always much tormented, and by no means always triumphant. Mrs. Gereth's son Owen breaks his engagement with Mona she has preserved the source of her freedom.

Karl Korsch is the interpreter of the philosophy of Karl Marx. He gives evidences and anecdotes to clarify the complicated concept of Marxist philosophy. In a supportive tone, he illustrates the crucial view of Marx in the following citation:

Capitalists, Marx answered, must enjoy a privileged and powerful position as owners of the means of production and are therefore able to ruthlessly exploit workers. Although the capitalist pays workers the correct wage, somehow—Marx was terribly vague here—the capitalist makes workers work more hours than are needed to create the worker’s labor power. If the capitalist pays each worker five dollars per day, he can require workers to work, say, twelve hours per day—a not uncommon workday during Marx’s time. (197)

Although Marx tried to use the labor theory of value against capitalism by stretching it to its limits, he unintentionally demonstrated the weakness of the theory’s logic and underlying assumptions. Marx was correct when he claimed that classical economists failed to adequately explain capitalist profits. But Marx failed as well. By the late nineteenth century, the economics profession rejected the labor theory of value. Mainstream economists now believe that capitalists do not earn profits by exploiting workers. Instead, they believe, entrepreneurial capitalists earn profits by forgoing current consumption, by taking risks, and by organizing production.

Mrs. Gereth’s version of understanding Owen-Mona makes Fleda feel uncomfortable. Owen let Mona decide whether or not to break the engagement. The following extract exemplifies how the bond of human relation is rooted in materialistic calculation:

The awareness is momentary, and by the end of the novel—or at least until the house burns down—Fleda is again reconciled to her decision and “happy,” and

even attempts to persuade Mrs. Gereth that the refuge of the unhappy maiden aunt to which Mrs. Gereth has fled has a charm, a soul, a story, and a life, that Poynton lacked substantial aura of charm. (251)

The brevity of the recognition does not negate the recognition itself. It is only one side—a showy side. The showiness of which may hint at why she missed or suppressed it. Mrs. Gereth is capable of recognizing. The force of the recognition reverberates in Fleda's reaction.

Marx believed that people, by nature, are free, creative beings who have the potential to totally transform the world. But he observed that the modern, technologically developed world is apparently beyond our full control. Marx condemned the free market, for instance, as being anarchic, or ungoverned. He maintained that the way the market economy is coordinated—through the spontaneous purchase and sale of private property dictated by the laws of supply and demands blocks our ability to take control of our individual and collective destinies.

Marx condemned capitalism as a system that alienates the masses. His reasoning was as follows: although workers produce things for the market, market forces, not workers, control things. People are required to work for capitalists who have full control over the means of production and maintain power in the workplace. Work, he said, becomes degrading, monotonous, and suitable for machines rather than for free, creative people. In the end, people themselves become objects—robot like mechanisms that have lost touch with human nature, that make decisions based on cold profit-and-loss considerations, with little concern for human worth and need. Marx concluded that capitalism blocks our capacity to create our own humane society.

Roja Luxemburg is critically attached to the unique concept of alienation propounded by Marx. The disintegration of the chance of identifying with the objects and commodities

has created the possibility of alienation. The following citation typifies Roja's analytical explanation of Marx's philosophy:

Marx claimed that we are alienated not only because many of us toil in tedious, perhaps even degrading, jobs, or because by competing in the marketplace we tend to place profitability above human need. The issue is not about toil versus happiness. We are alienated, he maintained, because we have not yet designed a society that is fully planned and controlled, a society without competition profits and losses, money, private property. (87)

Marx claimed that his criticism of capitalism was based on the latest developments in science. He called his theory scientific socialism to clearly distinguish his approach from that of other socialists. Marx's scientific socialism combined his economics and philosophy—including his theory of value and the concept of alienation—to demonstrate that throughout the course of human history, a profound struggle has developed between the haves and the have-nots. Specifically, Marx claimed that capitalism has ruptured into a war between two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marx claimed that he had discovered the laws of history, laws that expose the contradictions of capitalism and the necessity of the class struggle.

Gereth's description of the lost alternatives stirs Fleda. Her head seems to go round. She feels a sudden passion in her feet. She hears herself presently say, "I'll go to the Registrar now" (20). She is how a girl who has shown herself so perceptive in general has managed to miss "any part of the truth, much less a part that has as much bearing on her own future as it does on the future of those around her" (60). The following extract highlights this side of Mrs. Gereth's thinking:

Flede, with her mother dead, hadn't so much as even a home, and her nearest chance of one was that there was some appearance her sister would become

engaged to a curate whose eldest brother was supposed to have property and would perhaps allow him something. Her father paid some of her bills but didn't like her to live with him; and she had lately, in Paris, with several hundred other young women, spent a year at a studio, arming herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter. (140)

Fleda's background and prospects would have resounded pitifully. Fleda and Mrs. Gereth share a genuine bond in their affection for Poynton. Fleda feels more and more that her value to Mrs. Gereth is the mere value of a good agent. She is hypersensitive to anything that may place her in a false position.

Within weeks of Fleda's arrival at Poynton Mrs. Gereth has placed her in a grotesque position. Fleda's sense of humiliation and outrage is compounded by "a sore scared perception that her value to Mrs. Gereth is only as great as her value to Poynton" (36). Such a situation deepens her sense of insecurity and awakens her sense of Mrs. Gereth's inhumanity. It also deepens her sense of the awkwardness of her position at Poynton. The anxiety and instability involved in her relationship with Mrs. Gereth contributes to Fleda's growing love for Owen. He is unconscious of the possibility of despising Fleda for her presence in his home. Fleda finds it exquisite that:

whereas for her kind little circle at large, who didn't now at all matter, her tendency had begun to define itself as parasitical, this strong young man, who had a right to judge and even to loathe her, didn't judge and didn't loathe, let her down gently, treated her as if she pleased him—in fact evidently liked her to be just where she was. (41)

Fleda's powers of perception are limited. She is partly motivated by her need to maintain an illusion of self-respect. Her rejection of Owen is based less on her capacity to see the situation with more clarity. The version of the situation that Mrs. Gereth throws out at Fleda

is precisely the version Fleda has been attempting to spare herself. It strips her of her pretense to self-respect.

The social relations of production involve different classes. The basic determinant of one's class is one's relationship to the means of production. In late capitalist society the two basic classes remaining are the owners of the means of production and those who own only their labor. So in any historical period dominant and subservient classes can be identified. Inequality in wealth and power was of fundamental moral concern to Marx. Some groups come to dominate others and to win for themselves a disproportionate share of the society's wealth, power and privileges. The ultimate goal Marxists aim at is a classless society which is a society in which all enjoy more or less equal wealth and power. Johann George Eccarius strives to explain Marx's theory of historical materialism. According to Eccarius, Marx's analysis of history sound more pragmatic. He delivers the following view about Marx's objective analysis of history and historical development:

Marx said history is basically about the struggle between classes for dominance. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. In other words the most important questions to ask about a society are to do with what groups in society dominate or gain most benefit from the status quo, or whose interests does the situation or policy or proposal serve most? In capitalist society the capitalist class benefits most. Capitalists are those who own and control the means of production receive a disproportionate share of wealth, power, privileges and status. (98)

It can be seen from the foregoing that Marx put forward a theory of history. This historical principle explained the dynamic of history. The basic element in this is the Hegelian idea of a dialectical progression whereby an original situation or idea or thesis exists, an antithesis develops in opposition to this, and the two are resolved into a synthesis, which becomes the

new thesis. In any historical era, the inherent contradictions or class conflicts come to a head in some sort of revolution and are resolved when a new social order stabilizes.

The morals and manners that Mrs. Gereth often lacks are what save Fleda from being as victimized as she could be. Her refusal to surrender them does preserve her freedom. Her lack of beauty would fail to provide even the smallest amount of social expiation for her marriage. The following extract serves as an example:

The stunted gazing wide-eyed at the beautiful gentlemen and either stupidly or cunningly bringing but one [tea] thing at a time— gawking at Owen as if he were a celebrity—provides the reader with a wry view of how far out of her league Fleda is, as well as how liable under duress to fall into the same kind of unconscious class judgments she suspects Mrs. Gereth of making (155).

Fleda's reason for refusing to help Owen is out of his engagement. She wails out seconds before she flees their final scene. She reveals the complex motivations behind her consistent determination to refrain from all but high and delicate deed. The following extract serves as evidence:

You mustn't break faith. Anything's better than that. You must at any rate be utterly sure. She must love you—how can she help it? I wouldn't give you up. She spoke in broken bits, panting out her words. Fleda repeated. I couldn't have a hand in that, you know: that's my position—that's mine. You offered her marriage. It's a tremendous thing for her. Then looking at him another moment, I wouldn't give you up!' She said again. Never, never, never! She cried; and before he could succeed in seizing her she had turned and, flashing up the stairs, got away from him even faster than she had got away at Ricks. (106).

Fleda is afraid of being exploited. She forces the code of honor on men. She is afraid that breaking his engagement to Mona will be a proof of his inconstancy. Fleda has even more to lose from involving herself with an inconstant man than Mona. What looks like sympathy for Mona is actually a projection of her needs and insecurities on to Mona.

Three people with three different perspectives have recognized that Mona does not love Owen. She is holding on to him only in the hopes of becoming mistress of a restored Poynton. Mona's membership in an oppressed class seems to entitle her to consideration on that basis alone. Her mercenary behavior is almost legitimized in such a society. Fleda seems to imply that "robbing Mona of a tremendous marriage is just as unfair as it would be to rob her of a man she loved, that in the former situation she is just as bereft as she would be in the latter. On the other hand, Owen has given proof that he is more than just a fickle boy" (78). Although handsome and weak, he has enough sense to have appreciated Fleda's superior qualities long before Mona "makes the contrast seem as great as she eventually does; he also continually exhibits a great deal of natural tact and delicacy. Yet his membership in the oppressor class denies him consideration on that basis alone" (77).

Conflict and consolidation marked the last decade of Adorno's life. A leading figure in the positivism dispute in German sociology, Adorno was a key player in debates about restructuring German universities and a lightning rod for both student activists and their right-wing critics. These controversies did not prevent him from publishing numerous volumes of music criticism, two more volumes of *Notes to Literature*, books on Hegel and on existential philosophy, and collected essays in sociology and in aesthetics. Long before postmodernism became fashionable, Adorno and Horkheimer wrote one of the most searching critiques of modernity to have emerged among progressive European intellectuals.

*Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a product of their wartime exile. Their book opens with a grim assessment of the modern West: Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the

advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth radiates under the sign of disaster triumphant. Horkheimer and Adorno believe that society and culture form a historical totality, such that the pursuit of freedom in society is inseparable from the pursuit of enlightenment in culture.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the source of today's disaster is a pattern of blind domination, domination in a triple sense: the domination of nature by human beings, the domination of nature within human beings, and, in both of these forms of domination, the domination of some human beings by others. What motivates such triple domination is an irrational fear of the unknown: "Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown. This has determined the path of demythologization. Enlightenment is the radical manifestation of mythical fear"(11). In an unfree society whose culture pursues so-called progress no matter what the cost, that which is "other," whether human or nonhuman, gets shoved aside, exploited, or destroyed. The means of destruction may be more sophisticated in the modern West, and the exploitation may be less direct than outright slavery, but blind, fear-driven domination continues, with ever greater global consequences. The all-consuming engine driving this process is an ever-expanding capitalist economy, fed by scientific research and the latest technologies.

Fleda's lapse in clarity is explicit in her situation. Enough inequality still exists in her upbringing. Even Owen is a member of the oppressor class. He feels the pressure of the honor code. Mrs. Gereth tries to show Fleda that acknowledging her desperation can be a liberating choice. But Mrs. Gereth speaks from a privileged position herself. Her choice is between a greater and lesser home. However, Mrs. Gereth is unable to show Fleda the beauty and higher morality involved in such a choice. Mrs. Gereth has sacrificed her dignity for her love of her possessions. It is a choice that puts her on par with Mona. Fleda needs to be shown that to

sacrifice her dignity for her love of others is "ultimately not a sacrifice of her dignity at all, but rather a path to greater freedom and a higher dignity" (88).

Fleda's perceptivity works as a sense a defense mechanism. Her fear causes her to cling to an overly refined honor code. This code keeps her from seizing a chance for security and happiness. Fleda's real lapses of vision occur when she falls under Mrs. Gereth's influence. She seeks to memorialize her virtue with one of the relics of Poynton. But she is badly scolded by a fiery reminder. Her inner perception is that "life always escapes one's attempts to idealize it. In the scene with Owen, on the other hand, Fleda becomes so determined not to do injustice to any possible aspect of the Other that she refrains from discriminating altogether" (89). She herself would like to be treated in the same situation.

Contrary to some interpretations, Horkheimer and Adorno do not reject the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Nor do they provide a negative meta-narrative of universal historical decline. Rather, through a highly unusual combination of philosophical argument, sociological reflection, and literary and cultural commentary, they construct a "double perspective" on the modern West as a historical formation (Jarvis 23). They summarize this double perspective in two interlinked theses: "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (Dialectics of Enlightenment 32). The first thesis allows them to suggest that, despite being declared mythical and outmoded by the forces of secularization, older rituals, religions, and philosophies may have contributed to the process of enlightenment and may still have something worthwhile to contribute. The second thesis allows them to expose ideological and destructive tendencies within modern forces of secularization, but without denying either that these forces are progressive and enlightening or that the older conceptions they displace were themselves ideological and destructive.

Dialectic of Enlightenment presupposes a critical social theory indebted to Karl Marx. Adorno reads Marx as a Hegelian materialist whose critique of capitalism unavoidably

includes a critique of the ideologies that capitalism sustains and requires. Adorno says that fetishism is one of the most important concepts invented by Marx. Adorno's view is listed below to reinforce the debilitating impact of commodification:

The most important of these is what Marx called the fetishism of commodities. Marx aimed his critique of commodity fetishism against bourgeois social scientists that simply describe the capitalist economy but, in so doing, simultaneously distorts it and prescribe a false social vision. According to Marx, bourgeois economists necessarily ignore the exploitation intrinsic to capitalist production. They fail to understand that capitalist production, for all its surface freedom and fairness, must extract surplus value from the labor of the working class. (77)

The commodity would not have "use value" if it did not satisfy human wants. It would not have exchange value if no one wished to exchange it for something else. And its exchange value could not be calculated if the commodity did not share with other commodities a value created by the expenditure of human labor power and measured by the average labor time socially necessary to produce commodities of various sorts.

Fleda acknowledges that Mona does not appreciate the pledge as she herself would. Her own decision not to intervene may "keep tied to an affection that had died a sudden and violent death" (106-7). She asks herself how a "decision made to keep Owen from dishonorable behavior could mean condemning him to a relationship with a woman he dislikes" (101). She comes to the conclusion that his likes and dislikes are none of her business:

She had nothing to do with his dislikes; she had only to do with his good nature and his good name. She had joy of him just as he was, but it was of these things she had the greatest. The worst aversion and the liveliest

wouldn't alter the fact—since one was facing facts—that but the other day his strong arms must have clasped a remarkably handsome girl as close as she had permitted. Fleda's emotion at this time was a wondrous mixture, in which Mona's permissions and Mona's beauty has figured powerfully as aids to reflection. (108).

Fleda goes on to hope that despite her generosity Mona will become tired of the engagement and break it off herself, but we need to look closely at this passage to explain Fleda's motivation in promoting Owen's honor over his happiness.

Owen's good nature is important to her for a variety of selfish reasons. The most relevant fact about Mona seems to be that she has enjoyed Owen's caresses. Fleda seems here to assume that physical love is sacred. It automatically creates obligations that it would be morally wrong to ignore. Even today many people have respect for individuals of both sexes who "assume that physical encounters entail some sort of obligation to the other; likewise, Fleda can be respected so far as not being virtuous is an option for her" (76). However the important question is whether she should be respected for keeping Owen under an obligation that Mona herself does not recognize.

Fleda's decision is not based on an observation of Mona's needs and desires. The conflict is between Fleda's love for Owen and her preconceived notions of honor. Fleda has nothing to do but make a show of trying to patch things up and blame her failure on her moral scruples. Mrs. Gereth catches on to her duplicity. She sends the furniture back before Mona has a chance to break off the engagement. Her lies and deceptions are more readily explained by the motives. Fleda's imagination has enriched her love for Owen from the very beginning. It enables her to see more value in him than either his mother or his fiancée has seen. Her love for Owen has never been blind. Fleda's perceptivity as she is evaluating Owen in their initial meeting. The following extract illustrates the point:

Fleda had other amusements as well, such as noting that Mrs. Gereth was now with Mona Brigstock; such as observing that she was all affability to that young woman; such as reflecting that, masterful and clever, with a great bright spirit, she was one of those who impose, who interfuse themselves; such as feeling finally that Owen Gereth was absolutely beautiful and delightfully dense. This young person had even from herself wonderful secrets of delicacy and pride; but she came as near distinctness as in the consideration of such matters. (11)

Fleda works to keep from being overly influenced by it. In fact her appreciation for his attractiveness is compounded by her susceptibility to beauty in general. Her exquisite taste enables her to do greater justice. Fleda overrates this quality. She nevertheless does it greater justice than either his mother or his fiancée do. She retains the capacity to recognize the latter. She can even see when and by whom he is being influenced. Encountering Owen on a shopping trip soon after she leaves Poynton, she notices that "he unduly prolonged their business together, giving Fleda a sense of his putting off something particular that he had to face. If she had ever dreamed of Owen Gereth as fluttered she would have seen him with" (122). She is still open to further revelations.

Mrs. Gereth eventually leads to a genuine friendship between the two women. This occurs partly because Mrs. Gereth is finally forced to develop a larger imagination herself as a result of her dramatic failure. She has looked deeply and thoroughly enough to see what is great. It can be respected and admired in Mrs. Gereth in spite of her faults. Fleda seems to feel that Mrs. Gereth is in some sense a victim of her blinkered obsession. Fleda extends concerned empathy to everyone she encounters without quibbling over whether or not each individual deserves it. Her actions are best described as charitable. Fleda uses at least once to describe her obligations to characters.

One of Fleda's most interesting lapses in empathy is her failure to enter into Mrs. Gereth's frustration over the loss of personal dignity. She empathizes with Mrs. Gereth's feelings for the spoils. She does scant justice to Mrs. Gereth's "long resentment" over "the effacement to which English usage reduced the widowed mother" (49). Fleda reports Mrs. Gereth's resentment but the text makes clear that she does not enter into it as she enters into Mrs. Gereth's feelings for Poynton. Fleda's feelings are all for Owen on this particular issue. She never questions her duty:

To help him to live as a gentleman and carry through what he had undertaken; her problem was to reinstate him in his rights"; and her failure to question whether these rights are after all right is of a piece with her failure to question the honor code that keeps him tied to Mona. All these lapses in sympathy can be linked to her lapses in similar areas of self-understanding, and that her responsibility to herself is connected to her responsibility to others. (56)

The apparent discord comes only with Fleda's devotion to uncritical notions of rights and honor. If Fleda had seen the claims of both mother and son with greater clarity, she might have achieved some sort of reconciliation between them from the very beginning. Her role at Poynton and later at Ricks is to be ambassador between the mother and son:

Mrs. Gereth sends her out to talk sense into Owen and he sends her back to try to persuade his mother, and Fleda pretends to do both but really does neither. She tells Owen his mother is softening (she is not) and encourages hopes in Mrs. Gereth that she herself feels to be vain. Part of her stated reluctance to fulfill her mission is that though she is visiting Poynton at Mrs. Gereth's request she has fallen in love with Owen early in her visit and has consequently switched sides. She now wants to help Owen and needs to hide this, she thinks, from Mrs. Gereth. (76)

The problem with this thinking however that is it puts Fleda in a false position. It depends on a false premise. Mrs. Gereth would be angry if she found out Fleda loved Owen. Mrs. Gereth would be delighted to learn Fleda loves Owen. Fleda really fears. She is afraid that Mrs. Gereth will make another vulgar attempt to fling Fleda into Owen's arms. On the other hand she is right in thinking that Mrs. Gereth would be upset to learn that Fleda's love for Owen has convinced her of his right to the house.

To be more intimate with each other is threatening to both Owen and Mona. But the pragmatic matters pressurize them to live together. Happiness is simultaneously followed by fear. Exposure to this marriage poses threat to his psychic integrity. The following extract dramatizes the tension that underlies their marriage:

She threw the garlic and peppers in the skillet and he moved another inch. His belt rasped against her buttocks. Even though she was covered in thick denim, the threat of a more intimate touch made her hands tremble around the knife. His breath rushed warm against the nape of her neck. He placed both palms flat on the countertop and caged her in. Favors are rare. Want to waste it on a stupid ball game that does mean anything? (135)

Normal things turn upside down. Mona seeks to cheat on him. He wants to cage her in the enclosure of his sexual hunger. He longs for her body the more he lives with her. Fulfilling his emotional and sexual thirst from her, he arrived at the condition that he needs her forever. Instead of making her contractual marriage partner, Nick wants to keep her as long-term friend.

Owen does not allow his nominal wife to sleep with him. In this way, he wants that sort of wife who lives with his as his wife without expecting any kind of emotional as well as sexual satisfaction. For living with his as his wife, she would get a lump sum at the end of the year. Marriage is a tool for him. He wants to buy the service of a woman who is ready to live

with him as his wife. To Owen, marriage is tradable. It can be converted into monetary value. In the traditional sense, wherever there is marriage, there is bound to be emotion, attachment, responsibility and mutual sense of trust as well as cooperation.

Thus, it can be concluded that the consequences of the commodification of human sentiments and sacred social institutions like marriage are torturous to Owen and Mona. In front of the forceful nature of human passions, economic or noneconomic consideration does not matter. The ground reality cannot be forsaken for the sake of immediate economic benefit.

### **III. James's Concern with Effect of Aggressive Materialism**

The core finding of this research that human emotions are likely to be commodified under the harsh economic pressures in the era of late capitalism. In James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, sacred and foundational social institutions like marriage are treated as a commodity that can be traded and transacted with money. Under the harsh economic pressures, human feelings and emotions no longer remain as the pure bonding between man and woman. When economic concern besets a person, he or she could not help compromising with the ideals.

Mona is a woman from decent and respectable family. She gives utmost importance to self-esteem and the social standing of her family. She runs a bookstore. She used to make decent profit from the bookstore she runs. But nowadays, her bookstore stops yielding profit. Contrary to her expectation, she is compelled to run her bookstore on credit. In her house, her parents are unable to pay off the medical insurance bill of her brother. Owen's business is on the brink of bankruptcy. She has to stop the bookstore and choose other profession. Without borrowing a large sum of money, she could not save her bookstore. But there is nobody to give her such a large amount of money. She is compelled to collect money by hook or crook.

At this dire moment, she happens to meet a man named Owen. Human emotion and sacred social institutions like marriage are commodified in the era of late capitalism. Economic concern and other pragmatic consideration have become so pressing and overpowering that people are almost bound to forget sanctity of human feelings and sentiments. Both Owen and Mona treat marriage as commodity which can be trade and transacted with money. They count it in monetary terms. It is just a tool to make money and create solid financial prospect in their lives.

Commodification refers to reification or objectification of human emotions. Reification is defined as the turning of something into a thing or object. Two characters in the novel use marriage as a means to solve their economic problems. They have challenged the traditional notion of marriage as a 'bonding of two souls' and use marriage as a commodity to save her family home and inherit his uncle's corporation respectively. Marriage is a social institution that is commonly supposed to be a compromise between the two human beings of different sexes. The circumstances of marriage like love, care and support between the couple. Sometimes their misunderstanding and conflicts lead to divorce.

James's *The Spoils of Poynton* raises an uncommon issue regarding the marital relationship. The novelistic discourse shows the traditional concept of marriage being challenged by the utilitarian values of the modern societies. The major characters' utilitarian attitude towards their own marriage represents the emerging social problem of the reification of human relationships. In late capitalism, economic power as a definitive term has replaced the old notions of human relations, kinships and marriage. Such a process reveals the shifting notions of commodification. This trend to trade abstract human emotions and norms for objective monetary values commodifies human emotions. That's why, human relation stands only in use value. Capitalistic society uses them and exchanges them with materials.

The eventual denouement of the narrative is relatively disappointing. Owen is forced to choose between the naturalness of human emotions and pressures of shifting economic condition. Deciding she has already lost the battle, Owen gives up trying to run his own bookstore and accepts the offer. The moral dimension of the contract between Owen and Mona is noticeably striking. The young, morality and sex are interchangeable terms. Frequently the judgment of right and wrong behavior rests almost exclusively on sexual behavior. Evil is identified with sex. There the devil wields his greatest powers. The relaxed social and sexual rituals of his time occupy the forefront of the novel.

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