"ADAPTING HENRY JAMES TO THE SCREEN: *WASHINGTON SQUARE & THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*"

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MWLYAS001

A MINOR DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH STUDIES.

FACULTY OF THE HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

2004

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the film adaptations of two of the novels of Henry James, namely *Washington Square* (1880) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). The Introduction discusses issues relating broadly to the problems and attractions of film adaptation. I draw especially on the work of James Naremore, Brian McFarlane and George Bluestone. Naremore surveys the history of film adaptation, pervasive in many countries with a film industry. McFarlane looks at the reasons for this interest in adapting novels to film as well as the issue of authenticity with regard to film adaptation. Bluestone looks at what film and literature have in common.

In Chapter One, I discuss the novel *Washington Square* and two adaptations, William Wyler's 1949 version and Agnieszka Holland's 1997 version. The chapter opens with a discussion of the novel, focussing on themes such as marriage, money and status in society. I then examine selected aspects of the two films. In *The Heiress*, I look at the inclusion of scenes that don't appear in the novel, and how these scenes drive the narrative in the film. I also look at how the characters are portrayed in the film and how they bring their own uniqueness to the screen. In Holland's *Washington Square*, I examine both the characters and the sets, while also looking at Holland's feminist interpretation of the story.

In Chapter Two, I examine the novel *The Portrait of a Lady* and Jane Campion's film version of this story. The discussion of the novel looks at themes like tragedy, the European experience, marriage, and the displaced American. I also discuss the various characters in the novel and the role that each of them plays. With regard to Campion's film, I look at unusual filmic devices that have been used as well as the way in which the characters from the novel have been translated to the screen.

I conclude by noting how films have inspired people to read classic works once again.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Lesley Marx, for all her help and support with this dissertation over the past several months. I will be eternally grateful to her for this. Also thank-you to William Daniels at the UCT library for helping me with all my Henry James research. It is much appreciated.

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INTRODUCTION

James Naremore, in his discussion on film adaptation starts by suggesting that

> Unfortunately, most discussions of adaptation in film can be summarized by a New Yorker cartoon that Alfred Hitchcock once described to François Truffaut: two goats are eating a pile of film cans, and one goat says to the other, "Personally, I liked the book better." (2000: 2)

Naremore goes on to describe how early Hollywood film production depended on adaptations of authors such as Shakespeare and Dante to give respectability to the new art:

> [Hollywood] recognized from the beginning that it could gain a sort of legitimacy among middle-class viewers by reproducing facsimiles of more respectable art or by adapting literature to another medium. (2000: 4)

Moreover, in France the *Société de Film d'Art* was established "which made quite profitable feature-length films based on the dramas of Rostand and Sardou, as well as silent versions of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*"(Naremore, 2000: 4). Naremore concludes that "[u]ncinematic as the *films d'art* may seem today, they were among the first feature films, and their drive for respectability pointed toward the development of the star system, the picture palace, and in one sense Hollywood itself" (2000: 4).

Some major film directors prefer making original films and not adaptations so that they can use their own creativity: Hitchcock once said that he "read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget about the book and start to create cinema" (Hitchcock, qtd. in Naremore, 2000: 7).

Robert B. Ray notes that "the theme of adaptation is often used as a way of teaching celebrated literature by another means" (Ray, qtd. in Naremore, 2000: 1). Naremore says that this is why films like *Orlando* (1993) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1998) spring to mind first and not other adapted works like *The Set Up* (1949, based on a narrative poem), *Batman* (1989 and originally a comic book), and *Mission Impossible* (1996) which was originally a television series. Thus it seems fair to say that film has a history of borrowing from a range of sources. My discussion will deal with the adaptations of two major novels, which pose special challenges to the screenwriter and director, rather than plays or other popular culture material.

Neil Sinyard (1986: vii) states that one of cinema's most immediate effects was to replace the novel as the primary art form of narrative realism. When the cinema started seeing itself as narrative entertainment, the idea of borrowing from the novel for material got started, and this is something that has been occurring for more than ninety years (McFarlane, 1996: 7).

Why is there such interest in adapting novels to film? As mentioned above, the quest for respectability is one reason. According to Brian McFarlane (1996: 7), cinema's borrowing from novels is the result of commercialism on the one hand and great respect for literary works on the other. He goes on to say that filmmakers consider the fact that a pre-sold title will already have influence and that the respectability and popularity already achieved in the one medium will rub off on the filmic medium. Frederic Raphael scathingly claimed of filmmakers that "like known quantities...they would sooner buy the rights of an expensive book than develop an original subject" (Raphael, qtd. in McFarlane, 1996: 7).

Adapting novels to the screen has not been a recent phenomenon. Even the early filmmaker D.W. Griffith did his fair share of borrowing from literature. In his first year of filmmaking, Griffith had adapted Jack London's *Just Meat* (*For Love of Gold*), Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* (Bluestone, 1971: 2). Sergei Eisenstein's essay, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today," is an example of how Griffith found in Dickens clues for almost all of his filmic ideas (Bluestone, 1971: 2).

D.W. Griffith is reported to have said in 1913 that, "The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see", a statement that mirrors the one Conrad made in his preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*, which read, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel -- it is, before all, to make you see"(qtd. in Bluestone, 1971: 1). Bluestone believes that the phrase "to make you see", signifies a relationship between the creative artist and the receptive audience and that it is here that both the novelist and the director have a common intention (Bluestone, 1971: 1). The viewer or reader is able to see either visually through the eye or imaginatively through the mind, and lying between the visual image and the mental image exists the basic difference between the two media (Bluestone, 1971: 1).

Another question that is invariably asked is whether a filmic adaptation is an authentic representation of the original literary text. McFarlane (1996: 8-9) argues that questions such as whether an adaptation is truly 'Jamesian', or true to the works of Lawrence or Dickens seem to be the most widespread with regard to filmic adaptations. He believes that 'period' films are exhaustive attempts at creating fidelity, like trying to recreate Dickens's London or Jane Austen's village community, and that rather than ensuring fidelity, a "distracting quaintness" (1996: 9) is produced, turning a contemporary work (the novel) into a period piece (the film).

Brian McFarlane (2000: 3-4) offers the following points with regard to the issue of fidelity: the ideal film adaptation should aspire to be bold and intelligent, as well as a work that is both connected to the novel and original in itself. He believes that a film should be judged as a film, that the original novel or text is just one aspect of a film adaptation, and that the original work's importance hinges on the viewer's own personal identification with the precursor text. McFarlane believes that not being adventurous with a film adaptation can result in a mundane adaptation of a famous novel. He cites the BBC adaptations as examples of this type of mundane transfer from novel to film, and he believes that with this type of adaptation the story drags along from scene to scene. (One has only to compare the BBC's *Sense and Sensibility* to the more popular, commercially successful Ang Lee version to know that this is indeed the case). However, McFarlane is also against a filmic adaptation that is too bold or adventurous in nature. According to him, a bold attempt does not necessarily

mean that the film will be enjoyable and absorbing. Interestingly enough, he uses the example of Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*, where the first scene is a black and white sequence of young Australian women talking, as well as the home movie sequences when Isabel is travelling; these scenes are unconventional and differ from the rest of the film (McFarlane, 2000: 3).

McFarlane believes that another problem with regard to filmic adaptations is the fact that literary scholars tend to look down on films as not measuring up to their ideas of how the film should have been attempted. He believes that the whole film-going experience for these people is not a good one because they are constantly searching the film for those aspects that they enjoyed in the novel; so most people want the film to be true to the novel, without any thought as to whether this type of fidelity is even possible in a filmic medium (McFarlane, 2000: 3).

In an article on Martin Scorcese's adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, Charles Helmetag notes that the year 1995 produced various period films, costume dramas and adaptations of Jane Austen's novels (1998: 1). Three of these films, *Braveheart*, *Restoration*, and *Sense and Sensibility* received a total of nineteen Oscar nominations and won eight awards in total. Helmetag observes that the recent interest in the period film started in the 1980's with the first Merchant Ivory films and peaked in 1993 with *The Age of Innocence*, which received the Academy Award for best costume design that year (1998: 1). Helmetag's article also informs us that, in his quest to re-create an authentic interpretation of 1870's New York, Scorsese had numerous paintings accurately reproduced, hundreds of costumes were made for extras and main characters, and the chandelier at the famous ball scene was reproduced at a staggering cost of $ 25 000 (1998: 2).

Dudley Andrew has stated that more than half of the films we watch are adapted from novels (qtd. in Naremore, 2000: 9). Naremore goes on to note that statistics that were published in *Variety* magazine showed that twenty percent of films produced in 1997 were sourced from books: these included authors like John Grisham, Stephen King, Michael Crichton, Howard Stern, James Ellroy and Leo Tolstoy; and another twenty percent of films were from plays, sequels, remakes, television shows, and magazine or

newspaper articles (2000: 10). This means, concludes Naremore, that approximately only half of the films seen by audiences that year were original scripts (2000: 10).

In years past, there has also been a lot of interest in the film adaptations of the acclaimed works of Henry James. Henry James's stories have formed the basis of several highly commended films that Allan Burns (2003: 1) has itemised: such as Frank Lloyd's *Berkeley Square* (made in 1933 and based on *The Sense of the Past*), William Wyler's *The Heiress* (made in 1949 and based on *Washington Square*), Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (made in 1961 and based on *The Turn of the Screw*, Peter Bogdanovich's *Daisy Miller* of 1974 and James Ivory's *The Europeans* (1979) and *The Bostonians* (1984). He also points to several more recent films based on James's novels, such as Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square* (1997), Iain Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* (1997), and James Ivory's *The Golden Bowl* in 2000 (2003: 1).

According to J. Sarah Koch, there have been about 125 film and television adaptations of the works of Henry James (Koch in Burns, 2003: 1). According to Koch, the novel that has been adapted the most is *The Turn of the Screw*, with sixteen film versions, then *Washington Square* with thirteen versions, *The Aspern Papers* with twelve versions, *The Wings of the Dove* with ten versions and *The Sense of the Past* with seven versions -- all the adaptations of *The Sense of the Past* were based on William Balderston's stage production, *Berkeley Square* (Koch in Burns, 2003: 1). Surprisingly, two of James's most popular novels, *Daisy Miller* and *The Portrait of a Lady* have only been adapted twice; and some of James's more important novels- *Roderick Hudson*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Tragic Muse*, *The Awkward Age*, *The Sacred Fount* and *The Ivory Tower* have not yet been adapted to the screen; but there are some minor works which have, such as *De Grey: A Romance*, *Glasses, Lord Beaupre* and *Watch and Ward* (Koch in Burns, 2003: 1).

Richard Gott (1998: 1) says that despite the success of the film version of *The Portrait of a Lady*, the fiction of Henry James is not really adaptable to the filmic medium. This is because his excellent writing is not only about what the characters say, but also about what they don't say (Gott, 1998: 1). Gott believes that because James was an outsider, being American, he could closely examine the habits and ways

as well as the moral problems of the upper middle class British of the late 19th century (1998: 2). Gott's distaste for film adaptations of James's work is clear: "While an ancient underground train or hansom cab can provide a film with a soup-cube flavour of that era, it cannot recreate a moral universe that has entirely evaporated" (Gott, 1998: 2). His advice to the public at large is, "See the film if you must, but try to find time to read the book."

An opposing view is held by Philip Horne, who is quoted in an article by Laurence Raw. Horne doesn't agree that a James film should be faithful to the text, saying that "extreme closeness to portions of the original [text] may be dangerous unless really thought through" (Horne, qtd. in Raw, 2002: 1).

I think that it is important to find a balance between the two -- where one doesn't stick too faithfully to the original text, but where one also does not veer too far away from it so as to make the film unrecognisable as an adaptation of the novel.

The discussion that follows focuses on central thematic issues in each novel and on the emphases and interpretations that the film adaptations provide. It is important to note that, in the case of film, the product is always the result of collaborative work: screenwriters, producers, cast and crew all have a role to play. Nevertheless, I have chosen to concentrate on the director's role as the final authoritative one.

CHAPTER ONE

Washington Square: themes and characters

Cynthia Ozick (2002: 1-2) describes the circumstances that led to the creation of *Washington Square*: Henry James visited Paris in autumn 1879 as he wanted to visit Turgenev and then journey on to Florence; but in December a blizzard came down on northern Europe so that routes to Italy were blocked while Paris lay covered in snow; while confined to his hotel room during this time, James wrote *A Bundle of Letters*, a comical tale about Americans in Europe; by this time, James was already living permanently in London, while travelling every now and then to France and Italy, but his thoughts constantly returned to America. It was while he was taking shelter from the Paris storms in the winter of 1880, notes Ozick (2002: 2), that he came up with the idea for his most American story, and called it *Washington Square,* after the area reminiscent of his own childhood, and in order to write the tale, he crossed a stormy Channel to get back to his London apartment.

According to Leon Edel, Henry James came up with the idea for *Washington Square* from a story told to him by a famous actress of that time, Mrs. Fanny Kemble: Mrs Kemble's brother had jilted an heiress when he discovered that her father would disinherit her if she married him (Edel in Ozick, 2002: 3). However, as Ozick argues, James was drawn to the concept of jilting: he had jilted America and gone to England, he had also deserted his ill young cousin Minny Temple, of whom he was very fond, but whom he also dreaded having to look after in her illness, even though she desperately wanted to join him in Europe (Ozick, 2002: 3). He would also intermittently abandon an admirer, Constance Woolson, with whom he enjoyed a secret friendship (Ozick, 2002: 3). Even though he was a friendly person, his life seemed to be made up of a series of escapes from unwanted relationships and any help forced on him (Ozick notes [2002: 3] that he was very angry when his friend Edith Wharton had secretly and out of the goodness of her heart asked her publisher to give James a sum from the royalties of her own writings). James was even jilted

himself in a way when his brother, with whom he had had such a close relationship, married (Ozick, 2002: 3).

Brian Lee (1978: 16) suggests that *Washington Square* may be compared to Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, but may be superior to Wharton's work in that it has the ability to transcend the limits of a novel of manners. Wharton's descriptive satire of this society is spectacular: we become involved in operas, balls, engagements, and sumptuous dining that are described with irony and detail (Lee, 1978: 17). In this way, she is able to create an environment that is closed and confined, an entirely superficial community that is "a small and slippery pyramid, in which, as yet, hardly a fissure had been made or a foothold gained" (Wharton, qtd. in Lee, 1978: 17).

In both *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, there seems to be a foreboding air of tragedy. In the earlier novel, Catherine Sloper is born after the Slopers' first male child has died, rendering Doctor Sloper a disappointed man from the start. Added to this is the fact that her mother dies shortly after Catherine is born, adding even more disappointment as far as the Doctor is concerned.

This air of tragedy infuses the triangle of Sloper, Catherine and Morris Townsend. Cynthia Ozick (2002: 3-4) summarises the dynamics of the relationship between Townsend and Dr Sloper as it unfolds: Morris Townsend sees his chance when he looks at the plain Catherine in the dress that suggests she has eighty thousand a year. But even though Morris is a fortune-hunter, he does possess other qualities: he is entertaining, funny and charming, and in order to get to Catherine, he charms his way into Mrs. Penniman's life, but doesn't succeed in charming Dr Sloper (Ozick, 2002: 3). Dr. Sloper sees Morris only as a fortune-hunter, and he sternly tells Catherine that she will not get any of his money if she marries him (Ozick, 2002: 4). Morris, convinced of Dr Sloper's wishes, deserts Catherine, just as her father had predicted (Ozick, 2002: 4). But the doctor doesn't see the happiness Catherine has in her relationship, and he takes away the attractive husband that his plain daughter might have had, thus reducing her, as Ozick argues (2002: 4) to a sort of widowhood and mourning that he himself once went through.

John Lucas (1972: 41), in his essay "Washington Square", makes the following points with respect to Catherine's suitor and the theme of class in the novel: Morris Townsend does not belong to the area of *Washington Square*, which was a very fashionable area at the time. Instead, he lives at the end of town, where Dr. Sloper himself has to go when he goes to see Morris's sister, Mrs Montgomery. Morris is the product of a society that tries to exclude him but that he desperately wants to be a part of, and it is evident that Morris is out of place in *Washington Square*. His intelligence is not that of a foreigner, but it is also not native or natural to New York society, argues Lucas, noting, too, that Morris's unnaturalness is evident in his indifference to the codes of behaviour that govern the elite society to which he wants to belong. Lucas points to Morris's proposal that Catherine meet him in the Square and not at her house where he feels he has been insulted:

> She hesitated awhile; then at last -- "You must come to the house," she said; "I am not afraid of that."
> "I would rather it were in the Square," the young man urged. "You know how empty it is, often. No one will see us."
> "I don't care who sees us. But leave me now."
> He left her resignedly; he had got what he wanted....Her father said nothing...Mrs Penniman also was silent; Morris Townsend had told her that her niece preferred, unromantically, an interview in a chintz-covered parlour to a sentimental tryst beside a fountain sheeted with dead leaves, and she was lost in wonderment at the oddity -- almost the perversity -- of the choice. (*WS*: 51-52)

Morris Townsend's character is made abundantly clear to the reader, even while it is hidden from the naïve Catherine. Arthur Townsend says that, with regard to finding a job, Morris "takes it easy -- he isn't in a hurry. He is very particular." (*WS*: 28). It is also obvious that Morris is interested in Catherine's wealth and home, rather than in the girl herself. In chapter six he is described in the following way while visiting Catherine at her home again: "He seemed more at home this time -- more familiar; lounging a little in the chair, slapping a cushion that was near him with his stick, and looking round the room a good deal, and at the objects it contained, as well as at Catherine; whom, however, he also contemplated freely" (*WS*: 32). It is obvious from

this extract that Catherine's possessions are more important to Morris, and that he views even Catherine as an object, something to be "contemplated freely," like everything else in the house. Morris has already acquired an air of possessiveness over the new surroundings in which he finds himself. Catherine's father sums him up neatly in chapter seven when he says, "He is extremely insinuating; but it's a vulgar nature... He is altogether too familiar- I hate familiarity. He is a plausible coxcomb" (*WS*: 41).

Doctor Sloper suggests that Morris has been interested in Catherine prior to meeting her. Morris asserts that, "My interest in Miss Sloper began the first time I saw her", to which Dr Sloper replies, "Did it not by chance precede your first meeting?" (*WS*: 62), implying that Morris became interested in her wealth prior even to having met Catherine.

John Lucas (1972: 44) argues that Sloper speaks firmly in the above passage, but his statement is just as much a reflection on him as it is on Morris Townsend. Sloper, Lucas reminds us, has himself spent thirty years in trying to become a gentleman. He has moved up town to the fashionable Washington Square and used his brilliance to obtain a wealthy wife, thus being a fortune-hunter himself. Thus, as Richard Poirier suggests, Sloper is able to recognise Morris's type (in Lucas: 44). But, concludes Lucas, James also lets us know that the Doctor himself possesses some degree of vulgarity (1972: 44-45).

Like Morris, Lucas (1972: 45) goes on to observe, Sloper also plays a part in society, a part that makes him become his own victim, found in the noteworthy conversation -- referenced by Lucas -- that Sloper has with Morris at Mrs Almond's. The conversation takes place partly because of Sloper's uneasy feeling that he might, "appear ridiculous to this intelligent young man, whose private perception of incongruities he suspected of being keen" (*WS*: 48).

Lucas (1972: 45) believes that the Doctor's social persona comes into effect in the speech where Morris tells the doctor that he only has the use of his right arm in order to earn a living:

"Do you mean what am I fit for? Very little, I am afraid. I have nothing but my good right arm, as they say in the melodramas."

"You are too modest," said the Doctor. "In addition to your good right arm, you have your subtle brain. I know nothing of you but what I see; but I see by your physiognomy that you are extremely intelligent."

"Ah," Townsend murmured, "I don't know what to answer when you say that! You advise me, then, not to despair?"

And he looked at his interlocutor as if the question might have a double meaning. The Doctor caught the look and weighed it a moment before he replied. "I should be very sorry to admit that a robust and well-disposed young man need ever despair. If he doesn't succeed in one thing, he can try another. Only, I should add, he should choose his line with discretion."

"Ah, yes, with discretion," Morris Townsend repeated, sympathetically. "Well, I have been indiscreet, formerly; but I think I have got over it. I am very steady now." And he stood a moment, looking down at his remarkably neat shoes. Then at last, "Were you kindly intending to propose something for my advantage?" he inquired, looking up and smiling. (*WS*: 48-49)

This exchange between Sloper and Morris is similar to the one between Osmond and Rosier in *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Osmond's distaste for vulgarity reveals him to be vulgar (Lucas, 1972: 45).

James cleverly depicts how Morris abandons his 'manner' when he is with Catherine's aunt, Mrs Penniman, because, as Lucas notes (1972: 42), when he's with Mrs Penniman, he doesn't need to put on an act. His coarseness is revealed in conversations with Mrs Penniman, such as the moment, highlighted by Lucas, where he meets with Mrs Penniman prior to Catherine's trip to Europe:

Morris was not in high good-humour, and his response to this speech was not particularly gallant. "I don't flatter myself we shall be much observed anywhere." Then he turned recklessly toward the centre of the town. "I hope you have come to tell me that he has knocked under," he went on.

"I am afraid I am not altogether a harbinger of good; and yet, too, I am to a certain extent a messenger of peace. I have been thinking a great deal, Mr Townsend," said Mrs Penniman.

"You think too much."

"I suppose I do; but I can't help it, my mind is so terribly active. When I give myself, I give myself. I pay the penalty in my headaches, my famous headaches -- a perfect circlet of pain! But I carry it as a queen carries her crown. Would you believe that I have one now? I wouldn't, however, have missed our rendezvous for anything. I have something very important to tell you."

"Well, let's have it," said Morris. (*WS*: 110-111)

Their relationship is part of the comedy of the story, for while Mrs. Penniman is on her best behaviour with Morris, he fails to behave well at all. But then again, as Lucas (1972: 43) points out in his analysis of this relationship, Morris doesn't need to even act in front of Mrs. Penniman because she fails to observe or understand the implications of Morris's behaviour:

Mrs. Penniman's real hope was that the girl would make a secret marriage, at which she should officiate as brideswoman or duenna. She had a vision of this ceremony being performed in some subterranean chapel -- subterranean chapels in New York were not frequent, but Mrs. Penniman's imagination was not chilled by trifles -- and of the guilty couple -- she liked to think of poor Catherine and her suitor as the guilty couple -- being shuffled away in a fast-whirling vehicle to some obscure lodging in the suburbs, where she would pay

> them (in a thick veil) clandestine visits; where they would endure a period of romantic privation, and where ultimately, after she should have been their earthly providence, their intercessor, their advocate, and their medium of communication with the world, they would be reconciled to her brother in an artistic tableau, in which she herself should be somehow the central figure. (*WS*: 82)

Lucas proposes that the "absurdities hinted at in Mrs. Penniman's name (the pennilessness that causes her to batten on to the Sloper household, and the simpering interest in men which makes her a prime cause of Catherine's miserable love-affair) are fully present in this passage" (1972: 43).

Morris's laziness is apparent despite his good looks. Lavinia tells her sister Mrs. Almond that Morris will make a lovely husband for Catherine, to which Mrs. Almond replies, "I don't believe in lovely husbands, I only believe in good ones" (*WS*: 122). Mrs. Almond goes on to explain that Morris will be decent to Catherine as long as she has money, whereas if she were to lose her fortune, he will be cruel to her.

Cynthia Ozick offers an astute analysis of the role of marriage in the novel. According to her, Henry James

> believed in matrimony (and its absence) also as a primary subject for the novel as a form: the novel of usages and habits. Of the four major presences, and one minor one, who govern the action of *Washington Square*, three are widowed, and much the worse for it. Dr. Sloper is embittered because he has lost a rich and beautiful and clever wife who has left him a plain and unprepossessing daughter. Mrs. Penniman, the doctor's widowed sister, childless and unoccupied, expends her store of perilous energy on intrigues and flighty romancings. Mrs. Montgomery, the minor presence, a respectable young widow with many children, lives tidily on little money, burdened by a ne'er-do-well brother. For all these deprived persons, the novel -- like its author -- admits to a belief in the social advantages of matrimony. Had Dr. Sloper's wife not died, he would

> have continued to enjoy an adored and sprightly companion; as it is, he has only Catherine, the daughter he regards as irredeemably dull. Were Mr. Penniman still alive, Lavinia Penniman's fantasies and shallow mischiefs might sufficiently divert her clergyman husband, who presumably was not averse to having a silly wife to wag a silver tongue at. As for poor Mrs Montgomery, who knows how a robust man in the house would have disposed of Morris Townsend, her shamelessly sponging brother? All these long-absent spouses, and their clear domestic benefits, foreshadow the husband who will always be absent in Catherine's story. (2002: 2)

Henry James himself was certainly aware of the clichéd nature of this story, as Cynthia Ozick (2002: 2) points out in referencing key moments, such as when Morris Townsend says, "I have nothing but my good right arm, as they say in the melodramas" (*WS*: 48).

Coming at the novel from another angle, Edwin T. Bowden (1956: 41) believes that the houses of *Washington Square* add to the theme of monstrous, tasteless American homes. Dr. Sloper's old house, prior to moving to Washington Square, is described as "an edifice of red brick, with granite copings and an enormous fan-light over the door" (*WS*: 14). It is representative of solidity and elegance, two qualities that made Dr. Sloper a success in his own right (Bowden, 1956: 41). His new house in Washington Square is the one which dominates the novel, offers a more tangible aspect and, as Bowden argues, is representative of the Doctor's success. This new house is described as

> a handsome, modern, wide-fronted house, with a big balcony before the drawing-room windows, and a flight of white marble steps ascending to a portal which was also faced with white marble. This structure, and many of its neighbours, which it exactly resembled, were supposed, forty years ago, to embody the last results of architectural science, and they remain to this day very solid and honourable dwellings. (*WS*: 15)

This house is also representative of the wealth and position that Morris wants for himself (Bowden, 1956: 41). Morris's only moment of triumph probably comes when he sneaks into the doctor's room while he is away, as the infiltration of that room is to Morris a symbol of the wealth and comfort and outward respectability which it represents (Bowden, 1956: 42).

Throughout the course of the novel, Morris's journeys from one part of the Sloper house to another -- from the formal public rooms, the private study of Dr. Sloper and back to the public rooms up until his final journey down the steps -- is representative of the curve of his fortunes throughout the novel (Bowden, 1956: 42). For Bowden, the architecture described in *Washington Square* seems to be symbolic of America. He believes that the private homes described in James's novels offer some means of interpretation (Bowden, 1956: 40). It is obvious that Washington Square and the rest of the city are new and rapidly expanding. The history of the New World is being built.

William Wyler's *The Heiress*

William Wyler, who was born in Germany, arrived in America in 1920, under the patronage of Carl Laemmle, head of Universal Pictures. The early thirties saw him directing features. Teamed with Samuel Goldwyn, he made social dramas such as *Dodsworth*, a film that dealt with a decaying marriage, and *Dead End*, about life in the slums. He became known for his sensitive direction of actors, including John Barrymore, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, and Myrna Loy. He worked with Bette Davis throughout the early 1940's, on powerful dramas such as *The Letter* (1940) and *The Little Foxes* (1941). These were followed by equally notable successes such as the very popular *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Best Years Of Our Lives*, both explorations of the effects of war. (http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/wyler)

Wyler was, thus, a good choice to direct the adaptation of James's novel, with his interest in intimate and intense dramatic narratives.

The Heiress was released in New York in October 1949, and in London three months later, with William Wyler being commended for adapting James's novel (Raw, 2002: 246). In terms of commercial success, the film took a lengthy six months to recoup its costs, but was nominated for eight Oscars and won four -- Best Actress, Best Art Direction, Best Costume Design and Best Score (Raw, 2002: 246).

Laurence Raw (2002: 243-45) gives an account of the genesis of the film: in making *The Heiress*, he notes, Wyler wanted to repeat the success of his previous film *The Little Foxes* (1941), just as much as he was intent on remaining faithful to the novel. *The Little Foxes* won nine Oscars and was also an adaptation of a Broadway show. The suggestion for filming *Washington Square* actually came from Olivia de Havilland, who had seen the Broadway production (it opened in September 1947 and was critically acclaimed) and she wanted Wyler to direct it. Although the film was shot entirely in the studio, Raw recounts that Paramount gave Wyler a whopping $2.5 m, with $400 000 alone going towards salaries.

According to Raw:

> It was Wyler's belief that, for any film to be a success, every element had to be treated with equal importance -- cast, photography, editing, and sets. He collaborated with designer Harry Horner (who eventually won an Oscar) to create authentic period settings which would not give the secrets of the story away. ...The house is dominated by a dramatic staircase, extending upward to the second and third floors. As Wyler himself suggested, "staircases can give you marvellous camera movement and people can back down them or rise up them to reflect their characters and relationships." (2002: 246).

The opening credits of the film appear against a backdrop of various tapestry images. The film starts with the title 'A Hundred Years Ago' and the background tapestry of Washington Square turns into a moving image. The beautiful *mise-en-scène* and cheerful music at the start of the film hide the fact that a tragic tale is about to unfold. The camera pans slowly over a foregrounded park; houses are in the background and a road separates the homes from the park. Carriages drive slowly up and down the road. We then get an aerial shot of the road and a return to a shot of the Sloper house from the park, just as a woman delivers a dress for Miss Sloper while exciting music accompanies this delivery. The sets, costumes and even the articulate acting of the characters add a sumptuousness to the film that is typical of classical Hollywood filmmaking. So, we are lulled into thinking that this is going to be a fairy-tale, until we discover the coldness of Dr. Sloper towards his daughter. When Catherine appears in a magnificent ballgown for the Almond party, her father sees her outfit as being representative of the wealth she has, but doesn't compliment her for looking beautiful. Instead he compares her to her more magnificent late mother, causing both Catherine and her aunt some disappointment.

The title chosen for Wyler's adaptation stresses Catherine Sloper's identity as an heiress. It is then no surprise that a classical Hollywood film version of *Washington Square*, with a regal Olivia de Havilland in period gowns, would, melodramatically, be entitled *The Heiress* (Ozick, 2002: 2). Laurence Raw reminds us that the film *The*

Heiress was based on the Broadway and then later on the West End adaptations of the novel, rather than on the novel itself (Raw, 2002: 243). The film *The Heiress* replaces some of the scenes that were omitted from the stage adaptation of James's novel, but in a different form: for example, as Raw points out, the first meeting between Morris and Catherine does not take place on a sofa but in a gazebo, at a party for the engaged Arthur Townsend and Marian Almond. Here we are meant to focus on Catherine's feelings for Morris, which we are able to do via a string of tight close-ups (Raw, 2002: 244-45).

Olivia de Havilland, in the role of Catherine Sloper, comes across as a bit old for the part. However, she is a more attractive version of the matronly character of the novel. The actress conveys a sense of neatness, she is dutiful towards her father but is clearly absent-minded and embarrassingly shy when she speaks to strangers. This absent-mindedness comes across in the scene where Catherine dances with a partner at the Almond party, but forgets to put her glass down before going onto the dance floor. Her naïveté and shyness are probably deliberately highlighted in the film to make her appear unmarriageable, seeing as a more worldly de Havilland would not have conformed to the role. Her naïveté also gives her a more youthful appeal, considering that she has to play a teenage girl. The film also includes a scene at the Almond party where Catherine's aunt has to organise a dance partner for her, as nobody wants to dance with her. This is done with the intention of informing the audience that Catherine is a plain, awkward young woman that others tend to avoid, despite her wealth. Thus we are quite surprised when Morris actually seeks her out at the party and then wants to continue an acquaintance with her.

Raw notes that Wyler found it very difficult to work with Olivia de Havilland: he had to push her to perform in some of the scenes -- in one instance Catherine has to carry her suitcase up the stairs after being jilted by Morris, and after several wasted takes, the actress threw the empty suitcase at Wyler. The bag was then filled with books and de Havilland had to redo the scene, and with the humiliation she felt and the weight tiring her out, Wyler achieved the shot he had been aiming for, even though this scene was not in the book (Raw, 2002: 245). There is, in Raw's view, a sort of nervous energy that permeates de Havilland's performance. This, he suggests, can be seen in the final sequence of the film when she snips the thread from the final letter of her

embroidered alphabet (Raw, 2002: 245). He also likens her to Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*: just as she puts off other suitors by weaving a cloth for three years while waiting for her husband, Catherine also embroiders while Morris is away. On his return, she has to make a final decision: as she finishes her embroidery and cuts the final thread, she also symbolically cuts Morris off from her as he is knocking on the door (Raw, 2002: 245).

At the time, film reviewer Hermione Rich Isaacs praised de Havilland's ability "to lower her voice, to mould her face to a mask, and to move with cold and considered gestures that give a suitable outward form to the tragedy" (in Raw, 2002: 246). In the last few scenes of the film, Catherine closes the curtains in the house and calmly sits in her father's chair, as she is now the new mistress of the house. Taking the lamp, she coldly walks up the stairs, while Morris watches the receding light from outside on the porch. When she reaches the top of the flight, she turns around and faces the door, a lonely but large figure, perversely satisfied with having jilted him, while delivering the line, "I have been taught by masters" (Raw, 2002: 245). This scene acutely depicts the tragedy of the situation, as the only way she can rid herself of the domineering men in her life is by becoming as cruel as they have been (Raw, 2002: 245).

Cast in the role of Dr. Sloper was British actor Ralph Richardson, who made his Hollywood debut after a long career in British film. Richardson also played the role of Dr. Sloper in the London production of *Washington Square* (Raw, 2002: 245). This actor certainly brings a coldness to the role of Dr. Sloper. Unlike the more expressive Albert Finney in Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square*, Richardson seems to deliver all his lines with perfect composure, displaying the so-called stiff upper lip that the British are famous for, even when he tells Catherine that he is dying of an illness.

Because Montgomery Clift is such a physically appealing actor, the film had to somehow display his true intentions without making the character seem entirely odious. Doubtless a visibly scheming Morris Townsend would not have gone down well with Clift's female fans. So in the film, Morris turns objects around in the Sloper home to scrutinise them, and lounges in a chair with a cigar while the doctor is away -- all subtle signs that he has already made himself comfortable in the Sloper home.

These scenes also seem to say that Morris is interested in material gain, and he will go so far as to marry to get it.

According to Raw, Wyler also paid close attention to the music in the film:

> Wyler's concern for detail also extended to the music for *The Heiress*. During his seduction of Catherine, Morris sings "Plaisirs d'Amour," an eighteenth-century song by Giovanni Martini. The melody reappears from time to time in Aaron Copland's score as thematic material for the love scenes, particularly during the jilting scene, and in the final moments involving Catherine and Morris. (2002: 246)

When Morris plays this tune on the piano for Catherine, he also translates it for her. It means: "The joys of love last but a short time. The pains of love last all your life, all your life". This is exactly what happens to Catherine as she enjoys a brief love affair with Morris but feels the pain of his leaving her for the rest of her days.

In the novel, Morris tells Catherine that he is going to New Orleans for a while and deserts her by leaving her house. This is after he is convinced that he will never get his hands on Catherine's money. The film, however, presents us with a rather more dramatic scene highlighting the jilting theme, analysed so well by Ozick. In the film Catherine and Morris plan to elope, but after Morris realises that he will never get Catherine's money, he leaves Catherine waiting for him outside her front door. Obviously, the scene in the film is a much more melodramatic way of portraying their doomed relationship and Morris's greedy intentions. This scene is also the first step of Catherine's descent into a kind of madness, as she continues to wait for him even long after the time he specified. This scene also justifies the cruel way she jilts him at the end of the film.

The ending of the film version is also a lot more dramatic than that of the novel. In the novel, Morris comes to see Catherine at her home, but she makes it clear that she doesn't want to see him again. In the film, she makes him believe that they can once again be re-united, but when he returns and knocks on the front door, Catherine coldly tells the servant not to open it, thus jilting Morris in the same way he did her all those

years before. The very fact that she tricks him into believing he has another chance with her indicates that Catherine herself has become warped and vindictive, again illustrating the importance of marriage for James's novel (see Ozick above) and how the lack of a marriage can have negative consequences on a woman.

The Heiress sparked a renewed interest in the novel, which was re-issued in 1950 in both paperback and hardcover versions (Raw, 2002: 246-47). Thus while many have complained that films cannot be faithful to the original text, the irony is that these same films have sparked a renewed interest in the original literary works.

Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square*

The director of the recent film *Washington Square* (1997) is Polish-born Agnieszka Holland, who had already directed films like *The Secret Garden* (1993) and *Angry Harvest* in 1985 (Sterritt, 1997: 1).

According to Sandra Brennan, the director is "[b]est recognised for her highly politicized contributions to Polish New Wave cinema, [and] ranks as one of Poland's most prominent filmmakers." After being mentored by Andrzej Wajda, she went from strength to strength. In 1985, her feature film *Bittere Ernte/Angry Harvest*, detailing the relationship between a gentile farmer and the Jewish woman he conceals during World War 2, was nominated for an Academy award for Best Foreign Language Film. "Six years later," writes Brennan, "Holland earned even greater international acclaim and a score of awards, including a Golden Globe, for *Europa Europa* (1991). The powerful true story of a young Jewish man who assumes the identity of a Nazi in order to survive the Holocaust, it provided an unforgettable look at human atrocities and the nature of identity." (http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?).

Holland herself views her take on the story of *Washington Square* in the following way,

> I think my touch was a bit feminist. The story is about a struggle between two worlds, two kinds of values. One is the male world, where money and power and possessions are the most important things. The other is a female world, where feelings and truthfulness are more important. (qtd. in Sterritt, 1997: 1-2)

Indeed, there is a monumental struggle between Catherine and her father in this film, with both parties showing an increase in stubbornness as the film progresses.

Holland compares modern society with James's society:

> In some ways, I think the story is very modern. I think we live in a society very much like James's society...very bourgeois, with strong monetary values, and a strong feeling of class. I don't mean the traditional classes, since today you can move from one class to another. But it's still true that money... dictates very strongly where you belong and who you are (qtd. in Sterritt, 1997:2).

Holland argues that our belief in class, money and power stems from values that were instituted in the mid-1800's, which is why today we live in a "very rationalised and monetary society, where the only god is what things are worth on the free market. People -- especially women -- are seen as products, or objects of desire. This is dangerous for the human soul" (qtd. in Sterritt, 1997:2).

In this film, Catherine is clearly seen as a product or object. Morris wants Catherine, but only with her full inheritance. Once he discovers that she will only get ten thousand pounds and not the full thirty thousand, he promptly tells her that he has wasted two years of his life on her. These monetary values also apply to Dr. Sloper who sees Catherine as a possession and thinks that his own money is a means of controlling others (Sterritt, 1997:12). In this film version, a scene is included where Dr. Sloper wants to pay Mrs. Montgomery to keep Morris away from his daughter, but she stubbornly refuses.

The Holland film version starts with credits in black and white, and the music that plays is quite sombre, indicating that the story about to unfold is not going to be a happy one. Catherine is contrasted with her more sociable cousin, Marian Almond, played by the stunning Jennifer Garner. Catherine is also rendered rather insipid and idiotic in her choice of clothes and hairstyle. At the start of the film we see a rather sad-looking twelve-year old Catherine gazing out of the window, with her hair arranged in childish curls down the sides of her chubby face. Immediately thereafter, the scene changes to show a thin, adult Catherine still staring out of the window, with her hair still arranged in the ridiculous curls. Even though most of the women in the

film have their hair arranged in this way, Catherine's hair is made to look even worse because of her garish taste in clothes. Catherine's first ball gown in the Holland version is a hideous one. In the novel this particular evening dress is described as being red satin with gold fringe, which "made her look, when she sported it, like a woman of thirty;" (*WS*: 14). Thus the novel merely conveys that the outfit makes Catherine appear older and that it is made from very rich fabric, not really telling us whether it was beautiful or not. The ironic line Dr Sloper says in the novel, namely "Can this magnificent creature be my daughter?" is given even more weight by Albert Finney in this film, prompting Catherine/Leigh to reply, "I'll go change".

The director has made use of certain filmic devices to create contrasts in the film. In the opening few shots, the camera pans over a lush green park where the sounds of happy children can be heard. It pans across the road to a row of semi-detached three-story houses of red brick, and enters the one belonging to the Slopers. This exterior sequence showing the park and houses is almost exactly like the exterior scenes in the Wyler version. But the sombre interior of the house is in direct contrast to the happy scenes in the park outside. A baby has just been born and in one of the upstairs rooms a woman lies dead and drenched in blood on the bed. A nurse holds the baby up to Dr. Sloper, telling him, "Your daughter, sir". But he ignores the child, nods his head, and goes to lie next to his dead wife, saying, "You'll be with our son, in heaven". This additional scene in the film is a forecast as to how the doctor will treat his child in the future.

As Dr. Sloper lies next to his dead wife, the camera rests on the newborn, still covered in blood. The image changes to the image of the adolescent Catherine staring out of the window waiting for her father: fat, clumsy and extremely shy in front of others. In the scene where she has to sing in front of her cousins, she does the most embarrassing thing by wetting herself, much to her father's horror. The adult Catherine is a thinner version of her former self but still an unattractive, plain figure. Under Holland's direction, Jennifer Jason Leigh contrives an exaggerated performance as an irritating, infantile young woman who is rendered speechless in most social situations. Even as an adult, she still rushes childishly every evening to greet her father when he comes home from work. These juvenile displays tend to

create embarrassment in the audience on her behalf, a provocative strategy on Holland's part.

In this film, a further scene has been included to show the viewer that Catherine is not the type of girl Morris would usually be interested in. It takes place at Marian Almond's wedding when Morris introduces his sister to Catherine. Unfortunately, Catherine is standing next to her more beautiful cousin Alice Almond at the time, causing Mrs Montgomery to mistake Alice for Catherine.

It is obvious to the viewer that Catherine is not exactly the most sought-after of young ladies, with most of her relatives treating her with pity rather than respect. At Marian's party, it is obvious that Mrs. Almond dislikes Catherine's garish dress, even though she is too polite to say so. When she is introduced to Morris, she is too shy even to tell him what her name is, and hides behind her fan, leaving her more sociable cousin Marian to come to her rescue. However, we see a change in Catherine when she speaks positively of Morris Townsend in the carriage on the way home, leaving her father and Aunt Lavinia to look at her with interest. Her outburst in the carriage is the first sign of change that will proceed to take place in Catherine throughout the rest of the film.

When Morris first comes to visit Catherine at home, she is so startled by his sudden appearance that she drops all the papers she has been carrying, and is altogether awkward in the scene.

However, this film does give Catherine accomplishments not in the novel: she can play the piano and sing quite well. In the scene where Catherine and Morris sing at the piano, even the servants come and listen to their playing, and Aunt Lavinia sings along, much to Dr. Sloper's amusement. Catherine is also not afraid to display her sexual attraction for Morris, which is done hurriedly behind closed parlour doors. *The Heiress* shows Morris (Montgomery Clift), leaning over Catherine (Olivia de Havilland) in an almost overpowering way, and when they kiss, it is done in a very chaste way. In the Holland film, Morris (Ben Chaplin) kisses Catherine in a very passionate way, and she kisses him back just as passionately, indicating Holland's contemporary and revisionary depiction of Catherine as more sexually assertive.

Catherine's European tour does much to contribute to her maturity in the film. Included is the scene from the novel where Catherine and her father are alone in the Alps, and where her father warns her against marriage to Morris. After her father's cruel words to her, Catherine's scarf flutters away in the strong wind but she doesn't even notice. It seems that the more cruel Dr. Sloper becomes towards Catherine, the more mature she herself becomes, as she learns that she cannot depend on her father for anything anymore.

A scene additional to the novel -- which heightens Catherine's plight and strengthens the sense of alienation between father and daughter -- is the one where Catherine is trying on a wedding gown when her father unexpectedly walks in. He stares dumbstruck at her and offers no comment on her appearance. Disappointed, Catherine asks her maid to help her out of her dress. This scene reminds the audience of just how tragic Catherine's situation is, as even though she is trying on the dress in which she wants to marry Morris, we as the audience know that she will never marry.

On Catherine's return from her European trip, we see that she has changed greatly. When she gets off the boat and meets her aunt, she firmly tells her aunt that she is home to get married whether her father gives his consent or not. Her dress sense has improved noticeably after her European tour. When she meets Morris again for the first time after arriving, she is splendidly dressed in a gold, off-the-shoulder gown with matching accessories, while her hair is arranged in a more elegant manner.

After Morris tells Catherine that he is leaving for New Orleans, she goes to see him at his sister's house. It is on her visit to him that we see how dismal and poor his bedroom is at Mrs Montgomery's, and it is in this scene that Morris shows his true colours by admitting he was after her money. In the most tragic sequence of the entire film, Catherine runs shamelessly after his carriage in the rain, only to fall down sobbing in the mud. The effect of this scene is to show Morris in the worst possible light. The fact that he ignores Catherine so completely and cruelly and that he takes no pity on her helps us as the audience to side completely with Catherine, and to applaud her when she dismisses him from her house at the end of the film.

In the next scene, after Morris has left her, Catherine shows the cook how to prepare a complicated meal in the kitchen. In this scene, her appearance has changed dramatically from when we first saw her. She now wears a peasant-style blouse and an exotic ivory choker, while her hair is arranged in a more mature, subdued, style. When her father enters the kitchen to speak to her, it is obvious that Catherine is the one in charge. She tells him that she has broken off her engagement with Morris and has sent him away for a long time, even though the opposite has in fact occurred. Catherine is now far from the simpering, gullible girl she used to be. While Catherine's change in appearance indicates an emotional growth, Aunt Lavinia's unchanged appearance suggests that she has not matured at all, and that she still acts foolishly in her old age.

It is only in the scene where Dr. Sloper's will is read that we see a return to Catherine's old hairstyle, but this time it is arranged in braids down the sides of her face whereas before she wore curls. In this scene, her childish hairstyle suits her behaviour because she acts quite crazed when she hears that she will not be getting her full inheritance after all. This scene is the final one where Dr. Sloper exercises his will over his daughter, and thus she is dressed and acts in the same way she used to when her father was still alive and controlled all her actions.

The final scene shows a mature Catherine, who now runs a day-care centre from home. She is dressed in an austere outfit of maroon while her hair is neatly secured in a Spanish-style net. She bends awkwardly to pick up the scattered toys, and she sounds extremely tired, giving us the impression that she has aged somewhat since we last saw her. After the children have left, Aunt Lavinia comes to tell her that she has a surprise for her, and produces Morris Townsend. Catherine is unfazed, and after listening to Morris, calmly tells him never to return again. She plays a tune on the piano after Morris has left -- and an operatic voice sings the same song that she and Morris once sang together on the piano for her father and Aunt Lavinia. The camera maintains a close-up on her face while she plays, and she smiles fleetingly, a smile that is at once both triumphant and tragic.

This sequence appears to express Holland's feminist position. Rather than having Catherine remain a rich spinster, she portrays her as a working woman, one who

doesn't need a man to complete her life and who can take charge of her own fate, rather than have it be determined by a man. Having her open a crèche, Holland allows the woman to enter the working world, albeit in the traditional -- but plausible -- capacity of child caregiver.

Throughout the film, the director contrasts Catherine's unhappy situation with Marian Almond's happy one. While Dr. Sloper is ashamed of his daughter, Mr. Almond is proud of Marian. Marian is beautiful and vivacious while Catherine is plain and idiotic; Marian marries Arthur while Catherine has a long courtship with Morris; Marian has her first child while Catherine is jilted by Morris; and finally Marian has several children while the still unmarried Catherine acts as godmother to them and eventually opens a crèche at her home. Despite Holland's feminist bias, then, these scenes seem to indicate that ninteteenth-century women could only find happiness if they were married, and that if one were not married, one would be relegated to the fringes of society.

Even though this film does include both interior and exterior scenes (unlike the sets of *The Heiress*), the film is shot mostly indoors, with the spaces being rather small and confined. The interior of the Sloper house is also a lot smaller than in the Wyler version, thus losing some of the grandeur we found in the older film. Even the Almond house is small, with the garden seeming like a closed-in space. These small spaces act as a metaphor for the limited choices the women at this time had. These women are limited to the home and the family, and thus only move around in confined spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

The Portrait of a Lady: themes and characters

The themes of tragedy and inevitability are present in this novel, which was written at the same time as *Washington Square*, and forms part of James's first period of writing. While *Washington Square* is entirely concerned with New York, *The Portrait of a Lady* deals with the European experience, particularly the European experience through the eyes of an American.

Edwin T. Bowden (1956: 37) points out that Europe seems to represent the great tradition of the past, a lifestyle that was deeper and more sensitive than an American one, but it was also a life that was more corrupt and inhuman. The corruption of Europe seems to be particularly apparent with regard to, and perhaps personified by, the American Gilbert Osmond, whose fine European taste lures the naïve Isabel Archer. In a way, Isabel is representative of America, and Osmond is representative of Europe: Isabel represents all that is young and vulnerable about the new world, compared to Osmond who represents the historic and musty atmosphere of provincial European life.

In the opening chapter of *The Portrait of a Lady*, everything about the setting denotes European ideals: the grand house with its park-like surroundings, the aristocratic neighbour, afternoon tea, idle conversation, enormous wealth. It is far removed from the city-like atmosphere of Washington Square, where the entrance to the Sloper residence is on street level and not set away from the road in a garden. Even though the Touchetts themselves are American, they have an air of English gentility about them that is more in keeping with a European way of life. Isabel herself acknowledges the fact that Gardencourt has a romantic setting when she waits for Lord Warburton, suspecting him of coming to propose to her:

> It suddenly came upon her that her situation was one which a few weeks ago she would have deemed deeply romantic; the park of an old English country-house, with the foreground embellished by a local nobleman in

> the act of making love to a young lady who, on careful inspection, should be found to present re-markable analogies with herself. (*PL*: 298)

Even Lord Warburton plays on the England versus America theme: "I'm afraid it's my being an Englishman that makes you hesitate, I know your uncle thinks you ought to marry in your own country." (*PL*: 301).

In his excellent essay, "The American as a Young Lady", Christof Wegelin discusses James's American female:

> Fundamentally James's American girl is merely the American variety of a type to which, quite independent of international contrast, he liked to assign the role of the protagonist in the struggle which is central in his work, the struggle of the individual to protect his integrity and freedom against violation by the world....What matters more than life or death is the grounds on which James arouses our sympathy for the American girl, the causes of her ordeal as well as the fortitude with which she meets it. They constitute her story and, since she is his central symbol of the positive qualities he saw in America, the story of his own relation to Europe and America. (1958: 58)

Wegelin goes on to discuss Isabel in terms of being an American girl,

> Isabel too, however, is for all her pride of independence entangled in conventional American ways of thinking. ...she possesses the primary colours of James's moral spectrum: integrity, intelligence, imagination, all of which contribute -- and this is the source of the tragic tone of her story -- not only to her strength but equally to her weakness. ...The general pattern of Isabel's story is the pattern underlying many of James's stories of the American girl in Europe. Their common theme is nothing more than a variation on the theme of the lived life, probably the most constant concern of his work. The full life -- almost axiomatically the good life -- is of course not mere activity, but consists of experience had and understood, experience appropriated to oneself and made into knowledge.

> Experience missed -- rejected by oneself or withheld by others -- and experience misunderstood, perverted, is what is bad. What is therefore necessary for the full and good life are the opportunity and the freedom which provide experience; the desire, the energy, the curiosity which takes it; and the intelligence which understands it....The quality which the American girl invariably has is the eager curiosity, the freedom of the mind, and her story consists either of the struggle against the limitations on her freedom imposed from without, or -- if the freedom is granted -- of the growth of her awareness. (1958: 65-9)

Ralph can be seen as a catalyst of sorts in the novel, as well as being a complex character. After returning from America and spending a few years in England, Ralph becomes ill. He views his illness as another person's at first but gradually he comes to accept it: "It appeared to him that it was not himself in the least that he was taking care of, but an uninteresting and uninterested person with whom he had nothing in common"(*PL*: 229).

Whether or not Ralph's role in the novel is clear from the beginning, he is ultimately relegated to the role of observer, as he is destined to watch Isabel from a distance, rather than become involved in her life romantically or otherwise: "He [Ralph] speedily acquired a conviction, however, that he was not destined to fall in love with his cousin."(*PL* :231). This is a forewarning of what is to come, and Ralph is the one who unwittingly helps Isabel along to her unhappy fate. After finding out that he is the cause of Isabel's wanting to marry Osmond, he desperately tries to convince her not to, and feels an intense misery that she still wants to marry Osmond. In many ways, Ralph sees Isabel as the embodiment of everything that he is not, and wants her to fulfil all the dreams he has for her and do all the things that he himself could never do. Ralph speaks to Isabel about her decision to marry:

> "I had a sort of vision of your future," Ralph said, ... "I amused myself with planning out a kind of destiny for you. There was to be nothing of this sort in it. You were not to come down so easily, so soon."
>
> "To come down? What strange expressions you use! Is that your description of my marriage?"

> "It expresses my idea of it. You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue -- to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly some one tosses up a faded rose-bud -- a missile that should never have reached you -- and down you drop to the ground. It hurts me," said Ralph, audaciously, "as if I had fallen myself!" (*PL*: 546).

In his speech, Isabel has been compared to a soaring bird, while Osmond is like a faded rose-bud, something past its prime, tainted and unwanted.

It is as if a shadow has now passed over Ralph's life, one that is more fatal to him than even his illness:

> Ralph, standing there with his hands in his pockets, followed her with his eyes; then the lurking chill of the high-walled court struck him and made him shiver, so that he returned to the garden, to breakfast on the Florentine sunshine (*PL*: 550).

The fact that he doesn't eat and instead "breakfasts on the Florentine sunshine" gives him a sort of ethereal quality that has been brought on by his illness and almost suggests his moving towards his death.

According to Lee Clark Mitchell,

> Isabel was a vision, that is, before James discovered a plot to spin -- a plot that ensued from what he repeatedly referred to as "my primary question: 'Well, what will she do?'" Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that the question reverberates through the novel, asked by various characters of Isabel and continuing to echo at the end. James's unusual ploy was to interest us in his heroine for her capacities rather than her actions, for her potential rather than her history, for her freedom from plot rather than her engagement "in the tangle." As a consequence, we tend to treat Isabel not as a character mired in narrative but as an actual figure only partially portrayed by the text. She has a life behind and beyond the book whose fantasies about her constitute our only access to her being. (1998:2)

Daniel Shaw has noted that one of Isabel's most impressive traits is her ability to make almost every man she meets fall in love with her (Shaw, 2002: 250). Her cousin Ralph, who is probably the most sympathetic male character in the story, loves her from a distance, but won't admit to it or do anything about it for two reasons: 1. He thinks that cousins shouldn't marry and 2. He has a deathly case of tuberculosis (Shaw, 2002: 250). Because he thinks it unfair to burden Isabel with himself, he is set on protecting her rather than becoming a suitor to her (Shaw, 2002: 250).

Lord Warburton, on the other hand, openly confesses his love for Isabel, and proposes to her in the grounds of Gardencourt shortly after Isabel's arrival there. According to Dorothea Krook (1967: 28), Warburton is presented as the perfect example of an Englishman of the British aristocracy, and Mr. Touchett's description of him below is thought to be quite an accurate account of this British lord:

> "Lord Warburton is a very amiable young man -- a very fine young man. He has a hundred thousand a year. He owns fifty thousand acres of the soil of this little island. He has half-a-dozen houses to live in. He has a seat in Parliament as I have one at my own dinner-table. He has very cultivated tastes -- cares for literature, for art, for science, for charming young ladies. The most cultivated is his taste for the new views. It affords him a great deal of entertainment -- more perhaps than anything else, except the young ladies...His views don't hurt any one as far as I can see; they certainly don't hurt himself. And if there were to be a revolution, he would come off very easily; they wouldn't touch him, they would leave him as he is; he is too much liked." (*PL*: 265-266)

Thus Lord Warburton is presented as "exceedingly likeable; and easily the most likeable feature of his character (we are soon made to see) is his complete and perfect simplicity." (Krook, 1967: 28).

Krook (1967: 32) suggests that there is a less than admirable side to Warburton's character and that this only comes out later in the novel. When Warburton re-appears again in the story some years after Isabel's marriage, he almost immediately develops an attachment for Pansy Osmond, but their difference in ages renders Warburton a less than admirable character (Krook, 1967: 32). When he eventually leaves Rome and marries a young English woman from the aristocracy, we feel that Isabel's belief was right when she told him that she was not the right wife for him (Krook, 1967: 33).

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer's stubborn refusal to marry the two decent men who initially propose to her results in her ending up married to the awful and opportunistic Gilbert Osmond. Isabel's refusal to marry Lord Warburton even scares herself, as he is the best man that she could hope to marry for economic and social reasons, given that she is a foreigner and has not received her fortune as yet. However, on a personal level, Warburton is not the right man for Isabel as she will be confined to other sorts of limitations if she were to marry him.

Ironically it is because of her cousin's sharing his wealth with her that she becomes the prey of Osmond and Madame Merle. There are numerous allusions to Isabel's unhappy future throughout the first few chapters of the novel, such as the exchange between her and old Mr. Touchett. They compare life in Europe to life in America and old Mr. Touchett says, "I sometimes think I have paid too much for this [meaning his life in England]. Perhaps you also might have to pay too much"(*PL*: 308). Isabel tells Lord Warburton, "I can't escape unhappiness....In marrying you, I shall be trying to." (*PL*: 326). Even Henrietta Stackpole recognises that Isabel is on a collision course with disaster. She tells Ralph that:

> "Isabel is changing every day; she is drifting away - right out to sea. I have watched her and I can see it. She is not the bright American girl she was. She is taking different views, and turning away from her old ideals. I want to save those ideals, Mr Touchett,..." (*PL* :314).

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel is described by her brother-in-law, Mr. Ludlow, in the following way:

> "Isabel is written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out. She ought to marry an Armenian, or a Portuguese".
>
> "That's just what I am afraid she will do!" cried Lillian, who thought Isabel capable of anything."(*PL:* 220-21).

These moments in the novel can be seen as a premonition or a foreboding as to what is going to happen in future -- the fact that Isabel will indeed marry a sort of foreigner, in the form of the expatriate American, Gilbert Osmond. Christof Wegelin describes Osmond in the following way:

> Isabel's uninformed vitality is in sharp contrast with the studied formality of Osmond. Meeting him when her senses are charmed and her fancy stirred by her first experience of Italy....For everything in Osmond is pose....His contempt for the world turns out to be the shabbiest kind of snobbery. His deeply calculated effects, though produced by no vulgar means, have after all the vulgarest of motives. He is in sum the very antithesis of herself. (1958: 72)

After Isabel announces her marriage to her family, she is determined not to hear anything bad about her future husband, which clearly shows a great deal of naïveté on her part. On a visit to the Countess Gemini, she is determined not to hear anything from the Countess that Pansy cannot hear, thus aligning herself with childish ideals instead of trying to be mature. Countess Gemini: "Do you think my niece ought to go out of the room? Pansy, go and practise a little in my boudoir." To which Isabel replies, "Let her stay please, I would rather hear nothing that Pansy may not!"(*PL:* 558). Isabel is also very naïve about the relationship between Madame Merle and Osmond. At one point, Isabel interrupts a conversation between Madame Merle and Osmond, and comes to believe that there was more between them than she initially believed. Later, Isabel reflects on those things that drew her to Osmond in the first place (at this point Isabel has already been married for a few years):

> She had a vision of him -- she had not read him right. A certain combination of features had touched her, and in them she had seen the most striking of portraits. That he was poor and lonely, and yet that somehow he was noble -- that was what interested her and seemed to give her her opportunity. There was an indefinable beauty about him -- in his situaution, in his mind, in his face. She had felt at the same time that he was helpless and ineffectual, but the feeling had taken the form of a tenderness which was the very flower of respect. (*PL*: 631).

Once Isabel comes to know the true Osmond after they are married, her feelings about him are transformed to the opposite of what she felt when she first met him.

Osmond is in fact an American expatriate and not a European (Wegelin, 1958: 73). Gilbert Osmond appears to be more European than American as he seems to have adopted a false sense of history and good taste that seems to be more in keeping with a European lifestyle. Osmond, an American by birth but who has been living in Europe since childhood, is the archetypal Jamesian expatriate (Krook, 1967: 39). His villa contains *objets d'art* that single him out as being a man of good taste (Krook, 1967: 39). Ralph describes Osmond to Lord Warburton: "Oh yes, he is an American; but one forgets that; he is so little of one."(*PL*: 495).

Osmond's oppressive nature in the novel, and the way this nature will affect his marriage to Isabel is evident in a dialogue between him and Madame Merle after he has met Isabel:

> "She is really very charming; I have scarcely known anyone more graceful."
>
> "I like to hear you say that. The better you like her, the better for me."
>
> "I like her very much. She is all you said, and into the bargain capable, I feel, of great devotion. She has only one

fault."

"What is that?"

"She has too many ideas."

"I warned you she was clever."

"Fortunately they are very bad ones," said Osmond.

"Why is that fortunate?"

"*Dame,* if they must be sacrificed!" (*PL:* 484)

This exchange between the two characters not only demonstrates Osmond's manipulativeness, but also indicates his intense cruelty and his conviction that Isabel will be his. Osmond not only goes on to inhibit her freedom, but he also inhibits her very soul. His interest in Isabel seems to have little to do with love for her. Rather, he desires her because she is the best possible choice in a marriage partner that he is likely to have. Osmond has a warped mind. Isabel appeals to him even more in light of the fact that an English Lord proposed to her and was subsequently rejected by her:

> We knew that he was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior, the exquisite; and now that he had seen Lord Warburton, whom he thought a very fine example of his race and order, he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by rejecting the splendid offer of a British aristocrat. Gilbert Osmond had a high appreciation of the British aristocracy -- he had never forgiven Providence for not making him an English duke -- and could measure the unexpectedness of this conduct. It would be proper that the woman he should marry should have done something of that sort. (*PL:* 501).

Osmond is an aesthete, a type found in novels like *A Room with a View* and *The Portrait of Dorian Grey* (Shaw, 2002: 250). He enjoys collecting art works, thus a marriage to Isabel will provide him with enough wealth to continue his art collecting (Shaw, 2002: 250).

Krook argues that Isabel marries Osmond for several reasons:

> The first....is her ardent desire to enlarge and enrich her experience of life, to grow in wisdom and virtue under the guidance of this most superior of men. The second is her desire, equally ardent, to serve. More specifically, it is the desire to do something with her money that will be at once useful and imaginative; most specifically, to use her money in the service of someone she loves. These are the two fundamental needs of her nature; and in Gilbert Osmond she believes she has found someone who will satisfy both. Osmond, she believes, is a man to whom her fortune will be of real service, whose enjoyment of it she can intimately share. At the same time (she also believes) he is a man who in his turn will share her desire for self-development, and by virtue of his superior gifts and accomplishments will contribute everything in the world to the enlargement of her mind, the refinement of her sensibilities, indeed to the extension -- the most splendid extension imaginable -- of her life's experience. (1967: 44-45)

It is obvious from the novel that Osmond has delusions of grandeur, and Isabel is the key to helping him achieve that grandeur. It is because of Isabel's many attributes that he is interested in her -- her money, her connections, her intelligence. She is seen by Osmond as being the best, and he likes only the best, whether it be objects or people -- this is why he has been connected to Madame Merle all these years, because she too was the best example of the perfect woman. Even Ralph describes Madame Merle as being too perfect, and as having no stain on her character whatsoever. So it is natural that Osmond should want to be acquainted with her, but her lack of money would have prevented him from marrying her:

> He had waited all these years because he wanted only the best, and a portionless bride naturally would not have been the best....
>
> There was therefore no incongruity in his wishing to marry -- it was his own idea of success, as well as that which Madame Merle, with her old-time interest in his affairs,

entertained for him (*PL*: 505).

Everyone Isabel knows disapproves of her marrying Osmond. Daniel Shaw (2002: 251) offers an argument for Isabel choosing Osmond: the resistance from her friends might have been the deciding factor for Isabel. Shaw directs our attention to the following moment in the novel: "This dislike was not alarming to Isabel; she scarcely even regretted it; for it served mainly to throw into higher relief the fact, in every way so honourable, that she married to please herself"(*PL*: 551). If marriage to Goodwood or Warburton would have pleased her friends, then it was their very social acceptability that made her refuse their offers, suggests Shaw, going on to point out that Isabel's intention to marry Osmond is questionable as she becomes more attracted to him after her friends' resistance to him. Thus, he adds, she is like the rebellious modern-day teenager who does the exact opposite of what his/her parents tell them to do.

However, it is a rather astute observation made by Ralph Touchett after Isabel's marriage that gives us a true insight into what Osmond is really like:

> Ralph was a clever man; but Ralph had never -- to his own sense -- been so clever as when he observed, *in petto*, that under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values, Osmond lived exclusively for the world. Far from being its master, as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant, and the degree of its attention was his only measure of success. He lived with his eye on it, from morning till night, and the world was so stupid it never suspected the trick. Everything he did was *pose* -- *pose* so deeply calculated that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse. Ralph had never met a man who lived so much in the land of calculation. His tastes, his studies, his accomplishments, his collections, were all for a purpose. His life on his hill-top at Florence had been a *pose* of years. (*PL* :597-598).

The novel is divided into three sections. The first section starts with Isabel being found by her aunt and taken to England and Europe. This section of the novel marks a happy time for Isabel, where her world is still full of possibilities. This is followed by the section in Europe where Isabel meets and marries Gilbert Osmond and where she also meets a host of other characters: the Countess Gemini, Pansy and a renewal of acquaintance with Edward Rosier. This section of the novel is distinctly dark and depressing, where Isabel is no longer the free spirit she once was. She is now part of Osmond's world, where he is able to manipulate everyone, including his co-conspirator, Madame Merle. Even Madame Merle possesses a certain oppressive quality, with her true feelings always hidden and her apartment full to the brim with *objets d'art*. The final section of the novel describes a return to Gardencourt and everything that Isabel once knew. When she meets Henrietta Stackpole and the kindly Mr. Bantling, it becomes a return to happier times, even if it's only for a little while. The reader undoubtedly feels a sense of relief when Isabel returns to Gardencourt to see her invalid cousin. The oppressiveness we felt when Isabel was in Rome is lifted when she arrives back in England. Isabel views Gardencourt with nostalgia and when she finally talks to Ralph at his bedside, she recognises the fact that she has not fulfilled her potential, that she instead wasted what was given to her.

Her return is also marked by the viability of Caspar Goodwood as an alternative to Osmond. Goodwood has been described earlier:

> He was not especially good-looking, but his physiognomy had an air of requesting your attention, which it rewarded or not, according to the charm you found in a blue eye of remarkable fixedness and a jaw of the somewhat angular mould, which is supposed to bespeak resolution. (*PL*: 226)

Dorothea Krook analyses Goodwood:

> In Caspar Goodwood, James desires to give us a type standing as nearly as possible at the opposite pole to Lord Warburton (and also, as we shall see, to Gilbert Osmond). A Bostonian, the son of a prosperous cotton industrialist, he has, though still young, been running the family business

> for some years; and he is offered to us as the late nineteenth-century variant of the modern American tycoon. He is a man in whom the practical intelligence and the practical imagination predominate to the exclusion of other sorts of intelligence and imagination: a man of resolute will; completely single-minded in his pursuit of particular practical ends; incapable of being deflected from his purpose. (1967: 33-34)

It is precisely this resolute will of Goodwood's that allows him to pursue Isabel across the world.

By the end of the novel, Isabel returns to Rome, but for what purpose? Caspar Goodwood goes to Henrietta, expecting to find Isabel, but only to discover that she has already left for Rome. Yet the question remains: why does the novel end on such an expectant note? Henrietta says, "Look here Mr. Goodwood, just you wait!"(*PL*: 800). It would be nice to believe that Henrietta means to tell him that Isabel is planning on returning to England again and that she will separate from Osmond. But we can't be sure that this is the case. It is entirely possible that Isabel returns to Rome for good out of a sense of duty towards both her marriage and Pansy (Isabel knows that Pansy will be left at the mercy of her father and has no real mother figure to speak of), and this seems to be the common consensus amongst critics.

Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*

New Zealand director Jane Campion tackled *The Portrait of a Lady* directly after the success of *The Piano* (1993), but whereas *The Piano* was an original script by Campion, some members of the audience for *The Portrait of a Lady* would have read James's novel, and had mental images of what they thought the characters looked like (Shaw, 2002: 254). Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* was released in 1996, at the time of a renewed interest in British and American "literary" films such as *The Crucible*, *The English Patient*, *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Gordon, 2003: 14).

However, Campion didn't want to follow the realistic conventions made popular by the Merchant-Ivory productions of classic novels. Daniel Shaw (2002: 254) summarises the unconventional cinematic features of the film: canted frames, Chaplin-type silent movie inserts, as well as surrealist dream sequences. Shaw notes that these departures from traditional Hollywood convention were on the whole disturbing to audience members.

The film opens with a series of voice-overs from present-day Australian women who talk about their romantic lives. These voices are heard against a black screen, which then changes to scenes of contemporary women in a forest-like setting but where there are no sounds to be heard. Rather, these women are in various postures, either dancing, or sitting and staring confidently at the camera. These scenes provide a contrast with the one about to follow, as these happy women are in direct opposition to the first image we have of Isabel.

Isabel is sitting outdoors, with the camera slowly zooming in on her pale, agitated face. Her face is devoid of any colour, her eyebrows are unshaped and her hair is parted down the middle and seems untidy. She also seems close to tears. Warburton comes to the spot where she is sitting but as he speaks, we become aware that he is in fact in the process of continuing a conversation with her that must have started before we met Isabel. This scene is the start of the film, but in the novel the scene is from chapter twelve. Presumably, the reason Campion starts the film in this way is so that

we can compare the lives of women today with the limitations placed on women in the 1800's, and so that we can sympathise with our female protagonist. We also see how happy the contemporary women sound when they talk about love, and how the concept of love, or rather Warburton's declaration of his love for Isabel, might cause Isabel so much pain. The tilted angle of the camera as it focuses on Isabel's lower body while she walks back to the house makes us feel uncomfortable, just as Isabel feels visibly angry and uncomfortable after Warburton's speech.

Shaw (2002: 254) discusses the casting of Warburton noting that, in the novel, Warburton is described as a lively, handsome member of the aristocracy who, in Shaw's view, should perhaps be played by someone more like Christopher Reeve than Richard E. Grant. Shaw goes on to point out that Grant has been known to play rather uptight, smug characters such as the fashion designer in *Ready to Wear* and a submissive husband in *Henry and June,* characters who certainly don't conform to notions of vigor and health. Thus, by making Warburton somewhat less than desirable, Campion makes the audience agree with Isabel's refusal of this English lord (Shaw, 2002: 254). On the other hand, suggests Shaw (2002: 254), the choice of Viggo Mortensen (who has been described in Microsoft Cinemania as having a "handsome, yet edgy, even threatening, European appearance") makes Caspar Goodwood a more attractive suitor in the film than he is in the book. In the conversation in the novel where Henrietta tells Isabel that she met Goodwood on the steamer coming from America, Henrietta says, "I see his face now, and his earnest, absorbed look, while I talked. I never saw an ugly man look so handsome!" (*PL*: 290).

In the film, Isabel is staying at Pratt's Inn in London with Henrietta Stackpole. Caspar Goodwood comes to see her but we get the idea that the inn is in a dingy part of town, and even the interior of Isabel's room is very dark and dreary. In the film, Caspar Goodwood is played by the striking, and indeed good-looking Viggo Mortensen, who lends a certain charm to the supposedly ugly character from the novel.

Just before Caspar Goodwood leaves, he touches Isabel's face lovingly, obviously hesitant to leave her behind. It is after Goodwood has left that Isabel fantasises about three men touching and caressing her on her bed, namely, Goodwood, Warburton and Ralph. This scene not only points to Isabel's sexual desires, but the fact that all three

men are in her fantasy suggests that she sees all of them in the same light, she doesn't see any one of them as particularly special.

The next morning at the inn Ralph talks to Henrietta alone in the breakfast room, and at the end of the scene, Ralph has a fly trapped in a pretty crystal glass, an image that acts as a metaphor for Isabel who will be trapped in a loveless marriage in the future, even though she'll be surrounded by finery.

The next few scenes take place at Gardencourt once more. Old Mr. Touchett is very ill and Isabel and Ralph have returned from London to see him. The house is gloomy and in keeping with the dreariness that accompanies impending death. Isabel hovers on the staircase and hears the strains of music from the piano. She opens a door downstairs and a slant of light falls across part of her face, leaving the rest of her figure in darkness and producing a beautiful chiaroscuro effect. The room she enters is in direct contrast to the dark passageway she has just left behind. The room is filled with natural light, with its walls painted lime green and its surfaces covered in expensive objects.

An elegant woman is playing the piano and is sitting in profile. Her hair is beautifully arranged and piled on top of her head, and she wears long gold earrings and a gorgeous plum silk dress. She presents a direct contrast to Isabel who tends to favour dark, plain clothes, minimal jewellery and unkempt hair. These two women's outer appearances are an indication of their inner feelings. Isabel's plain appearance is indicative of her naïve, uncomplicated life while Madame Merle's groomed figure is an outer façade of her, manipulative nature, a nature that she feels can be hidden underneath all her finery.

One thing that both the novel and the film vividly convey to the audience is the way in which Osmond's home is described. In the film, there is a scene where Isabel returns home to her husband after having been out. She steps from the carriage into the sunlight and soon thereafter into the oppressive shadow of the interior of her home. In the film, even her face changes as she steps into this gloom, so that we can see that she is acutely aware of her trapped state. However, Isabel's character in the film seems to have a gloomy appearance from the beginning of the film (her clothes

and hairstyle give her a look of severity), so that her marriage to Osmond seems to be the completion of a gloom that has already enveloped her. In the novel, the depressing state of Osmond's home is described to the reader on Isabel's first visit to him in Florence. His home is described in the following way, "There was something rather severe about the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in, it would not be easy to get out...Mr. Osmond met her in the cold ante-chamber -- it was cold even in the month of May..." (*PL*: 451). Osmond's home is an extension of himself, and both the novel and the film convey the cold atmosphere of his house.

After Isabel is married, the first image we see of her is when she is seated at a dresser in a dark room. She is seated in profile and holds her head in her hand, while her other hand strokes a tiny porcelain hand. We can only assume that this hand is a replica of her dead baby son's. We see what the Osmonds' life together is like while they are preparing for a party. Yet, even in the scenes where Isabel talks to Osmond in their house, the rooms are dark and Osmond keeps the shutters closed to keep the light out.

With the party in preparation, numerous servants walk around and Osmond instructs them in Italian. The house may now be described as gloomy but opulent: the Osmonds appear to live like royalty. Even the servants are richly dressed in the old-fashioned style of brocaded jackets, powdered wigs and cravats. As Osmond instructs the servants, Isabel appears. This is the first time we see her after she is married, and she appears richly dressed. Her clothes are expensive and her hair is stylishly arranged on top of her head in thick waves, while heavy gold earrings dangle from her lobes. She now closely resembles Madame Merle in her style of dress. Osmond asks her coldly where Pansy is and she replies that she has already come down. All three of them arrange themselves perfectly on the sofa to await their guests, with Isabel and Pansy seated and Osmond standing behind them. It is obvious that Osmond is in charge, and that he has them right where he wants them.

The choice of John Malkovich to play Gilbert Osmond has brought about much discussion among critics. In his paper, "Isabel Archer: Tragic Protagonist or Pitiable Victim?", Daniel Shaw notes that Osmond is quite an undeveloped character in Campion's film and adds that John Malkovich is renowned for playing bad guys ever since his role in *Dangerous Liaisons*, thus making it difficult for audience members to

understand why Isabel cannot see his manipulations (Shaw, 2002: 254). However, Isabel's blindness to his manipulations can be explained in light of the fact that she is still very young and very naïve when she marries him. I believe that the choice of John Malkovich to play Gilbert Osmond in the film is a good one, as he has the ability to inspire either pity or fear in others, making him the perfect choice for the villainous, yet enigmatic, role.

It is interesting to note that there are three scenes in the film that show Isabel and Madame Merle walking together in the rain. In films, rain is often indicative of a gloomy atmosphere or a depressing period, thus the use of rain implies that the relationship between these two women will not be a happy one. The first scene is when Isabel initially meets Madame Merle at Gardencourt and they go for a walk in the grounds together. It is raining and they carry black umbrellas, while Isabel refuses to believe that anyone could possibly dislike Madame Merle. The next rainy scene takes place in Rome when Madame Merle requests that Isabel convince Lord Warburton to marry Pansy, causing great shock in Isabel and prompting her to ask Merle, "Who are you? What have you to do with me?", to which Madame Merle replies, "Everything". It is after this scene that we see Madame Merle and Osmond talking. Madame Merle admits that she hates what she has done to Isabel and bangs the door repeatedly, with tears running down her face. In this scene Osmond picks up a beautiful blue teacup to inspect it, and Madame Merle says, "Please be careful of that precious object", to which Osmond replies, "It already has the wee bit of a tiny crack". The cup acts as a metaphor for Isabel and the fact that Osmond has already damaged her.

The next scene is an outdoor one showing Pansy, Isabel and the Countess Gemini together. It is then that Rosier spots them and calls out to Pansy, but unfortunately they are separated by iron bars that seem to act as prison bars. And both Rosier and Pansy seem to be in prisons of their own, brought about by Gilbert Osmond. Rosier desperately calls out to Isabel as well, saying that he has sold his bibelots for fifty thousand dollars, and asks whether Mr Osmond will find him rich enough now. It is just after this that Osmond informs Isabel and his sister that he has sent Pansy back to the convent, claiming that she has become "dusty". But this is obviously an excuse to separate her from Mr Rosier. Osmond not only wants to separate Pansy and Rosier, he

also wants to separate Isabel from her family. If Osmond can separate his wife and daughter from the people they love, then it becomes easier for him to control them.

When Isabel receives a telegraph from her aunt saying that Ralph is on his deathbed, she goes to her husband's room unannounced to tell him that she wants to go and see him. However, he is determined not to let her go and tells her: "You are nearer to me than any other human creature and I am nearer to you."

Even though these words are supposed to be words of love, we know that they are not if they are uttered by Osmond. These words are instead more like a prison sentence for the heroine. We see that Isabel is distraught at these words as she bangs her head twice against the wall, before Osmond prevents her from doing it again by placing his hand on her forehead. Isabel walks out of the room crying and comes across the Countess Gemini in one of the sitting rooms. Immediately, the frame contains more colour, with more orange tones, unlike the scene Isabel has just been in with Osmond where the colours were grey. She tells the Countess about her dying cousin and goes to her room, where she lies across the bed. It is in this scene that the Countess tells her about Pansy being Madame Merle's daughter.

The final scene between Isabel and Madame Merle, following this revelation, is at the convent. Isabel goes to the convent to see Pansy, only to encounter Madame Merle as well. When she sees Madame Merle, Isabel turns away from her. Thus, Madame Merle speaks to Isabel's back. Isabel doesn't say a word all through Madame Merle's speech, and we can see on Madame Merle's face that she realises Isabel knows her secret about Pansy. The camera pans down to the object Madame Merle is holding. It is a doll, a gift for Pansy, but it is also an object that is representative of a baby. After Isabel leaves the convent, Madame Merle waits for her outside, and while Isabel gets into the waiting carriage, Madame Merle speaks to Isabel, getting wet in the rain. It is here that Madame Merle tells her that it was Ralph who made her rich.

The rain holds a different meaning for each of the scenes in the film. Rather, it is an indication of Isabel's growing awareness of what is really going on with the people around her. In the first rain scene at Gardencourt, Isabel is still very naïve and thinks that Madame Merle is a wonderful person. In the second scene she becomes conscious

of the fact that Madame Merle is more involved in her life than she herself has been and in the third scene, Isabel is fully aware of Madame Merle's role in her marriage as well as the fact that she is really Pansy's mother. It is also in this third scene that Madame Merle makes Isabel aware of Ralph's generosity, thus completing Isabel's emotional awareness.

It is after this revelation that Isabel goes back to England. At the station, she is met by Henrietta and Mr. Bantling (this is in fact Mr. Bantling's first appearance in the film), and once back at Gardencourt she walks around the same green room in which she first met Madame Merle all those years before. At Gardencourt, Isabel reverts to her old hairstyle, with her hair parted in the middle and arranged on either side of her head. Ralph is by now very ill, and as Isabel sits by his bedside and talks to him, the regret and pain she feels at marrying Osmond is apparent. She even goes so far as to lie next to Ralph in bed, and kiss him fervently, while we realise that she would have been so much better off had she married Ralph in spite of his illness.

The scene changes to an outdoor one. Snow covers the grounds of Gardencourt and a procession makes its way to the cemetery close by. Ralph has finally died and after the funeral Isabel goes to sit on the same low tree branch she sat on at the start of the film. When the film started the grounds at Gardencourt were green, it was summer and Isabel's life still held numerous possibilities. Now it is winter, the tree is bare and the ground is white, and Isabel is older and wiser. Just as Lord Warburton appeared to Isabel at the start of the film, Caspar Goodwood now appears and tries to convince Isabel to make a new life with him. But after they share a long kiss, Isabel runs away from him, through the snow and back to the house. It is here that the film ends, with Isabel trapped between either entering the house or going back to Caspar Goodwood. However, the fact that she runs away from Goodwood in the film does seem to suggest that she feels trapped by him as well.

My impression of Campion's film is that it is a gloomy interpretation of the novel. Even the first scene with Isabel is depressing, whereas the start of the novel has a note of optimism to it. However, it provides an accurate interpretation of a young woman trapped in an oppressive relationship, with actress Nicole Kidman portraying Isabel's tragic life to great effect.

CONCLUSION

Film directors bring their own interpretations of the novel to the screen. These directors not only interpret the novels in terms of the times they themselves work in, but are also influenced by certain types of cinema. Consider the golden age of Hollywood that William Wyler was a part of and the feminist beliefs that inspired female directors Campion and Holland. While being faithful to the original text has to be considered so that the film doesn't veer too far off the mark, it is also important to adapt the text in such a way as to make it interesting for a filmic medium.

While the topic of adapting novels to film is still greatly debated, it would be safe to say that the films usually generate a renewed interest in the novels themselves. This is quite a feat considering that we live in a world that is becoming faster and more technologically advanced, a world where the cinema is a form of instant gratification, where we can be entertained for a short while before returning to our busy lives. So if the world of film can inspire us to once again read the classic works of great authors, perhaps the cinema is providing a return to older forms of narrative entertainment.

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