

**THE SHAPING OF CONSCIOUSNESS: CONVENTIONAL ADVENTURE
LANGUAGE AND GOTHIC IMAGERY IN JAMES'S "DAISY MILLER" AND
THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Henry James's use of conventional adventure language and Gothic imagery in "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady to develop the consciousnesses of the respective heroines, Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer.

The thesis demonstrates that whereas in "Daisy Miller" these conventions delineate the heroine's undeveloped imagination and underdeveloped consciousness, in The Portrait they delineate the heroine's rather active imagination and developed consciousness.

Identifying James's belief that adventure stems not so much from event as from the way a character perceives event, the thesis explains how Daisy can undertake one conventional adventure after another and experience some emotional excitement yet nowhere near the psychological stirrings or the sense of adventure that Isabel derives from her rather ordinary experiences.

The thesis suggests that in contrast to Daisy, who takes little time to reflect on her adventures, Isabel continually calls on her consciousness to assimilate her experiences, identify their adventurous aspects and use the results to track her destiny.

The thesis concludes that whereas Daisy eventually perishes as a result of her undeveloped consciousness and her failure to consider the probable consequences of the adventurous actions of her life, Isabel perseveres, using her active consciousness to direct her life and ultimately to help her survive an unforeseen, disappointing destiny.

In the latter part of "The Art of Fiction" Henry James responds to the nineteenth-century literary critic Walter Besant's assertion that a story is nothing without adventure. James asks, "What is adventure . . . ?"¹ In posing the question, James suggests not that his lexicon lacks a definition for the word but rather that what constitutes adventure differs among people, particularly among fiction writers. Implicit in this question is James's belief that while a story might well consist of exciting or remarkable experiences or the encountering of risks, adventure does not necessarily lie outside the realm of ordinary experience.

The author expresses this notion throughout his literary works by means of his subject matter. James bypasses the standard adventure subjects—man's "relations with the pistol, the pirate, the police, the wild and tame beast"²—that English adventure novelists of his era treated and he writes instead of adventure more common to daily life, particularly, psychological adventure. Intrigued by the perilous battles, the strange encounters and the enormous risks that can engage a character's mind as a result of his or her ordinary experiences, James seeks to relate the kinds of extraordinary adventures that can stem from "an 'exciting' inward life."³

According to the literary critic John Paterson, James writes about psychological adventure because he believes that "the territories of the mind are as fraught with perilous adventure as the more rugged territories traversed by [literary contemporaries] Scott, Stevenson, and Kipling."⁴ James also writes about psychological adventure because he believes that it delineates a key element in fiction—character. In "The Art of Fiction," James stresses the importance of character by asking, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is . . . a novel that is not of character?"⁵ James's rhetoric communicates his belief that without character, a work has no incident. In James's estimate, a work could hold all the perils in the world and still fall short of being a great work of adventure by lacking a character who perceives events in such a way that relatively ordinary experiences become extraordinary psychological adventures.

Bearing out this point are "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady, two of James's early works which treat the experiences of the unattached young American woman traveling in Europe. Composed during a career which James devoted to examining the internal, psychological experiences of character and to developing the modern psychological novel, the works examine the consciousnesses of the respective heroines, Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer, two "freely adventuring American maidens"⁶ who embark on

excursions abroad. James illustrates the heroines' characters by drawing on the conventional imagery of his literary contemporaries, particularly that which stems from Gothic fiction, a type of literature characterized by medieval atmospheres, Gothic settings and images of magic, mystery, chivalry, danger, and sometimes horror. A study of how James uses such imagery reveals the great psychological differences between the two heroines and distinguishes them. James's imagery indicates, for example, that while both heroines have similar desires to undertake conventional adventures such as trips to foreign lands, journeys to Gothic castles and tours of unfamiliar estates, they differ from each other in their views of such adventures and in the way that they pursue them. Daisy's heedless pursuit of actual conventional adventures reveals a naive, uneducated mind and evidences an underdeveloped consciousness which precludes her from experiencing psychological adventure. By contrast, Isabel's more mindful view and more deliberate, carefully-conceived pursuit of imagined conventional adventure illuminates a more active and somewhat more educated mind and sheds light on a more developed consciousness which prompts her to experience psychological adventure continually. James's imagery establishes the heroines' different motives for pursuing conventional adventure and thus exposes their diametrically opposed inward lives. In the end, the imagery gives reason for Daisy's helpless fall to her catastrophic death and

establishes a case for Isabel's brave acceptance of, and perseverance in, her own unforeseen destiny.

From the start, James suggests the mental simplicity of the "wandering maiden,"⁷ Daisy Miller, a character whose ignorance of the likely consequences of conventional adventures evidences her underdeveloped consciousness. The heroine first reveals her obliviousness when, upon meeting Winterbourne at Vevey, she inquires about the Castle of Chillon, an image from Gothic adventure. "'Have you been to that old castle?'"⁸ Daisy asks her companion offhandedly, pointing nonchalantly at the Chateau with her parasol. Daisy's simplicity emerges in the way that she so casually introduces, in conversation with a relative stranger, a subject that connotes mystery, romance and adventure. Whereas a more mindful maiden might hesitate to broach such a subject, Daisy fails to consider the potential impropriety of her speech. Nor does the heroine see the awkwardness in the way that she gestures towards the ancient monument or refers to the "far-shining walls of the Chateau de Chillon"⁹ simply as "that old castle." Uneducated in Gothic history, Daisy is blind to both Chillon's romantic implications and its historic significance.

James illuminates the heroine's ignorance further by contrasting her underdeveloped consciousness to Winterbourne's more attuned one. Whereas Winterbourne recognizes the romantic implications of an unescorted expedition to the Gothic castle and is "conscious that he

had gone very far"¹⁰ in suggesting such a trip, Daisy remains oblivious. Winterbourne's notion of the proposed trip bespeaks romance: the "prospect seemed [to him] almost too good to believe; he felt as if he ought to kiss the young lady's hand."¹¹ Daisy's reflection, on the other hand, bears about as much romantic intrigue as the "hundred frills and flounces and knots of pale-coloured ribbon"¹² that decorate her dress. Unaware that Winterbourne's proposal violates European social decorum, Daisy betrays her ignorance in the way that she talks freely about the proposed adventure, openly telling her family courier of their plan: "'See here, Eugenio,'" she proclaims, "'I'm going to that old castle anyway.'"¹³ Although Daisy's words indicate that she has had designs on visiting Chillon for some time, her speech lacks any of the sophistication of an adventuress. Interested in Chillon only insofar as it represents a foreign attraction, Daisy desires to see the Chateau simply for curiosity's sake.

James underscores Daisy's simplicity when the heroine asks Winterbourne to take her "'out in a boat'"¹⁴ later that night. Daisy's desire for the thrill of a moonlight sail blinds her to the potential pitfalls of such a romantic excursion. She fails to see the social implications in sailing alone with her companion. Whereas Winterbourne, on his side, is quite conscious of the romance and adventure inherent in the "chance to guide through the summer starlight a skiff freighted with a fresh and beautiful

girl,"¹⁵ Daisy is conscious only of an innocent desire to go out in a boat. Daisy's naivete prevents her from understanding Winterbourne's true meaning when he remarks that he would love to give the heroine "'a row'"¹⁶ under the stars. Her mind focused simply on experiencing an exhilarating adventure, Daisy misses the double entendre in Winterbourne's speech, betrays her simplicity, and subsequently underscores her underdeveloped consciousness.

Later, James demonstrates Daisy's obliviousness of the romantic aspects of yet another adventure. When Winterbourne suggests that they "be conveyed to Chillon in a carriage,"¹⁷ a romantic adventure image, Daisy dismisses the idea. The heroine instead expresses a "wish to go in the little steamer—there would be such a lovely breeze upon the water and they should see such lots of people."¹⁸ James makes it clear that in contrast to Winterbourne, who is conscious of an ardent desire to pursue serious, romantic adventure, Daisy is conscious only of an innocent desire to enjoy herself. Similarly, whereas Winterbourne's imagination is at work: he "would have believed he was really going 'off' with her,"¹⁹ Daisy's remains inert, her mind focused simply on seeing a foreign land and its sights.

Despite this underactive imagination, when it comes to adventure, Daisy has a purposefulness about her that Winterbourne lacks. Although she has little knowledge of the dangers inherent in certain adventures, as soon as Daisy

is struck with an idea for adventure, she inquires or considers how she might undertake it. Winterbourne, on the other hand, merely talks a good game. In spite of his duplicitous speech, Winterbourne proves unwilling to commit himself to any romantic adventure, particularly to an escapade that would bind him to the heroine. His purported wishes to go "'off'" with Daisy or take her for a "'row'" beneath the stars, for instance, remain only professed desires of his feverous imagination. Whereas Daisy evidences a readiness for action, Winterbourne does not.

Nonetheless, even though Daisy has a stronger determination to undertake actual adventure than Winterbourne, her limited consciousness prevents her from perceiving the adventurous aspects of her escapades even as she engages in them. Daisy's undeveloped imagination becomes particularly pronounced at Chillon. When she steps inside the castle, it is evident that little there impresses her consciousness. Oblivious to the mysterious grandeur of the ancient monument, the heroine shows only a lack of sensibility towards Chillon's interior in the way that she "tripped about the vaulted chambers, rustled her skirts in the corkscrew staircases, flirted back with a pretty little cry and a shudder from the edge of the oubliettes"20 Unschooled in the inspirational qualities of Gothic architecture and the transcendent thoughts that it is designed to evoke, Daisy remains inwardly unmoved. Her coquettish behavior and overt display of emotion toward the

castle's mysterious Gothic elements evidence an awkwardness that suggests she can only pretend to be affected by Chillon's Gothic features.

As Daisy progresses through the momentous structure, she remains unmoved by the castle's historic curiosities. Whereas a more mindful maiden might find its mysterious qualities intriguing, Daisy does not. Evidencing no awe of the Gothic, Daisy shows only that she "cared little for medieval history and that the grim ghosts of Chillon loomed but faintly before her."²¹ Nor does the heroine evidence any conception of the secret horrors that might once have pervaded the ancient prison. Daisy takes no interest in "the tortuous passages and rugged embrasures of the place."²² Not even Winterbourne's recitation of a Gothic verse stirs the consciousness of the indifferent heroine, who, having no knowledge of such poetry, exhibits only an uninterested manner which indicates that the "history of Bonnivard had evidently . . . gone into one ear and out of the other."²³ Ironically, the closest Daisy comes to experiencing anything Gothic at Chillon occurs when she calls Winterbourne "'horrid'"²⁴ upon learning of his imminent departure for Geneva. Genuinely moved by the news, Daisy immediately voices displeasure with his plan and automatically "opened fire"²⁵ on the conjectural lover that she imagines Winterbourne intends to visit there. James's language indicates that despite Daisy's Gothic surroundings, it takes a hypothetical figure who threatens her

relationship with Winterbourne to agitate the imagination of the absentminded heroine, whose consciousness remains impervious to things outside its limited perspective.

Daisy's underdeveloped consciousness and limited imagination prevent her from recognizing not only Winterbourne's romantic overtures and Chillon's Gothic elements but the dangers associated with conventional adventures in Rome. Ultimately this obliviousness sets the heroine on the path to her death. Daisy proves obstinate, for instance, when she decides to go alone to the Pincio at 'the hour for the throng of carriages and of contemplative pedestrians.'²⁶ Unaware of the city's social customs, Daisy fails to see the implications in walking unattended at such an hour. Conscious only of her desire to make the trip, the heroine pays no attention to others' warnings about its inherent risks.

Nor does Daisy see the enormous risk in undertaking an unescorted, late-night visit to the Colosseum during the fever season. Accompanying a man who lacks the willingness to shelter his companion from the Roman fever that threatens their adventure, Daisy cannot see that Giovanelli will not protect her from the danger. When Winterbourne confronts her with the seriousness of the matter, Daisy remarks blithely:

'I was bound to see the Colosseum by moonlight—I wouldn't have wanted to go home without that; and we've had the most beautiful time. . . . If there has been any danger Eugenio can give me some pills.'²⁷

The heroine's desire for the thrill of a conventional adventure prevents her from considering any dangers that might interfere with the immediate moment of pleasure. Daisy tosses off Winterbourne's reprimand, imagining that "'pills'" can combat any physical ailment that she might experience. The heroine's inexperience and limited imagination prevent her from realizing that there is no curing the fever and that her heedless attitude will lead her to death.

The closest Daisy comes to experiencing any true adventure by moving outside her limited consciousness is in that brief moment when she looks into Winterbourne's eyes after he warns her of her foolishness in accompanying Giovanelli to the Colosseum. Drawing on imagery of darkness from Gothic fiction, James paints an atmosphere of obscurity and dense fog to indicate that Daisy makes a start at moving outside her limited consciousness. James notes that after Winterbourne admonishes the heroine, he "felt her lighted eyes fairly penetrate the thick gloom of the vaulted passage—as if to seek some access to him she hadn't yet compassed."²⁸ Although James's imagery indicates that Daisy begins to experience a rather significant turn of imagination by seeking access to Winterbourne's thoughts, the event nonetheless occurs too late. Shortly after, Daisy dies of the fever. James makes it clear that had the heroine a more attuned sensibility enabling her to anticipate the potential dangers inherent in some of her

adventures, she might have experienced a different fate. Instead, she emerges as a naive, innocent American who perishes in Europe largely because of her limited consciousness, her lack of education, and her lack of experience.

Although Daisy has outward conventional adventure experiences, she has few of the psychological adventures that emerge as a result of "an 'exciting' inward life."²⁹ By contrast, the protagonist of James's The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer, has many. In The Portrait, James places "the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness"³⁰ and employs conventional adventure language to show that although the heroine's experiences might prove rather ordinary, she can nonetheless lead an exciting life simply in the way that she perceives her experiences.

Shortly after introducing Isabel, a "certain young woman affronting her destiny,"³¹ James uses conventional adventure language to illuminate her well-developed consciousness and vivid imagination. Upon describing the heroine at her home in Albany, for instance, James indicates that Isabel has maintained an active imagination from the time of her childhood, when she would sit in her father's library and imagine that a strange world lay behind the "silent, motionless portal [which] opened into the street . . . --a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of

terror."³² Such an active imagination might well be the result of a deficient education. James makes it clear early in the novel that Isabel, who did not care for primary school, obtained her education not in a classroom but "in the idleness of her grandmother's house,"³³ where she read books that she selected on the basis of their frontispieces. Left to the guidance of her own mind, its preferences and its imaginings, Isabel has for all practical purposes obtained only a superficial education. Not only has she a scanty reading background, but she has also "seen very little of the evil of the world."³⁴ Isabel, furthermore, has "spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity."³⁵ As a result, her thoughts, mostly of the romantic kind, are "a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgement of people speaking with authority."³⁶

It is no surprise, then, that Isabel's consciousness becomes particularly lively when her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, arrives in Albany to invite Isabel to Florence. Intrigued by the prospect of experiencing a Gothic place, Isabel readily accepts her aunt's invitation to visit a timeworn Florentine palace "'in which three people have been murdered.'"³⁷ Eager to experience "'places in which things have happened—even if they're sad things,'"³⁸ the heroine soon imagines the kinds of adventures that might await her in Europe. Envisioning herself as a grand adventurer in search of her destiny, Isabel suddenly reflects that her

decision to go abroad will have an enormous impact on her quest: "the importance of what had happened was out of proportion to its appearance; there had really been a change in her life."³⁹

It is evident from the moment the heroine sets foot in England that she expects her European expedition to initiate her quest for a destiny by bringing her life romance and adventure. As soon as Isabel reaches Gardencourt and learns of Lord Warburton's presence, for example, she remarks, "'Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!'"⁴⁰ The heroine's observation that Gardencourt is "'enchanted'"⁴¹ further evidences her notion that romance and adventure are to be earmarks of her European experience. Such enthusiasm on the part of the heroine introduces an element of danger to the novel. Aware only of the excitement inherent in the mystery and intrigue associated with the Old World, Isabel fails to perceive its underlying evil. The heroine is prepared to see Europe not as it really is but as she has imagined it.

Isabel's reactions to the Gothic atmosphere at Gardencourt further evidence the heroine's overactive imagination by indicating her belief that the establishment is to provide an element of romance during her stay. The heroine quickly becomes enamored of Gardencourt's "large, low rooms," "deep embrasures," "curious casements," and "dark, polished panels."⁴² Isabel also takes a keen interest in the palace's paintings, delighting in their

"vague squares of rich colour" and "the faded gilding of heavy frames."⁴³ Unlike Daisy, who would barely note such effects, Isabel recognizes them immediately. Confident of her sense of them, she need not feign interest. Rather, her sensibility displays itself naturally in the way that she "indulged in little exclamations and murmurs"⁴⁴ over Gardencourt's treasures.

Eventually the heroine finds that the historic sights not only at Gardencourt but throughout Europe generate excitement in her consciousness. As Isabel wanders through Florence, she stops at places that evoke wonder and awe within her. In doing so, she "knew the sweetness of rising tears in eyes to which faded fresco and darkened marble grew dim."⁴⁵ In Rome, Isabel finds Saint Peter's so breathtaking that she "gazed and wondered like a child . . . , she paid her silent tribute to the seated sublime."⁴⁶ In contrast to Daisy, who proves impervious to the vivid sights about her, Isabel finds picturesque sights moving. She proves sensitive to the power of the historic elements and demonstrates that she can identify and experience the sublime element that the Renaissance architecture evokes in her consciousness.

Like Daisy, Isabel has a thirst for experience. She regards "the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action."⁴⁷ Moreover, she is eager to uncover its mysteries and discover her place in it. Unlike Daisy, however, Isabel is not intent on physically

undertaking conventional adventures. Rather, Isabel delights in imagined romantic adventure and undertakes certain expeditions simply for the excitement that they generate in her consciousness. A character who has made it a habit "to live by enthusiasm, to fall in love with suddenly-perceived possibilities, with the idea of some new adventure,"⁴⁸ Isabel frequently imagines what certain conventional adventures—particularly the Gothic kind—might be like were she actually to engage in them. She confides to Henrietta Stackpole, for example, that she imagines perfect happiness as riding in a "swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see."⁴⁹ Early in the novel the heroine asks her cousin Ralph if there is not a "castle-spectre, a thing that appears"⁵⁰ at Gardencourt and assures him that she is "not afraid of ghosts."⁵¹ Later, after accompanying her sister to Euston Station, Isabel imagines the different adventures that she could undertake on her way home. Recognizing the "deep thrill"⁵² in her freedom to do whatever she should like, Isabel considers the possibilities that lie before her. Although she decides simply to make the return trip to her hotel, Isabel nonetheless "performed the journey with a positive enjoyment of its dangers and lost her way almost on purpose, in order to get more sensations."⁵³ Such unabashed enthusiasm for adventure places the heroine in a potentially precarious position, however. The impulsive spirit with which Isabel embarks on hazardous adventure simply for the

purpose of seeking "sensations" is nothing if not dangerous. Unable to perceive the true danger to which she exposes herself, Isabel compromises her safety by acting on instinct.

Isabel's relationships with other characters in the novel are also connected to the "sensations" and intrigue that they produce in her consciousness. When it comes to other women, the heroine most appreciates those characters who fuel her active imagination by facing life as though they were undertaking their own quest for adventure. Isabel admires Henrietta Stackpole, for instance, because she exhibits the courage necessary to explore every unexamined corner of the world; "she was brave: she went into cages, she flourished lashes, like a spangled lion-tamer."⁵⁴ Similarly, Isabel admires Madame Merle because she too exhibits courage and self-assurance in confronting her daily adventures. To Isabel's imagination, Madame Merle represents a Gothic warrior-type "completely equipped for the social battle. She carried her flag discreetly, but her weapons were polished steel, and she used them with a skill which struck Isabel as more and more that of a veteran."⁵⁵

Isabel's relationships with her suitors are likewise affected by how they influence her penchant for imagined romantic adventure. Isabel is drawn to men who promise to widen the horizons of her active imagination. Initially, she is attracted to Lord Warburton because he reminds her of

'a hero of romance'⁵⁶ and his house resembles a 'castle in a legend.'⁵⁷ Such Gothic images engage Isabel's consciousness because they provide an element of romance that her life lacks. Nonetheless, the heroine ultimately decides that life with Warburton would confine her imagination by posing a threat to her quest for a destiny: 'the idea failed to support any enlightened prejudice in favour of the free exploration of life that she had hitherto entertained.'⁵⁸ In Isabel's estimate, to marry Warburton would be to settle for a life empty of adventures, dangers and risks. Isabel believes that to accept such an existence would be to ''escape [her] fate''⁵⁹ and to avoid ''the usual chances and dangers, what most people know and suffer.'⁶⁰ By discouraging Warburton's advances, Isabel suggests that she would rather preserve her imagination and uncover suffering and unhappiness in her quest for a destiny than halt her search completely by submitting to a life free from danger and risk.

For similar reasons of preserving her imagination and her desire for imagined adventure, Isabel rejects Caspar Goodwood. To the heroine's mind, the young American businessman represents the sheltered, limited existence that she longs to leave behind her. Goodwood's cotton mill has made him a success, but marriage to a man who is already a member of the establishment spurs no excitement in Isabel's consciousness: 'the Goodwood patent left her imagination absolutely cold.'⁶¹

Isabel rejects Goodwood, moreover, for fear that he will put an end to her adventure by succeeding in his quest to marry her, then taking her back to the States, away from her European expedition. Isabel's apprehension towards the suitor from home emerges in the martial imagery which James uses to describe the impression that Goodwood leaves on the heroine's consciousness. To Isabel's mind, Goodwood is a hardheaded knight who is "naturally plated and steeled, armed essentially for aggression."⁶² Desiring to elude this persistent suitor and save her imagination, Isabel resolves to enter the battlefield and tell Goodwood outright that she cannot marry him: ". . . she had recognized the fact that perfect frankness was her best weapon. To attempt to spare his sensibility or to escape from him edgewise, as one might do from a man who had barred the way less sturdily . . . was wasted agility."⁶³

The heroine's triumphant rejection of Goodwood energizes her consciousness. Whereas Isabel once grew afraid of her resistance to her male admirers, she suddenly takes pride in her power to ward off suitors. She reflects not only that when it comes to suitor warfare she "'shouldn't be an easy victim'"⁶⁴ but that "she had done something; she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of victory."⁶⁵ Having no thought of letting anyone slow her search for her destiny, Isabel refuses to give up her pursuit.

Indeed, the heroine continues on her adventure more

zealously than ever. In her search to see "the cup of experience,"⁶⁶ however, Isabel comes across Gilbert Osmond, who interrupts the heroine's "exploring expedition"⁶⁷ and causes her to "[slacken] speed."⁶⁸ Intrigued by the feelings of curiosity that Osmond stirs in her consciousness, Isabel is attracted to the mystery associated with him. Unlike Warburton, who all but gives himself away, and Goodwood, who reflects the too-familiar, all-American male, Osmond proves appealing to Isabel because he represents the mysterious unknown: "There was something in [him] that checked her and held her in suspense"⁶⁹ When Osmond tells Isabel that he is in love with her, the heroine's imagination suddenly halts: ". . . there was a last vague space it couldn't cross—a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight."⁷⁰ Such a Gothic image proves exciting to the heroine, who, imperceptive of the underlying terrors inherent in such an image, is spurred on by the enticing dangers of such an opportunity. Isabel takes Osmond's aloofness for a reserved European air and believes that he is a refined gentleman who can enlighten her imagination. A romantic image who poses a measure of intrigue to the heroine, Osmond becomes even more fascinating in the way that Isabel cannot see what might be ahead for her were she to pursue a life with him.

Isabel is attracted not only to the mystery of Osmond but to that of his villa in Florence. There she responds to

an element of mystery that entices her even as she senses danger: "There was something grave and strong in the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in, you would need an act of energy to get out."⁷¹ Captivated by the underlying adventures that she imagines must lurk at the villa, Isabel is determined to explore the stately structure. She has "no thought of getting out, but only of advancing."⁷² The heroine's attraction to the villa suggests that danger and mystery do much more for her imagination than any familiar happiness or contentment which Warburton or Goodwood might offer.

Enamored of the ways in which life with Osmond poses a lifetime of potentially perilous adventures, Isabel plunges into the marriage. Ultimately, however, she comes face to face with the horrors of such a relationship and, disillusioned, realizes that the marriage produces the exact opposite of what she had expected. Whereas she once had hoped that life with Osmond would invigorate her imagination and nurture her consciousness, she soon realizes that it proves constricting to both. Shortly after her first wedding anniversary, Isabel reflects that "there were days when the world looked black and she asked herself with some sharpness what it was that she was pretending to live for."⁷³ Not only has Isabel's union revealed the falsity of what she had imagined; it has halted her habit of turning to impulsive action for comfort. When the heroine considers her dejected state, she "gave an envious thought to the

happier lot of men, who are always free to plunge into the healing waters of action."⁷⁴

Isabel's recognition that her marriage is causing emotional distress is but one painful truth that she ultimately comes to acknowledge on her search for adventure. This initial recognition merely sets her on route to a host of other personal truths. It is not until Chapter Forty-Two of the novel, when the heroine undertakes an adventure one evening simply by sitting beside a dying fire and reflecting on her life, that Isabel fully acknowledges the truth about herself, her husband, their marriage and the gloomy cast that her life has assumed.

Isabel's vigil is an adventure because it involves seeing. For James, "sight is insight,"⁷⁵ and insight necessarily makes for adventure. In the Preface to The Portrait, James indicates that Isabel's vigil is the greatest adventure in the novel:

She sits up, by her dying fire, far into the night, under the spell of recognitions on which she finds the last sharpness suddenly wait. It is a representation simply of her motionlessly seeing, and an attempt withal to make the mere still lucidity of her act as 'interesting' as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate. It . . . all goes on without her being approached by another person and without her leaving her chair. It is obviously the best thing in the book, but it is only a supreme illustration of the general plan.⁷⁶

During the vigil Isabel makes no physical motion nor comes into contact with anyone other than a household servant. While these conditions do not seem to be

characteristic of those of an adventure, Isabel's reflection is nonetheless a great adventure because she stirs the recesses of her mind, that most intimate chamber of the self. James reveals that a psychological adventure represents the greatest adventure that a character can have by making Isabel's reflections "as exciting as an adventure story."⁷⁷ As Isabel arrives at truths about herself, her marriage and her husband during her vigil of reflection, James uses imagery from Gothic fiction and language of an adventurous quest to express her insights.

The heroine begins her inward journey by attempting to determine the extent to which Lord Warburton's affection for her plays a part in his professed affection for her step-daughter, Pansy. James expresses the progression of Isabel's thoughts on this matter in compelling language associated with disordered travel. He remarks that "Isabel wandered among [the] ugly possibilities until she had completely lost her way . . . ,"⁷⁸ then notes that she suddenly breaks out of "the labyrinth"⁷⁹ of her thoughts concerning Warburton. James's Gothic image of a disjointed, peripatetic search reveals the disjointed, disquieting course of Isabel's mental reflection. The farther that Isabel wanders into the recesses of her mind, the more disturbing James's imagery becomes.

As Isabel progresses, James draws on imagery from Gothic fiction to signify the dire impressions that the heroine's reflections about her marriage leave on her

consciousness. When Isabel reflects not only that she and her husband harbor a deep mistrust for each other but that Osmond and Madame Merle share a secret confidence, James notes that the heroine's soul suddenly becomes "haunted with terrors."⁸⁰ James relates Isabel's gradual recognition of her grief by using Gothic images of darkness and a journey downward to suggest that Isabel's recognition about the state of her marriage is driving her into an emotional abyss:

. . . she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness . . . , it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression⁸¹

The words "dark," "narrow," "dead wall," "downward," "earthward," "restriction" and "depression," all derived from Gothic fiction, suggest the state of a character whose spirit is in utter torment. These words not only indicate that Isabel is greatly changed from the high-spirited, freely-adventuring young woman she once was, but they presage the increasingly foreboding gloom that Isabel is to uncover as she continues her journey into the corners of her soul.

As Isabel realizes that her nuptial state is a disaster and that in little more than a few years' time her marriage has become a lonely journey into the depths of depression, James uses images of growing darkness to express her increasing dismay. Isabel soon reflects that Osmond had begun to stifle her spirit almost from the start. She

remembers that the "shadows had begun to gather"⁸² shortly after their first year of marriage and that "it was as if Osmond deliberately, almost malignantly, had put the lights out one by one."⁸³ James uses Gothic images of growing darkness to foster Isabel's recognition of how Osmond slowly invaded her imagination: "The dusk at first was vague and thin, and she could still see her way in it. But it steadily deepened, and if now and again it had occasionally lifted there were certain corners of her prospect that were impenetrably black."⁸⁴

To stress the moving effect that Isabel's thoughts have on her consciousness, James thrusts a sudden image of great light into the deepening pool of darkness imagery. He remarks that the succession of Isabel's thoughts prompt her to see "the full moon now."⁸⁵ An image that indicates mental disorder to the point of lunacy in Gothic fiction, the lunar reference implies that Isabel is haunted by what she is suddenly able to see. The great image of light signifies that the heroine recognizes not only the truth about Osmond—his predatory mind and his evil character—but also the truth about herself, her imagination, and the shortcomings of her own character. Enlightened to her own responsibility for the failure of their marriage, Isabel suddenly realizes that she had allowed her imagination to prevent her from seeing clearly what she was entering. She reflects that "she had wished to be charmed"⁸⁶ by Osmond and that "she had imagined a world of things that had no

substance."⁸⁷ Isabel acknowledges her proclivity to pride, moreover, and admits to herself that she had loved Osmond "a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal also for what she brought him and what might enrich the gift."⁸⁸ The heroine sees her egotism completely when she realizes that her attraction to Osmond stemmed largely from her belief that the "finest--in the sense of being the subtlest--manly organism she had ever known had become her property, and the recognition of her having but to put out her hands and take it had been originally a sort of act of devotion."⁸⁹

James continues to employ images from Gothic fiction to describe Isabel's recognition that Osmond hates her because she has so many ideas. Realizing that Osmond is an egoist who wants his wife's ideas to mirror his own, Isabel reflects that her husband has attempted to stifle her imagination by driving her into "the mansion of his own habitation,"⁹⁰ a stale, destitute, and sterile environment engulfed by his own self. Isabel sees Osmond's evilness fully when she realizes that he wants to take over her mind completely by making it part of his personal property:

The real offence . . . was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his--attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching.⁹¹

Whereas Osmond once represented romance and intrigue to

Isabel, he now represents an egocentric manipulator who lives in a haunted mansion. Unlike Osmond's villa in Florence, Roccanera now resembles a gravely dark and disturbing, emotionally distressing house of Gothic horror to the heroine. Sensing that the walls of the place are closing in on her, Isabel reflects that she is immured in "the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation."⁹²

No longer oblivious to the truth about herself, her husband and her disastrous marriage, Isabel recognizes that she has trapped herself in a relationship from which she will never escape. James turns to images of death from Gothic fiction to express the heroine's dismay at her situation:

When [Isabel] saw this rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken took possession of her; she seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay."⁹³

James's imagery conveys the heroine's sense of being entombed not only in a failed marriage but in an emotional state of depression, both of which are causing gradual "mould and decay" to envelop her consciousness. Her spirit all but consumed, Isabel's consciousness has come to resemble a burial plot full of dark, dreary horrors. The imagery of darkness and the absence of light which mark the close of Isabel's vigil communicate the final state of the heroine's spirit: "the fire had gone out . . . the lamp had long since gone out and the candles burned down to their

sockets."⁹⁴

The close of Isabel's vigil coincides with the temporary close of her pursuit of psychological adventure. Suffering a winter of the soul, Isabel is unable to stir up any further reflections. Months after her midnight reflection, the heroine admits that she has grown "'afraid."⁹⁵ No longer the valiant explorer that she once was, Isabel cannot seriously consider leaving Osmond. Nor is she inclined to call upon her imagination in order to escape. Isabel cannot bring herself to venture off to a foreign place by any means because such an act would represent to her a repudiation of her marriage. Regarding that union as "the single sacred act—of her life,"⁹⁶ Isabel cannot conceive of severing herself from Osmond and admitting that their "whole attempt had proved a failure."⁹⁷ Such an admission would only provoke further grief for the heroine by intimating that what she believed to be the greatest adventure in her quest for a destiny should never have occurred in the first place.

Despite this strong reluctance to leave Osmond, Isabel ultimately finds herself disposed to make a retreat. In a succession of "lurid flashes,"⁹⁸ the heroine suddenly is besieged by grief at the news of two events. First, Isabel learns that her best friend and cousin, Ralph, lies dying at Gardencourt. The antithesis to Osmond, Ralph embodies for Isabel all the good that she has experienced in life. Aware that it was Ralph who put all her opportunities within

reach, who helped foster her imagination, and who cautioned her not to marry Osmond, Isabel now reflects that her cousin's impending death represents for her the impending loss of her only source of truth and happiness. Second, Isabel is struck with the news that her failed marriage was contrived by Madame Merle, who arranged the relationship not only to enjoy the thrill of ensnaring an innocent young American but to secure the future of her former lover, Osmond, by providing him access to Isabel's fortune. Isabel comes to face the fact, moreover, that Madame Merle and Osmond, still confidants, share a common bond in her own step-daughter, Pansy. Disheartened to learn that she has been duped, Isabel finds herself completely disillusioned. Her grief escalates to such a height that in an attempt to preserve her self-possession, she disobeys Osmond's command and flees to Gardencourt, her "much-embracing refuge" and a place which "would be a sanctuary now."⁹⁹

On Isabel's journey to England, it is evident that the recent circumstances and events of her life have taken their toll on her consciousness. Consumed by grievous, disordered reflections, Isabel remains impervious to the spring sights that she passes along the way. Her thoughts follow only "strange-looking, dimly-lighted, pathless lands, in which there was no change of seasons, but only, as it seemed, a perpetual dreariness of winter."¹⁰⁰ Upon her arrival in London, Isabel notes the absence of her formerly adventurous spirit. Nervously looking about at her strange

surroundings, the heroine remembers "how she walked [spiritedly] away from Euston, in the winter dusk, in the crowded streets, five years before. She could not have done that to-day, and the incident came before her as the deed of another person."¹⁰¹

When Isabel finally reaches Gardencourt, she begins a retreat that proves to be an indispensable sojourn on her quest for a destiny. During her stay, Isabel makes peace not only with Ralph and his plot to secure her fortune but with her painful past, those events and experiences that have enlightened the heroine not only to her own character but to that of others around her, most of whom have proved radically different from what she had originally imagined them to be. Presented with the truth about all the people and events that have helped shape her life, the heroine comes to see her life in a true light. Moreover, she reconciles herself to its authenticity. To denote Isabel's final acceptance of the past, James employs an image from Gothic fiction. Shortly after dawn one morning, the heroine opens her eyes and senses the presence of a "ghost"¹⁰² in the room with her. Undaunted by the spirit, Isabel takes no alarm: she "was not afraid; she was only sure."¹⁰³ The sighting signifies the moment of Ralph's death and the occasion of Isabel's ability to see the events of her life clearly and objectively. The spirit represents the same ghost Ralph once told Isabel she would be able to see only after she had suffered much. The heroine's ability to see

the ghost and remain calm suggests not only that she has indeed suffered much but that, like Ralph, she has made peace with her sufferings. The sighting marks, furthermore, the closing of a painful chapter of the heroine's life and the gradual resumption of her life with Osmond in Rome, where she returns to continue the destiny that she began long ago.

Although Isabel ultimately decides to continue this quest, her determination to do so emerges not at the moment that she sights the ghost but rather in a final run-in with that most persistent suitor, Goodwood, who calls on Isabel while she lingers at Gardencourt after Ralph's death. Sitting outdoors early one evening given to contemplation, Isabel senses the presence of another person nearby and, looking up, sees Goodwood approaching her. In a scene marked by passion, Goodwood makes a last-minute plea to Isabel to forget about Rome and her disappointing marriage and to run off with him instead. The heroine, however, proves obstinate. Unwilling to abandon her relationship with Osmond and her duty to Pansy as step-mother, friend and guardian, Isabel stands her ground and resists the insistent suitor. Not even a kiss like "white lightning"¹⁰⁴ thwarts the heroine's determination to persevere in her marriage. Resolved to remain steadfast in the destiny of her choice, Isabel intends to make the best of the life that she has discovered for herself, in spite of the fact that it has proved to be radically different from what she had

originally imagined. Freeing herself from Goodwood's passionate embrace, Isabel flees the scene and repairs to the house. James suggests that this adventurous encounter and subsequent escape remove all the fog that had been obscuring the heroine's path and clear the way for her to continue the life she has chosen:

In an extraordinarily short time—for the distance was considerable—she had moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing) and reached the door. Here only she paused. She looked all about her; she listened a little; then she put her hand on the latch. She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path.¹⁰⁵

Having gained the strength to pass through a door representative not only of her unknown future with Osmond but the unknown inlets of her consciousness, Isabel forges ahead. In doing so, she shuts out the persistent influences from her past and, without looking behind her, trusts herself to discover her future.

A few days later, the heroine returns to Rome and the dreary walls of Roccanera to carry on with her marriage. In doing so, Isabel renews her quest. She emerges from the novel as an eager, experienced adventurer whose consciousness is recharged by her own ability to make peace with the past.

It is no coincidence that James deposits both Daisy and Isabel in Rome. For James, Rome, with all its ruins, represents "a huge chunk of 'the visitable past.'"¹⁰⁶ That the heroines end there and each meet a different fate

delineates their deepest natures. Daisy, blind to the significance of the city's historic monuments and their ties to the past, perishes amidst them all. Unable to see even the significance of her own past, Daisy becomes a ruin amidst "a world of ruins."¹⁰⁷ By contrast, Rome brings out Isabel's strength. A character who is able to accept the demise of her desired destiny and the errors of her past, Isabel makes amends with her life. She returns to a city that represents for her and for ages past the strength that can emerge from admitted destruction. Isabel fits right in with the things in Rome "that had crumbled for centuries and yet still were upright."¹⁰⁸

NOTES

1 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," The Portable Henry James, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: Viking, 1968) 408-09.

2 as quoted in Philip Sicker, Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 9.

3 Henry James, The Art of the Novel (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1984) 56.

4 John Paterson, "The Language of 'Adventure' in Henry James," American Literature 32.3 (1960): 301.

5 James, "The Art of Fiction" 401.

6 Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1958) 63.

7 Henry James, "Daisy Miller," Fiction 100: An Anthology of Short Stories, ed. James H. Pickering, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1985) 549.

8 James, "Daisy Miller" 550.

9-11 James, "Daisy Miller" 551.

12 James, "Daisy Miller" 547.

13 James, "Daisy Miller" 551.

14-16 James, "Daisy Miller" 557.

17-19 James, "Daisy Miller" 558.

20-23 James, "Daisy Miller" 559.

24-25 James, "Daisy Miller" 560.

26 James, "Daisy Miller" 564.

27 James, "Daisy Miller" 577.

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- 28 James, "Daisy Miller" 578.
- 29 James, Art 56.
- 30 James, Art 51.
- 31 James, Art 48.
- 32 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, ed. Robert D. Bamberg (New York: Norton, 1975) 33.
- 33 James, Portrait 33.
- 34-35 James, Portrait 54.
- 36 James, Portrait 53.
- 37 James, Portrait 36.
- 38 James, Portrait 35.
- 39 James, Portrait 39.
- 40 James, Portrait 27.
- 41 James, Portrait 26.
- 42 James, Portrait 57.
- 43-44 James, Portrait 50.
- 45 James, Portrait 212.
- 46 James, Portrait 251.
- 47 James, Portrait 54.
- 48 James, Portrait 337.
- 49 James, Portrait 146.
- 50 James, Portrait 50.
- 51 James, Portrait 52.
- 52-53 James, Portrait 273.

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- 54 James, Portrait 86.
- 55 James, Portrait 337.
- 56 James, Portrait 66.
- 57 James, Portrait 75.
- 58 James, Portrait 101.
- 59 James, Portrait 118.
- 60 James, Portrait 119.
- 61 James, Portrait 106.
- 62-63 James, Portrait 137.
- 64 James, Portrait 140.
- 65 James, Portrait 145.
- 66 James, Portrait 134.
- 67-68 James, Portrait 235.
- 69 James, Portrait 212.
- 70 James, Portrait 265.
- 71 James, Portrait 217.
- 72 James, Portrait 217-18.
- 73 James, Portrait 337.
- 74 James, Portrait 324.
- 75 Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Portrait of a Lady," Critics on Henry James, ed. J. Don Vann (Coral Gables: U of Miami P, 1972) 83.
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- 77 Leon Edel, The Psychological Novel: 1900-1950 (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1955) 56.
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- 80 James, Portrait 355.
- 81-84 James, Portrait 356.
- 85-87 James, Portrait 357.
- 88-89 James, Portrait 358.
- 90 James, Portrait 360.
- 91 James, Portrait 362.
- 92 James, Portrait 360.
- 93 James, Portrait 361.
- 94 James, Portrait 364.
- 95 James, Portrait 419.
- 96-97 James, Portrait 386.
- 98 James, Portrait 464.
- 99 James, Portrait 465.
- 100 James, Portrait 465.
- 101 James, Portrait 466.
- 102-03 James, Portrait 479.
- 104 James, Portrait 489.
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