

TRAVELLING AND GENDER: *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

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ABSTRACT

Unlike the title suggests, Henry James's famous novel *The Portrait of a Lady* is not the story of one particular lady as is commonly assumed. The novel proves to be an outstanding one in that it not only presents in its centre one of the most charming heroines of the nineteenth-century but also spins a web of challenging travelling women around Isabel Archer. What makes the novel unique is James's handling the gender roles. On one hand there are the outstanding female characters challenging the fixed gender roles imposed by the Victorian period, and on the other hand there are still women seen as 'objects'. My aim will be to reveal this complex gender issue by studying the female characters through travel. Taking from James Clifford and Judith Butler's theories I will try to open up this discussion to better understand how travel works.

Key Words: Henry James, the Portrait of a Lady, the Victorian Period, Gender, Travelling Women

Seyahat ve Cinsiyet: Bir Kadının Portresi

ÖZET

Henry James'in ünlü romanı *Bir Kadının Portresi*, başlığın düşündürdüğü aksine tek bir kadının hikayesi değildir. Sadece hikayenin merkezine ondokuzuncu yüzyılın en etkileyici kadın kahramanlarından birini koymasıyla değil, fakat aynı zamanda Isabel Archer'in etrafında güçlü kadın kahramanlardan oluşan bir ağ örmesi ile de roman sıradışı olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır. Romanı farklı yapan James'in toplumsal cinsiyet kavramını irdeleyiş tarzıdır. Romanda bir tarafta Victoria döneminin dayattığı belirlenmiş toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine meydan okuyan kadınlar, diğer tarafta da hala birer 'nesne' olarak algılanan kadınlar vardır. Benim amacım romandaki kadın karakterleri yaptıkları seyahatlerle inceleyerek bu karmaşık toplumsal cinsiyet konusunu ortaya çıkarmak olacaktır. Bu tartışmayı James Clifford ve Judith Butler'in kuramlarından yararlanarak seyahatin toplumsal cinsiyet üzerindeki rolünü daha iyi anlamak için açmaya çalışacağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Henry James, *Bir Kadının Portresi*, Viktorya Dönemi, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Seyahat Eden Kadınlar

American expatriate writer Henry James (1843-1916) travelled back and forth between Europe and America, and portrayed Americans living abroad. In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), fond of her independence and after her right to choose, Isabel Archer is adopted by her aunt after the death of her parents, leaves the easy life in America and goes to England with her aunt. However, this movement from Albany to London does not satisfy her. She travels from London to Florence then to Rome and finally to Greece, Turkey and Egypt in the belief to see all chances of life afforded to her. For Isabel travelling becomes the means of opening up to the world of male power and wisdom since Victorian society restricted female mobility by the gender-related doctrines of "separation of spheres" and "angels in the house." Unfortunately Isabel is

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deceived by expatriate Americans, Osmond and Madam Merle, who are after the money she inherited from her uncle. She gets married to Osmond and eventually yields to a conventional life.

Unlike the title suggests, *The Portrait of a Lady* is not the story of one particular lady as is commonly assumed¹. For instance, Susan Morgan points out that Isabel Archer is “one of the most memorable creations” of Anglo-American fiction whose appearance contributed greatly to the novel (195) and;

The Portrait quite self-consciously draws on the classic pattern of these nineteenth-century British novels of education: the heroine is a young, attractive, intelligent, sensitive gentlewoman affronting her destiny; the plot is *rite du passage* from innocence to experience; the action of the novel is a perceptual process that inevitably involves self-revelation; the education is to be open to experience, to use imagination and feeling to reach outside oneself rather than to insulate oneself.(196)

Actually in her craving for knowledge, Isabel symbolizes the women of the period, who were not allowed to access the male territories. Elaine Showalter states that since women were restricted to a domestic life and had to find out a way to educate themselves, unfortunately most of the time they were misled because they overvalued romance (79). In this respect, George Eliot’s Dorothea decided to marry Casaubon in order to learn about classical authors, while James’s Isabel believed travel would provide her the means to achieve knowledge.

However, focusing on Isabel most of the critics have ignored the other female characters of the novel². Thus, what follows is more concerned with Isabel and the other female characters of the novel who believe in the power of travelling. The novel is remarkable not only because it presents in its centre a charming female character, but also because it spins a web of challenging female characters around Isabel. Isabel Archer at the centre, Mrs. Touchett, Madam Merle, Henrietta Stackpole and most importantly Pansy surrounding Isabel make us wonder how James as a male writer successfully created strong and determined female characters besides weaker ones. What makes the novel

¹ See Ruth Yeazell, Tessa Hadley and Dominic J. Bazenella.

² See George Levine, F.R. Leavis and Jeremy Tambling.

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unique is James's handling the gender roles. On one hand, there are the outstanding female characters like Isabel, Mrs. Touchett, Madam Merle and Henrietta stepping out of their fixed gender roles attributed by the society and on the other hand, there are still women seen as objects, like Pansy.

What James's women have in common is "travelling." Hence, my aim is to reveal the complex gender issue by studying the female characters within the framework of the concept of travel. James Clifford argues that culture and cultural identities can no longer be adequately understood in terms of place, but are better conceptualized in terms of travel and movement (96-110). From this perspective, James's criticism towards a change in the existing society and its norms is better understood. Gendering domestic place as feminine, and movement as masculine, the Victorian Age manifests the limitation of women's mobility in terms of both space and identity. Thus, since gender is a cultural construct and an organizing principle of social life generated by power relations, travel then will help reveal the formations and changes in gender. It becomes the means of conflict and a battle for power within the gendered spaces. As Chris Barker puts it "[s]table identities are rarely questioned; they appear as 'natural' and taken for granted. However, when 'naturalness' is seen to dissolve, we are inclined to examine these identities anew (200).

In this respect Isabel's travels and her gender constructions should be explored since she dissolves from the "naturalness" by intruding into masculine public space. Travel then becomes the key point because it not only provides some kind of freedom for the female characters revealing gender shifts, but at the same time it unfolds the established gender roles for the ones deprived of it.

Depicting travelling women, James suggests that mobility equips women with power, yet immobility points out to the contrary. In *The Portrait of a Lady* immobile women inevitably become the objects of the patriarchal society, like Pansy, while travelling women are portrayed as strong figures with "masculine" traits, like Isabel, Mrs. Touchett and Henrietta. In addition, not only female but immobile male characters are also depicted with "feminine" qualities suggesting their weakness and fragile natures. Travel, then, becomes James's literary tool for expressing his thoughts about gender and revealing peculiar gender roles.

Gender-related physical limitations of the nineteenth century imposed upon women by the doctrine of "separation of spheres" restricted female mobility. A Victorian woman who has access to the male space was called a masculine woman or a prostitute. Barbara Leah Harman argues that for women "[p]ublic space is promiscuous space...and entry into it is inevitably

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compromising" (373). In addition, Hugh Cunningham reports that "the general rule was that any woman in a public place of leisure, and unaccompanied by husband or other suitable male, was a prostitute" (130). It was a very harsh demand which naturally prevented women's involvement in public spaces and barred women's having equal rights and opportunities with men. Denied public facilities, proper literary education and even walking on the street alone, women, married or not, were all treated as inferiors.

In addition, the female exclusion from the public spaces and confinement to domestic ones defined women's roles as "Angels in the House":

The middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post-industrial England and America, prescribed a woman who would be a Perfect Lady, an Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men
(Showalter, 14)

This impediment denied Victorian women occupations other than domestic ones. Actually, the long lasting patriarchal tradition has taught that women were inferior both physically and intellectually. As Gilbert and Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic*; "From Eve, Minerva, Sophia, and Galatea onward, after all patriarchal mythology defines women as created by, from and for men, the children of male brains, ribs, and ingenuity (12).

Because of the so-called anatomical inferiority the Victorian Age was characterized by domestic stability and submissiveness for women. In a patriarchal social context they were described in terms of "angels" and "domestic servants" which constantly reiterated the idea of submissiveness.

This attitude towards women could be termed as "feminization" and it was "at the centre of nineteenth-century fiction's ideas of historical process" (Morgan, 12). Feminization meant forcing women to be angels or dolls denying any other occupation other than a wife and a mother. Women were supposed to live domestically while men enjoyed the freedom of the public spaces and mobility. In *The Portrait of a Lady* it is the Victorian society and its norms keeping women from movement and forcing them to stay home instead. In this respect, travel becomes the means of transcending the fixed gender roles for James.

Judith Butler claims that gender is not a biological attribute so it should be studied as the subject of that very culture (6). Since gender is not a stable

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concept we have to see it changing, just like the Victorian Age. Carol MacKay confirms that the period experienced continuous transformations in every aspect of the society contradicting the already existed definitions, reconstructing and reinstating new ones;

[t]his was a period of intense ontological ferment. Virtually any given self-definition seemed to be in peril. At the same time, however, the period was a highly reactionary one: the very boundaries and self-definitions were reaffirmed again and again, especially those related to gender roles. (2)

Morgan points out that the changes in Victorian Age had an impact on the constructions of social definitions such as gender; "To change must mean to change what we mean by masculine and feminine, male and female. Gender, then, must be an issue in any account of Victorian progress (12).

Then Victorian age becomes the arena where fixed definitions are challenged and reconstructed. As culture changes gender accordingly is transformed. Hence, female and male roles undergo a period of redefinition as well. In this respect, travel becomes a means whereby James's women assert their gender identity and reveal their true selves. In this respect, especially the place of travelling women in the Victorian Age needs to be revisited and re-interpreted.

Clifford writes that during Victorian Age "[g]ood' travel (heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling) is something men (should) do. Women are impeded from serious travel" (105), and "[p]eople may choose to limit their mobility, and people may be kept "in their place by repressive forces" (103). Actually, the doctrines of the Victorian society kept women from movement and forced them to stay home instead. Marian Tingling argues that,

among explorers women are comparative newcomers. Few women were able to travel outside of their own countries before the eighteenth century. Indeed, until the time of the Second World War, the average middle-class woman had little of the freedom and self-assertion men took for granted. (10)

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Steve Clark points out that public space was a masculine domain, so “it becomes possible to celebrate the female traveller as in flight from domestic oppression” (21). Although men had the advantage of travelling and recording their journeys more than women did, there were a few women travellers and travel writers before the nineteenth century (Clark, 19). Travel then inevitably becomes both the motive and the means of freedom. Dorothy Middleton, who presented a lecture on “Some Victorian Lady Travellers” to the Royal Geographical Society in 1973, studied some of the professional Victorian lady travellers and reported that in the second half of the nineteenth century the number of women travelling abroad increased:

Between these dates, much water flowed under the bridge, with an increasing number of women taking to travel abroad and returning to write books and give lectures. The mechanics of transport were improving all the time while women were becoming freer in every way. (66)

As Middleton reports Mary Kingsley, Fanny Bullock Workman, Isabella Bird Bishop and May French Sheldon were the most eccentric women travellers of the period (65-68). Strikingly the fictional representation of Henrietta and Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady* as close friends parallels with a historical fact. As Middleton reports, Isabella Bird Bishop (1831-1904) was among the remarkable and independent Victorian women travellers and travel writers. With her first travel book, *An Englishwoman in America* (1858) Isabella challenged and delighted a wide and appreciative audience by writing up her travel adventures. She first started writing in the form of letters to her sister Henrietta (69). At this point it is possible that James had read Bird’s travel writings and may have inspired from them in creating the fictional names of Isabel and Henrietta. Moreover, since James is the author of four travel writings; *A Little Tour in France* (1884), *English Hours* (1905), *The American Scene* (1907), and *Italian Hours* (1909)³, it is possible to see the reflection of travel in this novel.

Surely this background helps us understand why we read travelling women as outstanding and strong characters moving outside the already given gender roles. Furthermore, it also reveals why Isabel sees travel as the means to access male territories and achieve the knowledge, privileged to men. We will misinterpret the characters if we read them as fixed selves. Therefore, it is

³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_James#Travel_writings.

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significant to realize especially James's women, moving outside their existing gender roles to create new and more challenging ones.

Isabel's aunt, an American Lady, Mrs. Touchett is an independent woman determined to live a life of her own away from her husband. She lives in Florence where she has a house of her own and she is quite happy with this arrangement. James calls her "a person of many oddities" because she returns to "her husband's house" after several months without even greeting him and her only son. This tough woman keeps a distance not only physically but also emotionally from her husband and son. She appears cold hearted as she communicates with them only by means of telegram and when she wants.

In this respect, Mrs. Touchett appears to be the stronger and the dominant partner in her marriage. She is a woman with masculine qualities. Even her son, Ralph, believes: "[h]is father, as he had often said to himself, was more motherly; his mother, on the other hand, was paternal" (44). The distance Mrs. Touchett tries to keep even with her son is revealed clearly as she embraces her son with her "gloved hands" (44). Mrs. Touchett's "gloved hands" stand metaphorically for the distance she keeps from her surroundings.

As Americans living in Europe, Mrs. and Mr. Touchett have different ways of adapting to England revealing the shifting gender roles. Mr. Touchett is 'gentle' as he feels it is "so very soluble a problem to live in England assimilated yet unconverted" whereas Mrs. Touchett is quite sure of "her wisdom in not exposing herself to the English climate" (44). Her perseverance not to adapt and adopt herself to England manifests the 'male' attributions of her character. Her authoritativeness is further displayed by her refusal to establish relationships with her "husband's neighbours" (61).

As an experienced old lady, Mrs. Touchett is aware that money provides the means of power and freedom for women. Upon Isabel's inheritance she comments:

You can do a great many things if you're rich which would be severely criticized if you were poor. You can go and come, you can travel alone, you can have your own establishment: I mean of course if you'll take a companion....Of course you can do as you please; I only want you to understand how much you're at liberty.(194)

Although Mrs. Touchett points out to the importance of money she also stresses the fact that without a company a woman cannot travel. Actually, this

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is what she has been practicing all her life. Sparing only a month in a year to her husband she prefers to stay mostly in Florence, freely travels over Europe and visits America once a year. Mrs. Touchett becomes the male counterpart in her marriage because she is strong, governing, hard and reluctant to adapt herself to England and even to her family. However, Mr. Touchett has a soft and a gentle character easily adapting to his environment. His sickness and death proves his fragile nature as he does not have the power to survive in life. In Butler's theory identity becomes a matter of performance challenging the essential norms of identity and body. A multiple field of possible body and identity types are represented when binary oppositions of young and old, black and white, male and female bodies are suggested (6-16).

In this respect, by taking on male traits, Mrs. Touchett easily disguises her feminine identity under the costume of a female body and performs a masculine character while Mr Touchett puts on female traits. Since gender, in Butler's theory is a shifting category independent of sex; "gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one (6). Then, Mrs. Touchett's body is read as a metaphorical space whose boundaries are perpetually in motion so that her gendered identity can be read as unstable. Butler's notion of performativity emphasizes the productive effect of power and power relations in the construction of the gendered and sexualized body where gender becomes an attribute or a performance rather than an essential being (1-16).

Mrs. Touchett is not the only woman in the novel with masculine traits. Henrietta Stackpole with her profession signifies yet another form of masculinity. She is a friend of Isabel from America and a successful journalist with a "steel pen" (417) challenging the established notions of writer/male relationship;

she was thoroughly launched in journalism, and her letters to the *Interviewer*, from Washington, Newport, the White Mountains and other places, were universally quoted... Henrietta was in the van of progress and had clear-cut views on most subjects. (56)

Isabel appreciates Henrietta because without a family and money she lives on her own and even takes care of and supports her widowed sister's three children like a man (56). Isabel believes she is courageous and energetic and sees her as an example of useful activity (57).

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According to Annette Niemtow, Henrietta is “James’s spectre of the new woman” (381) because as Showalter argues “Victorian women were not accustomed to *choosing* a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself” (21). Her life style shows Isabel how a woman without a family is able to support herself financially and lead a happy life at the same time. As Henrietta talks about social and political problems and exchange ideas with men on various topics, Isabel believes that travel makes people intelligent and learned. Metaphors of “remarkably open eyes” without “shutters” represent Henrietta’s intelligence (414). Isabel sees her as a model. Putting in front of Isabel a woman character with male characteristics James enables Isabel to speak out her radical feminist ideas freely; “she held that a woman ought to be able to live to herself, in the absence of exceptional flimsiness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex (57).

Because of her profession Henrietta is always on the move. It is hard to keep track of her travels. It is also remarkable to see her travelling alone since female public appearance meant “sexual promiscuity”⁴ in the Victorian Age. James justifies Henrietta’s privilege to travel alone linking it to her professional career as a “literary woman” (117). She is quite confident of her occupation and successful; “I’m drifting to a big position- that of the Queen of American Journalism. If my next letter isn’t copied all over the West I’ll swallow my penwiper!” (151).

Although James hints that having a profession is a sign of independence for a woman Wolff tells us quite a different fact about the situation of a literary woman of the period, Elizabeth Gaskell:

When Mrs. Gaskell wanted to visit London in 1849 to see her publisher and to meet people in the literary world, she had to find another woman to travel with her as chaperone, since her husband could not leave his work in Manchester. (25)

Wolff refers to another story belonging to an unmarried Manchester writer, a contemporary and neighbour of the Gaskells; “Geraldine Jewsbury...appears to have moved with more freedom; but she, as her biographer records, was a more spirited and ‘masculine’ woman, who smoked cigarettes and proposed to men” (25). Furthermore, Clifford has also argued

⁴Barbara Leah Harman, “In Promiscuous Company: Female Public Appearance in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*”, p. 371.

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that in the Victorian Age it was not usual to see the bourgeois and white women travelling and if they did so they were forced to conform, masquerade, or rebel discreetly within a set of normatively male definitions and experiences (106). Clifford suggests that; “[o]ne thinks of George Sand’s famous account of dressing as a man in order to move freely in the city, to experience the gendered freedom of the *flâneur*” (105).

It is clearly seen from these examples that women’s exclusion from male public life limited even female authors’ experiences in the public space and put restrictions on their daily lives. Even a professional woman was not allowed to travel alone. Either a family member or a servant had to accompany her. Caspar Goodwood, Isabel’s friend from Albany, believes he can not let Henrietta go to Rome alone because “it would be an insult to an unprotected woman...Still she was a lady travelling alone; it was his duty to put himself out for her” (393). In this respect it is a challenge to see a woman travelling alone, yet we are informed about the response of patriarchal society upon such a challenge through Caspar.

Isabel sees Henrietta as a male companion with whom she would have no hesitation to travel with; “With Henrietta I may go anywhere; she isn’t hampered in that way. She has travelled over the whole American continent and can at least find her way about this minute island” (117). Hence it will be a safe travel for Isabel because Henrietta is like a guard. However, it is arranged that the ladies will travel to London under Ralph’s escort (126). Since Ralph is a man he could be the only reasonable guard to young ladies. Ironically, Ralph tells Isabel; “let me take the advantage of her protection to go up to town as well. I may never have a chance to travel so safely!” (117). Accepting Henrietta’s guardianship, Ralph becomes the dependent and the ‘feminine’ partner. While depicting Henrietta with masculine qualities, James attributes feminine qualities to Ralph. Once again James reveals the gender shifts by transferring male power to Henrietta and depicting Ralph with feminine weakness and dependence.

Patriarchal prejudices of the Victorian society are put forward through male characters’ views about Henrietta. As Osmond speaks to Isabel he declares his hatred;

Miss Stackpole, however, is your most wonderful invention. She strikes me as a kind of monster. One hasn’t a nerve in one’s body that she doesn’t set quivering. You know I never have admitted that she’s a woman. Do you know what she reminds me

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of? Of a steel pen -the most odious thing in nature. She talks as a steel pen writes; aren't her letters, by the way, on ruled paper? She thinks and moves and walks and looks exactly as she talks. (417)

Osmond hates Henrietta because she is a strong and an independent woman - like a 'man'. The metaphor "steel pen" stands for Henrietta's power both physically and intellectually. Osmond wants her to be away from Isabel because Henrietta defies the long lasting patriarchal notion that man is the author/father of the text, identifying the author with the male (Gilber and Gubar, 7).

Another travelling woman in the novel is Madam Merle. Penniless, yet a woman with "distinct identity" (157), Madam Merle is a close friend of Mrs. Touchett. What impresses Isabel about Madam Merle is that she had travelled a lot and made friends in many countries:

Madame Merle had been a dweller in many lands and had social ties in a dozen different countries. 'I don't pretend to be educated,' she would say, 'but I think I know my Europe;' and she spoke one day of going to Sweden to stay with an old friend, and another of proceeding to Malta to follow up a new acquaintance. With England, where she had often dwelt, she was thoroughly familiar. (173)

Madam Merle's talks about Florence, Rome and other places she had been and people she had known (176) draws Isabel towards her. The fact that she has many friends both in Italy and England, and her promise that she will introduce them to Isabel attracts Isabel and she shows no signs of resistance to Madam Merle's wishes (214-215).

Her misjudgement about this seemingly 'perfect' woman will lead Isabel to despair. Harmless as she seems Merle is the person to entrap Isabel into the web of Osmond. She starts to poison Isabel by imposing her views on marriage proposals; "It's a pleasant exercise of power; but accepting's after all an exercise of power as well" (180). Yet, clueless, Isabel is far from seeing the dark side of Madam Merle and trusts her blindly. After Isabel's marriage Madam Merle is away from Rome. She had been in England for six months and in Paris for sometime in winter visiting many friends (343). She is always travelling. This is the kind of freedom Isabel is looking for in her future life.

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She believes travelling provides the means to learn about different people and customs of various countries, and get to know new ones. It is the patriarchal arena open to men and accessible only to powerful women. Isabel believes travelling equips Merle with features to be competent in the social arena as James portrays her as a warrior:

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. She was never weary, never overcome with disgust; she never appeared to need rest or consolation. She had her own ideas; she had of old exposed a great many of them to Isabel, who knew also that under an appearance of extreme self-control her highly-cultivated friend concealed a rich sensibility. (343)

These masculine qualities of Madam Merle satisfy Isabel's needs for knowledge and become the key to power women are not allowed to.

So a series of travels starts by Isabel's arrival in Europe. A new continent is definitely a new start for her. This freedom of travel makes her feel the world is before her to conquer. Isabel's first journey is to London. James tells us that Isabel and Henrietta would be travelling "under Ralph's escort" (126) since it was not possible for a woman to travel alone. Later in the novel James will repeatedly remind us of this fact: "Ralph Touchett was to take his cousin back to Florence on the morrow" (265), "[s]he returned...to Florence, under her cousin's escort" (271), or "[s]he accomplished this journey without other assistance than that of her servant" (278). James is well aware of the impositions of the Victorian society about ladies' travelling alone, so in each journey he arranges a company for Isabel. Thus, we see that in such a culture it is natural for Isabel to perceive 'travel' as the gate opening up to the male sphere. She wants to learn everything as "[s]he asked more questions than he [Ralph] could answer, and launched brave theories" (128).

Isabel's first act in London is to refuse Lord Warburton's marriage proposal because Isabel does not want to tie herself by marrying. Her second act is to refuse Caspar because she is determined not to marry until she has seen Europe (137). Her reply to Caspar reveals her strong will; "I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live. I can find it out for myself" (143). At

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this point, Isabel perceives marriage as a prison. So, she prefers to travel instead, which stands for freedom and knowledge.

Isabel's second journey is to Florence, Italy. Her company, aunt Mrs. Touchett, warns Isabel; "[y]ou can go and come, you can travel alone,...if you'll take a companion" (194). As the representative of the patriarchal society, Mrs. Touchett reminds Isabel of the limits of her freedom because she is still a woman. Just like in London, Isabel is still full of curiosity towards the unknown in Italy. Her journey is an "adventure" for her. In Florence she wonders what "Europe would offer to a young person of taste" (195). Isabel tries to get as much as she could out of travelling. James describes her as if she were in trance; "[s]he lost herself in a maze of visions" (198). She perceives Italy as "a land of promise" presenting "endless knowledge" (197). In her adventure she goes to Rome, visits galleries and palaces, and tries to get as much knowledge as she could. James describes her adventure as a "mental prostration" for exchanging knowledge (216), which keeps her "imagination awake" (217).

Between Florence and Rome, Isabel makes several journeys and her earlier "mental prostration" (216) turns into "unrest" (275). It is in Rome that she is mistaken about Osmond because as James has already hinted Isabel is "[t]oo troubled for attention she moved in a vain circle" (275). At this point Isabel feels very strong:

Grave she found herself, and positively more weighted, as by the experience of the lapse of the year she had spent in seeing the world. She had ranged, she would have said, through space and surveyed much of mankind, and was therefore now, in her own eyes, a very different person from the frivolous young woman from Albany...She flattered herself she had harvested wisdom and learned a great deal more of life....(276)

Ironically, the stronger Isabel feels, the weaker she becomes and starts making mistakes. Returning back to London she feels "the world lay before her" and "she could do whatever she chose". Disillusioned, Isabel experiences a "deep thrill" of freedom (278) and for the first time goes to Rome alone, without the company of a family or a friend, but her servant. First she goes down to Venice and then to south, Ancona.

Not yet satisfied of her travels, Isabel asks Madam Merle to go on a pilgrimage to the East. Madam Merle realizes that Isabel is "restless" about

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this journey (279). Together they spend three months in Greece, Turkey and Egypt. This is Isabel's third and last major journey in the novel. Yet, she is still thrilled as she "found much to interest her" there, but what is striking is for the first time: "Isabel travelled rapidly and recklessly; she was like a thirsty person draining cup after cup" (279). It is clear that Isabel is different in this final journey. James's choice of adjectives like "restless" and "reckless" signify that Isabel is impatient. It is possible that she sees this last journey as the final chapter of her development and wants to finish it as soon as possible. Travel becomes an occupation for Isabel, a part of education to be finished. She believes the further she travels the more knowledge she gets. Now that she has seen all, gone far enough to the East, become "grave" and "weighted", the next chapter of her life is about to begin (276). She feels capable of doing everything and making decisions for herself.

Travel empowers Isabel and becomes the medium to complete her education. Feeling "weighted" she believes she can choose the right thing and chooses to marry Osmond. This final act is quite significant because Osmond, collector of art objects, symbolizes the patriarchal society. By submitting herself to marriage, Isabel accepts the status of an object, like Pansy, Osmond's daughter. Now she is a piece of art in Osmond's collection. Moreover, since Isabel perceives travel as an occupation and an education, when it is finished she chooses another occupation. Its name is Pansy. Isabel believes it is her duty to save this little girl and for the first time in the novel Isabel feels superior over someone. After her encounters with strong characters like Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood, her aunt and Henrietta Isabel is in a dilemma. The vulnerable girl needs Isabel's help and "the girl's dependence was more than a pleasure; it operated as a definite reason when motives threatened to fail her. She said to herself that we must take our duty where find it, and that we must look for it as much as possible" (347). Thus, Pansy becomes Isabel's motivation to marry Osmond.

Even at the beginning of the novel, her motivation to visit Osmond for the first time as she told Ralph was; "to go and see his view, his pictures, his daughter" (219) as if Pansy was equal to Osmond's properties. It is clear that Isabel attributes similar values to Pansy by putting her in the same category of Osmond's house and pictures. Pansy becomes "a nosegay composed all of the same flower" (348) she is happy to carry with. By "nosegay" we understand that Pansy is like a freshener for Isabel, but nothing more than a suitcase Isabel carries during her visits around. Isabel's intention to save Pansy is basically to "edify" that blank page; write whatever she wants on it (243). Since that blank page stands for the innocence and virginity of Pansy it needs an author and

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Isabel desires to be one. Empowered by her travels by accessing the male territories Isabel displays male characteristics. Actually, she acts like a man. Susan Gubar in ‘The Blank Page’ puts it:

This model of the pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation- a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality. (247)

To be a writer, a ‘male’ writer and a member of the patriarchal authority Isabel needs Pansy as her object revealing the subversive nature of the ‘blank page’. Pansy’s relationship to her father is a reflection of Isabel’s position to Pansy. In this reciprocal bond Osmond owns Pansy. Isabel’s desire is the same; ownership. Actually this chain extends to James as the writer and creator of the fictional character of Isabel. After travelling, ownership becomes the patriarchal arena where Isabel experiences male power. Only through Pansy she could experience ownership, enter into the male world and be a part of it.

Surrounding Isabel with an interesting web of women and men, James has played with gender roles in *The Portrait of a Lady*. In Butler’s terms if gender is independent of sex “its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as ‘woman,’” (Preface, ix) which explains the possibility of multiple genders and shifts. Thus, “[a]s a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (Butler, 10). Presenting feminine and masculine traits as not fixed concepts, James depicted women with masculine qualities and men with feminine. The gender roles James displays in the novel are determined through and in culture, with the interaction between characters and by travelling.

Ralph Touchett, sick and dying, is depicted as a passive spectator in the novel. His inactivity and immobility proves his weakness in life, reminding us of the submissive and domestic women of the Victorian Age. His father, Mr. Touchett, compared to his wife, becomes the ‘gentle’ counterpart. Unable to survive he dies. Hence, both men are portrayed by James having effeminate qualities compared to the dominant mobile women characters around them.

Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton signify patriarchal society because they are powerful men physically and economically. They are alive because of their physical, social and financial statuses. Both manifest

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masculine virtues which cause Isabel to run away. In fact, Isabel wants to run away from the strong male dominance of the patriarchal society. She does not want to be an object of the patriarchal society imposing restrictions on female in every sphere of life. She refuses the power of male assigning female no occupation other than being a wife. She wants to move freely and travel alone which are forbidden to Victorian women through the doctrine of "Angels in the House" and "Separation of Spheres". However, Isabel yields to the impositions of the age by marrying Osmond. Although he does not have the financial means to do so, Osmond becomes yet another symbol of the patriarchal society, since seemingly he possesses Pansy and Isabel as precious objects in his collection.

Mrs. Touchett, Henrietta and Madam Merle represent another facade of the patriarchal society. Mrs. Touchett is the strongest and the most independent female character in the novel endowed with masculine properties. She proves her strength as she survives after her major losses in life. With her guardianship to Isabel and her profession, Henrietta is yet another symbol of patriarchy. However her masculine power diminishes as she yields to marriage, signifying again the gender shifts. Isabel on the other hand refuses the dominance of the patriarchal society and its masculine values at the beginning of the novel. Later, she sees at the end that there is no way out and becomes a part of the patriarchal chain by choosing an object, Pansy, to exercise dominance and governance. Isabel realizes that only through patriarchal means she could experience ownership and be embedded with masculine values. As a male writer James once again reminds the reader of the restrictive bonds for women in a world of conventional marriages and patriarchal rules. Yet, through travelling and shifting gender roles James implies the hope and need for improvement in the ever changing and chaotic society, and most importantly reveals the possibilities for men and women for a better world. His criticism at this point is valuable, since he is a male writer.

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