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Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*: The Figure of the Lady Between Surplus Value and Surplus Enjoyment

Jacques Sohier

- 1 The germ of this article comes from a reaction to a shift in language. The French translation of the title *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James is *Portrait de Femme*.¹ And Jane Campion's 1986 film in its French version has retained the same title. James who was a self-conscious writer with a love of French literature and language would have frowned on this inadequate translation because it not only tones down the artistic banner he chose for his novel, but it also alters the problematics of the novel. A lady can only be in French *une grande dame*, someone "clever, cold, self-possessed, ineffably elegant" (James, *Literary Criticism* 64), as the master himself wrote in a critical paper on Balzac.
- 2 The purpose of this article is to explore the concept of ladyhood in order to grasp Henry James's artistic vision. A lady is a woman, necessarily, and as James imagines her, she goes through cultural and ontological processes that turn her into a lady. These processes that imply sacrificing oneself to high ideals, ultimately give the lady a Christian aura. As we shall see, elaborate social and religious apparatuses akin to the famous state apparatuses described by Louis Althusser are involved in the formation of a lady. A series of ideological constraints conspire to fashion a lady of substance, and subtle distinctions are to be made as is suggested by the quotation from the novel, "'The ladies will save us,' said the old man, 'that is the best of them will—for I [Daniel Touchett] make a difference between them'" (23). The saving grace of the lady entails a working through of experience on the part of the individual. Dorothy Van Ghent has called this process "an ordeal of knowledge of evil" (680), whose end product is artistically and religiously an assumption. We may say a true lady rises to glory. She does so by undergoing a transfiguration, a metamorphosis. She also rises to glory in the

eyes of the beholder who places her on a pedestal to be adored as the untouchable “Thing,” in the Freudian sense, that is to say someone who is taboo and can only be admired from a distance.

- 3 To analyze James's ideal of ladyhood, I shall begin by underlining the contrast he draws between the *jeune fille* and the American girl to show that James defies expectations by constructing a New World lady with Old World attributes. Then, I shall highlight the differences in various portraits of women the better to distinguish the characteristics of the fledgling lady. Lastly, I shall concentrate on the matrix of discourses that Jacques Lacan has delineated. I mean to show that these discourses, in their own different ways, function like ideological straitjackets, and contribute to fashioning a lady and eventually impose standards of behaviour and ethics on her.

La jeune fille

- 4 When James uses the term “*la jeune fille*” (238) it seems at first sight that he has in mind someone like Pansy Osmond who is, in the words of her father Gilbert Osmond, “a little convent-flower” (220). These convent flowers are nurtured in secluded places. They are pressed dry in the negative space of the convent, as suggested by the wax flowers under glass that are an ornament of Pansy's convent. Kept out of the world, Pansy has received a very strict education, carried out by “the ladies of the sisterhood” (456), a group of Catholic nuns who inspire complete obedience to the father in their pupils. Since Pansy wants to marry Ned Rosier who is not as glamorous as the immensely wealthy Lord Warburton, her father sends her back to the convent for the so-called “finishing touches” (442). In keeping with the metaphor of life as a script that is written in advance, the lady is perceived as a work of art that requires completion to conform to an ideal.
- 5 For young ladies, it is in the convent that the ontological finishing touches are to be achieved. Osmond has it that, “The Catholics are very wise after all. The convent is a great institution; we can't do without it; it corresponds to an essential need in families, in society. It's a school of manners; it's a school of repose” (442). The authority of the Church and that of the father are complicit in the creation of submission in young ladies. James describes the outcome of this upbringing in striking terms: “She was evidently impregnated with the idea of submission” (202). Pansy is made pregnant with an ideology, that of the father's will, since “Osmond wished it to be known he shrank from nothing” (443). The father as tyrant delegates to the convent the power to perform something akin to moral torture. As the narrator euphemistically states, the father plays “theoretic tricks” (442) on the delicate sensibility of his daughter. However, if Pansy has had the education of a lady she will not become a genuine lady in the Jamesian sense of the term. Pansy has become “ineffably passive” (313). She is obviously under the control of patriarchal ideology. The dutiful daughter is perceived as “a blank page” that can be written over with “an edifying text” (268), presumably the text programming ladyhood. Pansy has all the potential of a lady, including a great capacity for waiting which is evoked by her willingness to wait endlessly for Ned Rosier's proposal of marriage. But she has not completely surrendered her personality to her father's will, as she manoeuvres to keep Lord Warburton at a safe distance.
- 6 If Pansy is not the ideal Jamesian lady it is above all because James is interested in Pansy as a “satellite” as he says in his preface to the novel (11), projecting a light on the

main heroine. Pansy's history and character form a sharp contrast to the characteristics of the American *jeune fille*. Writing Pansy's life would only have meant fictionalizing the lived and felt lives of European ladies like Madame de Sabran whose correspondence James reviewed in 1875. James noted that Madame de Sabran, "married with the usual docility of the young women of her country" (James 1984 649).² Instead of writing about the misfortunes of a lady at the hands of an abusive husband, James seems to perform a cross-breeding of traditions between European traditions and American traditions. In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) James rewrites the typical historic formula in a variation on his Daisy Miller story. In "Daisy Miller, A Study" (1878), James kills the young American girl who flirts with the fortune hunter Giovanelli. Daisy Miller catches the "*perniciosa*" (malaria) at dusk in the Roman coliseum and never recovers from flouting European conventions (James, "Daisy" 79). The novella ends with a reference to "a report that he [Winterbourne], is 'studying' hard—an intimation that he is much interested in a very clever foreign lady" (James, "Daisy" 81). James takes up this story again in *The Portrait of a Lady* where he is most interested in a very clever American lady and fervently resumes his studying. James was so shocked by the death of his beloved cousin Minny Temple in 1870 that he tried to imagine what her destiny might have been. Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer are both case studies that show James's fascination with independent, self-assertive female characters. Isabel Archer, however, is a much more complex character than Daisy Miller or even Pansy Osmond. For instance, Isabel has a "virginité savante."³ She is "savante," or she thinks she is, in the sense of being self-educated since along with her sisters, "They had had no regular education" (40). She is reputed to have read the classics in translation. She is also a virgin as the numerous references to her fear in front of the "images of energy" (194) Caspar Goodwood or Lord Warburton testify. And she admits "she believed in such a thing as chastity" (362). She is given a complex personality whose features are presented by an analytical narrator. The character's intellectual capacity is undermined by the narrative discourse. For example, Isabel Archer is credited with having "a reach of intellect," but it leads to arrogance since "this encouraged an impatience that might be easily confounded with superiority" (53).

- 7 Unlike Pansy Osmond who lives a sheltered life, the heroine has lived in the world. Isabel Archer has had a liberal education:
Even when her father had left his daughters for three months at Neufchatel with a French *bonne* who eloped with a Russian nobleman staying at the same hotel—even in this irregular situation (an incident of the girl's eleventh year) she had been neither frightened nor ashamed, but had thought it a romantic episode in a liberal education (40).
- 8 These incidents could hardly figure in Pansy Osmond's life experience since the would-be lady has to enter marriage with no previous knowledge of passion whether it be in actual life or in novels. Edward Rosier even thinks that Pansy reads no newspapers and "if she had read a Walter Scott novel it was the very most" (311). The contrast between the two characters, Pansy and Isabel, throws into relief the destiny James has in mind for the fledgling lady as is going to be shown in the following part.

Portraits de femmes

- 9 Other images of women are often contrasted with Isabel Archer and they provide imperfect images of the true lady. For instance, sociologically Countess Gemini has become a lady by marrying a member of an ancient Tuscan family. But if the lineage is there to operate a grafting between the old and the new, the outcome is a failure. The count is “a low-lived brute” (449) and a womanizer who leads his wife to seek vengeance or compensation elsewhere: “When I discovered ten years ago, that my husband’s dearest wish was to make me miserable [...] ah, it was a wonderful simplification!” (449). Countess Gemini falls short of the Jamesian standard of ladyhood by swerving away from a battle of wills. She also lacks one of the features of the Jamesian lady, cleverness: “She was a good creature, not clever at all” (239). The text for ladyhood has become blurred and is unreadable. The Countess is a palimpsest: “She was by no means a blank sheet; she had been written over in a variety of hands” (238). She has let herself be written over rather than taking the writing of her self in hand. She is “the unfortunate lady” (239), someone who has mismanaged her reputation.
- 10 In opposition to Amy Gemini, Madame Merle has succeeded in protecting her reputation but she only has the appearance of ladyhood without any of the attendant signs, wealth, or status. Madame Merle is definitely a lady, “a great lady” (166), albeit a very problematic one. She adheres to the social obligations and duties of a lady, like the Thursday evenings Isabel finds irksome. As she says to the heroine, “I was born before the French Revolution. Ah, my dear, *je viens de loin*; I belong to the old, old world” (170). Ideologically, she is fitted to assume the responsibilities of a lady. She has this social grace that makes her welcome in the great houses of Europe. She is a “mistress of the social art” (216). She has a formidable competence in communication that enables her to glide in social intercourse and to be, as the admiring Rosier has it, “intimate without being familiar” (307). Ontologically, too, she has gone through suffering that has forged her will:
- This history was so sad a one (in so far as it concerned the late M. Merle, a positive adventurer, she might say, though originally so plausible, who had taken advantage, years before of her youth and of an inexperience in which doubtless those who knew her only now would find it difficult to believe); it abounded so in startling and lamentable incidents that her companion wondered a person so *éprouvée* could have kept so much of her freshness, her interest in life. (274)
- 11 The word “*éprouvée*” is interesting, as it condenses both the trials endured and the strength of character that conspire to make the lady. Madame Merle has overcome hardships elegantly, keeping her scars hidden from view. Her will has gathered her self to a point, so that she is “a woman of strong impulses kept in admirable order” (154). And this James finds fascinating. Madame Merle is the perfect lady. She is certainly “cold, clever, self-possessed, ineffably elegant” (James, 1984 64). This deliberate construction of herself into a lady makes of Madame Merle a tragic figure since her worldly ambitions have failed to materialize. She is perfect and complete for the role but circumstances have disavowed her. Her ideals for perfection have undergone a fatal twist that makes her into a courtesan: “Her conceptions of human motives might, in certain lights, have been acquired at the court of some kingdom in decadence” (275). Madame Merle can be viewed as a tragic woman because she hardly reaps any benefits from the diabolical pact that binds her to Gilbert Osmond. She has had to forego all

claims on her daughter Pansy so that Osmond can pass himself off in front of the world as a lonely widower. Moreover, Madame Merle continues to desire a form of recognition from her former lover, which is in fact an implicit demand for love. When Osmond tells her “No, I don't care very much” (204), the reader realizes that Madame Merle has been “vile all for nothing” (437), as she says herself.

- 12 Madame Merle shares with Mrs Touchett this coldness that is an attribute of the lady. In both women the fount of emotion has dried up. In the case of Madame Merle, the strained emotional relation with Osmond makes her suppress her feelings. For Lydia Touchett it is, it seems, her choice of a hard, functional form of living that has deprived her of an imagination that can “commune with the unseen” (329) and the deeper rhythms of life. Mrs Touchett is a lady in the very restricted sense of being an eccentric lady. She is a snob who relishes the cards, those “oblong morsels of symbolic pasteboard” (60) that symbolize her social standing. She lives most of the year in Palazzo Crescentini in Florence, away from her husband who is presented as suffering from this separation. She is also an interesting case of a subversive woman since she manages her own fortune and lives an independent life. She subverts the traditional distinction of the sexes that patriarchy has invented. She unsettles gender role by being paternal, “for Ralph his father, so he had often said to himself was the more motherly; his mother, on the other hand, was paternal” (43). Although she has immense freedom of movement and financial power, James makes her into “an old woman without memories” (473). Being a philistine and living separated from her closest relations in order to please herself, Mrs Touchett has missed the values of life. When her son dies, she generalizes and rationalizes her pain, “after all, such things happened to other people and not to herself” (482). And the heroine wonders about her aunt, “if she were not even missing those enrichments of consciousness and privately trying—reaching out for some after taste of life, dregs of the banquet” (373). This expression “the enrichments of consciousness” is typically Jamesian and it underlines the process the master has in mind for the true lady. The process of becoming-lady requires a cluster of circumstances to work together. Those circumstances refer to the situation the young American girl finds herself in when she becomes the prey of fortune hunters. Dorothy Van Ghent has formulated this by saying that “necessity wears its most insidious disguise, the disguise of freedom” (678). If Lydia Touchett has no need to disguise her freedom, it is altogether a different matter for Henrietta Stackpole who has to earn her living. Henrietta Stackpole does not inhabit the highest spheres of material opportunity, but she can see her friend drifting to become an enslaved lady. Henrietta Stackpole has a relative view of Isabel Archer's opportunities because she has to work as a journalist to earn her living. Moreover, this character has none of the elements for potential ladyhood. She gleefully subverts gender roles, too. She looks straight back at others and objectifies the objectifying gaze, “the most striking point in her appearance was the remarkable fixedness of this organ, which rested without impudence or defiance, but as if in conscientious exercise of a natural right, upon every object it happened to encounter” (80). She refutes the masculine look that proliferates in this novel, making women into aesthetic objects to be appropriated or desired from afar as transcendent objects of desire.
- 13 Henrietta Stackpole is an example of the *Modern Woman* that one of the books reviewed by James describes. According to Ralph Touchett she “smells somewhat strongly of the future” (88). She makes the constructor of the lady and the keeper of the patriarchal

status quo tremble. Osmond thinks her “a kind of monster,” and he makes the characteristic remark, “You know I never have admitted that she’s a woman” (409). Henrietta Stackpole is not feminine for Osmond because she overturns the traditional hierarchy and opposition between passivity/activity and femininity/masculinity critiqued by feminists (see, for example, Moi). Henrietta Stackpole is female but she is not feminine according to the standards of patriarchy since she refuses reification. She is active in her professional life as well as in her quest for a companion. She is interested in the happiness of others since she has the match-making fever. As Ralph Touchett says making fun of her, “what a rage you have for marrying people” (108). James turns this character into the butt of jokes, using her for comic relief. She is “the light *ficelle*, not ... the true agent” (13), as James says in his preface. James even compares her to a fishwife, one of the fishwives “who helped to bring back to Paris from Versailles ... the carriage of the royal family” (13). To James, this character was allowed to pervade rather too much, as he says, causing an aesthetic fault in the whole design. A possible answer to this insistent questioning of whether “we have indubitably too much” of Henrietta Stackpole (13) provides the author with an antithesis to the bleak fate of the great lady. When she marries Mr Bantling Henrietta disappoints Isabel: “Henrietta, after all, had confessed herself human and feminine, Henrietta whom she had hitherto regarded as a light keen flame, a disembodied voice” (470). This disappointment is telling, it shows that Isabel Archer needs her friend as a symbol of independent womanhood to counterbalance the alienation she undergoes.

La grande dame

- 14 The process Isabel Archer goes through to become a Jamesian lady involves suffering that is then transformed into wisdom. Isabel Archer starts out on her journey to Europe as a clever but naive young woman and becomes a rich heiress. She then marries the worst possible suitor “on a factitious theory, in order to do something finely appreciable with the money” (358). In the famous chapter of her self-analysis she comes to see what she is in for, “he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance” (359).
- 15 The heroine has to admit that her husband hates her for not effacing herself. She has to repossess a part of the self-love she has invested in Osmond, which proves difficult, “She had no opinions—none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved” (359). In fact, she has to come to terms with the discovery that Osmond and Madame Merle were once lovers, that Pansy is their daughter and that she has been their dupe. This is a symbolic wound to her self, this failure in knowing and guessing the evil of the world, when others around her, like Countess Gemini or Ralph, have had the imagination to see the unseen.
- 16 It is also the mystique of marriage that constrains her as strongly as an ideology. She sees marriage as a sacred form, an indissoluble commitment, even when her husband becomes a tyrant in the private sphere. She identifies Osmond’s “blasphemous sophistry” (446) when he tries to prevent her from going to see Ralph when he is dying, but she remains convinced marriage is sacred. Although Henrietta invokes the possibility of freedom by separation or divorce, the heroine reacts strongly; she is “extremely struck with the off-hand way in which you [Henrietta Stackpole] speak of a woman’s leaving her husband” (418).

- 17 These very fine psychological insights allow the reader to see from within the subjectivity of a lady and feel the pressure she has to withstand to simply exist. However, what makes *The Portrait of a Lady* a masterpiece is that James, alongside the subtle psychological insights, also fictionalizes alienation, in its religious, social and ontological dimensions. These dimensions inform the dynamics of a *becoming-lady*. The lady comes to occupy a place in a structure that is organised to receive the pretenders. The contenders, as mentioned before, are numerous and not all of them can occupy the place of the lady. For the lady to assume her proper place certain forces need to be exerted. The forces that come into play are supported by discourses. Lacan has structurally defined the different discourses that constitute a system and I mean to show that they all concur in fashioning a lady of high spirit. These discourses circumscribe the place of the lady.
- 18 The discourse of the master comes first in Lacan's formalisation. This discourse finds its inspiration in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which identifies a fight for mastery between the master and the slave. Fearing death, the slave gives in and waits for the master's death. Lacan refines this insight by seeing in it a fundamental organisation of human intercourse. He sees the master's discourse as the way the structure of the speaking subject is instituted and also as the way to political subjection. On the one hand, James sees the lady as an empty place in a structure, and on the other hand, this place is to be filled by an individual subjectivity.
- 19 The lady is hemmed in by this discourse of the master. When Gilbert Osmond thinks of his marriage, he intimately voices this discourse:
 Madame Merle has made him a present of incalculable value. What could be a finer thing than to live with a high spirit attuned to softness? For would not the softness be all for one's self, and the strenuousness for society, which admired the air of superiority. (295)
- 20 "The softness all for one self" and "the strenuousness for society" evoke the Marxist notion of surplus value along with the Lacanian notion of surplus enjoyment on which it is based. Two discourses are inextricably intertwined. On the one hand, the master's discourse insists on the smooth running of things, on things being properly "attuned" and working as they should. And on the other hand, the master does not countenance rebellion since "he [will shrink] from nothing" (443). This discourse can evolve into the discourse of capitalism whose inner working is exploitation and profiteering. Does not Osmond sound like a master who is a capitalist in disguise? In this framework, the lady's duties, such as holding receptions for example, are forms of exploitation since she works for the benefit of the master/capitalist who appropriates the surplus value. This surplus value is partially kept by the capitalist since the rest of it is to be reinvested in the improvement of production in an endless cycle.
- 21 The interesting aspect of this exploitation is that James displaces the context of love relationships, of snobbery and of the workforce to create an intermediary zone in which properties and qualities are exchanged because at bottom it is the material conditions that matter. In the same way, Lacan turns by quarter turns his terms within the structure of the different discourses to obtain five different discourses which are meant to synthesize a great many possible situations. For Lacan, four terms are connected, the S1 for the master-signifier, S2 for knowledge, S for the speaking subject and *a*, object *petit a*, which stands for 'plus-de-jourir' or surplus enjoyment. These elements can take a place that is already inscribed in the formalisation, linking the

agent to the other and production with truth (Lacan *Séminaire*). Thus we have the following organisation:

The master's discourse

- 22 S1 on the top left hand corner occupies the place of the agent and determines the discourse of the master, while S2 in that position defines the discourse of the university. S in this place, inscribes the discourse of the hysteric while *a* in that place formulates the discourse of the psychoanalyst. And finally, the discourse of the capitalist, which is derived from the master's discourse, makes preeminent the surplus value appropriated by the capitalist from the worker in the process of production. In his novel, it seems James positions Gilbert Osmond as a capitalist who has his wife for a worker and expropriates the surplus value she produces. This paradigm with the surplus enjoyment suggests that the lady derives very little pleasure from her social duties. As a matter of fact, Isabel Archer feels that by marrying Osmond she has entered "the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation" (360). The lady at this moment sees nothing of the enjoyment shared between the master and society. The master gets the lion's share since he receives as a surplus the admiration of society for his possession of the lady.
- 23 It might be said that Osmond is not a true capitalist but rather a dilettante, an esthete. Osmond is a fortune hunter who desires to lay back and enjoy the fruits of his labour once the object of his quest has been attained and the strains induced by the work of seducing the lady are over. The true capitalist, on the face of it, is Caspar Goodwood who owns a series of mills in America. Goodwood, however, is not the best representative of the capitalist's discourse, above all because he is shown in his strenuous and finally unsuccessful conquest of the lady. Nevertheless, he has much more to offer to the lady than simply a very restricted life made of social duties. After giving voice to the pleasure principle by saying to the heroine "we can do absolutely as we please" (488) an extraordinary scene takes place. James depicts the unconscious forces that overwhelm the heroine:

Isabel gave a low murmur like a creature in pain; it was as if he were pressing something that hurt her. 'The world's very small' she said at random; she had an immense desire to appear to resist. She said it at random, to hear herself say something; but it was not what she meant. The world, in truth, had never seemed so large. It seemed to open out all around her, to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters. (489)

- 24 The passage reads like a description of a deflowering, but it is also a writerly dramatisation of mounting pleasure culminating in *jouissance*. The heroine utters a statement she finds in contradiction with her intention. Since this vacillation happens in a context where pain and pleasure are mixed, one could say with Lacan that “*jouissance* is forbidden to the speaker as such, or else it can only be said between the lines for anyone who is subject of the Law, since the Law is grounded on this very interdiction” (Lacan, “Subversion” 821[My translation.]). Since *jouissance* is transgressive, it takes the heroine beyond the limits of her ego, beyond the safety of well-known boundaries into unknown territories. The consequence of this event is that “she darted from the spot” (489) to return to her hateful husband. This makes her a good hysteric and a good illustrator of the hysteric’s discourse, too, since she is running away from what James called “images of energies” to protect herself from desire.
- 25 Caspar Goodwood could be seen as an element that functions in the discourse of the hysteric. Goodwood is an image of energy that frightens the heroine so much so that she chooses instead to marry the more sedate and sexually mute Gilbert Osmond. When she is offered a debacle of the senses, the heroine prefers not to. Generally, masochism has been given as an explanation for her return to Osmond. James seems to validate this reading through the narrator’s observation that “women find their religion in strange places” (362). This is to make short shrift of the necessary salvage of Pansy’s life as well as the coming to terms with herself after her generous cousin’s death. By returning to Osmond the heroine will be able to protect Pansy from a tyrannical father and will make a stand for herself.
- 26 Another possibility is that she deliberately turns her back on the freedom-in-being which is promised by the discourse of the analyst. This discourse has object *a* in the place of the agent. Ralph Touchett might come close to the position of the analyst pointing to where desire might lie. However, since he gives half of his inheritance to Isabel Archer, Ralph Touchett could stand for the obverse of the discourse of the analyst. Normally, it is the patient in the psychoanalytical session that gives money to the analyst so that work can be carried out in earnest. Ralph Touchett convinces his reluctant father to give half of his inheritance to the heroine in order to satisfy his curiosity and to enable her to meet the requirements of her imagination, but instead it contributes to her ensnaring. The wealth she inherits is one of several factors that precipitates the heroine’s tragedy: “What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it [her wealth] over to the man with the best taste in the world? Unless she should have given it to a hospital there would have been nothing better she could do with it; and there was no charitable institution in which she had been as much interested as in Gilbert Osmond” (358). Her hesitation in donating money to a hospital and the explicit association of her lover with a charitable institution suggest that the heroine seeks a form of acknowledgement for her financial power. When one conjures up Osmond’s paranoiac and sadistic tendencies, the mention of a “hospital” and a “charitable institution” creates an appropriately “droll pathos”, James would say.⁴
- 27 Another factor in Isabel Archer’s tragedy can be associated with the discourse of the master. This discourse places knowledge in the agent’s place and it legitimizes the position of the master. The heroine has had little education and her knowledge is derived from classics read in translation. As something is always lost in translation, it can be said that knowledge and the lack of it intervene in her alienation since *she thinks*

she knows. This knowledge should not be confused with science that has nothing to do with the speaking subject. It is instead symbolic knowledge or a loss of innocence.

- 28 The heroine embarks on a philosophical quest for self-realization: "The love of knowledge co-existed in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance" (173). It is because of this ignorance of the evil of the world that she comes to marry the worst possible man. James denounces Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy of the freedom of exploration, of self-validation and self-reliance (Emerson 273 *and passim*). Coming to Europe from America, Isabel Archer carries with her the desire to "advance out of faith into freedom," as Emerson says in "Fate". The heroine is both a child of the great Transcendentalist and a child of the Puritans.⁵ The heroine's hysterical tendencies are grafted onto Transcendentalist ethics. Through the destiny of his heroine, James castigates Ralph Waldo Emerson because he has no conception of evil, precisely what Isabel Archer encounters in the form of the fortune hunters, Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond. James takes Emerson's enthusiasm for exploring life to its logical conclusions. Instead of enjoying what leaves us better for the experience, it is enjoyment itself that has to be renounced. Here, the lady becomes a prescient figure of modernity. According to Slavoj Žižek, "today, psychoanalysis is the only discourse in which you are allowed *not* to enjoy (as opposed to 'not allowed to enjoy')" (304). James leads his heroine back to Rome as she renounces the super ego's injunction to enjoy in order to give precedence to the injunction 'not to enjoy'. Indeed, James's heroine decides not to enjoy and this decision itself makes the lady.
- 29 Except for Isabel Archer who embodies the Jamesian ideal of ladyhood, all the other female characters fall short of Henry James's ideal of the lady. Pansy Osmond has the potential for ladyhood, but she shows herself very astute in turning down Lord Warburton's proposal of marriage. This astuteness estranges her from the Jamesian pedestal. Henrietta Stackpole and Lydia Touchett act as comic foils to the heroine. They are manly and too independent to conform to this ideal. Madame Merle has the bearing and knowledge of what it takes to make a lady but her lack of morals and life's circumstances have disavowed her aspirations. The lady who has the proper *tenue*, James would say, is Isabel Archer who confronts her destiny and all the mistakes she has made. The great lady is sacrificial like Isabel Archer who goes back to her tyrannical husband to save Pansy's life. She has so constrained herself that she can now stand her ground in her combat with Osmond. This decision also accounts for the adjective "cold" that James attributes to the true lady. The lady evinces a form of coldness because her sacrificial life has purified her of all erotic dimensions, unless, of course, it is precisely this that the master, as James was often called, finds entrancing and awesome.

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NOTES

1. The French edition, *Portrait de femme*, was translated by Claude Bonnafond. All references to the English text are from the 1995 Norton Critical Edition.
2. Henry, James, Correspondance inédite de la Comtesse de Sabran et du Chevalier de Boufflers, *Literary Criticism*. op. cit., 649.
3. The term "virginité savante" comes from James's comment on one of Balzac's characters: "And yet Madame de l'Estorade is given us as a model of the all-gracious wife and mother; she figures in the 'Deux Jeunes Mariées' as the foil of the luxurious, passionate and pedantic Louise de Chaulieu—the young lady who, on issuing from the convent where she got her education, writes to her friend that she is the possessor of a 'virginité savante'" ("Honoré de Balzac" 44).
4. The expression, "droll pathos," is used by Henry James in order to describe a summary of Frédéric Moreau's life in Flaubert, *L'Education sentimentale*, "il connut alors la mélancolie des paquebots" (James, *Literary Criticism* 340).

5. The puritanism of the heroine has already been pointed out in Robert Chase's study of the novel. See also my essay in the volume edited by Sophie Geoffroy-Menoux.

ABSTRACTS

The paper analyses the cultural and ontological processes by which a presumptuous young American woman is turned into a lady. Henry James imagines Isabel Archer as caught up in the complex dynamics of a becoming-lady. Several portraits of ladies are confronted, from the *jeune fille* to the courtesan, from the independent lady to the socially frustrated one, the better to show the Jamesian ideal of a true lady. Isabel Archer is shown as being the end product of sadistic forces that conspire to hem in feminine subjectivity.

L'article cherche à analyser la nature des processus culturels et ontologiques qui transforment une jeune américaine présomptueuse en grande dame. Henry James construit Isabel Archer en la représentant prise dans un engrenage complexe propre à la dynamique d'un devenir-lady. Plusieurs portraits de grandes dames sont confrontés les uns aux autres, de la jeune fille à la courtisane, de la femme indépendante à la femme aux ambitions sociales frustrées. Ces portraits de femmes permettent de définir l'idéal jamesien de la véritable grande dame. Cet idéal est le fruit de forces sadiques qui s'unissent pour circonscrire la subjectivité féminine.

INDEX

Keywords: the lady, the modern woman, the master's discourse, the four Lacanian discourses, enjoyment, surplus value, surplus enjoyment

Mots-clés: la grande dame, la femme moderne, le discours du maître, les quatre discours de Lacan, jouissance, plus-value, plus-de-jouir

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