

## From Melodrama to Monologue: Henry James and Domestic Terror

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Toward the end of *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Maggie Verver watches her stepmother Charlotte guide yet another group of guests through a tour of her husband's private art collection. Charlotte's "high voice went on," she observes, "its quaver was doubtless for conscious ears only, but there were verily thirty seconds during which it sounded, for our young woman, like the shriek of a soul in pain. Kept up a minute later it would break and collapse— . . ." (526–27). Transformed into both icon and guardian of Adam Verver's personal gallery, prize object and *cicerone* of his sterile museum, the misery of Charlotte's wretched marriage emerges as no more than a tremulous vibration audible only to the most alert listeners. Her compulsive lecturing permits the momentary acknowledgement of her pain but prevents her from expressing it fully, as even the slightest hint of her profound unhappiness threatens to shatter her voice altogether. Straining to express the true depth of her despair, the "high coerced quaver" (528) of Charlotte's *cicerone* patter dramatizes the fragility and ultimate failure of language, for her empty aesthetic discourse proves not only inadequate but oppressive, and her running monologue reveals the futility of speech as a means of resisting her husband's "wordless, wordless" domination (524).

Silent feminine suffering, wordless oppression, tyrannical aestheticism. Charlotte's muted shriek of pain assembles some of Henry James's most persistent formal and cultural preoccupations: the disturbing connection between aesthetic and sexual domination, the ambiguous power of wielding and withholding language, and the troubling, often elusive relationship between melodramatic modes of external self-presentation and monologic representations of inner feeling. Charlotte's desperate and ineffectual public patter, her inexpressible misery, and her permanent and painful banishment to her husband's art gallery

all point to the centrality of masculine sexual violence within James's larger artistic project. Beginning with James's profound connections to Robert Browning, this essay investigates the evolution of James's style in relation to both melodrama and monologue, relating these formal developments particularly to late-nineteenth-century domestic ideology and bourgeois masculinity.

By extension, this essay also attempts to contribute to a growing body of scholarship on James and masculinity that examines the range of sexual identities in his work without simply labeling him repressed or closeted.<sup>1</sup> Wendy Graham, Katherine Snyder, and Christopher Lane have recently suggested that James's arcane style and resistance to conventional marketplace masculinity need not be read exclusively as evidence of his queer secret. There can be little question, of course, that interpreting James's work requires a recognition of its homoerotic dynamics (a recognition necessary to this essay as well). But James scrutinizes the traditional bourgeois paterfamilias—and heterosexuality—as avidly as he investigates the ambiguous power inherent in more “marginalized” (to use Kelly Cannon's term) or androgynous models of masculinity. Indeed, James's portraits of oppressive bourgeois husbands not only raise a host of questions pertaining to the relationship between masculinity and rhetorical authority in the late nineteenth century, but they also expose the profound and complex affiliations between the early psychological novel and the dynamics of domestic violence.

In his 1908 monograph on Browning's dramatic monologues, S. S. Curry casually observes that “[m]any a long novel does not say so much [as Browning's “My Last Duchess”], nor give such insight into human beings” (99). Curry's remark resonates within a broader literary context, for it points to the deeper connections between the dramatic monologue and the early psychological novel. Comparing “My Last Duchess” to the novel's effort to “give insight into human beings” pinpoints the very problem late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novelists struggled to resolve: how to give voice to the inner self within the novel. The dramatic monologue became an important model for modern novelists, and Curry's remark anticipates not only Leon Edel's 1955 description of the emerging “internal monologue” (11) within the psychological novel, but also Ross Posnock's 1985 claim that Browning's monologues profoundly influenced Henry James's efforts to “represent[] a self responsive to the pressure of social reality” (11).<sup>2</sup> As Posnock points out, Browning's positioning of complex human psychology within larger historical and social frameworks strongly engaged James, who, in his 1912 essay on *The Ring and the Book* (1868–1869), openly admired Browning's ability “[t]o express his inner self . . . and to express it utterly” (NN 398). “[T]he solitude of James and Browning,” remarks Posnock, “reflects the historical conditions in which modernism's radical subjectivity was born. . . . [T]heir decisive inward turn, a legacy of the Romantic concern with the solitary self, is accompanied by a preoccupation with modern forms of theatricality, which involve both writers in a dialectic of public and private” (179). Browning's dramatic monologues, which construct the interior, lyric self as dramatically—and hence socially and historically—situated, were central to the early psychological novel's construction of the inner self. They were a particularly crucial source of inspiration for James, who persistently attempted to render the lyric's

focus on the inner self within the melodramatic, inherently social world of the novel.

James's life-long effort to dramatize human psychology—or, to borrow Peter Brooks's phrase, to create in his novels "melodrama[s] of consciousness" (157)—has been for some time the aspect of his work most discussed by literary critics. Following in the footsteps of Jacques Barzun's 1943 "Henry James, Melodramatist" and Brooks's 1985 *The Melodramatic Imagination*, modern scholars have repeatedly mapped James's struggle to stage the inner theater of the mind.<sup>3</sup> But James's psychological theatrics engage scholarly interest not only because they illuminate the shift between poetry and fiction and between Victorian and modern narrative but because they are inextricably intertwined with James's decidedly unsettling vision of bourgeois domesticity. James's alarming transformation of the comfortable bourgeois family into a psychological sublimation of Gothic melodrama taps into the pervasive social fear that the bourgeois home might not be such a safe place after all—a fear shared by both James's contemporaries and by more recent literary scholars concerned with the enduring afterlife of nineteenth-century domestic ideology.

Historians such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have repeatedly demonstrated that the Victorian domestic ideal positioned the bourgeois home as the ultimate sanctuary in a world fraught with conflict and violence, not only a source of intimate felicity between husband and wife, but an index of the very moral well-being of England. Family violence, of course, was generally associated only with the very poor. As the wide-ranging cultural appeal of Charles Dickens's melodramatic description of Nancy's murder in *Oliver Twist* (1838) reveals, Victorian writers often structured the division between the lower and upper classes along the axis of domestic conflict. James was no stranger to this view: his own autobiography describes a boyhood cab ride in the crowded streets of London as a terrifying Dickensian journey, complete with scenes of lower-class domestic violence. The streets, he says, remind him of "Cruikshank's . . . Bill Sikes and his Nancy," and the trip culminates in his seeing, "[t]hrough the frame of the cab window . . . 'a woman reeling backwards as a man felled her to the ground'" (SB 307–08).

But as the Divorce Bill and other social developments repeatedly challenged the stability of bourgeois domesticity, the idea that severe family conflict was exclusive to the lower classes came under considerable pressure in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Hammerton, Poovey). James's representations of the psychological dimensions of bourgeois family conflict and misery, which suggest that dynamics of abuse and oppression govern the most outwardly civilized domestic relationships, explore the failure of the Victorian domestic ideal—a failure with particular resonances when it comes to marriage. James's most famous depictions of heterosexual domestic relationships, such as Isabel Archer's marriage to Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), contest the Victorian ideal of marriage as a safe place for women. As he repeatedly transforms the physical trials of the traditional melodramatic heroine into the mental anguish of the unhappy bourgeois wife, James reveals that marriage fails to protect women from abuse and oppression.<sup>4</sup> Even when physically safe, they

remain subject to a broad range of psychological violations and painful betrayals. As Joseph Boone observes, in his many representations of unhappy wives James “spent his novelistic career plotting fictions that chipped away at the constraints imposed on theme and form by the marriage tradition” (187).

Hence, when Curry contrasts “My Last Duchess” (1842) with the novel, he also inadvertently highlights the importance of domestic conflict to the construction of the psychological novel (and augurs even deeper connections between domestic violence and modernist narrative emerging at the beginning of the next century). For Browning and James share more than an interest in expressing the inner self dramatically: both are obsessed with exploring various forms of domestic and sexual violence. If “My Last Duchess” is an extraordinarily economical investigation of a particular form of sexual domination, one in which sexual violence emerges at the heart of aesthetic appreciation, this same preoccupation, complicated further by the increased strain experienced by the bourgeois family in the latter half of the nineteenth century, also dominates James’s novels. As Posnock notes, versions of Browning’s Duke Ferrara appear with an alarming regularity throughout James’s work, which is populated by male characters who collect women as artistic ornaments and then destroy them at their first sign of independent agency.<sup>5</sup> James repeatedly returns to the idea of husband as connoisseur, the patriarch who dominates his wife by adding her to his art collection (see Donahue). When Browning’s Duke sees his wife attempting independence—threatening to move momentarily out of his frame, which would symbolize a rejection of his power as Duke, as husband, and as collector of rare and beautiful objects—he solves his problem by reframing her as a literal work of art that he can control absolutely: “[N]one puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I” (lines 9–10). Similarly, Gilbert Osmond effectively collapses aesthetic and sexual domination by treating Isabel as a reflection of both his exquisite taste and his absolute mastery: she is simultaneously his wife and a decorative ornament for his household. Late-Jamesian husbands establish their bourgeois patriarchal authority by aspiring to Duke Ferrara’s model of effortless masculine mastery wherein wives are controlled—indeed, obliterated—without a display of physical brutality or even psychological strain.

Thus, if melodrama imagines the structures of power from below, James’s novels, which feature the rationale of the dominant, bourgeois party—the Osmonds, Amerigos, and Adam Ververs—imagine them from above. He explores a bourgeois world where aesthetic refinement merges with sexual power, creating a masculine domination so subtle that it appears nothing more than an extension of good taste. In *The Portrait of a Lady* or *The Golden Bowl*, physical domination is the ultimate vulgarity: brutal, caddish, the stuff of stage melodrama. For a husband to exhibit physical violence would undermine his claim to the utterly self-assured power that distinguishes him as an aristocrat—at least in taste and sensibility, if not by birth. This “aesthetic rewriting of power” (to appropriate a phrase from Mark Seltzer [19]) thus depends on James’s conjoining the social conflict of domestic melodrama with the aggressive intellect of Browning’s monologues. For James’s bourgeois patriarchs, the ability to dominate stems from their psychological power rather than their wielding of physical force. The more

refined their intellectual abilities, the more powerful they are. Domestic violence shades into domestic terror, moving from physical violence to more subtle forms of psychological and emotional intimidation.

The remainder of this essay investigates how James's novels suggest that the cultivation of intellect and taste augments—rather than reduces—the opportunities for domestic violence within the ostensibly civilized domestic sphere. I argue that James not only chips away at the marriage plot, but actually exposes intellectual and artistic refinement—conventional markers of an achieved bourgeois domesticity—as the very source of oppression and pain within the home. Jamesian husbands, of course, do not have Duke Ferrara's legal authority to kill their wives with impunity. But when their wives strive to be something more than ornaments expressive of their husbands' aesthetic and patriarchal authority, these husbands still have at their disposal various and subtle methods for exerting masculine control. Isabel Archer may be James's most famous portrait, but the picture he paints and repaints most obsessively is that of the anxious bourgeois patriarch who attempts to meld the world, and particularly his wife, to his self-image—all without any ungentlemanly sign of physical brutality.

Indeed, whether James's psychological portraits of male connoisseurs confirm or undermine masculine authority ultimately proved crucial to his popularity—or lack thereof. I argue that literary scholars have not fully appreciated how deeply James's equivocal representations of connoisseurship reveal the cultural appeal of an aristocratic masculine ideal where men can control their wives without crude or vulgar demonstrations of physical force. In an era in which brute force was considered anathema to gentlemanly behavior, the idea that intellectual refinement can function as an assertion of power rather than a mode of self-negation or repression fascinated James's own readers, as revealed by the fixation on masculinity in the late-nineteenth-century reviews of his novels. The deep ambivalence that marks James's depictions of intellectually refined but brutal patriarchs raised troubling questions for nineteenth-century readers about the authority of both the Victorian husband and the male author. Not only do James's portraits of connoisseurs skeptically undermine bourgeois domestic ideology by suggesting that even the most aesthetically refined form of dominance is, at its heart, still brutal, but James's uneasiness about the brutality of aestheticism raises a host of related questions about his own refined style.

Unlike Browning's monologues, James's complex monologic novels do not conjure up an audience being addressed by a speaker who wishes to dominate that audience. When James retreats into the complicated, shadowy world of the human mind, he seems to lose sight of his audience altogether. At least, his narrators do not aspire to the same kind of rhetorical command over their audiences that Browning's do. Indeed, James's shift away from conventional dramatic representation toward a dense, interior narrative style—the “prose-poetry” of his later work (Poirier 36)—often entails his representing the predicament of the victim more powerfully than that of the dominant power. This deeply troubled his contemporaries, who nervously wondered if the arcane, almost furtive complexity of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* undermined the social and rhetorical authority of the male author. Hence,

I conclude by investigating how James's depiction of intellectual refinement as a mode of masculine oppression influenced the reception of his later novels, considering particularly how the Jamesian monologue reveals a profound anxiety about the potential for vulgarity inherent in intellectual power and the expression of masculine authority.

Who is the "real" portrait of interest in *The Portrait of a Lady*? For many late-Victorian readers, it was the lady's husband, not the lady herself. Indeed, the underlying social and cultural preoccupations that shape contemporary readings of *Portrait* are much different from those informing late-nineteenth-century reviews. While the novel's contemporary appeal depends largely on our sympathetic affinity for Isabel's plight both as artist unfulfilled (a young woman forced to imprison her imagination "behind bolts" [PL 39]) and as long-suffering wife, Victorian audiences, by contrast, were obsessed with James's portrait of Gilbert Osmond, whom one reviewer called the "real" power of the novel (Gard 93). I suggest that the focus on James's heroines initiated by feminist scholarship may have inadvertently obscured certain nineteenth-century concerns regarding masculine authority and authorship in James's later work. The Victorian preoccupation with Gilbert Osmond is worth excavating, for it suggests that the social authority of the late-nineteenth-century bourgeois gentleman is inherently precarious or at least less monolithic and totalizing than some recent criticism has allowed.

James's representations of aestheticized masculine domination in *Portrait* and *Washington Square* (1880), the shorter work he interrupted his writing of *Portrait* to complete, articulate deep cultural anxieties about the instability of bourgeois masculine power, anxieties that plagued late-Victorian notions of domesticity and the male author. Both novels align bourgeois domestic refinement with extreme domination, and both deploy similar strategies for representing aesthetic and domestic violence as one and the same, laying the groundwork for the somewhat ambivalent portrayal of refined masculine violence in James's final books. That both show no signs of cultural exhaustion (each novel has inspired multiple rewritings and adaptations) suggests that their visions of refined bourgeois misery continue to engage contemporary audiences.<sup>6</sup>

As James Eli Adams notes, because aesthetic self-consciousness threatened to undermine "specifically middle-class, Victorian constructions of the ideal of the gentleman" (186), refinement was often attacked as a form of effeminacy. But in *Washington Square* and *Portrait*, James explores how aesthetic taste is far from effeminate and in no way compromises masculine power. The suggestion that aesthetic refinement works as an assertion of authority—indeed, as a mode of heterosexual domination—resonated in a culture that fiercely scrutinized and debated traditional masculine norms. *Washington Square* portrays the struggle for dominance within the bourgeois home in terms of speech and silence, anticipating the representation of silent aesthetic oppression depicted later in *Portrait*. In its representation of Dr. Sloper's increasingly ineffectual attempts to control his daughter Catherine, *Washington Square* foregrounds the uncertain position of the bourgeois paterfamilias expected to control his household without exhibiting a vulgar display of force. A narrative of middle-class masculine failure,



the novel registers the slow decline of Dr. Sloper's domestic power as an aesthetic failing, as his sophisticated taste, superior education, and financial security—the refinement which distinguishes him as a bourgeois gentleman—devolve into a comparatively coarse blundering marked, as John Auchard has observed, by his increasing use of brutal language.

Both Auchard and Lauren Berlant have pointed out that in *Washington Square* the purest form of domination is subtle: that which eschews obvious and vulgar shows of power. “The near-silence of inscrutable statement is the foundation of Sloper's dominance, over patients, over people in general, and particularly over his daughter,” Auchard remarks (65). “He remains strong and nearly invulnerable as long as he says nothing and as long as he never makes his desires explicit.” Withholding speech, then, is the ultimate power, while obvious displays of linguistic prowess function by contrast as crude weapons, almost as brutally violent as physical domination. But Dr. Sloper does not always remain silent, and this ultimately causes him to lose control over Catherine. *Washington Square* portrays even the most sophisticated rhetorical exchanges as coarse attacks, as Dr. Sloper, constantly on guard against domestic “treason” (60, 89), persistently assaults Catherine through the use of pointed irony. Catherine finds herself on ever-shifting rhetorical ground, for her father's very compliments contain pointed barbs that force her “to cut her pleasure out of the piece as it were” (18). Dr. Sloper's constant verbal tyranny over many years renders the very thought of filial disobedience unimaginable for Catherine, for whom “her father's words had such an authority . . . that her very thoughts were capable of obeying him” (87). But as the novel progresses, and as Catherine feels an increasing need to assert herself, she realizes that Dr. Sloper's linguistic terrorism, no matter how sophisticated, betrays a crudeness that undermines his authority as a gentleman.

In the novel's climax, Catherine learns that restraining language—the ultimate refinement—is far more powerful than using it as an offensive weapon. When Dr. Sloper makes a final bid for her absolute obedience, a deathbed demand that she never marry Morris Townsend, her brief but pointed refusal—“I can't promise that” (158)—refuses to engage her father's tactics of verbal warfare. Dr. Sloper has ruined his daughter's life, but instead of hurling accusations or recriminations, she simply declines to say the words that he wants to hear. The subtle rebellion implicit in her withholding of an important verbal transaction—the promise—within the economy of rhetorical power in the Sloper household renders her victorious. In refusing to speak the words Dr. Sloper demands, and in limiting her response to the briefest of polite phrases, Catherine becomes more powerful than her father, if only within the extremely limited confines of Washington Square.

Recent criticism has focused on the moment of Catherine's refusal to promise as a crisis of agency, the moment in which she must decide whether to submit utterly to her father's will. But many Victorian readers saw the real crisis of *Washington Square* as the dilemma of the bourgeois patriarch who destroys his claim to the aesthetic and masculine mastery he so wishes to epitomize through his desperate and vulgar abuse of his daughter. James's portrayal of Dr. Sloper's domestic failure triggered fears in Victorian reviewers about the instability of

masculine authority, fears that reviewers associated with his own prose. While contemporary scholars tend to interpret James's rhetorical styling as an effort to critique the abuse of language—"By sharing with Dr. Sloper the style of wit and control," remarks William Veeder, "James can comment from the inside upon life in Washington Square" (200)—nineteenth-century reviews from both sides of the Atlantic disliked the obvious affinity between Dr. Sloper and James the narrator. Their vehement attacks on James's "cold-hearted" (Gard 89) portrayal of Catherine's misery endow the author with all of Dr. Sloper's worst traits and depict James as engaged in acts of unsympathetic rhetorical cleverness for its own sake. "We should have been glad to be allowed to pity [Catherine]," remarked the *Atlantic* in 1881, "but in the passages which treat of her suffering at the hands of her father and lover, the author introduces so effectively his own wit and ingenuity that he withdraws our sympathy from her, and enlists our admiration only for his own cunning" (Gard 92). Cunning and excessive self-consciousness were, of course, considered as unmanly in the nineteenth century as they are now, and the charge that James's rhetorical style is somehow too ingenious for its own good betrays a more pressing fear: that his narrative voice threatens codes of Victorian manliness. James's refinement—his "wit and ingenuity"—threaten to be a crude self-display, and Victorian readers thus redescribe it as vulgar "cunning." They suggest that perhaps James, like Dr. Sloper, will crack under the pressure of trying to maintain his literary authority without resorting to unmanly displays of power. In James's own depiction of the culturally refined world of the bourgeois home, a world so polished and subtle that even irony is a suspect form of vulgarity, the patriarch must wield his authority with considerable skill, preserving control with no apparent effort.

Indeed, if masculine authorship, like masculine domestic power, should be exerted without rhetorical flair, then James's elaborate rhetorical descriptions—full of wit and cunning but without sympathy—diminish his masculine mastery, transforming both the bourgeois patriarch and the author into what one reviewer called "dilettante[s]" incapable of true authority (Gard 91). Showing signs of what William Cohen identifies as an anti-onanist discourse, one that reproduces Victorian "anxieties about an unregulated, excessively productive imagination" (26), the nineteenth-century reviews of *Washington Square* imply that the self-conscious display of James's own style is at best a solitary vice and at worst an exclusive aestheticism which compromises his masculine authority.

Victorian reviewers similarly criticized the style of *The Portrait of a Lady*. But *Portrait* was and remains James's most popular novel (see Richmond). Why? Although one could reasonably argue that *Portrait* is a much more complex novel in its own right, I suggest that perhaps the late-nineteenth-century appeal of the novel hinged primarily on James's portrayal of Gilbert Osmond. In *Portrait*, James rewrites Dr. Sloper's brutal rhetorical performance as Osmond's more assured—and more subtle—psychological mastery of his wife, depicting a version of refined masculine dominance far less vulgar than Dr. Sloper's effort to control his daughter. While Dr. Sloper's crude attacks effectively convert his relationship with Catherine into a rhetorical minefield, Osmond's methods of domestic terrorism, by contrast, range from verbal abuse, a crude expression of power



within the Jamesian continuum of violence, to an undiluted form of psychological oppression that proved of profound interest to James's readers.

If *Washington Square* disdains the spoken word as a coarse weapon, then *Portrait* further amplifies the idea that coercing another human being into obedience requires the withholding of language, a self-control that James associates with a particular kind of aesthetic refinement. Osmond's "dread of vulgarity," Madame Merle informs Isabel, "is his special line" (PL 214), and his extreme subtlety and taste render him able to control his household with apparently effortless mastery. Osmond's domination of Isabel thus begins with spoken exchanges but shifts to a more general mode of unspoken oppression, a "way of looking at her . . . which seemed to her to have a wonderfully cruel intention" (395). The very reserve Isabel initially finds so attractive—"It was not so much what he said and did, but rather what he withheld, that marked him for her" (224)—becomes a source of oppression as Osmond's silent presence "blight[s]" her life (356). She learns to live not only "with" Osmond's mind, but also "*in* it, almost—it appeared to have become her habitation" (358). Indeed, "[t]he real offence . . .," Isabel realizes not long after their marriage, is "her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his. . . . He expected her intelligence . . . to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences" (362).

Osmond's attempts to negate Isabel's very consciousness thus enact a form of refined domination far worse than physical or verbal brutality. Isabel even thinks to herself that "the miserable part" of Osmond's purely psychological oppression "was precisely that it was not a crime, for against a crime [Isabel] might have found redress. . . . [F]or physical suffering there might have been a remedy" (356, 360). Within what Joseph Conrad calls James's already nuanced "range of . . . fine consciousness" (44), Osmond's elegant mastery resides at the far end of a continuum of subtle violence, as his authority requires merely his "countenance" rather than physical brutality or barbed verbal attacks. His "scornful silent pressure," remarks Auchard, "works upon [Isabel's] imagination, [until] she finds almost no way out of a dense conjugal claustrophobia" (68). Osmond effectively translates power as silent masculine will: polished, refined, and inherently aristocratic. Isabel, in response, longs for the unequivocal violence of melodrama.

*Portrait* thus builds increasingly on the logic of unspoken exchanges, leading to a silent climax in which the novel's most important revelation is nothing more than a fleeting moment of impressionistic affect that, nevertheless, carries all the weight of a physical blow. When Isabel encounters Osmond and Madame Merle in the midst of a private conversation that hints at the scandal of their past relationship, the tableau James creates for this moment joins the force of melodramatic staging with the monologue's focus on interior subjectivity, creating a visual and psychological impression that affects Isabel's mind for weeks afterward. As the unbidden memory of the scene repeatedly returns to mind until she fully understands its implications, James shows how fully Osmond has come to dominate Isabel's consciousness. She becomes so attuned to his presence that even "an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light" bears immense force: the tableau "*struck her* as something detected" (343, emphasis

mine). Isabel's insight into Osmond's past with Madame Merle is itself a kind of violence, one that reveals how her heightened awareness of her husband keeps her in constant terror. At this moment, suggests Veeder, "James, by controlling coarseness as carefully with Osmond's actions as with his physiognomy, manages to associate a nonhistrionic villain with the most violent aspect of the Byronic temperament—the abyss-prone, peak-inspiring instinct" (128–29). But a historically closer literary context for this scene would be mid-nineteenth-century melodrama, a dramatic genre focused on domesticity and punctuated by pictorial tableaux. In this brief tableau, James conveys the sexual violence to the mid-nineteenth-century stage melodrama from a different direction. By concentrating only on Osmond's powers of self-mastery, *Portrait* reveals that masculine restraint can itself operate as a form of intense brutality. Never showing off his power with an obvious and vulgar display, Osmond manages to tune Isabel to his own consciousness, to achieve the subtle, aristocratic mastery that proves too difficult for Dr. Sloper. Isabel, unable to escape Osmond's silent and pervasive authority, temporarily flees her marriage only to return at the novel's end.

Thus, Isabel is framed, fixed forever as a portrait within Osmond's collection of *objets d'art*. Or is she? James's remarkable silence (what Auchard calls "the most troublesome silence in the novel" [73]) regarding Isabel's final motivation for returning to the "horrible life" (*PL* 363) of her marriage renders the novel's climax notoriously ambiguous. Veeder remarks that "[s]o much ink and blood have flowed over the issue of why Isabel preserves the 'form' of her marriage that what we need now is not one more explanation but a more sustained commitment to the reading experience" (84). To that end, contrasting the differences between contemporary and Victorian analyses of *Portrait's* ending reveals a crucial late-nineteenth-century discourse surrounding masculine power and refinement.

Recent work on the novel tends to focus on James's mysterious conclusion in terms of the logic of late-Victorian patriarchy—either as confirmation of or a (rather modest) challenge to that system.<sup>7</sup> Although nineteenth-century reviewers acknowledged the novel's feminist resonances—an 1881 *Literary World* review, for instance, ominously observed that James's shadowy conclusion creates a "puzzle, [which,] we presume, is already at work in the minds of many lady readers" (Gard 105–06)—the hint that Isabel may some day escape Osmond's aestheticizing vision has proved far more compelling to contemporary literary scholars invested in exploring various modes of feminine agency. For some, Isabel's enigmatic affirmation of her marriage brands her an unfortunate martyr who disappointingly "returns to wear her husband like a crown of thorns" (Bousquet 199). After all, as Jonathan Freedman asks, what is to prevent James from "enmeshing Isabel in a plot whose goal is to aestheticize her, to transform her into a static, frozen portrait of a lady (the literary equivalent of the murderous aestheticization performed by the Duke in Browning's *My Last Duchess*)" (165)? But for other scholars, including Freedman himself, Isabel ultimately "transcend[s] any one vision that tries to fix or define her—even the author's own ostensibly omniscient vision" (Freedman 166). Indeed, "one of James' many great accomplishments in the novel," argues Paul Hadella, "is to preserve a sense of purpose

and dignity for Isabel despite her being trapped in an unsatisfying marriage" (9). This interpretation of the novel's shadowy denouement as one that allows Isabel to break away from her static, frozen existence has been embraced by literary scholars understandably eager to grant her some degree of autonomy.<sup>8</sup>

But if the issue of Isabel's autonomy has dominated recent discussion, late-nineteenth-century reviewers, by contrast, were largely obsessed with the character of Osmond, the figure they viewed as the most compelling portrait of the novel. While some found James's description of Osmond's dominance over Isabel implausible—H. A. Huntington complained that "[i]t is asking too much that we should believe that a woman of Isabel's intellectual force could be taken in by so transparent a cheat" (Gard 111)—most considered him the most plausible and engaging character of the novel. R. H. Hutton, for instance, insisted that

the real power of the book consists in the wonderful pictures given of Ralph Touchett and Mr. Osmond. . . . In scene after scene this character [Osmond] is developed, and always with some fresh touch of fastidious insolence or intense though petty pride, which makes of it a wonderful, and yet most repulsive, artistic achievement. (Gard 93–94)

The *Saturday Review* agreed that "[t]he character of Osmond—a selfish, heartless, accomplished, and still ineffective man, . . . is one of the most successful in the book" (Gard 98). While these late-nineteenth-century assessments concede Osmond's cruelty and even acknowledge his ultimate ineffectiveness, their professed appreciation of his character as "the real power" of the book points to a deeper preoccupation with the version of masculine authority that he represents. Osmond's model of refined male control, his tactics of subtle mastery, alternately attracted and repulsed James's readers, for his character evokes a host of increasingly urgent late-nineteenth-century anxieties about masculinity and rhetorical power.

On the one hand, Victorian readers found something deeply attractive about Osmond. Nineteenth-century reviews of *Portrait* register a deep desire to view Osmond as a successful affirmation of bourgeois patriarchal authority, dependent upon refined, reserved elegance rather than a crude display of physical power. Some readers thus resisted James's shadowy conclusion (the same conclusion eagerly seized upon by modern academic critics) as "cowardly" (Gard 96) or "break[ing] down at the critical moment" (98). *Lippincott's Magazine* went so far as to claim that James

cannot bring himself to the vulgarity of a regular *dénouement*, and he lacks the poetic force to substitute for it a suggestive or picturesque climax. Everything in one of Mr. James's books seems to be leading to a simple and satisfactory end, but coming near the goal he sees a crowd there and turns aside in disgust. There is no time to change his destination, but he will not go out at the common turnstile, happen what may. (Gard 119)

In its desire for a conclusion that is forceful yet “suggestive,” direct but still “picturesque,” *Lippincott’s* reveals a longing for the achievement of that delicate balance of masculine power and refined taste almost mastered by Osmond. Victorian reviewers demanded not that a husband physically dominate his wife—the kind of affirmation, perhaps, that occurs at the end of James’s *The Bostonians* (1886)—but that James secure a version of psychological masculine authority in which power is as totalizing as it is subtle.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Osmond’s tactics also unnerved Victorian readers, for his rejection of conventional modes of human interaction in favor of alarmingly secret—not to mention largely effective—methods of social manipulation invited troubling comparisons to James’s own style. Although nineteenth-century reviewers found Osmond’s subtle mastery appealing, they fretted that James, with his oblique and increasingly arcane narrative voice, was dangerously close to becoming Osmond himself. In his effort to avoid vulgarity in his own prose, James threatened to reproduce Osmond’s subtle tactics of domination on the reading public. James’s own horror of coarseness, most evident in the opaque prose of *Portrait’s* ambiguous conclusion (and the dense, sometimes impenetrable style of the later novels), threatened to exert Osmond’s unwholesome, veiled powers on James’s audience.

Hence, James’s contemporaries displayed extreme discomfort with *Portrait’s* rhetorical extravagance and suggested that James’s style demonstrated an unhealthy self-absorption. The *Athenaeum* criticized the novel for “page after page of narrative and description, in which the author goes on refining and distinguishing” (Gard 97) and the *Atlantic* agreed, arguing that “[w]e may, on general grounds, doubt the self-confidence or power of a novelist who feels this part of his performance to be essential” (Gard 110). The *Nation* most emphatically endowed James’s style with Osmond’s subtle and mysterious power, remarking that James “has seemed to be getting further and further away from very safe ground. . . . *There is something uncanny in the perfection with which these secretive natures are turned inside out for the reader’s inspection*” (Gard 114–16, emphasis mine). Excessive stylistic performance, in other words, threatens heterosexual conventions and masculine social authority. James’s obsessive refining and uncanny perfection suggested to his contemporaries an insecurity with the traditionally direct modes of masculine address: a rejection of masculine openness and a fear of the crowd at the common turnstile. Late-nineteenth-century readers viewed James’s preoccupation with refinement in his own prose as transgressive in its subtlety and dangerous in its arcane refusal to employ conventional modes of direct address, dialogue, and descriptive characterization.

Thus, *Portrait’s* mysterious conclusion, which descends into the shadowy interior world of Browning’s monologues and James’s third phase novels, was not read as a proto-feminist victory. Rather, as *Blackwood’s Magazine* argued, *Portrait’s* ending was considered “a most equivocal if not debasing conclusion” (Gard 103). The question is, of course, debasing for whom? *Blackwood’s* remark vaguely suggests that it is Isabel who is demeaned by the book’s enigmatic finale, but underlying that concern is the deeper fear that James, with his increasingly esoteric and subtle style, might be undermining the social authority of the male author.

*Blackwood's* might well raise the question of masculine power and authorial voice in relation to the novel's conclusion, for Isabel's twilight confrontation with Casper Goodwood progressively blurs the distinction between the male narrator and Isabel's consciousness, aligning the voice of the male author with the thoughts of a female victim caught in a moment of erotic desire and subjection. In inhabiting the consciousness of the victimized wife, James threatens melodrama's traditional display and affirmation of masculine authority. Goodwood's proposal that Isabel leave Osmond works upon her with an extraordinary violence, "lift[ing] her off her feet, . . . forc[ing] open her set teeth" (488). Beginning with Goodwood's seizing of Isabel's wrist and her ensuing "feeling of danger" (486), the narrator increasingly subordinates traditional third-person objectivity to the representation of Isabel's inner agitation as the emotional force of Goodwood's "pressing her still harder" (487) throws her into turmoil. As the thought of leaving Osmond "loom[s] large" (488) in her consciousness, the narrative increasingly foregrounds Isabel's thoughts and feelings. Her interior emotions eclipse physical—and melodramatic—details, culminating in a kiss that is paradoxically the most physically passionate and the most intangible, elusive moment of the novel. "I know not," says the narrator

whether she believed everything he said, but she believed just then that to let him take her in his arms would be the next best thing to her dying. This belief, for a moment, was a kind of rapture, in which she felt herself sink and sink. . . . He glared at her a moment through the dusk, and the next instant she felt his arms about her and his lips on her own lips. His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So had she heard of those wrecked and underwater following a train of images before they sink. But when darkness returned she was free. (489)

The kiss, Goodwood's last-ditch effort to win Isabel, hovers uncertainly between the melodramatic tableau and interior monologue: it works as both a staged scene and a brief excavation of her private desire, confusion, and terror. The narrator's suggestion that he is separate from Isabel (for he does not know everything she thinks) is quickly countered by his intense identification with her (for he does know what she believed "just then"), and the third-person voice temporarily merges into the ocean of Isabel's consciousness as she submits to the force of the kiss. The abstraction of physical details—the weird vagueness of arms and lips—appears momentarily to merge the external with the internal, emphasizing the force of monologue fused with melodrama. But at the last (and crucial) minute, the narrator pulls away from Isabel's mind, forever shrouding in mystery the motive for her decision to take the "very straight path" (490) of returning to her marriage.

As Ruth Yeazell points out, the “ambiguous blurring of voices” between narrator and character in James’s novels is “[o]f course in part . . . simply a convention of third-person narrative, to be accepted like any other: in *le style indirect libre*, as it is often known, we move imperceptibly from the narrator’s account of his character’s thoughts to intimations of that character’s own inner language” (12). But in James’s late novels, Yeazell continues, “this fluidity affects us all the more strongly . . . because of the consistent stylization of James’s language—those striking idiosyncrasies of cadence and diction that enable us to recognize virtually any passage, whatever its subject or ostensible source, as unmistakably Jamesian” (12–13). *The Portrait of a Lady* thus points toward the style of James’s later work, where his narrative voice increasingly fuses with the thoughts of his characters. What undoubtedly troubled Victorian critics about this complex, often elusive style, anticipated here in *Portrait*’s puzzling ending, was the sense that James, as the ultimate aesthetic master, was beginning to construct a world in which all conventional appearances and forms of representation are inherently vulgar. *Portrait* sets the stage for a literary style that eschews dialogue and ultimately suggests that conventional representation—including traditional heterosexuality—is violent in its tastelessness. (Perhaps this accounts for the continued approval of *Portrait* when compared to James’s later work. *Portrait* “would have been a perfect book to end a career with,” claims David Kirby [12], echoing the sentiment of many modern and Victorian readers alike.) Although the public response to James’s third phase was, of course, not entirely unfavorable, his final work deeply troubled many of his contemporaries, who suspected that it rejected heterosexuality in its refusal to conform to traditional modes of representation.

Although both novels were successful, frequently praised for their delicacy and insight, it is perhaps no surprise that *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* received mixed criticism, never achieving *Portrait*’s popularity. The contemporary reviews of James’s late novels impart a distinct uneasiness that James, in giving full play to the most arcane tendencies of his narrative voice, is acquiring an unhealthy, solipsistic, and ultimately unmasculine tone, one skeptical of heterosexuality itself.

In his final books, James becomes more of a monologist than ever, rejecting conventional forms of novelistic representation—dialogue and action—in favor of tracking the minute, interior workings of the mind. If “*The Awkward Age* is mostly expressed in dialogue,” observed William Dean Howells in 1903, then “*The Wings of the Dove* is mostly in the narration and the synthesis of emotions” (16). James’s last novels pursue what Stuart Sherman calls “the presentation of the unseen, the unsaid, the unacted—the vast quantity of mental life in highly organized beings which makes no outward sign, the invisible drama upon which most of [James’s] predecessors had hardly thought of raising the curtain” (84). James’s Victorian readers worried that the preoccupation with style in these late novels revealed an antisocial self-absorption reminiscent of Osmond’s brutal aestheticizing. As the *Bookman* complained of *The Golden Bowl*, James “continues . . . to bestow on all his characters his own form of speech down to the disposal of the adverb. All are little faithful copies of their author, madly absorbed in



introspection" (Gard 391). Harriet Waters Preston put it more directly. "Mr. James's characters . . .," she said in a 1903 review of *The Wings of the Dove*, "[are] scared by the sound of their own voices" (Gard 333).<sup>10</sup> The more James's novels resembled monologues, the more they engaged the elusive world of unconscious emotions, the more they were labeled introverted, mad, frightened, or otherwise unapproachable.

But it was not just James's increasingly arcane style that unsettled his readers; it was his use of that style to represent the conflicts of heterosexuality. For the stylistically complex, monologic representations of marriage in the late novels point toward a view of domestic life in which heterosexuality itself becomes the ultimate vulgarity. James's deep descent into the minds of his characters reveals that a profoundly oppressive banality governs even the most subtle marital conflicts. In this context, Jonathan Freedman's analysis of the relationship between taste and violence in James's work might be productively and specifically applied to questions of late-nineteenth-century domesticity. Freedman argues that the novels of James's final phase reveal that the refinement underwriting Victorian middle-class pretensions functions as a form of widespread social violence. "Culture, we discover in *Wings*," Freedman asserts, "is anarchy; civilization is barbarism; aestheticization is exploitation; imaginative freedom is the will to control; beauty is ugliness; love—even the most radiantly sacrificial love—is indistinguishable from cruelty" (227). But it is not just culture, or love, but heterosexual love—especially the bourgeois marriage—that James portrays as vulgar.

In *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, the vulgar forces of melodrama inherently structure all marriages. Both novels portray marriage as an institution that demands that men and women—particularly women—sacrifice themselves on the altar of the banal. In order to marry or to protect their marriages, husbands and wives must scheme, plot, "handle[]," "manipulate[]," and "manage[]" (WD 251, 362). No matter how subtle or refined their efforts, these complex machinations ultimately reduce their lives to conventional melodramas, making marriage one of the coarsest forms of self-representation available in late-nineteenth-century society. James's monologic focus on the inner voices of marriage—the silent conflicts behind attractive marital facades—gives him free range to depict its deepest clichés or to show that clichés exist at marriage's deepest levels. His scrutiny of the interior world—the brutal emotional pressure men and women exert upon each other rather than the physical violence they might enact—becomes the ultimate test of heterosexuality: the long monologues of his late novels allow him to explore the melodramatic violence below the surface of outwardly placid, socially respectable, highly refined married couples. As melodrama meets monologue, James suggests that violence underwrites all heterosexual attraction.

The melodramatic vulgarity of heterosexuality emerges with stark clarity in *The Wings of the Dove*, a novel in which the quest for the idealized bourgeois marriage thwarts refinement—particularly masculine refinement—at every turn. The most aesthetically sensitive character in the book, Merton Densher, finds himself embroiled in an ugly fortune hunt, no less brutal for all its delicate

handling. In his tacit acquiescence to helping Kate Croy win Milly Theale's inheritance, Densher realizes that in a world in which everyone operates "on the plane of mere elegant representation" (164), "the question of how a gentleman would behave" (367) is rendered impossible. Underneath his ostensible gentility, he discovers that he must play either the melodramatic victim or the villain. He finds himself impotent or powerful, weak or brutal. He rages at Kate's manipulation and yet is haunted by the secret fear that he is at heart a monster. James's monologic focus on Densher's frustrated awareness of his own coarseness reveals the vulgarity behind every effort to achieve the idealized marriage. "He hadn't come all the way from England to be a brute," Densher thinks to himself.

He hadn't thought of what it might give him to have a fortnight, however handicapped with Kate in Venice, to be a brute. He hadn't treated Mrs Lowder as if in responding to her suggestion he had understood her—he hadn't done that either to be a brute. And what he had prepared least of all for such an anti-climax was the prompt and inevitable, the achieved surrender—as a gentleman, oh that indubitably!—to the unexpected impression made by poor pale exquisite Milly as the mistress of a grand old palace. . . . (368)

The fragmented syntax of Densher's thoughts, his ability to conceive of his behavior only in a series of negatives (what he "hadn't" done), and his nervous repetition of the word brute all suggest the futility of trying to escape melodrama. Densher can protest, but he cannot hide: as soon as he commits to marrying Kate with money, he is trapped in a melodramatic play, one that eventually destroys any possibility of their future happiness. He may not "come all the way from England to be a brute," but he cannot escape his own brutality; the pressures of marriage transform him into someone unrefined, boorish, and vulgar.

*The Golden Bowl* further tests the banality of heterosexuality in its representation of Maggie's desperate efforts to preserve her marriage. Maggie's predicament as the forsaken princess-wife, carefully ensconced in her "palace" with very little room for maneuvering, allows James to probe the inner depths of marriage's violence even more fully than in *Wings*. In *The Wings of the Dove*, melodrama still exists on the surface: although Kate and Densher refuse to articulate their plans for Milly explicitly, their scheming has a melodramatic obviousness that Maggie's plans lack. Fortune-hunting is always crude, and Kate's exaggerated evasiveness on the subject of their plans—as when she tells Densher that she'll "do *all* the work" but that if he "wants things named [he] must name them" (WD 394)—betrays her awareness of their inherent coarseness. But in *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie awakens slowly (and painfully) to the melodramatic vulgarity of her situation (see Yeazell). Her vague awareness that "[s]omething had happened" (GB 328) to her marriage, her increasing awareness of "the 'funny' changes" (344) in her relationship with Amerigo, contribute to a larger picture of marriage in which a brutality penetrates its deepest, semi-conscious levels of awareness. Even Maggie, who barely thinks—let alone speaks—of what she must do to terminate Amerigo's affair, finds herself becoming little more than

a base circus performer, “the lady in short spangled skirts” at the circus who “brilliantly caper[s] and posture[s] . . . with such a show of pink stocking and such an abbreviation of white petticoat” (374). Maggie’s scheme to recover her husband is so subtle as to be virtually imperceptible (even to herself), but it still smacks of vulgarity. In *The Golden Bowl*, melodrama goes all the way down.

That the “*high fight*” (424) for Maggie’s marriage has at its core the violence of melodrama emerges immediately in volume two of *The Golden Bowl*, where Maggie begins to enact small, almost undetectable changes in her behavior as a means of silently confronting her husband. When she drives to Portland Place instead of dining with Amerigo, for instance, her “small breach of custom” serves as a “strike” (331, 335), a military “manoeuvre[.]” that, no matter how “mild,” is nevertheless a “single sharp sweep” (331). She is “no longer playing with blunt and idle tools” (331), for “[t]here passed across her vision ten times a day the gleam of a bare blade” (331). Maggie’s silence speaks volumes, as in the unspoken monologue Amerigo “hears” her deliver upon his return:

“Why, why” have I made this evening such a point of our not all dining together? Well, because I’ve all day been so wanting you alone that I finally couldn’t bear it and that there didn’t seem any great reason why I should try to. . . . After all I’ve scarcely to explain that I’m as much in love with you now as the first hour; except that there are some hours—which I know when they come, because they almost frighten me—that show me I’m even more so. They come of themselves—and ah they’ve been coming! After all, after all—! (337)

“Some such words as those,” the narrator continues,

were what *didn’t* ring out, yet it was as if even the unuttered sound had been quenched here in its own quaver. It was where utterance would have broken down by its very weight if he had let it get so far. Without that extremity, at the end of a moment, he [Amerigo] had taken in what he needed to take—that his wife was *testifying*, that she adored and missed and desired him. (337)

Maggie’s unspoken but powerful statement suggests that the silent conventions of married life—outwardly unremarkable, apparently mundane moments such as a wife awaiting her husband—contain as much melodramatic force as a physical scene. In her careful domestic staging, Maggie both admits her intense anguish and emotionally strikes Amerigo with a blow too intense (“it would have broken down by its very weight”) for language. Her silent monologue exceeds the force of open and direct exchange.

James thus achieves the heightened violence of melodrama from the inside out. As Boone observes, in James’s late novels, “[w]edlock remain[s] a mutual pact of *noncommunication*” (200), as affairs, engagements, and marriages continually revolve in a realm of silent conflict and unexpressed misery. Rather than the explicit and visible signs of melodrama, the major phase novels focus on the

vague and inexpressible, working through crucial domestic conflicts at the level of the unconscious. This is nowhere more apparent than in the moment when Charlotte and Amerigo re-initiate their affair. Echoing the final kiss between Goodwood and Isabel in *Portrait*, James depicts Charlotte and Amerigo's kiss as a passionate merging of two minds, not bodies:

[T]hrough this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea and beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they passionately sealed their pledge. (259)

With its awkward, almost ludicrous description of detached lips and pressures, this late-Jamesian kiss urgently shifts the focus from the physical contact of melodrama to the violent fusion of two psyches. The kiss is more than just a kiss, for it surpasses a conventional physical connection. Charlotte and Amerigo's merging is excessively violent in its totality: everything breaks (broke up, broke down, gave way). In the sheer intensity of their complete intimacy, which breaks social, physical, and psychological barriers, James suggests that physical contact is only the beginning. Melodramatic violence comes from within, emerging at the deepest levels of heterosexual attraction.

James's evasive and intricate style resulted in nervous accusations of effeminacy. In a particularly telling review of *The Wings of the Dove*, J. P. Mowbray complained that

[i]n trying to form anything like a comprehensive estimate of Mr. James's mature work, the effeminacy of it has to be counted with. One cannot call it virile, and—with the best examples still with us—hardly Saxon. In the selection of theme he appears to turn instinctively to the boudoir side of life, and to give himself, with a perspicacity and a zest that have been held to be characteristic of the other sex, to the intricacies of match-making and the silken embroideries of scheming dowagers and tender protégés. If there is any finesse or delicacy in the treatment, the merit we suspect is owing to the indisposition of a mind to contemplate more rugged aspects of humanity and content to loiter with a strange industry amid the foibles and fashions of mere intellectual coquetry. (Gard 331)

Mowbray's critique unites James's complex style with his domestic subject matter and views both as failures of masculinity. It is not just James's focus on domestic life that concerns Mowbray but the "perspicacity," "zest," and "delicacy" with which he treats the theme. Increasingly drawing upon the rhetorical strategies of the monologue, James's arcane, psychologically complex, and pessimistic depictions of domestic misery ultimately threaten the traditional authority of the male author as someone who both confirms bourgeois domesticity and openly exposes

himself to public scrutiny. For Mowbray, and for other Victorian reviewers, James is nothing more than an “intellectual coquette”—an interpretation no doubt invited by the ambiguous blending of internal monologues with the narrator’s own voice. As Maggie’s thoughts bleed into the narrator’s—what Posnock calls a “fusion (or confusion) of the narrator’s and Maggie’s voices” (169)—James’s shrouded and cryptic style, his intense scrutiny of the psychologically oppressive burden of heterosexuality, suggest new—and, for late-nineteenth-century readers, profoundly troubling—possibilities for the male novelist. For Victorian readers, *The Golden Bowl* raised the alarming possibility that James had been transformed from Osmond into Charlotte, from the dominant to the dominated, trapped in an aesthetic cage unable to express himself clearly.

Perhaps an *Academy* review of *The Golden Bowl* put it best, remarking that “Mr. James knows that modern domesticity is a thing of half-tints, even in its suffering: it bleeds, but it does not bleed red” (Gard 376). For James, if modern domesticity fails to bleed red, so does the late-nineteenth-century domestic novelist. James’s many portraits of masculine connoisseurs, painted as existing in a subtle world of unspoken “half-tints,” evoke a larger vision of masculine power, one in which real authority can be gained only by escaping—or evading—traditional forms of representation: from heterosexuality to conventional forms of language. The rhetorical power of the male author depends on his ability to move beyond melodrama into pure monologue where his is the only voice.

James’s transition from melodrama to monologue ultimately points toward modernism, and not only because *Portrait* inspired a number of modernist poems, including T. S. Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady” (1917).<sup>11</sup> In his movement into monologue, James lays the groundwork for the stream-of-consciousness novel as he “seek[s] to find words that convey elusive and evanescent thought: not only the words that come to the mind, but the images of the inner world of fantasy, fusing with sounds and smells, the world of perceptual experience” (Edel 16). This crucial literary development happens along the axis of domestic violence. Hence, James’s novels help to establish the importance of domestic conflict to modernist narrative. While John Auchard claims that *The Golden Bowl* “presents, translated into words, the potential for dignity, for vitality, of a language of silence which might work to rejoin the pieces of a rapidly fragmenting world” (151), in strictly domestic terms, silence in *The Golden Bowl* also conveys oppression and destruction, rather than reconstitution, of the whole. In James’s elusive, inner worlds, the rapidly fragmenting family indeed shatters (everything breaks), anticipating the fragmentation of Victorian domestic values so fundamental to modernism.

For Virginia Woolf, for instance, domestic terror is a link to her Victorian past, emerging in the sublimated psychological violence of bourgeois family life in novels such as *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Maggie’s blurry recognition in *The Golden Bowl* that her marriage has been threatened—that “[s]omething *had* happened” (328)—presages Mr. Ramsay’s pathetic obsession with the famous expression of patriarchal failure in Tennyson’s 1854 poem “The Charge of the Light Brigade”: “Some one had blundered” (18). The most important Victorian institution, marriage, has gone vaguely, elusively awry, perhaps because the

mechanisms of discipline that used to keep order, such as physical violence, have been absorbed into the psyche. Michael Whitworth observes that *To the Lighthouse* offers a critique of the idealized pre-war days by revealing their “suppressed” violence: the oppression inherent in Mr. Tansley’s view of women artists, for instance, or the conflict between “the sexes” (157). But in the primitive “tattoo” (Woolf 16) of the waves beating against the post-Victorian shore, in Mr. Ramsay’s “half said, half chanted” (16) repetition of Tennyson, Woolf suggests that the modern family has absorbed and disseminated (not suppressed) the violence of Victorian heterosexuality. Woolf’s Ramsays are a Victorian couple in a modern world, and their family conflict is diffused into the psychological undercurrents of modernist domesticity: the rhythm of the waves, the pulse of the lighthouse beam. (“Where did Victorian writing go?” asks Gillian Beer. “One answer is that [it] went into the writing of Virginia Woolf—and some very strange things happened to [it] there” [92]).<sup>12</sup> Something has happened, someone has blundered, everything is broken. The most sacred institution of Victorian heterosexuality has been lost. Between melodrama and monologue, between Victorian and Modern, James’s novels of family dissolution reveal how violence is inherently woven into the aspirations of the bourgeois family.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The most famous reading of James’s queer secret is, of course, Sedgwick’s “The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic.”

<sup>2</sup>Edel suggests that

[t]he term “internal monologue” becomes merely a useful designation for certain works of fiction of sustained subjectivity, written from a single point of view, in which the writer himself narrows down the stream of consciousness and places us largely at the “centre” of the character’s thoughts—that centre where thought often uses words rather than images. (58)

Poirier similarly proposes that “the environment which is James’s style—an extraordinary invention in the history of language—makes it natural for the author to have total entry into the consciousness of all his characters. James’s later novels have the quality of vast interior monologues with James playing all the parts at will” (20).

<sup>3</sup>The Jamesian critical canon bursts at the seams with titles such as Wiesenfarth’s 1963 *Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy*, or more recent essays that examine how *The Portrait of a Lady* effectively converts “Mrs. Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* . . . into a *drama of consciousness*” (Porte 16, emphasis mine), or investigate how “Isabel’s masochistic submission and Osmond’s sadistic appropriation of her passive desire are played out on a *psychological stage*” (Ash 155, emphasis mine). Brooks observes that “[t]he Jamesian mode is subtler, more refined [than the melodrama], but it aims at the same thing: a total articulation of the grandiose moral terms of the drama, an assertion that what is being played out on the plane of manners is charged from the realm of the moral occult, that gestures within the world constantly refer us to another, hyperbolic set of gestures where life and death are at stake” (7–8).

<sup>4</sup>The melodramatic heroine is “cursed by her father, spurned by the hero, left wretched in a garret with starving children or exhausted in the snow in the heartless city . . .” (Booth 24). Habegger suggests that while James’s first novel, *Watch and Ward* (1871), rather crudely reproduces the conventions of the 1860s sensation narratives “about unhappily married wives” read so avidly by James in his youth, it was precisely this early exposure to melodrama that prompted him “to begin imagining his way toward *The Portrait of a Lady*” (24), a considerably more sophisticated and subtle anatomization of a wife’s misery within melodramatic marriage plot.

<sup>5</sup>Both the Duke of Ferrara and Gilbert Osmond, Posnock observes, exude a “malevolent aestheticism” and “wear masks of icy connoisseurship to conceal the brutal subjugation of their wives” (7).

<sup>6</sup>This includes *Washington Square*’s transformation into several stage and then film versions of *The Heiress* (1911, 1949, 1969) and Campion’s 1996 film version of *Portrait*. See Tintner.



<sup>7</sup>See Foss for further discussions of the “feminist recuperation of Henry James” (253–68).

<sup>8</sup>Recent film adaptations of *Portrait* share the view that Isabel “transcends” the confines of the patriarchal frame. Campion’s 1996 film, for instance, explicitly positions Isabel’s emergent sexual awareness against Osmond’s physically brutal patriarchal power, showing how Isabel “is at first tethered to her nineteenth-century history but in the end overcomes her inhibitions” (Tintner 342).

<sup>9</sup>Ender argues that

[t]he ending [of *The Bostonians*] can . . . be envisaged as the climactic confrontation of the two concepts of femininity and masculinity, or at least a desperate attempt to save one (masculinity) by saving the other. . . . The closing moment of *The Bostonians*, with the figure of Ransom embodying the force or violence that brings about proper gender alignment, is thus symptomatic of the “disciplinary practices” that entail and produce the proper kinds of engendering or “a coherent gender” (120).

<sup>10</sup>William James wrote a letter asking that Henry write “a new book, with no twilight or mustiness in the plot, [and] with great vigor and decisiveness in the action” (qtd. in Gard 392). James replied that William’s critique “shows how far apart and to what different ends we have had to work out . . . our respective intellectual lives” (394).

<sup>11</sup>Tintner observes that Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Ernest Hemingway were fascinated by *The Portrait of a Lady* and that Eliot and Hemingway wrote poems with the same title, in 1917 and 1926 respectively (329–30).

<sup>12</sup>Fogel similarly argues that one can “find traces of the concealed literary father, Henry James, in the child of the fictionalized literal father, Mr. Ramsay—to find these traces, to be precise, in James Ramsay” (151).

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