

WOMEN'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN  
MODERN FICTION (1881-1927):  
SELF-DEFINITION IN CRISIS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Women's Search for Identity in  
Modern Fiction (1881-1927): Self-  
Definition in Crisis

Wilda Leslie Grant, Doctor of Philosophy, 1987

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A study of eight women in the novels of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf reveals the validity of the statement of Henry James that "the novel is history." Each of the eight characters reflects the position of women at a specific point in the history of the modern world. The situations in which the eight women find themselves demonstrate the unique ability of each author to develop a character who parallels conditions that existed for women in the period in which the author wrote.

Conventions governing the place and expectations of women changed radically toward the end of the nineteenth century. Modern English fiction dramatically recorded these changes over time in the evolution of the female character as it was developed in The Portrait of a Lady (1881) and in The Golden Bowl (1904) by Henry James, in Nostromo (1904) and in Victory (1915) by Joseph Conrad, in The Rainbow (1915) and in Women in Love (1921) by D. H. Lawrence, and in Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and in To the Lighthouse (1927) by

Virginia Woolf.

James's Isabel Archer and Charlotte Stant, Conrad's Emilia Gould and Lena, Lawrence's Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, and Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay are endowed with charm, intelligence, courage, moral integrity, and patience. These virtues do not vary qualitatively as one generation leads to the next. What does vary, as the eight novels show, is the measure of free choice available to the women; and this measure is significantly connected to their places in historical time.

The eight novels register the continuous process of women's search for self-definition. Viewed separately, the novels offer insightful character studies of eight women with remarkable emotional strength, whose actions respectively set the pace in the novels. Grouped as a unit, the novels in which these women appear present a poignant commentary on the status of women in the years between 1881 and 1927, years that included not only the havoc of the Great War, but also a growing reassessment of social and moral values.

## Preface

The inspiration for this dissertation comes from a short analogy offered by Henry James that "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history."<sup>1</sup> With these words in mind, I propose to study the actions of eight fictional women who were created between 1881 and 1927 in order to show that each character in her particular fictional milieu reflects the position of women at a specific point in the history of the modern world. The situations in which the eight women find themselves demonstrate the unique ability of each author who is responsible for them to develop a character who parallels conditions that existed for women in the period in which the author wrote. The women are remarkable in their emotional strength. They face and resolve challenges to their individual freedoms with enviable dignity. My aim is simple--to read and to report the actions and reactions of the eight fictional women as they individually relate to their environments to see how they achieve spiritual freedom in the light of what is offered them by custom.

Conventions governing the place and expectations of women changed radically toward the end of the nineteenth century, during a time of sharp social changes and transition.



Modern English fiction dramatically recorded these changes over time in the evolution of the female character as it was developed in The Portrait of a Lady (1881) and in The Golden Bowl (1904) by Henry James, in Nostromo (1904) and in Victory (1915) by Joseph Conrad, in The Rainbow (1915) and in Women in Love (1921) by D. H. Lawrence, and in Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and in To the Lighthouse (1927) by Virginia Woolf.

James's Isabel Archer and Charlotte Stant, Conrad's Emilia Gould and Lena, Lawrence's Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, and Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay are endowed with charm, intelligence, courage, moral integrity, and patience. These virtues do not vary qualitatively as one generation is followed by the next. What does vary is the measure of free choice each of the women is willing to take as her prerogative in facing psychological and sociological challenges; and this measure is significantly connected to her place in historical time. For instance, the precisely defined limits that control the New England conscience of duty-bound Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady have faded by the time Lawrence introduces us to the determined individualism of Gudrun Brangwen in Women in Love.

Following Lawrence's visionary Ursula and determined Gudrun Brangwen, Woolf's sensitive portrayals of sociable Clarissa Dalloway and quixotic Mrs. Ramsay suggest that progress for women has taken a backward step until one remembers that Woolf was a woman who was writing about women. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that her

views are naturally slanted otherwise than those of James, Conrad, and Lawrence who are men narrating a view of women from the perspective of a man. Furthermore, Woolf is writing about two women who are in their fifties, and their ideas of "life" and "freedom" would have been formed in a generation before that of Ursula and Gudrun. Lawrence describes the Brangwen sisters as being in their twenties, at least at the point when "freedom" comes into their lives.

A study of the female protagonists in The Portrait of a Lady, The Golden Bowl, Nostromo, Victory, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse reveals a line of thought respectively shared by James, Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf that is concretely grounded in the powerful characteristics that each author has assigned to his strong-minded women. This line of thought is viably conveyed by the four novelists, all of whom are sensitive to the stresses provoked by the flux of traditional standards of behavior. The common leitmotif of the eight novels honors the women's heroic confrontation with the central equation of modern life--"how to act . . . how to become one's self . . . when one was merely an unfixed something-nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstat-<sup>2</sup>ed." James, Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf use an equivalent method to enlighten their fictive women in their searches for individual identities. As a consequence of their relationships to the men in their respective lives, the women discover their separate selfhoods and begin to shape their

own destinies.

If men seem to take up an inordinate share of a dissertation that professes to be concerned with women and their individual searches for a well-defined self, it is because the social history of the late Victorian era and that of the early part of the twentieth century tells of women who were totally dependent on men for their well-being by virtue of the legal status of women. During this period, women progressed slowly out of a condition that John Stuart Mill had called "subjugation" to a condition that Woolf illustrates by having Mrs. Ramsay wonder what she has done with her life. To voice the question in itself represents progress because it intimates that a choice had been available.

It should be pointed out that the spiritual freedom sought and found by Isabel Archer, Charlotte Stant, Emilia Gould, Lena, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, Clarissa Dalloway, and Mrs. Ramsay neither includes nor excludes sexual freedom. If we accept the thesis that "the novel is history" and then just casually review the literature of past generations, we will be able to say that women have always had sexual freedom available to them if they chose to accept its consequences. (We could test this thought by rereading the adventures of Geoffrey Chaucer's Criseyde or the adventures of Henry Fielding's Molly Seagrim.)

Modern fiction is indebted to James, Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf for their insightful portraits of imaginary women. The portraits, each in turn, register for a reading public



the conditions under which women lived in the late years of the reign of Victoria and the early years of the twentieth century. Henry James, a dedicated theorist of literary form and matter, was master of this group of authors. His strong commitment to craftsmanship in the art of prose fiction is evidenced by the Prefaces that he undertook to write for the New York Edition of his works. In his Introduction to the collected Prefaces, R. P. Blackmur noted that the influence of James on succeeding writers was especially effective because his followers could "absorb something of a technical mastery good for any subject, any attitude, any style."<sup>3</sup> Blackmur concluded that the Prefaces of James "added up to a fairly exhaustive reference book on the technical aspects of the art of fiction."<sup>4</sup>

Further evidence of the impact of James on the writing of Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf can be found in an evaluation of James by Leon Edel who wrote that the advice offered by James in "The Art of Fiction" and in a short letter of regrets to Deerfield Summer School make up "a kind of novelist's manifesto, one of those great pronouncements which seems to offer the last word on the subject."<sup>5</sup> The essay and the letter recommend "life" and "freedom" to be the basic concerns of any writer of prose fiction. James insisted that an author must be allowed complete freedom in writing about any subject that was "the result of some direct impression of life."<sup>6</sup> Thus Isabel Archer becomes the vanguard of modern fictional women. She claims the right to an individual

self and accepts self-responsibility in respect to it.

Two major events in the history of the world had profound repercussions on the status of women in the past century and a half. The events were a World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840 and the Great War of 1914-1918. History tells us that improving the status of women has been a slow process. Ingrained attitudes are difficult to change. The Women's Movement actually began as an outgrowth of the Anti-Slavery Movement. The process started for women in general on July 19 and 20 in 1848, when a convention that was the first organized movement for Women's Rights was held in the United States at Seneca Falls, New York. The purpose of the convention was to discuss "the social, civil and religious rights of women." The organizers were five Quaker women, two of whom had accompanied their husbands to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. At that meeting in 1840, Elizabeth Cady Stanton faced the humiliation of being denied entrance into the main hall to be part of the discussions because she was a woman. She was relegated to the gallery where she met Lucretia Coffin Mott, whose husband also was sitting in the main hall. Upon returning to their homes, the two women became the instigators of the Women's Rights Movement in the United States. The men in the New World were more supportive of women's bid for independence than were the men of the Old World. In fact, forty sympathetic men attended the first day of the session in Seneca Falls. Another notable influence on the lives of women that



affected English prose fiction was World War I. The influence of the War, particularly on the sensibility of Lawrence and Woolf, is accepted universally. The orientation and tone of many of their writings show they were deeply touched by the senseless slaughter of the War. Lawrence, writing Women in Love in the midst of World War I, uses Gudrun and the unattractive Loerke's imaginary game of chess to point out the shrinking value of man in "a world gone mad." He uses Ursula and Birkin to illustrate the possibilities offered to those willing to compromise; and he uses Gudrun and Gerald to show the devastating effects wrought by one individual demanding total capitulation of another individual. Woolf, writing To the Lighthouse in the aftermath of the War and seeking the wholeness implicit in peace, develops a relationship for Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay that does not ignore the self-orientation of a Gerald or a Gudrun, but Woolf balances the egoism of Mr. Ramsay with the understanding, unselfish, conciliatory nature of Mrs. Ramsay.

This dissertation will begin with an examination of two women created by James because of his place in literary history as the author who laid the foundation for a new wave of prose fiction. The foundation rests on the proposition that "the house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million--a number of possible windows. . . . They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall. . . . They are . . . as nothing without . . . the consciousness of the artist."<sup>7</sup> James advocated freedom in the matter of inter-

pretation, which led to experimentation. The eight novels--The Portrait of a Lady, The Golden Bowl, Nostromo, Victory, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse--cover the years between 1881 and 1927. In the quest for an individual self that the novels entail, James begins with the warmth of Isabel Archer and her unbending sense of duty, Conrad advances in the devotion of Emily Gould, Lawrence extends to the destructiveness of the free will of Gudrun Brangwen, and Woolf interrupts with a reminder that the quest is yet in its infancy with her portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay.

In The Portrait of a Lady Isabel Archer is a young American heiress living before the turn of the century. She falls prey to a fortune hunter. A Victorian sense of duty to conventions influences her when she is buffeted by emotional misfortunes and uncertainty. James furnishes the young woman with incredible fortitude and a self-respect that she values at a price too great to destroy by turning her back on her marriage vows. The virtue that will enable Isabel to survive her ordeal and accept self-responsibility for her future is patience, which the religious philosopher Romano Guardini in a thoughtful book, The Virtues, defines as being

impossible without insight, without knowing the ways of life. Patience is wisdom, understanding what it means that I have this and not something else, that I am of this nature and not another, that the person with whom I am associated is as he is and not like another. I would like it to be



different, and by persevering effort I may be able to change many things, but basically things are as they are and I must accept that. Wisdom is insight into the way in which realization comes about; how an idea is lifted from the imagination and worked into the substance of existence.<sup>8</sup>

Some twenty years later, James created another "lady" in The Golden Bowl. The trials of the young lady, the less than wealthy Charlotte Stant, are resolved to her satisfaction because she is able to temper reason with grace and adapt her emotional needs to her psychological and financial means. She defines her self in terms of marriage and conventionally following the lead of her husband. A purpose in life solves the question for her of, as Lawrence was to write later in The Rainbow, "how to act . . . how to become one's self . . . [and how to avoid being] merely an unfixed something-nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated."

In Nostromo, Conrad creates an Emilia Gould who chooses to have a self that is at the disposal of her husband. Her only complaint is that she does not see him often enough. His responsibilities at the Gould Concession, which the two of them have built from scratch into a monster of materialism, keep him away from home. Besides possessing a good measure of patience, Emilia is endowed with a facility for action. The narrator noted that Charles found consolation at the time of the death of his father in action, which is "consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action

can we find the sense of mastery over the fates."<sup>9</sup> However fated for tragedy the marriage of Emilia and Charles Gould appears on the surface, Emilia keeps it from becoming so by resorting to action. Throughout the novel she is available to help wherever and whenever she is needed. The dying Nostromo aptly defines the individual self that Emilia Gould displays by the end of Conrad's novel: "Shining! Incorruptible!"<sup>10</sup> Conrad has created the single and singular martyr among the eight strong-minded women discussed in this dissertation. Lena in Victory dies quite by chance when she tries to prove her loyalty to the lover who has freed her from her former enslaved self.

Lawrence dramatized "the quest of the modern spirit for deliverance from the terror of a meaningless universe"<sup>11</sup> when he introduced Ursula Brangwen in The Rainbow. Along with her younger sister Gudrun, whose exploits are featured in Women in Love, Ursula opts for an education in order to prepare herself for a profession that will allow her to be financially independent--much to the distress of her parents. In the workaday world "she did not know what she was, nor what she must be. [But] she wanted to remain her own responsive, personal self."<sup>12</sup> In The Rainbow, Ursula must peel away layer after layer of illusions in order to find her individual self and accept self-responsibility. Not the least of her illusions is Anton Skrebensky whom young Ursula had felt would have been "the doorway to her into the boundless sky of happiness and plunging, inexhaustible freedom.



. . . Ah, the great range he would have opened to her, the illimitable endless space for self-realization and delight for ever."<sup>13</sup> Following Isabel Archer, Charlotte Stant, Emilia Gould, and even Lena, Ursula is strikingly independent and progressive. Through her characterization Lawrence gives a graphic account of the changing position of women in respect to how they viewed themselves as they "faced outwards to where men moved dominant and creative . . . to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom."<sup>14</sup>

Gudrun in Women in Love follows the lead of her sister. This novel traces the struggle of Gudrun to maintain her equilibrium in spite of temptations to do otherwise. The spectacularly colored clothing that Gudrun wears is one way through which she asserts her independence and displays the existence of an individual self. Her manner of dressing pleases Gerald Crich in particular. The author mentions that Gerald "felt the challenge in her very attire--she challenged the whole world. And he smiled as to the note of a trumpet."<sup>15</sup> With the characterizations of Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, Lawrence unequivocally proclaims that women have a position in the natural order that allows them the free choice of how they are to spend their lives.

The women that Woolf portrays, Clarissa Dalloway in Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, have no great drive to be anything other than tradition dictates, but they do question whether or not they are making as much of their lives as they could. What is important to remember in the

history of the Women's Movement is that Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay had much more freedom of choice in the twenties when it came to deciding "how to act . . . how to become one's self" than did Isabel Archer in 1881. Progress had been made, and the novel of the period illustrates the trend.

James, Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf have delineated in the eight novels studied the continuous process of women's search for self-definition. Viewed separately, the novels offer insightful character studies of eight remarkably strong-minded women, whose actions set the pace in The Portrait of a Lady, The Golden Bowl, Nostromo, Victory, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse. Grouped as a unit, the novels in which these women appear present a poignant commentary on the status of women in the years between 1881 and 1927, years that included not only the destroying havoc of the Great War, but also a growing reassessment of social and moral values.

## Notes

- 1 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" [1884], in Henry James: The Future of the Novel, ed. Introduction, Leon Edel (New York: Vantage books, 1956), p. 5.
- 2 D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (Great Britain, 1915; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 284.
- 3 R. P. Blackmur, ed. Introduction, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's sons [1934], 1962), p. xii.
- 4 Blackmur, p. viii.
- 5 The Future of the Novel, p. x.
- 6 "The Great form: A Letter to the Deerfield Summer School" [Summer 1889], in The Future of the Novel, p. 29.
- 7 Critical Prefaces, p. 46.
- 8 Romano Guardini, The Virtues: On Forms of Moral Life, trans. Stella Lange (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company [1963], 1967), pp. 34-35.
- 9 Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (Great Britain, 1904; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 86.
- 10 Nostromo, p. 460.
- 11 Vivian de Sola Pinto, "The Burning Bush: D. H. Lawrence as Religious Poet," in Mansions of the Spirit, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967), p. 223.
- 12 The Rainbow, p. 378.
- 13 The Rainbow, p. 439.
- 14 The Rainbow, p. 9.
- 15 Women in Love, p. 231.

to my Daughter  
Victoria

and

to my Sons  
William

and

Christopher



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ii
Part I. Henry James (1843-1916)	1
Chapter 1. <u>The Portrait of a Lady</u> (1881) A <u>Duty-Bound Isabel Archer</u>	1
Chapter 2. <u>The Golden Bowl</u> (1904) A <u>Conventional Charlotte Stant</u>	28
Part II. Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)	53
Chapter 1. <u>Nostromo</u> (1904) A <u>Devoted Emilia Gould</u>	53
Chapter 2. <u>Victory</u> (1915) A <u>Loyal Lena</u>	79
Part III. D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)	105
Chapter 1. <u>The Rainbow</u> (1915) A <u>Visionary Ursula</u>	105
Chapter 2. <u>Women in Love</u> (1921) A <u>Determined Gudrun</u>	132
Part IV. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)	159
Chapter 1. <u>Mrs. Dalloway</u> (1925) A <u>Sociable Clarissa Dalloway</u>	159
Chapter 2. <u>To the Lighthouse</u> (1927) A <u>Quixotic Mrs. Ramsay</u>	189
Conclusion	217
Bibliography	234

Part I. Henry James (1843-1916)

Chapter 1. The Portrait of a Lady (1881):

A Duty-Bound Isabel Archer

I

Henry James chronicled a chapter in women's struggle for freedom when, in the second half of the Victorian era, he painted the portrait of Isabel Archer. In The Portrait of a Lady (1881), James accommodated the past, depicted the present, and presaged the future for the status of women in his characterization of Isabel's search for an identity beyond that of the man she would marry. Like a portrait on canvas, it is not an in-depth, psychoanalytical study of the young woman, but rather a human document that reveals the responses of Isabel to chance and necessity with the pressures of the moment taken into consideration.

The novel begins when Isabel is twenty-two years old and ends some seven years later, seven years in which Isabel learns to adapt her idealized self-image to the reality of life for women in the 1870s. Despite a queen being on the throne and despite the remarkable change in the position of women during Queen Victoria's reign, England's women were second-class citizens throughout the nineteenth century. The Victorian era is noted particularly for its moral

severity, hypocrisy, and pompous conservatism. With these national characteristics as a backdrop, James's talent for "excluding and simplifying" (in F. R. Leavis's phrase) enriched his portrait of Isabel by allowing us to judge her capacity to remain in control of herself through a view of her actions and their consequences.

During Victoria's reign, the longest in English history, an industrial civilization sprang up that introduced radical changes in the living styles of both men and women. Revolutionary technological advances irrevocably altered the expectations and value systems of all classes of individuals. The changes precipitated what had been an agrarian society into a materialistic and urban one. Motor cars, submarines, heavier-than-air flight, all had beginnings in the years that Victoria ruled Britain, from 1837 to 1901. Furthermore, x-rays and the properties of radium were discovered, and new surgical techniques came into use during this period. Victoria, herself, popularized the use of chloroform during childbirth when she allowed her doctor to give it to her during the birth of her eighth child. In addition, life in the nineteenth century became somewhat easier and more pleasant for people by the arrival of electricity to light their homes and kinematographs and gramophones to entertain them. Late in the century, typesetting machines were invented so that the general public thereafter had ready access to printed matter for information



and for recreation.

Although most of modern British social structures, including those relating to woman, grew out of Victoria's reforms, the passage of time was needed to make them a reality. The second half of Victoria's reign became a time of considering the effects of the many social, political, and economic innovations that took place during the first half of her reign. Those in power began to wonder if a change in the name of progress necessarily led to improved living conditions for the many. The development of the machine gun in the middle of the nineteenth century is a case in point. In the March issue of Saint Pauls Magazine, Anthony Trollope wrote:

It is the year of grace 1868. The roar of our machinery, the din of our revolutions, echoes through the solar system; can we not, then, make up our minds whether our progress is a reality and a gain, or a delusion and a mistake?<sup>1</sup>

Uncertainty, in short, characterized the years between 1868 and the outbreak of World War I. This uncertainty introduced the modern concept of stress into the lives of those living in the last half of the nineteenth century. A more positive trait of this period, that of society's rising concern for others, was noted by Thomas Hardy in The Return of the Native (1878):

People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting mark of mental concern upon himself is too far from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type.<sup>2</sup>

Henry James's Isabel Archer was a distinctly modern type within the framework of Hardy's remark. Her characteristics correspond well to those of the mid-Victorian women who exposed themselves to censure for the sake of promoting the idea of a woman being free to rule her own person. The Victorian feminists, for the most part, were young women who became part of the women's movement as an extension of their philanthropic enterprises. The women had moneyed backgrounds and, not infrequently, an indulgent father who had encouraged them to think for themselves as they were growing up. James's Isabel is like these women. She was brought up by her father after her mother died, and he encouraged her to be independent. Although surely not intended as a sermon on Women's Rights, the portrait that James gave us of Isabel unwittingly supported the theory that mid-Victorian women were restricted unjustly by virtue of their position in society as "the lesser man."<sup>3</sup>

The Victorian women who became concerned with women's rights had for inspiration the pioneer work of Mary Wollstonecraft whose A Vindication of the Rights of Women: With Strictures on Political and Moral Rights had been published in 1792. Two years previously, Wollstonecraft had published A Vindication of the Rights of Men, which had been an answer to Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, which, in turn, had been in answer to a sermon preached by her friend Richard Price in 1789.<sup>4</sup> Delivering the annual address to the

Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain  
(the Glorious Revolution of 1688), Price said:

Tremble all ye oppressors of the world! Take warning all ye Supporters of slavish governments, and slavish hierarchies! . . . You cannot now hold the world in darkness. . . . Restore to mankind their rights; and consent to the correction of abuses before they and you are destroyed altogether.

In his address the following year, Burke eloquently attacked Price and his radical views. Subsequently, Mary Wollstonecraft translated her arguments in defense of Price and her belief in the rights of man into terms applicable to the status of women in the late eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft did not advocate preempting any of the rights of man, she simply wanted women to be recognized as human beings, without regard to the distinction of sex.

The Rights of Woman decried the fact that women's strength of body and mind was sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty and that their only way to rise in the world was to marry. Wollstonecraft blamed much of women's predicament on women's own attitudes about themselves. When women no longer devoted their energies to "dress" and "paint," Wollstonecraft believed that women would be accepted as equal to men. Beyond an attitude change on women's part, Wollstonecraft recommended education and economic independence as the ways for women to gain the God-given rights due any human being. She attributed the time that women spent "at their glass" to an "exertion of



cunning . . . an instinct of nature to enable them to obtain indirectly a little of that power of which they [were] unjustly denied a share."<sup>5</sup>

A later version of Wollstonecraft's views can be read in Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century, which was published in 1845. A transcendentalist, Fuller was born in 1810 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the older daughter of a lawyer, who taught her the lessons she might have learned with other students at Harvard College had she not been a woman. Like Wollstonecraft before her, Margaret Fuller admitted to women's "cunning, blandishment, and unreasonable emotion," which Fuller called "the arena of the servile." Fuller stated in her 1845 publication that improving women's lot would not threaten men's position in society because "what woman [needed was] not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded."<sup>6</sup> For these very reasons, Isabel Archer refuses all proposals of marriage until she meets Gilbert Osmond, whose temperament she misjudges.

## II

In his portrait of Isabel Archer, Henry James blended the traits of a great lady with those of an intellectual woman. It is tempting to say that James intended her to be a happy combination of Queen Victoria and Margaret Fuller. To James, "a great lady" would have been one who was willing to accept

the conventions of the Victorian era as mandated by male-dominated English society. A brief excerpt from a series of essays that James wrote after an extended visit to the United States clearly expressed his disapproval of the ways of American woman:

The man in America may correct his wife when he can, just as the mother may correct her daughter when she dares; but no mere man may correct a mere woman in any contingency whatever, since this undermines the whole theory of queenship. . . . In societies other than ours the male privilege of correction springs, and quite logically, from the social fact that the male is the member of society primarily acting and administering and primarily listened to-- whereby . . . his standards . . . react upon his companion and establish for her the principal relation she recognizes. . . . she is never at all thoroughly a well-bred person unless he has begun by having a sense for it and by showing the way.

James has made the picture of Isabel a composite of the New World and the Old--a free-spirited young American who respects conventions, "a young woman about whom there should be a great deal to tell and as to whom such telling should be interesting."<sup>8</sup>

In the "telling," Isabel is presented initially as a flippant young American whose Aunt Lydia is about to offer her the broadening experience of a "grand tour." The flippancy is apparent in Isabel's responses to her aunt's queries about Isabel's identity and the whereabouts of the young girl's older sister. When Mrs. Touchett asks Isabel, a niece



whom she has not seen for years, whether she is one of the daughters, the young niece replies, "It depends upon whose daughter you mean," and to "Your sister must be a great gossip. . . . Is she accustomed to staying out for hours?" (28).<sup>9</sup> Isabel answers pertly, "You have been out almost as long as she. . . . She can have left the house but a short time before you came in." As the "telling" unfolds, the young American becomes less and less prone to flippancy; and James's carefully wrought dialogue prepares us for Isabel's dutiful acceptance of the consequences of her marriage to Gilbert Osmond.

Instead of psychological detail so that we know Isabel "inside out," James gives us dialogue and action in The Portrait of a Lady from which we can judge for ourselves the extent of Isabel's emotional growth and the depth of her commitment to her marriage vows. James makes it clear to us that Isabel's dedication to liberty is predicated on choice. This fact is particularly evident in an incident that takes place shortly after Isabel arrives at her aunt's home in England for an extended visit. We witness the burgeoning grace of Isabel's personality under the tutelage of her aunt when the American niece withdraws a momentary disinclination to accept her aunt's advice that the two of them go upstairs and leave the men to their after-dinner conversation. Isabel reacts to the incident by telling her aunt politely that she

appreciates being told the rules of proper behavior so that she can decide for herself whether or not to follow them. Unhappily for Isabel, the only time she openly rejects her aunt's advice is when the aunt advises Isabel to give Osmond her money, but "marry some one else."

In an undated Notebooks entry, James referred to Isabel as a

poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness, who has done, as she believes, a generous, natural, clear-sighted thing, [then] finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional. After a year or two of marriage the antagonism between her nature and [her husband's] comes out.<sup>10</sup>

The antagonism to which James referred results from American Isabel's nature that demands she be at liberty to make decisions about her responsibilities and her husband's nature that expects Isabel to take on the traditional role of a Victorian wife. The young woman's upbringing in the United States has not taught her to have an unquestioning acceptance of authority, which fact Osmond wholeheartedly resents. The resentment turns the marriage that Isabel approached "in the purest confidence" that it was right into a "dark, narrow alley, with a dead wall at the end" (391).

Isabel's taste for freedom had been respected and given full rein in the home of her grandmother Archer in Albany, New York, where Isabel spent much of her young life and where the grandmother seemed to have encouraged the child's wish to

be independent by allowing her to forgo a formal education at the primary school that stood across the street from her grandmother's home. As a youngster, Isabel was "offered the opportunity of laying a foundation of knowledge" in this school, "spent a single day in it . . . expressed great disgust with the place" and then was permitted to stay home where "when the windows of the Dutch House [the school] were open, she used to hear the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication table--an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mingled" (23). Thus, at a tender age, Isabel learned to avoid the trap of "inclusion," of being told what to do and when to do it.

To protect the freedom that both Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood threaten when they offer marriage, Isabel marries Gilbert Osmond whom she describes to her cousin Ralph Touchett as being especially charming because he is a man with

no property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It is the total absence of all these things that pleases me. Mr. Osmond is a simple man--he is not a proprietor! (321)

In short, Osmond's unique "sensibilities" as a "sterile dilettante" offer a marital alternative to Isabel that portends freedom from becoming another's proprietary item. On Osmond's part, he had thought that once married to Isabel he could mould her to his liking. When he cannot change Isabel's way



of thinking, discord results.

Isabel's mind rules her heart. She has learned to use her mental faculties for more than a preoccupation with dressing and painting. One of her favorite retreats for cultivating her mind in the days before her Aunt Lydia took her off to Europe was an apartment called "the office," which adjoined the library of the Archer home in Albany. There the young woman read and dreamed in solitude. The "office" was properly entered through a second door to the house, a door that had been condemned and was fastened by bolts:

[Isabel] knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street; if the sidelights had not been filled with green paper. . . . But she had no wish to look out. (23-4)

This young woman preferred to leave the region unexplored, except in the vagaries of her imagination. Her rational mind knew it could strip the side-lights of their green paper any time it chose to do so. The "office" was Isabel's island where she could be alone with her mind:

She had spent much ingenuity in training it [her mind] to a military step, and teaching it to advance, to halt, to retreat, to perform even more complicated manoeuvres, at the word of a command. . . . She had given it marching orders, and it had been trudging over the sandy plains of a history of German thought. (24)

All who come in contact with Isabel in The Portrait face her quick mind. She invariably judges a man's worth on

the basis of the "mind which he displays" in his conversation. Osmond's "beautiful mind" had been one of his attractions as a suitor. Isabel's mind is noticed particularly by Lord Warburton, who replies to Isabel's comment that she is going abroad with her aunt to improve her mind by foreign travel, "You can't improve your mind, Miss Archer. . . . It's already a most formidable instrument. It looks down on us all. . . . You judge only from the outside--you don't care" (75). A bit later, Isabel watches herself as she refuses the English lord's offer of marriage and admits to herself that she succeeds in looking at the situation no less from the outside than if she were not the heroine of the episode.

Unlike Osmond whom Isabel pictures as "poor," "lonely," and "noble," Lord Warburton is judged to be "a territorial, a political, a social magnate" who has conceived "the design of drawing her into the system in which he lived and moved" (95). Isabel saves herself from this fate because "a certain instinct . . . told her to resist--it murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own" (95). Her immediate reaction to the English peer's petition is that it momentarily "incommodes" her. Isabel's reason for not wanting to marry Lord Warburton parallels that that she gives for not allowing Caspar Goodwood to "take complete possession of her." Goodwood seems to Isabel "to take from her the sense of freedom" that she cherishes (106).

Having made a conscious effort to choose a mate who corresponded with her ideal, Isabel knows that she has only herself to blame for the unwise choice of Osmond, who contrary to her first impression acquired after their marriage a faculty of "making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at" (391). In a scene that James considered "obviously the best thing in the book," Isabel holds a "vigil of criticism" with her self in order to shed light on the "house of darkness . . . of suffocation" that union with Osmond has created, a union that was to have been a "union of great knowledge with great liberty" (397). Confident that her mind controls her destiny and can free her from the emotional labyrinth of life with Osmond, Isabel objectively evaluates her attitude and her husband's attitude as she sits by the dying fire in her sitting room, much as she used to sit in the "office" back in Albany and put her mind through its paces. Her rational mind, having unblinkingly explored the region of her relationship to Osmond, frankly admits that Osmond had never misrepresented himself--Isabel simply had been blinded by his charm.

Actually, Isabel had been blinded by unrealistic expectations of her role as a married woman in the 1870s. This young American never faced restrictions on her freedom until her Aunt Lydia took her in hand after the girl's father died. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator alerts us to the



remarkable ego that controls Isabel's conscious behavior. The description of Isabel reminds one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's recollection of transcendentalist Margaret Fuller. He wrote that Fuller was capable of telling her friends, "I know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own."<sup>11</sup> Snatches of the narrator's long description of Isabel demonstrate the attitude that accompanied Isabel on her adventures abroad and reveal the influences affecting the dilemma her marriage poses--whether liberty under the shadow of a failed marriage is a viable choice for her to make for her future well-being:

It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast. . . . [She] had none of the consciousness of genius; she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were rather superior. Whether or no she were superior, people were right when they treated her so; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs, and this encouraged an impatience that might easily be confounded with superiority. . . . Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem. (46-7)

Isabel believes that life is worth living only if one "has an unquenchable desire to think well" of one's self. Her conditions for a worthwhile life include never doubting one's self; "one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization . . . should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic" (47). By the end of the novel, we discover that "the girl had

a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a great many tricks" (47).

Isabel gives a great deal of thought to "planning out her own development, desiring her own perfection, observing her own progress" (50). She does wonder what one should do about "the misery of the world in a scheme of the agreeable for one's self," but only briefly before going back to her paramount interest--what to make of herself.

She always returned to her theory that a young woman after all every one thought clever should begin by getting a general impression of life. This was necessary to prevent mistakes, and after it should be secured she might make the unfortunate condition of others an object of special attention. (50-1)

Thus Isabel, "desiring her own perfection," spends some four years "getting a general impression of life." Experiences in England and on the continent and her marriage to dilettante Gilbert Osmond teach her who she is and, in the end, leave her with the time and energy to turn her attention to the needs of her stepdaughter Pansy. Isabel's well-trained mind knows that its freedom cannot be touched, not even by the Victorian pre-occupation with appearances. How far her ingenuous "sense of freedom" can carry Isabel is tested with unexpected vengeance when she inherits a sizable fortune from her uncle, Mr. Touchett. Her cousin Ralph suggests to his father that Isabel be so blessed because Ralph wanted "to put a little wind in



her sails" to enable Isabel to gratify her imagination.

Isabel's windfall sails her right into the territory of Madame Merle, Osmond's ex-mistress. Because she has no independent means of support, Madame Merle has developed herself into an admirable, sought-after guest. Moreover, as the narrator tells us, Madame Merle "knew how to think--an accomplishment rare in women." She has the quiet confidence that comes from "a large experience," which leads Isabel to admit secretly, "I should like to be like that!" Isabel's cousin Ralph characterizes Madame Merle as the cleverest woman he knows and tells Isabel that she does everything beautifully. This clever woman has earned her spotless reputation by recognizing precisely how to please others. She explains to Isabel why Mrs. Touchett, for instance, believes that she, Madame Merle, has no faults:

. . . having no faults for your aunt, means that one is never late for dinner--that is, for her dinner. I was not late, by the way, the other day, when you came back from London; it was the rest of you that were before the time. It means that one answers a letter the day one gets it, and that when one comes to stay with her one doesn't bring too much luggage, and is careful not to be taken ill. For Mrs. Touchett those things constitute virtue.  
(180)

Madame Merle's friendship with the Touchetts puts her in a position to make a "convenience" of Isabel. Because James paints his "good" lady Isabel with dark "even to blackness" hair and his "evil" lady Madame Merle with "fair" hair

contrary to the custom, as Northrop Frye has theorized, it is tempting to say that James intended neither Isabel nor Serena Merle to be judged by his reader as all good or all bad. Each one of the women is as good as the best opportunities she is allowed in the period of history in which she lives. Madame Merle stresses this point when she advises Isabel in a manner that reflects nineteenth-century materialism:

When you have lived as long as I, you will see that every human being has his shell, and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we are each of us made up of a cluster of appurtenances. . . . I know that a large part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for things! (186)

In order to provide "things" for her daughter Pansy, Madame Merle exploits Isabel's desire to become culturally "exquisite." Madame Merle's admirable motive is to her credit.

A fortnight after Madame Merle laments to Isabel, "You are an exquisite creature. . . . I wish you had a little money," she discovers that Isabel has acquired a fortune. It takes six months for circumstances to fall into place so that Madame Merle can launch her plan to provide for the future of the daughter whom she does not acknowledge publicly. First, Madame Merle visits Osmond to tell him of his part in her plan. She begins by telling him that there is something he

can do for her in Florence and adds, "[It] is not a great labour, and it may prove a great pleasure. . . . There is a friend of mine I want you to know" (221). Because Osmond refuses to meet any young lady unless she is "beautiful, clever, rich, splendid, universally intelligent and unprecedentedly virtuous" (222), Madame Merle hastens to assure him that Isabel Archer fills all his requirements and has a handsome fortune as well. Her remark prompts Osmond to wonder aloud if Isabel is not "meant for something better" (222).

Madame Merle brings widower Gilbert Osmond and heiress Isabel Archer together "just by chance" when Osmond makes a prearranged social call on his "old friend" Madame Merle, who happens to be staying in Florence at the home of Mrs. Touchett while the latter's niece is a guest. This initial introduction is to be the "beginning" of a relationship that Madame Merle explains to Osmond by saying, "I want you of course to marry her" (225). As the plan is set in motion, Osmond's ex-mistress cautions him to play his part in the affair with tasteful discretion because Isabel is "a delicate piece of machinery."

Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, quickly senses the conspiracy between her brother and his former mistress as regards Isabel's future. When the Countess tells Madame Merle that she disapproves of the conspiracy and will interfere, Madame Merle rebukes her by saying, "The matter you allude to concerns three persons much stronger of purpose than yourself"



(248). The Countess knows the names of two of the three and asks if Miss Archer is "also very strong of purpose." She is told that Isabel is quite as strong of purpose as either Madame Merle or the Countess's brother. The narrator supports this view of the young American and acknowledges that Isabel knows what is good for her and that "her effort was constantly to find something that was good enough" (297). Madame Merle cleverly discerns that this search for perfection on Isabel's part will blend well with Osmond's "dread of vulgarity" (230). The conspiracy between Osmond and the mother of his daughter pays off handsomely for Osmond whom the narrator describes as being "immensely pleased with his young lady; Madame Merle had made him a present of incalculable value" (323). By the end of The Portrait of a Lady, the young heiress shows how very strong of purpose she is when she returns without undue emotion to her obligations in Rome.

### III

In the early 1870s, Isabel would have been quite literally a "present" to Osmond; after marriage, Isabel became his chattel, differing from his other possessions in that God had endowed her with the capacity to reason. Victorian woman, however, were not without British men to champion the movement for their civil rights. One such man was John Stuart Mill who advocated votes for women as part of his platform

when he won the Westminster constituency at a general election in 1864. The Subjection of Women, published in 1869, reported Mill's view that the time had come to free women from their historical bondage, that their lesser strength no longer was a valid reason in the civilized world to keep women under the subjugation of men. He argued that even the most contented of married women were suppressed because no perfect confidence could exist between an authority figure and a subordinate. Women's political rights became a continuing issue. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870 gave women the first full rights over their own earnings subsequent to marriage. It was not until the Acts of 1882 and 1883 were passed that women finally were granted full rights over their own property. Assuming that James expected Isabel to be governed by British law, Osmond did indeed receive "a present of incalculable value" when he married Isabel in the early 1870s. The young heiress herself refers to Osmond as her "master."

Cool reasoning powers permit both Isabel and Madame Merle to survive mentally intact when their respective goals cross paths and momentarily conflict where Pansy's future is at stake. Madame Merle has twenty years more of experience in the social world than does Isabel, and the younger woman respects and marvels at what the older woman has to teach her about survival:

Familiarity had modified in some degree her first



impression of Madame Merle, but it had not essentially altered it; there was still a kind of wonder of admiration in it. Madame Merle was armed at all points; it was a pleasure to see a person so completely equipped for the social battle. She carried her flag discreetly, but her weapons were polished steel, and she used them with a skill which struck Isabel as more and more that of a veteran. She was never weary, never overcome with disgust; she never appeared to need rest or consolation. She had her own ideas. . . . Her will was mistress of her life. . . . Madame Merle was doubtless of great use to herself. . . . The best way to profit by Madame Merle--this indeed Isabel had always thought--was to imitate her. (370-1)

Madame Merle is described as a woman about whom "there was something exquisite in her dignity." It is just this sort of dignity that James seeks for his portrait of a lady and that he finds for her when Isabel returns to her husband at the end of the novel. In order to keep intact the image of self that the young woman displayed at the beginning of the novel, Isabel resolves that "her will must be mistress of her life" and her differences with her husband must not be aired. Why?

Any open acknowledgement of irreconcilable needs would be an admission that their whole attempt had proved a failure. For them there could be no condonement, no compromise, no easy forgetfulness, no formal readjustment. They had attempted only one thing, but that one thing was to have been exquisite. (426-7)

Later, Isabel voices the substance of her private thoughts aloud when her friend Henrietta chides her about being unnecessarily considerate of Osmond by not leaving him and giving



up her unfortunate marriage. Quite simply she explains her reasoning to Henrietta:

. . . I can't publish my mistake. . . . One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate. . . . It's not of him that I am considerate--it's of myself! (450)

Leaving a husband in the 1870s carried with it a social stigma that easily might destroy the self-image of a woman, like Isabel, who is possessed by an "unquenchable desire to think well of herself." Isabel's cool approach to this crisis in her life parallels her reaction to her refusal of Lord Warburton's proposal of marriage. Her reasoning self-possession seems to allow her to look at the situation from the outside as if she were not the heroine of the episode. Although civil rights for women were improving, the young heiress--by her own admission--is not willing to make any effort to free herself physically from Osmond that would publicly affirm the failure of her marriage. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 that set up the divorce court did not favor women; therefore, Isabel's reticence to petition it was reasonable on her part. The rules permitted a man to obtain a divorce simply by charging adultery; a woman, on the other hand, had to show evidence of incest, rape, bigamy with a married woman, an unnatural offense, or adultery along with cruelty and desertion. Under these double-standards that

governed the Osmonds' wedding vows, Isabel had no grounds to leave her husband legally in 1877. She was trapped by society's conventions and her own predilection for respecting those conventions.

The sympathetic narrator of The Portrait laments Isabel's "natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners," despite "all her love of knowledge" and her belief that knowledge is freedom. Had others in the novel not lifted pertinent curtains to allow her to see beyond her own dedication to the sanctity of her marriage vows and into the sordid reality of Osmond's desire to marry her, Isabel surely would have become a prisoner to every vindictive whim of her husband, as was his daughter Pansy. Before her marriage, Mrs. Touchett had warned her niece that Isabel was "going to be put into a cage" (315). Pansy, at the age of nineteen, has no freedom to make any decisions about her future. Osmond prides himself on bringing up his daughter in the "old way." Because Pansy does not entice Lord Warburton into marriage as her father demands, her father sends her out of the world and into the convent that had been her home while she was growing up. The "retreat," according to her father, was to give Pansy time to think over the error of her ways, of falling in love with a young man who lacked a lord's possessions.

When Isabel displeases Osmond, she is not sent to a convent, but put under house arrest, so to speak. The final

incident that leads to Isabel's psychological release from her duty to her husband is initiated by his sister Amy. The Countess is visiting the Osmonds at the time that Isabel receives word that her beloved cousin Ralph is dying in England. Osmond denies his wife permission to go to her cousin, because for her to go would be "dishonourable," "indelicate," and "indecent" (495). The reasons he gives for the denial, Isabel bitterly sums up in a conversation with Amy, "We are so happy together that we cannot separate even for a fortnight" (498). Actually, Osmond had stated that he had "an ideal of what [his] wife should do and should not do," and he uncompromisingly continued, "She should not travel across Europe alone, in defiance of my deepest desire, to sit at the bedside of other men. . . . We are indissolubly united. . . . We should accept the consequences of our actions" (495).

Although Isabel recognizes a "refinement of egotism" in Osmond's harangue on the propriety of her intentions to go to her dying cousin, she knows that he speaks "in the name of something sacred and precious--the observation of a magnificent form" (496); and, albeit disappointed, she resigns herself to abiding by his wishes "to reserve appearances." No such compunctions rule Amy's existence; so, hoping to dispel Isabel's, she reveals the truth of Pansy's parentage. Amy's revelation that Osmond and Madame Merle are the parents of Pansy, coupled with Isabel's knowledge that Osmond married



her for her money at Madame Merle's urging, finally grant the young woman the liberty her temperament demands, but her conscience forbids.

Reason proves to be Isabel's salvation when she is exposed to evil in the guise of Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle. She measures the extent of a particular difficulty and then copes with it by choosing the least harmful alternative as good. In choosing a husband, for example, she rules out Lord Warburton to avoid the risk of becoming one of Warburton's proprietary items. Caspar Goodwood is passed over to avoid having "to defend herself against a certain air that he had of knowing better what was good for her than she knew herself." She chose Gilbert Osborn because, as a husband, he appeared to be the least threatening of Isabel's suitors. Osmond was "non-demonstrative," not excitable, and always wore "the appearance of "devoted attention." The Portrait of a Lady illustrates how tragically one can be fooled by appearances. Isabel concedes that Osmond had not changed after the two were married. She simply "had not read him right" (393). Osmond subsequently gives Isabel new insight into his character when she hears him exclaim with unstudied quickness, "Are you out of your mind?" (496). What she had suggested at the time was that, if she defied him and went to her dying cousin, her husband would not expect her to return. Shortly thereafter in England, Caspar Goodwood makes Isabel's return to the Palazzo

Roccanera inevitable when, in an effort to persuade her to accept his support, he declares, "We can do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything?" (543).

At the end of The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer returns to her mansion in Rome, not in defeat but in triumph, because she chooses to return. At long last, she has control of herself and thereby of Osmond. James demonstrates in his characterizations of Isabel, Osmond, and Madame Merle the preoccupation with propriety and social placing that was prevalent in the Victorian era. Isabel's acquired ability to adapt to these conventions is a greater victory because it includes Pansy in its wake. Throughout the pages of The Portrait, the young American heiress remains faithful to her ideals. Back in her "office" days, she had considered it to "be detestable to be afraid or ashamed" (48). Isabel knows that to keep herself free of these two conditions she must return to her husband. Having secured "a general impression of life" by the end of the novel, she knows that life is "vacant without some private duty which gathered one's energies to a point" (325). The Portrait of a Lady is the history of a human heart as it responds to duty.

## Notes

- 1 Anthony Trollope, "Progress," in Saint Pauls: A Monthly Magazine, ed. Anthony Trollope (London: Virtue and Company, 1868), p. 712.
- 2 Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native, intro. Warner Taylor (1878; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922), p. 197.
- 3 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Locksley Hall" [1842], in Poetry of the Victorian Period, ed. George Benjamin Woods and Jerome Hamilton Buckley (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, c1955), p. 48.
- 4 Anglo-American Thomas Paine responded to Edmund Burke by writing, The rights of Man (1791, 1792).
- 5 Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, ed. Carol H. Poston (1792; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), p. 6.
- 6 Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, intro. Bernard Rosenthal (1845; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), p. 38.
- 7 Henry James, "The Speech and Manners of American Women," ed. E. S. Riggs, intro. Inez Martinez (Harper's Bazaar, 1906 and 1907; Lancaster, Pa.: Lancaster House Press, 1973), pp. 91-92.
- 8 Henry James Letters, 1875-1883, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), II, 321.
- 9 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, Afterword, Oscar Cargill (1881; New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 28; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 10 Henry James, The Notebooks, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 25.
- 11 The American Transcendentalists, ed. Perry Miller (Doubleday, 1957; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981), p. 101.



## Chapter 2. The Golden Bowl (1904):

### A Conventional Charlotte Stant

#### I

Henry James's sensitivity to the emotional and psychological needs of women in many of his novels and novellas is easily discernible, but he seems not to have used his writing specifically as a vehicle to discuss the status of women in the nineteenth century until he wrote The Bostonians, which followed The Portrait of a Lady by some five years. In both The Portrait and The Bostonians, James clearly depicted his female protagonists as being captured by their respective spouses. In the earlier novel, Isabel realizes her state of captivity after her marriage to Gilbert Osmond, which the young heiress had believed would lead her to "the high places of happiness." In the later novel, James revealed a lesson had been learned from Isabel's shattering marital experience when he ended The Bostonians with the implication that marriage led rather to the low places of tragedy. After James rewards his hero with the hand of the heroine in the later novel, the narrator observes that tears are falling beneath the hood that covers Verena Tarrant's face and comments, "It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these [tears] were not the last that

she was destined to shed."<sup>1</sup>

The publication of The Golden Bowl in 1904 revealed an author involved in experimenting with the possibilities for painting life in a novel form. In this novel, the individual uniqueness of his liberty-loving Isabel Archer has been transferred to a woman equally unique and independent, but one not trapped by Victorian conventions. Charlotte Stant's moral fiber may be paradoxically open to interpretation as, like Isabel, she affronts her destiny. Maggie Verver is an important element of the destiny with which Charlotte must deal if she is to find her raison d'être as successfully as did Isabel, whose relationship to her husband had to be resolved to the satisfaction of Isabel's sense of duty to her vows, her respect for Victorian conventions, and her need to preserve appearances.

Charlotte's characterization differs from Isabel's mainly because the former young woman is living in Edwardian England and is not an heiress. Although James could permit Charlotte to say that "the position of a single woman to-day is very favourable, you know" (66)<sup>2</sup>, how favorable was in direct proportion to a single woman's personal command of wealth. It had been on behalf of single women, spinsters and widows, that Queen Victoria had sanctioned Women's Rights; she believed that the woman without a husband, father, or brother to protect her was unfairly vulnerable. Charlotte Stant has no family and manages on a small income because her beauty, intelligence, and charm afford her opportunities to visit at

the homes of wealthy friends. One such friend is Maggie Verver, a "young girl with a million a year," whose widower father eventually marries Charlotte. Both of these young women are dedicated to the proposition to do "the best for one's self one can--without injury to others" (67), which leads to an involved competition.

The controlling principle for the structure of The Golden Bowl is the Jamesian idea that fiction is an organic form, "that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts."<sup>3</sup> The organic structure of this novel is enlivened with elements of symbolism, rhetorical complexity, and scenic drama. In addition, James introduces his concept of a central intelligence, a "consciousness" behind the surface drama that observes human experience objectively while it stands outside the experience in order to watch it being experienced. By focusing on two agents, one at a time, James creates a compositional center of intelligence from which the two-fold drama of the novel unfolds around a single attraction, a crystal drinking-vessel that has been dipped in gold.

The principal characters in the novel are widower Adam Verver, an immeasurably wealthy American businessman and avid collector of fine and rare objects; Adam's only offspring Maggie; an Italian Prince Amerigo, whose family line is so illustrious that the British Museum has "a whole immense room . . . filled with books written about his family alone" (82); and Charlotte Stant, who loves the Prince who



marries Maggie. James offers a plethora of evidence in the novel to show that the Prince married Maggie for her money in return for giving Maggie a title.

Through the "consciousness" of the Prince in Book I and the "consciousness" of the Princess in Book II, we watch Maggie and Charlotte compete, bargain, and compromise in order to arrive at a solution to their individual psychological and physical needs in respect to the men in their lives. Considering responses to incidents incurred as James exposes Maggie to chance and "the complications of existence" in The Golden Bowl, Maggie displays a strong will and a natural aptitude for arranging the lives of her loved ones to suit her particular design. Ferner Nuhn in "The Enchanted Kingdom of Henry James" noted the possibility of Maggie, "the lovely Princess of the fairy tale," turning into "the bad witch" if she were viewed in the light of her actions in the novel:

For to have done what Maggie has done; to have bought a Prince for a sort of household pet or charm, to think so little of him as a husband that one spends three fourths of one's time with one's father, then to make a further purchase of a female charm or pet for the same menage and deliberately throw the two into each other's company . . . is this not a piece of contriving that opens up . . . the more lurid reaches of the fiendish?<sup>4</sup>

Playing a role in The Golden Bowl comparable to that played by Madame Merle in The Portrait, Maggie contributes a goodly bit to Charlotte's final resolution in her search for an identity. Maggie's manipulative nature actually works to Charlotte's eventual well-being.

The reader's introduction to the golden bowl and its flaw, which symbolically represents Maggie's marriage and the threat that her friend Charlotte poses, comes appropriately through the two individuals whose relationship to one another provides the controversy for the novel. The bowl first appears when the Prince and Charlotte visit an antique shop to buy a wedding present for Charlotte to give to her dear friend Maggie on the occasion of Maggie's impending wedding to the Prince. Although attracted to one another, the Prince and Charlotte previously had ruled out marriage because neither one of them could support the other. It is safe to say, and in no way demeans Charlotte to admit it, that the shopping trip has been calculated by Charlotte to put her in the Prince's path the day before his marriage to Maggie. Charlotte's unexpected arrival from America disconcerts the Prince who wonders, "Has she come with designs upon me?" It seems more likely that this young woman has come to test herself. She keeps her own council, sets the tone of her first meeting with her engaged former lover, and maintains the leadership in their relationship thereafter. The Prince is a very passive character who follows the scent of money and romance, the former taking precedence over the latter at all times.

The golden bowl that Charlotte considers for a wedding present is described by the antique dealer in terms that could apply to the human that Maggie's father has purchased for his daughter to wed. The bowl is cut from a single crystal whose perfection, or lack of it, is obscured by a thin



covering of gold which cannot be scraped off as "it has been too well put on . . . by some very fine old worker and by some beautiful process." This comment, of course, suggests the breeding that is part and parcel of the Prince, the breeding that has evolved over many generations into the veneer which the Ververs find so pleasing and valuable. It is the generations that give the Prince the aesthetic polish that Gilbert Osmond worked to acquire, that Isabel Archer found "exquisite," and that the Ververs spend a fortune to make the person possessing it part of their family. The veneer also is what Charlotte returns from America to assess before the Prince marries another.

Charlotte's competition for the Prince's love is not another woman; it is money. In The Golden Bowl, it is an openly acknowledged fact that the Ververs literally purchase the Prince. James leaves no doubt of the matter. Maggie and her future husband discuss the subject with Maggie showing not the least bit of delicacy for any sensitivity her future husband might have on the subject:

You're . . . a part of his [her father's] collection . . . one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. . . . You're what they call a morceau de musée. (35)

When she remarks to the Prince that the Ververs' more "cum-brous" items are stored in warehouses all over the world while "the smaller pieces" travel with father and daughter in order to make the hotels where they stay and the houses which they



rent more pleasant as residences, the Prince responds in barbed humor that he is pleased to be one of the "smaller" items. That Maggie neither blanches nor laughs at her beloved's comment that suggests his size will keep him out of storage reveals her insensitivity to the feeling of others.

It is Maggie who decides that the Verver threesome--father, daughter, and Prince--should be "grander" yet and wonders if Charlotte Stant should not be invited to visit Adam's household to complement the group. Maggie professes to her father that "Charlotte hasn't a creature in the world really. . . . Only acquaintances who, in all sorts of ways, make use of her, and distant relatives who are so afraid she'll make use of them that they seldom let her look at them" (149). When Adam asks if they will not be "using" Maggie's friend to make them "grander," Maggie has an appropriate answer for her father: "We're old, old friends--we do her good too. I should always, even at the worst--speaking for myself--admire her more than I used her" (149).

Maggie's strategy in having Adam invite the remarkable Charlotte to visit is intended to fend off husband-seeking females that her father may attract once his freedom from parental duties by Maggie's marriage to the Prince becomes known in the outside world. Maggie not only decides that her father must marry, she even decides who it will be. She cleverly arouses Adam's sympathy for Charlotte's lonely life, insinuates a fondness that Charlotte harbors for Maggie's bachelor father, and adroitly enlists Adam's help in finding

"grand" Charlotte a husband to stave off the "waste" that a single Charlotte represents. Although Charlotte's position in society is similar to that of James's Madame Merle, one appreciable difference exists beyond the fact that the actions of one took place in Victorian England and the other takes place in Edwardian England with its dedication to pleasure for pleasure's sake. The author makes it known that Charlotte broke up with the Prince because he would not include marriage in their arrangement. Madame Merle, on the contrary, was reported as not wanting to marry Gilbert Osmond even after his wife's death--Osmond was not as grand a husband as Madame Merle intended to find.

Maggie comes to the upsetting knowledge that the Ververs' "exquisite" mates have minds of their own and emotions unbecoming purchased items when, by chance, she buys the golden bowl that four years before Charlotte and the Prince had admired together. Shortly after selling Maggie the golden bowl, the antique dealer comes to Maggie's home to discuss how he can make amends for having sold Maggie a bowl with a crack. While sitting in Maggie's home, his recognition of Charlotte and the Prince in photographs displayed in the room reminded him of the earlier visit to his shop by the two of them. The antique dealer comments on the incident to an unprepared Maggie. The tell-tale bowl thus becomes a signal to Maggie to arm against the Ververs' respective spouses declaring their freedoms. The vision that the antique dealer leaves with Maggie incongruously leads to more



independence for Charlotte who, though one seemingly able to count her blessings, must have been under great emotional stress trying to avoid the arms of her daughter-in-law's husband, whom James made temptingly available to her.

The royal manner of living that the Ververs afford their respective mates, whose physical attraction to one another could not have survived an impoverished setting, becomes an important aspect of Charlotte's discovery of self in The Golden Bowl. Charlotte's meteoric rise from having all her worldly possessions "in two colossal trunks" to being mistress of three lavish establishments in England alone is due to her charm and intelligence, as well as being in the right place at the right time. Except for a brief interlude at Brighton and the moments spent at the antique shop in London, all action in the novel takes place within the confines of elaborate settings: Eaton Square, Portland Place, Matchem, and Fawns. The first two are London mansions owned by wealthy Adam Verver, the third is the country estate of friends, and the fourth is the country estate of Adam. The latter is described as having eighty rooms. What charm and intelligence have achieved for Charlotte, acquiring and maintaining the proper attitude will retain. James conditions Charlotte to have a proper attitude by portraying her as being amenable to Maggie's lead, which happily leads Charlotte to a position in society that is fully compatible with what we know of Charlotte as a person, as an "unconscious opportunist."

An unpleasant side of Maggie's character comes out one



evening while she watches her family playing bridge and speculates on the power her knowledge of the Prince and Charlotte's indiscretion gives her. Maggie and her husband and Colonel and Fanny Assingham, James's ficelle, are guests of Adam and his young bride. The six have finished dinner and have paired off for an evening of bridge. As is customary when the six spend an evening together, Adam and Fanny pair off opposite the Prince and Charlotte. Princess Maggie and the Colonel forgo inclusion by choice, neither is fond of playing the game. On this particular occasion, while the others play bridge, the Colonel goes off to write letters and the Princess subsides "near a lamp, with the last salmon-coloured French periodical . . . for refreshment" (455). Her mind, however, refuses to focus on the periodical and returns to the facts brought to it by the situation seen round the table of card players. She considers the relations that exist between the players--among themselves and individually to herself:

The fact of her father's wife's lover facing his mistress; the fact of her father sitting, all unsounded and unblinking, between them; the fact of Charlotte keeping it up, keeping up everything across the table, with her husband beside her. . . . herself so speciously eliminated for the hour, but presumably more present to the attention of each than the next card to be played. (456)

Maggie's relationship to her father has unusual aspects. James, as a recorder of history, reflects a nineteenth-century psychological phenomenon in Maggie's preoccupation with her father. The phenomenon was considered by Peter Gay in his discussion of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie's sensual

life. Gay cited the celebrated affair between Mabel Loomis Todd and Austin Dickinson, who was a year younger than Mabel Todd's father, to show an instance of a girl's erotic fantasies about an idealized father being actualized in adulthood. At one point in The Golden Bowl, Maggie refers to the father-daughter relationship as a "marriage." At another, reference is made to Maggie's endearing habit of making her father happy by tendering him an occasional "intimate confidence"; and, following this remark, there is an implication that Maggie's communications with her father are sometimes contrived on the daughter's part--"With her so conscious, so delicately-cultivated scheme of conduct as a daughter, she could make her profit at will" (139).

Maggie has surrendered herself to her husband as a wife is expected to do in conjugal matters; yet, all at the same time, she never gives up her father in the least little way. Maggie's dependence on her father is always pictured as being greater than his on her. When Maggie apologizes for the trouble her move, that is her marriage, has had on her father, he replies, "I guess I don't feel as if you had 'moved' very far. You've only moved next door" (143). Before Adam married Charlotte, Maggie sympathizes with her father's lack of a wife, because "now that [his daughter is] married to someone else [he is] as in consequence, married to nobody"(143). But, now that Adam has married a beautiful and charming young woman, Maggie takes secret pleasure in spoiling it for her father.

As Maggie watches the four playing cards, before she roams

outside to the terrace, she wonders how the group would react if she suddenly destroyed all decorum and shouted what she knew. In her thoughts she considers the power that she holds over the lives of Charlotte and the Prince. She believes that she is holding the two of them in her hands as they are holding cards. But, is she really? If we accept F. R. Leavis's estimation of Adam--that he is the culmination of James's search for a man-character who is distinctively American, one "without the refinements of European culture," one "also without its corruptions," one who represents "energy, uncompromising moral vitality and straight-forward will"<sup>5</sup>--then the question arises, who would Maggie injure the most with her unsought proclamation?

Once out on the terrace, Maggie continues to watch the four playing bridge. She thinks of the group as actors and actresses performing a play, the key to which she holds in her pocket and is able to turn it at will. Maggie's belief in her control over Charlotte is obvious in the chilling cage imagery that Maggie uses in reference to Charlotte. During Maggie's aimless stroll on the terrace, Charlotte leaves the bridge table and joins Maggie. Watching her move, Maggie thinks of her as a "splendid shining supple creature . . . out of a cage" (460) and wonders if there isn't some artful way she [Maggie] can hem her in and secure her before she goes further. As the two young women stand uncomfortably together on the terrace, the narrator reflects on how mutually threatening they are to one another:



The others were absorbed and unconscious, either silent over their game or dropping remarks unheard on the terrace; and it was to her father's quiet face, discernibly expressive of nothing that was in his daughter's mind, that our young woman's attention was most directly given. His wife and his daughter were both closely watching him, and to which of them would he have felt it most important to destroy--for his clutch at the equilibrium--any germ of uneasiness? Not yet, since his marriage had Maggie so sharply and so formidably known her old possession of him as a thing divided and contested. (464)

If we could know to whom Maggie's father and Charlotte's husband would turn first, we would be able to judge his relationship to his daughter and whether his allegiance switched after his marriage to his new wife. Should he turn to his young wife first, Charlotte would have achieved in the motion the stable place in society that hitherto she had lacked because she was a single woman. James's portrayal of Maggie leaves plenty of room for speculation that Adam would have turned first to the quiet and unassuming elegance of his new wife. As he had angrily responded when Charlotte had wondered how Maggie would react to having her father take a wife, "Can't a man be, all his life . . . anything but a father?" (177).

The pathos of a man catering to the whims of a spoiled daughter echoes in Adam's question, which was addressed to Charlotte on the occasion of his proposal. Maggie's high and mighty attitude is seen in her actions as well as in the narrator's descriptive passages, like the one in which we learn of Maggie's offensive posture toward her young stepmother.

The author makes it clear that Maggie demands to be treated with exaggerated deference because of her title. That Maggie includes her friend and stepmother among those who must comply is revealed by Maggie's comments that Charlotte's

inveteracy of never passing first, of not sitting till she was seated, of not interrupting till she appeared to give leave, of not forgetting, too familiarly, that in addition to being important she was also sensitive, had the effect of throwing over their intercourse a kind of silver tissue of decorum. It hung there above them like a canopy of state, a reminder that though the lady-in-waiting was an established favourite, safe in her position, a little queen, however good-natured, was always a little queen and might, with small warning, remember it. (325)

The more James writes about Maggie's ways the more we realize how pleased Adam Verver must be to have married his daughter to someone else and to have graceful Charlotte for a wife. The final scenes in The Golden Bowl give further proof of Maggie's tyrannical nature. While she and the Prince wait for Adam and Charlotte to come for farewells prior to the Ververs sailing for America to establish their permanent residence, the Prince broaches the subject of Charlotte's and his shared indiscretion of which Maggie is aware unbeknownst to Charlotte. The Prince believes that he must "correct" Charlotte's ignorance. The Princess reacts by echoing the Prince's "correct" and haughtily demanding, "Aren't you forgetting who she is?" When the Ververs carriage finally arrives outside, Maggie majestically orders the Prince, "The carriage. Come!" Outside, she orders him to approach the carriage with, "Go!" Later, in reference to her son's appearance to share in



the family's farewells, the Princess remarks to her father, "I 'ordered' him for half past five--which hasn't yet struck" (542).

## II

There is no certain answer in The Golden Bowl as to who outwits whom in the power struggle between Charlotte and Maggie, although the struggle is weighted on the side of the Princess because most of what we know of Maggie's saving her marriage comes from Maggie's Jamesian "consciousness." We never really hear what pleases or displeases Charlotte except through the bias of either the Prince or the Princess. Mrs. Assingham, for instance, says to Maggie in reference to the Ververs going to America to establish their permanent home, "You've done it" (504). In actual fact, the stress on the words might read, "[Now] you've done it." Instead of congratulating Maggie for a job well done, Mrs. Assingham might have intended her remark as a reproof. Moreover, does the Princess "do it," or does Charlotte's superior intelligence strategically determine the resolution to protect her position as mistress of Adam Verver's lavish establishments?

When Dorothea Krook wrote that Maggie's fight for her territory "is informed by intelligence: it fights to win, and uses all the resources of the mind to accomplish its end,"<sup>6</sup> she overlooked the fact that Maggie's success story is related by Maggie. It is probable that much negative criticism of Charlotte could have been avoided had critics, among them F. W. Dupee, recognized that the vision of Charlotte as a



"caged beast" comes out of the distraught imaginings of the jealous Princess. A "caged beast" who is tethered to her husband's will by a silken cord that Adam has attached to a halter that encircles Charlotte's head is how Maggie sees her competition and is not necessarily how either Charlotte or Adam would describe their relationship as a married couple. Of the novel's two parts, the first has the Prince determining our view of everyone and everything and the second has Maggie doing it. We, therefore, know Charlotte and Adam only through the eyes of the Prince and Princess.

Although the Princess solves her marital problems in the end to her apparent satisfaction, she does so at a great personal cost--she banishes her beloved father and his wife to America so as to keep her "pure and perfect crystal" out of Charlotte's reach. Admittedly, Charlotte's reach appears to Maggie to be limitless; but, Charlotte actually reaches for no more than emotional stability and a purpose in life. Reasonably, she first looks for these two in union with the man she loves. She returns to London a few days before the Prince is to marry Maggie; and, within hours of her arrival, Charlotte arranges for the Prince to go on a private shopping jaunt with her to help her select an interesting wedding gift for Maggie. She requests that Maggie not be told of their meeting. All she asks of the Prince is to be with him "for one small hour--or say for two" (93).

Charlotte finally marries for convenience, as did the Prince before her. After her marriage to Adam Verver, she

finds herself constantly in the company of the Prince because the two of them are expected to maintain the social obligations of the Ververs, which Adam and his daughter disdain. Father and daughter prefer to spend their time together alone. At the conclusion of a houseparty which the Prince and Charlotte attend at a country estate without their respective mates (but with the mates' approval) the two Verver consorts take a "larger step altogether" in their relationship by going to inspect the towers of Gloucester rather than returning home on schedule. Charlotte invitingly remarks to the Prince, following reference to the imperfect bowl that the two of them had viewed months before, "Don't you think too much of 'cracks', and aren't you too afraid of them? I risk the cracks" (269).

Charlotte's great physical charm, as inventoried so sensuously by the Prince (58-9), has intelligence to enhance its value to collector Adam Verver. Her invitation to wed Adam follows immediately a scene in which Charlotte accompanies Adam to the home of an art dealer to negotiate for "The Damascene tiles." Here Adam first "exposed her to the north light, the quite properly hard business-light, of the room in which they had been alone with the treasure and its master" (173). On this occasion, Charlotte shows Adam that she possesses both the inimitable "quick mind of discussion" and the awareness of "the right felicity of silence for negotiating successfully. These are important characteristics for Charlotte to display to Adam if she intends to interest him because the lack of them in Adam's first wife had been a source of grief



for him:

He even sometimes wondered what would have become of his intelligence, in the sphere in which it was to learn more and more exclusively to play, if his wife's influence upon it had not been, in the strange scheme of things, so promptly removed. . . . would she have prevented him from ever scaling his vertiginous peak? (123)

Charlotte's marriage to Adam Verver affords her a "Mrs." for identity. This title means more to Charlotte than suddenly possessing great wealth. She responds to Adam's proposal by saying that it would be good for her to marry because she was "so awfully unattached." She further explains:

I should like to be a little less adrift. I should like to have a home. I should like to have an existence. I should like to have a motive for one thing more than another--a motive outside myself. In fact . . . you know, I want to be married. It's --well, it's the condition. (175)

When Adam questions her meaning, Charlotte clarifies her statement by telling him that it is her status that she does not like, that "Miss" is "dreadful--except for a shopgirl."

Charlotte gracefully accepts her responsibilities as the wife of Adam and acquires the behavior to hold her position as the mistress of his homes. James relied on "appearances" to strengthen her position. For one such example, the "prodigious" kiss that Charlotte exacts of Maggie in the garden at Fawns to seal Maggie's hypocritical denial that Maggie knows of any wrong that her stepmother may have done to undermine the relationship of friendship the two women had previously maintained. The beauty of the kiss is its timing.



It comes as Adam and the Prince appear on the terrace, and thus it signals erroneously to the men that all is well on the distaff side of the Verver family. Although Charlotte places the kiss on the cheek of an unresponsive Maggie, Maggie realizes that to the approaching men "Charlotte's embrace of her . . . wasn't to be distinguished . . . from her embrace of Charlotte" (469).

Reading between the lines that James gave to a shallow Prince and a spiteful Princess, James's sympathy for Charlotte and her predicament as a single woman in Edwardian England emerges as the paramount issue in The Golden Bowl. To protect her admittedly selfish interest in Adam her husband, Charlotte--not Maggie, as Maggie's consciousness would have us believe--engineers the ending of the novel, where we find Adam and Charlotte on their way to America to settle permanently. Shortly before, Charlotte had informed Maggie that she planned "to take him [Adam] home--to his real position" (512). She adds that she wants "to have him at last a little to [her-self]" (512). Charlotte states decisively, "I want. . . to keep the man I've married. And to do so, I see, I must act." A telegram in the wife's name announces the departure of the Ververs to the Prince and Princess: "We shall come and ask you for tea at five, if convenient to you. Am wiring the Assinghams to lunch" (525). The precise message leaves no room for doubt that the Ververs have conjoined to resettle in America.

Figuratively speaking, Mrs. Assingham (James's ficelle)

had earlier warned the Prince that Charlotte would do well to remember that her place was in Mr. Verver's "boat." The Prince responded to this suggestion by acknowledging that he, too, belongs in Mr. Verver's boat and then qualifies his assertion by adding:

The "boat" . . . is a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored, if you like, out in the stream. I have to jump out from time to time to stretch my legs, and you'll probably perceive, if you give it your attention, that Charlotte really can't help occasionally doing the same. It isn't even a question, sometimes, of one's getting to the dock--one has to take a header and splash about in the water. . . . We shan't drown, we shan't sink--at least I can answer for myself. Mrs. Verver too moreover--do her the justice--visibly knows how to swim. (208)

The author assures us that "when Charlotte had to make a selection, her selection was always the most effective possible" (203); therefore, when she determines it is to her advantage to remain permanently and publicly in Adam Verver's "boat," she does it with her customary decisiveness--forsaking all sentimental attachments for her immediate past.

At the farewell tea, "in Charlotte's affirmed presence--as Charlotte affirmed it--," Maggie notes the unequivocal union of Mr. and Mrs. Verver in making the momentous occasion easy on the Princess and her spouse. In a "resplendent . . . show of serenity," Charlotte plays her role of Mrs. Adam Verver faultlessly:

. . . she sat and smiled and waited, drank her tea, referred to her husband and remembered her mission. Her mission had quite taken form--it was but another name for the interest of her great opportunity



--that of representing the arts and the graces to a people languishing, afar off, in ignorance. (539)

During the first conversation between the Prince and Charlotte on her return from America for Maggie's wedding, Charlotte tells him that she stayed in her native country as long as was possible without "interests," and continues, "It's the country for interests. . . . If I had only had a few I doubtless wouldn't have left it" (66). There are evidences of William James's pragmatism in Charlotte's character. She learns from her experience, and the knowledge thus learned contributes to her strength of mind as she makes a place for herself in the world in which she chooses to live. Mrs. Assingham explains any insinuated dislike of America on the part of Charlotte by telling the Prince aside that living in America is "hideously dear; she [Charlotte] can't, on her means, begin to live there" (74).

Charlotte's marriage to wealthy American Adam Verver gives her both the "interests" and the "means" to return to her native America to live. At the close of The Golden Bowl, Charlotte's positive control of her destiny leads the Prince to comment to Maggie, "She's making her life" (534). To his comment Maggie adds, "A little by the way then too, while she's about it, she's making ours" (534). Maggie's assessment of the situation compliments her stepmother who has been instrumental in freeing Maggie of her obsessive need to be close to her father. Recent memories prompt Maggie to admit, "It's terrible. . . . I see it's always terrible for women" (534).



One must cheer Maggie's good sense in manipulating the marriage of her father and her friend Charlotte, the beautiful, intelligent, and hardworking young woman. The achievement did not, however, earn her credits from Joseph Firebaugh, who described Maggie as

a heartless Machiavellian absolutist, willing to compromise with her absolutes to gain her selfish ends, willing to build a false world of appearances to conceal the truth about her life, interested primarily in maintenance of ownership.<sup>7</sup>

If the dramatic development of the actions of Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant are viewed as representing two instances of Machiavellian theory in practice, they illustrate quite clearly how the theory, when applied, can lead either to tyrannical rule or to rule that encompasses the bene commune, which is at the heart of Machiavelli's advice in The Prince. Maggie, as ruler, does not presage a comfortable future for James's Prince if we judge from the "pity" and the "dread" that Maggie feels for what she sees in her victim's eyes in the closing scene of The Golden Bowl. Maggie's final thoughts are reminiscent of the tears that James's commentator noticed in the heroine's eyes at the end of The Bostonians. Mark Seltzer has pointed out that "seeing is never innocent in James's fiction."<sup>8</sup>

No tears appear to be in the offing for the Ververs. In many ways, James has patterned Charlotte Stant after his model lady, Isabel Archer, who faces her problems squarely and unflinchingly and reasons out her seemingly tragic marital

situation to arrive at a way of life best suited to her emotional needs in the long run. Isabel and Charlotte want only the freedom to choose among all possible alternatives, and they each willingly accept the responsibilities that accompany the choices. In his discussion of the pressures of reality in the nineteenth century, Peter Gay could have had Isabel and Charlotte in mind when he wrote:

From the larger perspective of the human being, the ego is the true friend of the drives, the great negotiator and compromiser, which induces the individual to give up lesser and riskier pleasures now for greater and safer pleasures later.<sup>9</sup>

Charlotte's identity crisis is solved when she chooses life with Adam Verver, instead of an illicit relationship with her son-in-law. Marriage to a thoughtful and even-tempered man settles the personal issues that most troubled single Charlotte. She will never again be addressed with the dreadful title "Miss." Nor need she longer fear being catalogued "a horrible old-maid." With her marriage Charlotte ends her life of drifting; she has a home, in fact several, and a purpose in life--she and Adam are heading for America to establish a museum to house all the valuables that the Ververs have collected that are now housed in warehouses all over the world. To Charlotte's way of thinking, she is complete. She knows definitely who she is and where she's going and why she is going there.

Aware of the humdrum, stereotypic existence allotted women in his day, James creates an atypical woman in his

character of Charlotte Stant so that this young woman will be able to compete with men for ascendance. By the end of The Golden Bowl, it appears that Charlotte will be an equal business partner with Adam in the Verver enterprise--the museum. Charlotte's cool and quietly calculated approach to defining a viable self is in keeping with F. W. Dupee's statement that James is "simply a special instance of that Machiavellian strain without which the novel of modern society would lack experiential power and so be a mere sermon."<sup>10</sup>



## Notes

- 1 Henry James, The Bostonians: A Novel, intro. Irving Stone (1886; Random House, 1956) p. 464.
- 2 Henry James, The Golden Bowl, with the Author's Preface (1904; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 66; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 3 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction, 1884," in The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James, ed. and intro. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), p. 34.
- 4 Ferner Nuhn, "The Enchanted Kingdom of Henry James," in The Wind Blew From the East (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), pp. 133-34.
- 5 F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949; rpt. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 142.
- 6 Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 255.
- 7 Joseph Firebaugh, "The Ververs," in Essays in Criticism, 4 (October 1954), p. 406.
- 8 Mark Seltzer, Henry James and the Art of Power (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), p. 93.
- 9 Peter Gay, The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud, Vol. I (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), p. 227.
- 10 F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945), p. xvi.

Part II. Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)

Chapter 1. Nostromo (1904):

A Devoted Emilia Gould

I

Following the lead of Henry James's masterful treatment of Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady and of Charlotte Stant in The Golden Bowl, Joseph Conrad revealed in Nostromo's Emilia Gould a deep admiration for women and an awareness of the burden that was women's lot by virtue of their place in a male-dominated society. The key to Conrad's dramatic development of Emilia Gould as an individual in her own right despite Edwardian restrictions on her freedom was clearly presaged in the way that the author handled Charles Gould's proposal of marriage to the youthful Emilia. My interpretation of Emilia's character questions the validity of Clifford Leech's reference to the "withering" of the Gould's "romantic, infertile marriage,"<sup>1</sup> as it likewise questions Dr. Leavis's judgment that pronounced Nostromo's account of the Gould Concession to be the "tragedy of [Charles Gould's] wife."<sup>2</sup>

Clifford Leech and Dr. Leavis are not the only critics who have considered Emilia Gould a tragic figure. Invariably, critics view her to be an angel in distress. One of the few exceptions to this statement is Robert Penn Warren, who

pointed out that Emilia Gould was in no sense victimized by Charles Gould.<sup>3</sup> She shares Charles Gould's life and his dream willingly. On hearing of the death of his father, Charles rushes to Emilia for consolation. He asks the future Mrs. Gould if she loves him enough and has the courage to go far away to Costaguana with him so that he can work the silver mine that is his inheritance. Conrad states her reaction to Charles's proposal simply by saying, "She did. She would" (84).<sup>4</sup> My critical purpose in discussing Emilia's place in Nostromo is not only to invalidate theories that view her as a tragic figure, but also to offer textual evidence to show Emilia's discovery of self through the trials and tribulations of her married life in Costaguana. By learning from experience and adapting to situations beyond her control, Emilia avoided the destructive element that is a basic theme of Conrad's fiction.

The manner in which Mrs. Gould grapples with the destructive element in her life follows a recommendation made by Stein in Lord Jim:

A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavor to do, he drowns. . . . The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.<sup>5</sup>

Ford Madox Ford wrote in a discussion of Conrad's theory of fiction that Conrad was "scrupulous"<sup>6</sup> in the matter of justifying the inevitability in the revelation of a given lead



character's action. Thus, by noting that the youthful Emilia had "the fastidious soul of an experienced woman" (83), the author assured us in his introduction of Emilia that the future Mrs. Gould, for all her outward signs of frailty--"her little feet, little hands, little face attractively overweighted by great coils of hair" (83)--would mature into a well-defined individual.

The perspective from which I view this Tale of a Seaboard celebrates the faith that two young people had in each other and the strength of a joint commitment made to their declared mission in married life. Nostromo's intense revelation of this human relationship hinged on Conrad's "conviction that the world, the temporal world, [rested] on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It [rested] notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity." The faith that Mrs. Gould has in her husband's pursuit of his dream to work the mine that defeated his father and her open-eyed willingness to further the reality of that dream remove any taint of "tragedy" from Emilia's busy and respected life as the wife of the "King of Sulaco." Aside from the idealistic vision that is part of the young couple's dream of working the San Tomé mine is the challenge afforded Charles the professional engineer--that of besting a mine that history has shown to be an impossible venture. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Gould's painting of the San Tomé area in its primitive state is all that remains to remind one of what the area was like before Charles's engineering expertise and Emilia's

social skills combine to develop the Gould Concession into a productive enterprise. Emilia's watercolor captured the magic of a high ravine on the San Tomé mountain where "the thread of a slender waterfall flashed bright and glassy through the dark green of the heavy fronds of tree-ferns" (116). The area in its pristine state is analogous to the Garden of Eden before knowledge destroyed it.

Along with the changes in the terrain of the mine region there are changes in the young Mrs. Gould. She truly becomes more and more a power behind the throne of the "King of Sulaco," as she adapts her emotional needs to those of her husband from whom her thoughts rarely stray. Conrad had for a prototype his own mother who joined her husband in exile and by doing so unquestionably shortened her life. Her family had enough influence in political circles to procure for her a three months' reprieve from exile so that she could travel south and visit about four years before her death. Instead of remaining in the safety of her family where she could receive needed medical attention, Conrad's mother returned to her beloved husband and his unpopular ideology at the end of the three months' leave. She was a young woman in her early thirties when she died. She chose to be an emotionally involved ally of her husband, despite the personal costs; likewise, Mrs. Gould chooses in Nostromo to be an emotionally involved ally of Charles Gould in his dream of working the San Tomé mine productively.

The destructive element that Emilia faces in Nostromo



is her emotional dependence on Charles. She lives for her husband and is motivated only in terms of what will please him. Paradoxically, she achieves emotional independence through Charles Gould's need of her, which is reflected in a number of ways throughout the pages of the novel. Before her marriage, Emilia professes pleasure at sensing in the lovers' conversations that Charles is "the most anxious and deferential of dictators," because the attitude on Charles's part "affirmed her power without detracting from his dignity" (83). Although she is characterized as having a "quick mind" and an "eager intelligence," the narrator almost apologetically assured us that her mind was not masculine but feminine and being such "led her to achieve the conquest of Sulaco, simply by lighting the way for her unselfishness and sympathy" (87).

Mrs. Gould's "unselfishness and sympathy" are invested in Charles's dream and then in "the conquest of Sulaco" as a complement to the dream. When Charles tells Emilia, "The best of my feelings are in your keeping, my dear" (91), he is echoing a fact that the narrator put us privy to when he commented, "Theirs was a successful match" (91). Beginning with Charles's retrieval of his future wife's parasol from the dusty ditch into which it had fallen when he proposed, the two work in concert. Emilia's acceptance of Charles caused the earth to fall away from under her and vanish completely until Charles, "stepping with one foot into a dry and dusty ditch" (84), picks up the open parasol and brings



Emilia back to the reality of devoting her life to Charles and his dream. Conrad, more often than not, depicts women who act on impulse and instinct and fail to reason clearly. Emilia Gould in Nostromo and Lena in Victory represent two notable exceptions. Both of these women reason quite expertly to find a "best self" in the situations into which a love respectively propels them.

Emilia's marriage to Charles Gould, the inheritor of the Gould Concession, makes her the "new mistress of the Casa Gould." It is through the superb performance of her duties as mistress that Emilia earns prestige as an individual. To what extent Emilia values prestige in her definition of self can be read in her reaction to Martin Decoud's remark that Nostromo "looks upon prestige as a sort of investment" (204). Emilia seems to have herself in mind when she replies, "Perhaps he prizes it for its own sake," because she spoke "in a tone as if she were repelling an undeserved aspersion" (204). Emilia, as does Nostromo in a not dissimilar manner, earns her individual prestige through her dedication to others. Although idealism supported Charles and Emilia in their victory over the San Tomé mine, neither of the young couple is ignorant of the dangers underlying the vast riches of the silver mine.

## II

At the time of the Goulds initial meeting, Emilia was living in Italy with an aunt because she was an orphan and had no other immediate family. The aunt is a widowed and

impoverished Marchesa who

led a still, whispering existence, nun-like in her black robes and a white band over the forehead, in a corner of the first floor of an ancient and ruinous palace, whose big, empty halls downstairs sheltered under their painted ceilings the harvests, the fowls, and even the cattle, together with the whole family of the tenant farmer. (81)

From such an environment, Charles takes his bride to Costaguana to live in the Casa Gould that is an old Spanish house, one of the "finest specimens in Sulaco." The dimensions of its largest drawing room were such that they

dwarfed the mixture of heavy, straight-backed Spanish chairs of brown wood with leathern seats, and European furniture, low, and cushioned all over. . . . There were knick-knacks on little tables, mirrors let into the wall above marble consoles, square spaces of carpet under the two groups of armchairs, each presided over by a deep sofa; smaller rugs scattered all over the floor of red tiles; [and] three windows from ceiling to ground [opened] on a balcony. (75)

Mrs. Gould, "sitting in a cloud of muslin and lace before a slender mahogany table" (75), daily observed the English rite of teatime in her opulent drawing room. Emilia's first year of marriage, however, was not spent luxuriously dispensing tea from fine silver and porcelain. The newlyweds spent their first months together charting the course of the rest of their lives in Costaguana.

Charles first found financial backing for his dream of making the Gould Concession a profitable venture. Then the newlyweds headed for Costaguana to find the manpower needed to tame the wilderness that covered the property. With a



man's hat on her head, "her face powdered white like a plaster cast, and wearing a small silk mask during the heat of the day" for protection, Emilia, riding sidesaddle, accompanied Charles and his caravan into the hinterland of Costaguana as her husband recruited workers to help in the revitalization of the Gould Concession. Despite two months of wandering with Charles's caravan under trying conditions that included the danger of being attacked by bandits in the ungoverned territory between estate property lines, young Mrs. Gould showed no signs of fatigue, which the narrator attributed to Emilia's "remarkably stubborn spirit" (103). The author unquestionably endowed Mrs. Gould with this particular characteristic in order to dispel any worry on the reader's part that Emilia would not be up to facing whatever would be required of her as the wife of the powerful administrator of the San Tomé mine.

The "spirit" with which Emilia is endowed suggests further that the author does not intend Emilia to be a tragic figure. He allows her only one brief instance of personal regret in Nostromo. As she consoles Giselle Viola at the death of Nostromo at the end of the novel, the narrator admits that Mrs. Gould revealed "the first and only moments of bitterness in her life" when she says, "I have been loved, too" (461). The fact that Emilia voices the few words in a "severe tone" implies that her words contain a reprimand for Giselle who claimed she had been loved by Nostromo "as no one had ever been loved before" (461). This brief instance



is wholly inadequate as an indication that Emilia is a tragic figure or that the Gould's "infertile" marriage has lost its romance. It is naive and presumptuous to assume that a childless marriage is necessarily unromantic. This episode between Emilia and Giselle after Nostromo's death can reveal no regrets on Emilia's part in giving her life to Charles on his terms if we measure the episode against her more characteristic reaction when she considered the effect of Martin Decoud's death on his betrothed, Antonia Avellanos. On this latter occasion, Emilia queried herself in horror, "What would I have done if Charley had been drowned while we were engaged?" Aloud she cried out, "Antonia will kill herself!" (323).

The betrothed Emilia made a commitment which she faithfully honored after her marriage. It was not just an idle pledge made in the joy of the moment. During the years that the San Tomé mine was not worked, vegetation had grown unrestricted; and Charles and his wife had to take a "tortuous ride through a strip of forest" before they could rein in "their horses [to] gaze" for the first time upon "the jungle-grown solitude of the gorge" (116) and its hidden wealth of silver that together they would be instrumental in developing. Charles's bride did not sit at Casa Gould in Sulaco and listen to her new husband's description of the progress he was making at the silver mine. Mrs. Gould observed the progress from its beginning as she witnessed firsthand "the clearing of the wilderness, the making of the road, [and] the cutting of new paths up the cliff face of

San Tomé" (116-17). For weeks at a time, she actually lived at the construction site with Charles and his workers, Hers was not a casual interest.

Conrad leaves no doubt that Emilia feels as strongly as Charles about making the Gould Concession a success when he writes:

Doña Emilia . . . had watched the erection of the first frame-house put up on the lower mesa for an office and Don Pepe's quarters; she heard with a thrill of thankful emotion the first wagon-load of ore rattle down the then only shoot; she had stood by her husband's side perfectly silent, and gone cold all over with excitement at the instant when the first battery of only fifteen stamps was put in motion for the first time. On the occasion when the fires under the first set of retorts in their shed had glowed far into the night she did not retire to rest on the rough cadre set up for her in the as yet bare frame-house till she had seen the first spongy lump of silver yielded to the hazards of the world by the dark depths of the Gould concession; she had laid her unmercenary hands, with an eagerness that made them tremble, upon the first silver ingot turned out still warm from the mould; and by her imaginative estimate of its power she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle. (117)

The language with which Conrad describes Emilia as she attends the birth of "the first silver ingot turned out" by the Gould Concession reveals an Emilia emotionally tied to her husband's dream.

Doing the task for which each is best-suited by training, Charles and Emilia manage the Gould Concession together. The two are equally and irrevocably involved. During several discussions with his wife, Charles stresses their mutual commit-



ment to his dream. He does not speak in terms of "I," as one might reasonably expect a driven personage to do, but in terms of "we." "What should be perfectly clear to us," he tells Emilia, "is the fact that there is no going back. Where could we begin life afresh? We are in now for all that there is in us" (100). Later, when Emilia worries aloud about the position the two of them hold in the political unrest of Costaguana because of the successfully developed San Tomé mine, Charles reminds her that "there were things to be done. We have done them; we have gone on doing them. There is no going back now. I don't suppose that, even from the first, there was really any possible way back" (193-4). He adds, "We have brought mankind into it [the gorge], and we cannot turn our backs upon them to go and begin a new life elsewhere" (195).

The success of the Goulds' adventure unfortunately includes materialism in its wake, which Charles justifies to Emilia by explaining the good it can do:

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. (100)

The materialism that was created by the vast wealth produced by the San Tomé mine brought a "mire of corruption that was so universal as to almost lose its significance." Through



it all, Emilia trusted that the Goulds' dream would be safe because of her confidence in Charles, who "had struck her imagination from the first by his unsentimentalism, by that very quietude of mind which she had erected in her thought for a sign of perfect competency in the business of living" (73).

Charles's quietude of mind compounds the problem for Emilia of identifying with her role in Charles's life certainly, although not to the point that Albert Guerard was justified in referring to Charles's "desertion of his wife for the mine." On the contrary, the two Goulds had committed themselves to developing the silver mine, and each had a specific part to play in the process. The parts did not parallel one another, they complemented one another. Both parts contributed a necessary portion of the whole. Charles's role demands that he keep the San Tomé mine inviolable, because only that condition keeps Emilia and her interests safe from the corruption and the revolutionary forces that surround her. It should be obvious to any person that Charles cannot run the mine while sitting at Casa Gould with his wife; therefore, he must take whatever time is necessary to run the mine at the mine. The narrator emphasizes the Goulds' interdependence and close relationship, despite physical distance, when he comments:

Their confidential intercourse fell, not in moments of privacy, but precisely in public, when the quick meeting of their glances would comment upon some fresh turn of events. She had gone to his school of uncompromising silence, the only one possible,

since so much that seemed shocking, weird, and grotesques in the working out of their purposes had to be accepted as normal in this country. (161)

Every shipment of silver meant a step closer to the conquest of peace for Sulaco, to which both Charles and Emelia were committed. Charles realizes that his wife is somewhat "disenchanted" with the pattern of their lives; however, he trusts that her rational intelligence will permit her to understand that "his character safeguarded the enterprise of their lives as much as or more than his policy" (145). He recognizes the great power that has been put at his disposal by the extraordinary development of the Gould Concession; but "to feel that prosperity always at the mercy of unintelligent greed had grown irksome to him. To Mrs. Gould it was humiliating" (145).

Charles finally reacts to the revolutionary currents by discreetly supporting the Ribierist party in the land of his choice, Costaguana, because the Ribierist party appeared to be made up of "men of education and integrity." An impressive endorsement of Charles's character--other than his wife's view of him--is that voiced by an emissary of Hernandez who ruled over the region of the Campo. The emissary accosts Charles for his word that Hernandez and his band of followers will be treated fairly if they join the revolutionary forces that are backed by Charles. The emissary underscores Charles's reputation for being just by saying, "It is believed that your soul is so just that a prayer from you would cure the sickness of every beast" (308). Antonia, who

is near, interjects an explanation of the emissary's remark:

It is your character that is the inexhaustible treasure which may save us all yet; your character, Carlos, not your wealth. I entreat you to give this man your word that you will accept any arrangement my uncle may make with their chief. One word. He will want no more. (309)

Antonia's uncle is Father Corbelán, "the Grand vicar of the cathedral," a "fierce converter of savage Indians out of the wilds" who has chosen to work for the Ribierist cause (179). Armed with the nature of his calling, a political conviction, and personal courage, this missionary has become an important factor in persuading Hernandez and his powerful band to support the forces favored by the master of the mine. Charles, "with only a short hesitation, pronounced the required pledge" (309), and Charles saves the silver mine with the help of Hernandez and his former bandits.

When one realizes the numerous people who became dependent on the Goulds' silver mine, it is easier to acknowledge that Emilia's share of Charles's time had to be restricted by the duties imposed upon him as Administrator of a flourishing enterprise. At the very least, three villages of miners and their families looked to the San Tomé mine for a livelihood. These were all new villages, built in the depth of the gorge to house the families that flocked to the mine for work. Charles Gould's exemplary management of the Gould concession earned him the respect and the allegiance of those who worked his mine. When his life was threatened by revolutionist Pedrito Montero, the miners and their wives march on



Sulaco to save the Administrator who has treated them so justly. Charles becomes the symbol of stability on the "shifting ground of revolution" to seemingly everyone; however, it is his wife's welfare that worries him when trouble arises.

When Charles is interrogated by the revolutionist Montero, he states that "he would never surrender [the mine] alive," and asks, "Once dead, where [is] the power capable of resuscitating such an enterprise in all its vigour and wealth out of the ashes and ruin of destruction?" (340). Preliminary to the interrogation, Charles had enlisted Don Pepe, his overseer at the mine, to defend the gorge at the approach of an army just long enough to give Don Pepe the time needed to "destroy scientifically the whole plant, buildings, and workshops of the mine with heavy charges of dynamite; block with ruins the main tunnel, break down the pathways, blow up the dam of water-power" (338). These heroics on Charles's part are admittedly performed for the sake of Mrs. Gould. Charles is confident that the threat of shattering "the famous Gould Concession into fragments" represents his best way to protect his wife.

As soon as Montero releases Charles from custody, Charles returns home to Casa Gould. There he is greeted by an anxious Dr. Monygham who declares, "You are back at last! . . . I have been telling Mrs. Gould that you were perfectly safe, but I was not by any means certain that the fellow would have let you go" (344). With his eyes on the watercolor of the San Tomé gorge that Emilia had painted when the two of them had

visited the mountain in the first year of their marriage, Charles explains to the doctor that he had tried to make Montero see that the silver mine's continued existence was related closely to Charles Gould's personal safety. When Dr. Monygham asks if the revolutionist Montero believed him, Charles answers, "God knows! . . . I owed it to my wife to say that much" (344).

The first consignment of San Tomé silver for shipment to San Francisco is conveyed down the mountainside with the young Emilia in attendance. It marks the end of a year of "camp life" for her and the beginning of her role as the mistress of Casa Gould in earnest. The narrator of Nostromo tells us that, after a year of commuting between the silver mine and Sulaco, Mrs. Gould settled permanently in her town-house, "as was proper and even necessary for the wife of the administrator of such an important institution as the San Tomé mine" (119).

### III

After settling in her town-house, Emilia's only contact with the silver escort is from the balcony of her old Spanish house. She always arose on convoy days in time to flash a smile at her passing husband as he led the silver convoy on its way to the harbor. The San Tomé mine becomes "a rally-point for everything in the province that needed order and stability" and Mrs. Gould's large drawing room becomes its unofficial headquarters. Eventually, as she gains more experience in the art of living, she defines herself by what

she can do for others. She touches and influences almost every character in Nostromo. She serves as Charles's intermediary with the social and political worlds beyond the San Tomé silver mine.

Mrs. Gould understandably has moments when she fears the power of the mine, such as when she imagines that

the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver-bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers, and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration. (205)

Emilia's apparent dissatisfaction with her lot, however, is momentary and quickly mollified when she concludes, "Those poor people!" Decoud reminds Mrs. Gould of her responsibilities when he approaches her to seek her help in persuading her husband to back Decoud's plan to separate the Occidental Province from the rest of the Republic of Costaguana. He argues successfully by saying, "Think . . . of all that population which you and your husband have brought into the rocky gorge of San Tomé. Are you not responsible to your conscience for all these people? Is it not worth while to make another effort?" (201). Faced with the reality of what Decoud pronounces, Emilia nods her assent. Charles subsequently backs Decoud's plan.

Mrs. Gould's relationship to Dr. Monygham is that of benefactress; in return, the doctor worships Mrs. Gould.



She was above noticing his deformities of body and spirit. She recognizes only his ability to help the sick. She has a "humanizing influence" on the bitter man, who shows his respect for her by wearing a jacket when he calls at Casa Gould. The State Hospitals become a charge of the Gould Concession, and Dr. Monygham is chosen to head them. His other titles by the end of the novel include Official Adviser on Sanitation to the Municipality and Chief Medical Officer of the San Tomé Consolidated Mines and its extensive holdings of copper, lead, silver, and cobalt. The doctor becomes a very important person under the authority of the Gould Concession; yet, he turns to Mrs. Gould, not to its Administrator, when trouble is in the offing. Dr. Monygham started to give the news of Decoud's drowning and the loss of the shipment of silver that Decoud and Nostromo had been charged with saving to Charles, but decided instead that Mrs. Gould was the one who should be told the bad news first.

To Nostromo, Emilia Gould is the one incorruptible person that he knows who will listen to his death-bed confession with compassionate understanding. As he lay dying in the first-aid station near the harbor from a bullet wound that was intended for another, Nostromo requests Dr. Monygham to bring Mrs. Gould to him. He expects Mrs. Gould to honor his request even though the hour is late because he had "done something to keep a roof over her head" (458). The doctor can barely conceal the excitement he feels at the prospect that Nostromo is going to tell Mrs. Gould the secret of the missing

silver. Emilia dreads what she may hear; but, "full of endurance and compassion," she goes to Nostromo. He tells her about the four missing ingots and asks how he could have returned the silver with the four missing from the shipment. He asks, "Señora, shall I tell you where the treasure is? To you alone . . . Shining! Incorruptible!" "No, Capataz," Mrs. Gould responds unhesitatingly, "No one misses it now. Let it be lost forever" (460). Emilia's decision not only saves Nostromo's reputation, but it also averts a riot that the exposed silver ingots would have created. She has acted, albeit unwittingly, in accordance with her husband's thoughts on the lost silver.

Mrs. Gould's philosophy touched many lives. Her charm included the "merest ghost of a smile, a habitual movement with her, which was very fascinating to men by something subtly devoted, finely self-forgetful in its lively readiness of attention" (156). One word from Emilia to a railroad magnate saved the home of Giorgio Viola for as long as the Violas lived in it. The home was on land purchased by the railroad. On several occasions, Emilia had taken the Viola daughters into her home, once for an extended stay.

Although Emilia criticizes the material interests that keep Charles at the mine, material interests seem to share with good works the task of keeping Emilia occupied in her husband's absence and of providing her with a well-defined character. She is especially fond of the old Spanish house in Sulaco which the Goulds have occupied all of their married



life:

Mrs. Gould loved the patio of her Spanish house. A broad flight of stone steps was overlooked silently from a niche in the wall by a Madonna in blue robes with the crowned child sitting on her arm. Subdued voices ascended in the early mornings from the paved well of the quadrangle, with the stamping of horses and mules led out in pairs to drink at the cistern. . . . Barefooted servants passed to and fro, issuing from dark, low doorways below; two laundry girls with baskets of washed linen; the baker with the tray of bread made for the day; Leonarda--her own camerista--bearing high up . . . a bunch of starched underskirts dazzlingly white in the slant of sunshine. Then the old porter would hobble in, sweeping the flagstones, and the house was ready for the day. (88)

Besides the old Spanish house, which is described by the author in varying degrees of detail a number of times, there are clothes and jewelry. In one scene with Charles, "her train swished softly after her on the red tiles" (194), and "the stones in the rings upon her hand pressed to her forehead glittered in the lamplight" (195). Later in another scene, the narrator tells us that "Mrs. Gould, with a look upwards, dropped wearily on her lap her white hands with the gold and stones of many rings" (422). Toward the end of the novel, Conrad writes:

With a measured swish of her long train, flashing with jewels and the shimmer of silk, her delicate head bowed as if under the weight of a mass of fair hair, in which the silver threads were lost, the "first lady of Sulaco" . . . moved along the lighted corridor, wealthy beyond great dreams of wealth, considered, loved, respected, honoured, and as solitary as any human being had ever been, perhaps, on this earth. (457)

In a number of ways Emilia's characteristics remind one



of those belonging to Nostromo. Both have tremendous amounts of energy that need to be spent in action. Both are gregarious. Emilia's "starved loneliness," for example, is most marked just after her return from an eleven-month trip to England with her husband and immediately after a festive evening party at her beloved old Spanish home. Both dress to be noticed favorably, Mrs. Gould in swishy silk and spectacular jewelry and Nostromo as the following passage relates:

When the carriage moved on he took off his hat again, a grey sombrero with a silver cord and tassels. The bright colours of a Mexican serape twisted on the cantle, the enormous silver buttons on the embroidered leather jacket, the row of tiny silver buttons down the seam of the trousers, the snowy linen, a silk sash with embroidered ends, the silver plates on headstall and saddle, proclaimed the unapproachable style of the famous Capataz de Cargadores--a Mediterranean sailor. (131)

The great challenge of bringing a better life to the people of Sulaco concludes for Emilia much like a great challenge for Nostromo concludes for him. Young Emilia accepts Charles Gould's proposal of marriage and agrees without reservations to join him in bringing the San Tomé silver mine back to life. The idealistic young Goulds truly believed that a working silver mine would naturally lead to a permanent peace for Sulaco and an end to the political unrest that had ravaged the countryside for generations. Eventually, however, a disillusioned Mrs. Gould is forced to admit that "there was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea" (431). Nostromo lives a life based on the "assumption of unbroken

fidelity, rectitude, and courage." He is acknowledged to be "one in a thousand." When he is asked to save the shipment of silver that has been stored in Sulaco by sailing it across the gulf to a small port out of Costaguana territory in order to keep it from getting into the hands of the revolutionists, he accepts the dangerous mission. He had been commandeered for the task mainly because he could be trusted to succeed. As it turns out, the lighter with its cargo of silver is lost. Nostromo, on returning to Sulaco after his failure and expecting to hear how devastating is the loss of the silver ingots, hears only that the loss is unimportant. Nostromo is disillusioned because he has risked his life and his valuable reputation for nothing.

Had Nostromo heard Charles Gould's explanation of why the lost silver did not matter, he would have been less hurt perhaps. The explanation was offered to his wife and Dr. Monygham and probably influenced Emilia's later decision not to listen to the revelation of the silver ingots' hiding place when Nostromo attempted to tell her. Charles states flatly that the silver is gone and then continues

and I am glad of it. It would have been an immediate and strong temptation. The scramble for that visible plunder would have precipitated a disastrous ending. I would have had to defend it, too. I am glad we've removed it--even if it is lost. It would have been a danger and a curse. (346)

The comparison between Mrs. Gould and Nostromo, despite their obviously dissimilar backgrounds, gives credence to F. R. Leavis's conclusion on reviewing Nostromo that "for



all the rich variety of the interest and the tightness of the pattern, the reverberation of Nostromo has something hollow about it; with the colour and life there is a suggestion of a certain emptiness."<sup>7</sup> Without a doubt, the emptiness comes from the feeling that Conrad gives us that Mrs. Gould and Nostromo each have a self-image that is overwhelmed by an attachment to one other special person. For Mrs. Gould, it is her husband; for Nostromo, it is Giselle. Nostromo's reaction to having tried to save silver ingots that were considered well-lost parallels that of Emilia whose "long career of well-doing [is] touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic" (430).

Leavis points out that emptiness is stressed when Emilia reflects "that for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present" (430). Emilia's reflection, it can be suggested, also justifies a restless individual's fulfillment with something less than perfection. Her reflection continues, "Our daily work must be done to the glory of the dead and for the good of those who come after" (430). In other words, immediate gratification is not a necessary element of a rewarding life.

Toward the end of Nostromo Mrs. Gould holds a vigil to sort out her thoughts, as did Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady. She contemplates her relationship to Charles and what her life has become. She knows now that her husband is



"incorrigible in his devotion to the great silver mine . . . Incorrigible in his hard, determined service of the material interests to which he had pinned his faith in the triumph of order and justice" (431). Mrs. Gould recognizes that Charles is "perfect--perfect. What more could she have expected?" She knows that her husband laid all the cards on the table when he proposed. In her musings, she imagines

the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo . . . ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect; but she would never have him to herself. Never; not for one short hour altogether by herself in this old Spanish house she loved so well! . . . An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal life, of love, of work. (431)

Granted, Mrs. Gould shows weariness at times, but her vigil also reveals her to be honest with herself and capable of facing her role as wife of the busy Administrator of the Gould Concession. Her discontent stems entirely from the lack of attention her husband affords her. "Material interests" are an irritant mainly because they take her beloved Charles away from her. By reaching out to others, as she has done in the past, one feels optimistic that Conrad intends Mrs. Gould to make peace with the solitude that the inattentiveness of Charles offers her. In fact, she rebounds from her gloomy vigil the very day after it took place when Dr. Monygham says, "You are needed." Emilia immediately accompanies the doctor to give comfort to the dying Nostromo.

The virtue of patience sustains the devoted Mrs. Gould through moments of loneliness. As Conrad recommends in the beginning of Nostromo, "Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates" (86). The manner in which Emilia immediately goes to the dying Nostromo when she is told that he needs her indicates that Emilia defines self in action. "Shining! Incorruptible!" (460), the tragedy of the wife of Charles Gould is in Emilia's keeping.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Leech, "The Shaping of Time," in Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt, ed. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London: Methuen & Co., 1968), p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948; New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Penn Warren, Introduction, in Nostromo, by Joseph Conrad (New York: Modern Library, 1951), xxii.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Conrad, Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard, ed. Martin Seymour-Smith (England, 1904; New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 84; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, Afterword, Murray Krieger (Great Britain, 1900; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1981), p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> Ford Madox Ford, "Conrad on the Theory of Fiction," in Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Marvin Mudrick (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> Leavis, p. 200.



## Chapter 2. Victory (1915):

### A Loyal Lena

#### I

The dramatic development of the character of Lena in Joseph Conrad's Victory reveals an author who is "peculiarly alive to" the times in which he lived and "sensitive to the stresses of the changing spiritual climate as [the stresses began] to be registered by the most conscious."<sup>1</sup> Unlike Isabel Archer, Lena has neither money nor family; unlike Charlotte Stant, she seemingly has no friends until Axel Heyst becomes one; and unlike Emilia Gould, she has neither husband to protect her womanly virtues nor any motivation in life beyond surviving. To say that Lena has no family, of course, is not exactly correct, because she does have a father in a home for incurables somewhere in England; however, for all practical purposes, it is safe to say that Lena had no one in the world to give her "moral support" until lonely Axel Heyst befriended her.

At one of their meetings, Lena relates her shabby beginnings to the interested Heyst. She tells him that she had been almost "a child of the streets" (64)<sup>2</sup>, her mother having deserted her when she was little. Her father then raised her with the help of the landladies who managed the various poor

lodging-houses in which the father and daughter lived together. Her father had supported the two of them by playing in the orchestras of small theaters until he suffered a paralytic stroke during a performance. Her father being permanently disabled, the young girl left him in the home for incurables and headed out into the world to fend for herself. Her assets include seven shillings, three pence and a train ticket and an ability to play the violin. Presumably, the train ticket took her to a location where at some point she was hired to play the violin with the traveling Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra. When Conrad introduces us to her in Sourabaya, she is beset by three unattractive people, two men who covet her and one woman who maltreats her.

Although she tells Heyst that "there's nothing so lonely in the world as a girl who has got to look after herself," her aloneness cannot match that of Heyst before he meets her. He was alone by deliberate choice. He had made the choice after the death of his disillusioned father who had taught young Axel to distrust life and to pass "through [it] without suffering and almost without a single care in the world" by drifting and never "catching on to anything." Young Heyst had never known his mother. He had left school at the age of eighteen and had become the companion of his unhappy father in a large house in a London suburb, until the father had died three years later. Thereupon, the orphaned young man set his life's course by declaring he would "drift." He had asked his father for guidance and the father had responded

by suggesting that the absence of something in which to believe, particularly in respect to flesh and blood, was protected by cultivating "that form of contempt which is called pity" (142).

Pity first attracted Heyst to Lena. He previously had been drawn to Morrison, the owner and master of a trading brig, for much the same reason and with equally trying results for the man who had spent his adult life avoiding involvement. A telling flaw in Heyst's commitment to his father's negative philosophy, contrary to the conviction of Douglas Hewitt that Heyst had no flaws,<sup>3</sup> was the fact that the young Heyst drifted away from familiar surroundings when circumstances required him to look out for himself. The flaw, however, surfaced in good time, as it did in James's Golden Bowl, to change irreversibly the lives touched by Axel Heyst. A spontaneous reaching out to a seemingly troubled individual, first Morrison and then Lena, caught a willing Heyst in a web of consequences that ordered his remaining days on earth. His troubles arose not because he offered a helping hand to one in need, but because he did not leave well enough alone after the initial contact.

Meeting Morrison on a street of Delli, "a highly pestilential place" in Timor, Heyst suggests that the two men have a drink together out of the heat of the sun. Morrison is in a frantic state of mind because his brig has been taken over by the Portuguese authorities until Morrison is able to pay a fine. Morrison confides to Heyst that the fine has been



levied so that a competitor who is in league with the Portuguese authorities can purchase Morrison's brig for a song, "a line of a song," when the master of the brig cannot pay the fine two days hence. Morrison reputedly extends credit to his island customers beyond the point allowed by sound business practices; therefore, he lacks the wherewithal to redeem his brig. Hearing this fact from Morrison, Heyst responds without any hesitation, "Oh! If that's the case I would be very happy if you'd allow me to be of use!" (12). He faces the nonplussed reaction of the master of the brig with, "I can lend you the amount."

The fine paid and the brig once more under the grateful Morrison's command, the master of the redeemed brig offers a berth on it and a share of its earnings to Heyst to the extent of the debt, "a sum which was in itself so insignificant that any other person than Heyst would have exclaimed at it. And even Heyst could hardly keep incredulity out of his politely modulated voice" (11) when he inquired if Morrison lacked the money. The status of Heyst as an unattached wanderer amongst the islands of the South Pacific put him in the position of being able to accept the berth on the Capricorn. The narrator of Victory noted that it was characteristic of Heyst to have consented "to almost any arrangement in order to put an end to the harrowing scene in the cabin" of the brig, where Morrison was smothering Heyst with a grateful man's embarrassingly effusive thanks. Thus, Heyst begins a relationship, an attachment, that unwittingly places him back

in touch with a world he had tried to avoid. Had he truly been his father's son, he coolly would have instructed his friend Morrison to repay the debt through the Tesmans, who manage the financial affairs of Heyst, and then Heyst would have made an unhurried but positive retreat back to "drifting."

Instead of retreat, Heyst sails aboard the Capricorn with Morrison and joins, apparently wholeheartedly, in the master's dream of mining for coal at Samburan, an isolated island in the South Pacific. This adventure opens a new world for Heyst in which he becomes "concrete" and "visible," once again defying his father's admonishment, "Look on--make no sound" (142). When Morrison died unexpectedly in England, where he had traveled to further their coal interests, Heyst carried on alone. For two years Heyst managed the Tropical Belt Coal Company until the company was forced into liquidation. At its beginning, Heyst had had enough confidence in the permanent success of the coal company that he had sent from England furnishings for the bungalow that he occupied on the island Samburan. When the enterprise failed, he continued to reside in the home he had created with "a lot of books, some chairs and tables, his father's portrait in oils . . . [and] a lot of small objects, such as candlesticks, inkstands, and statuettes from his father's study" (144). Although Heyst is disenchanted with life as a whole, he enjoys the enchantment of the islands and plans to remain there forever, and the narrator tells us why:

Where could he have gone after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact--not such a remote one, after all--he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. (54)

Heyst's inconstant reactions to the teachings of his father leads C. B. Cox to comment that Victory includes "some of the best and some of the worst of Conrad's writing":

The best is seen in the depiction of Heyst, whose philosophy of stoical non-involvement is shown in typical Conradian fashion as temptingly attractive and yet ultimately suicidal. The worst is reflected . . . in the mushy sentimentality which surrounds Lena, the girl from the obnoxious Zangiacomo's travelling orchestra, with whom Heyst falls in love.<sup>4</sup>

Cox agrees with Albert Guerard's criticism of the "melodramatic and turgid elements" in Victory.<sup>5</sup> F. R. Leavis singles out the "fascinatingly complex portrait" of Heyst and notes that it reveals

the characteristic Conradian sensibility . . . that of the writer so intimately experienced in the strains and starvations of the isolated consciousness, and so deeply aware of the senses in which reality is social, something established and sustained in a kind of collaboration.<sup>6</sup>

## II

As he did in his relationship with Morrison, Heyst made the first move in the relationship that he forms with Lena. He is staying at a hotel run by a certain Schomberg while he



transacts personal business with the Tesmans. Being obliged to wait a few days for the boat to carry him back to the solitude of his island home, he enters Schomberg's concert-hall in order to view firsthand Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra that had been engaged by Schomberg to entertain his guests. Despite the rasping noises produced by the eighteen members of the orchestra, Heyst stays to listen, possibly because he "felt a sudden pity for these beings, exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace . . . [and fated to] cheerless dependence" (57). It is during the intermission when all but two of the performers had left the platform that Heyst notices "A girl, by Jove!" among the group.

The girl is Lena; although, actually she is called by the name of Alma until Heyst changes it to Lena. The significance of her names has been studied by Lee M. Whitehead, who reports in English Language Notes that "Alma," her first name, may signify "spirit" or "soul" after the Latin meaning of the word.<sup>7</sup> George Reinecke furthers the explanation by reminding us that "Alma is commonly applied to the Virgin in Latin hymns with the sense of "kind, fostering, loving."<sup>8</sup> Judging from the girl's role in Victory, the most reasonable explanation to apply to Conrad's "Alma" is the OED definition that refers to "Alm" as an Arabic term for a dancing girl. Whitehead's quotation from Zell's Popular Encyclopedia of 1870 comes close to a blueprint for the Alma we meet in the novel:

Alma--the name given by the modern Egyptians and

and Arabs to the dancing and singing girls of Egypt. They form a particular class or society, living together in bands, who are distributed in the various towns, or travel about the country in quest of employment. The girls who are admitted into this society have generally a fine voice. But they chiefly excel in pantomimic dances, which represent the various incidents of life, above all, the passion of love. . . . The indecency of their attitudes is excessive. . . . Their morals are as licentious as their songs; they are, in fact, the common courtesans of the country.

The name "Lena" is the choice of Heyst. It is the diminutive of "Helen," the eternal woman, as well as of "Magdalen," one of Lena's former names. "Magdalen," by tradition, was a harlot who was saved from stoning by Jesus. Bernard Meyer notes in his biography of Conrad that "Lena" could be the diminutive of the name of Conrad's mother, which was Evelina.<sup>10</sup> "Magdalen," of course, is most appropriate in view of the role played by the young girl in Victory.

It is not Alma's past that will change Heyst's life; it is Lena's future. Heyst is overwhelmed when he notices the young girl violinist for the first time:

She had captured Heyst's awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings. (58)

Heyst is troubled by the fact that his cultivated ability to see "life outside of the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness" deserts him; nevertheless, he decides to



rescue the girl violinist. Although he can not afford to buy out Lena's contract with Zangiacomo, he encourages her by optimistically telling her that he can "steal" her. Restless and unable to sleep the evening of that declaration, Heyst paces in the yard of the hotel where, by chance, he meets an equally restless Lena who asks him if he meant what he had said earlier. Convinced of his sincerity, Lena sighs and admits she knew that everything would be all right the moment he first spoke to her:

Yes, indeed, I knew directly you came up to me that evening. I knew it would be all right, if you only cared to make it so; but of course I could not tell if you meant it. "command me," you said. Funny thing for a man like you to say. Did you really mean it? You weren't making fun of me? . . . You'll never be sorry. Listen--I'm not twenty yet. It's the truth, and I can't be so bad looking, or else--I will tell you straight that I have been worried and pestered by fellows like this before. I don't know what comes to them-- (69)

Lena is referring to the hotelkeeper Schomberg and his unwanted attentions, but the attitude of Lena and the thought of Schomberg or any of the unknown men in Lena's past life momentarily repulses Heyst. Pity, however, resumes its hold on Heyst's emotions; and Lena's arguments, such as she would have no reason to live if Heyst deserts her, settle the dilemma that Heyst faces:

Don't you throw me over now. . . . If you did, what should I do? I should have to live, to be sure, because I'd be afraid to kill myself; but you would have done a thousand times worse than killing a body. You told me you had been always alone, you had never had a dog even. Well, then, I won't be



in anyone's way if I live with you--not even a dog's. (70)

Recalling how he had paired the young, unattached girl with Heyst, "the man of universal detachment," Conrad wrote some six years after the fact:

I felt that she would be heroically equal to every demand of the risky future. I was so convinced of it that I let her go with Heyst, I won't say without a pang but certainly without misgivings. And in view of her triumphant end what more could I have done for her rehabilitation and her happiness?<sup>11</sup>

Did Conrad design the character of Lena to be a vehicle for testing the stamina demanded of a lone and penniless woman living in the early 1900's? Another possibility for the character's design is that Conrad wants to point out in the novel, at least to a reading public, the potentially destructive force inherent in man's need of woman. Neither is an unlikely theory; furthermore, neither is mutually exclusive. In the words of the narrator, "It was the man who had broken the silence, but it was the woman who led the way" (290). The interactions of this man and this woman create an atmosphere in Victory that earns the novel classical standing in the estimation of Leavis:

Among those of Conrad's works which deserve to be current as representing his claim to classical standing; and of the novels (as distinguished from nouvelles and tales) in that class it is the one that answers most clearly to the stock notion of genius.<sup>12</sup>

A by-product of Leavis's reasoning is Conrad's classic portrayal of Lena, the young heroine of Victory, whose dramatic search for an identity proves to be ill-fated. Although seemingly marked by the author to evoke in the reader a sense of Eve, she differs from both our Original Mother and the Eve of Milton's Paradise Lost by virtue of the fact that Lena does not entice Conrad's Adam (Heyst) in order to have some one with whom to share her guilt. Lena knows that she is "a fiddle-scrapping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy" (290). Despite her past, she intends "to rise above herself, triumphant and humble"; at which point, Lena fully expects a torrential outpouring of "happiness" to fling "at her feet the man whom she loved" (290).

Whether the man who will afford Lena her envisioned happiness is to play the part of sacrificial lamb or adoring master cannot be surmised unequivocally from the text of Victory. If all of the author's barbed references to women in general are accepted at face value, then Heyst becomes an innocent sacrifice for Lena's goal. If, however, we take the events that go hand in hand with the comments, then the text of the novel becomes a sympathetic exposure of women's unfortunate status in the early 1900's.

It is on Heyst's first visit to the "concert-hall" of Schomberg that this "unconcerned spectator" notices Lena jump when the wife of the leader of the orchestra pinches the young girl to urge her to move more quickly to join the patrons of the concert-hall during intermission. Lena's voice



seduces a vulnerable Heyst because of its amazing quality:

It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune. . . .

[Its warmth] found its way into Heyst's heart. His mind, cool, alert, watched it sink there with a sort of vague concern at the absurdity of the occupation, till it rested at the bottom, deep down, where our unexpressed longings lie. (61)

Lena's bright smile beguiles Heyst, even though it is disconcertingly automatic. One evening after their first meeting, Lena again comes to Heyst's table during intermission; and, when she gets up to return to her place on the platform, Heyst recommends that Lena smile as she walks away from the table where the two of them have been sitting together, lest jealous eyes discern any relationship but a casual one between the man and woman. She obeys Heyst with "unexpected readiness" and

the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him; and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience. (66)

Heyst admits to the power of Lena's voice to captivate him when he answers her question, "What could I ever talk to you about?" with, "Don't let it trouble you. Your voice is enough. I am in love with it, whatever it says" (73). As



for her smile, it was too charming and too fascinating to trouble Heyst long because of its readiness. He, unreservedly, confesses to his new acquaintance that her smile astonished him, "It went as straight to my heart as though you had smiled for the purpose of dazzling me. I felt as if I had never seen a smile before in my life" (73). Then he continues, "If you had not smiled as you did, perhaps I should not have come out here tonight. . . . It was your triumph" (73).

Lena's bewitching smile had cause Heyst to be "restless" and unable to sleep; so, he wanders out into the yard of the hotel where he, by chance, meets Lena, who is also unable to sleep. He comforts her and assures her of the sincerity of his offer to help her resolve her unhappy situation at Schomberg's hotel in Sourabaya. When the two part company that night, Heyst returns to his room and tosses and turns for the remainder of the night. Needless to say, this man who prided himself on avoiding commitment wonders at the unsettled state of his mind that the voice and smile of Lena have induced. He decides, "What must be must be" (74). A return of sunlight to his room rouses Heyst, and he gets up and examines his face in a small mirror that is hanging on the wall of the room. Certain that his outward appearance must have changed during a night of such inner turmoil, he surprisingly finds no noticeable change in the face of the man that the mirror reflects:

It was almost a disappointment--a belittling of his

recent experience. And then he smiled at his na-iveness; for, being over five and thirty years of age, he ought to have known that in most cases the body is the unalterable mask of the soul, which even death itself changes but little. (74)

Thus begins the ill-fated relationship of Heyst and Lena, that loyal "mistress of herself" (257). The individuals who take a special interest in the departure of the couple from the hotel include Schomberg, who had coveted Lena with an irrational zeal and denies to anyone who will listen the reality of the situation--that the very nature of Lena's departure reveal her to be a follower of Heyst out of choice. The young woman yearned for an escape from harassment and had "a profound need of placing her trust where her woman's instinct guided her ignorance" (78).

An unexpected participant in the drama of Heyst and Lena and their unheralded flight to Samburan was Mrs. Schomberg. Without Mrs. Schomberg's help, the elopement of Heyst and Lena would have been very difficult, if not impossible. Mrs. Schomberg is described as a woman "too unattractive" to have any relationship with the hotelkeeper other than that of his wife. "Nobody had ever suspected her of having a mind" (33); but, as Captain Davidson--a friend of Heyst--offered in her defense, "There's a lot of unexpectedness about women" (46). Heyst had remarked to Davidson that Mrs. Schomberg had been more "resourceful" in the plot to help Lena escape with him than one would give her credit for. Davidson marvels at the part that Mrs. Schomberg played in the escape because she appeared to be "too stupid to understand human



speech and too scared to shoo a chicken away." Then he concludes, "Oh, the women, the women! You don't know what there may be in the quietest of them" (46-7).

Heyst understands the motivation of Mrs. Schomberg in helping Lena and tells Davidson that the hotelkeeper's wife was simply "defending her position in life . . . a very respectable task" (47). Mrs. Schomberg defended her position with no less risk or enthusiasm than does Lena later in the novel when she defends her territory on Samburan from "plain Mr. Jones" and his "secretary" Ricardo. The hotelkeeper's plans for Lena, which Heyst spoiled, would have relegated Mrs. Schomberg "to her people in Europe." Then Schomberg intended to sell his hotel in Sourabaya and "start another somewhere else" with Lena, his young and devoted companion, to help him.

Davidson's meeting with Heyst takes place on Samburan after Heyst has successfully brought Lena to his island home to live. It is Davidson's opinion that Lena "must have been miserable indeed to follow a strange man to such a spot. . . . But no words could do justice to the conditions of life on Samburan" (35):

The loneliness, the ruins of the spot, had impressed Davidson's simple soul. . . . That black jetty, sticking out of the jungle into the empty sea; those roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass! . . . The gigantic and funereal blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation. (35)



Heyst believes that on desolate Samburan he and Lena "can safely defy the fates" (47). Reporting on his visit to the island Samburan to friends, Davidson comments, "Funny notion of defying the fates--to take a woman in tow!" (47).

Davidson plays the part of what Henry James would call a "ficelle," "the reader's friend . . . an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity." For a novel that tends toward the melodramatic, particularly in the scenes that take place on the island after Mr. Jones, Martin Ricardo, and Pedro arrive, it is refreshing to have a calm, undemonstrative voice keep the strands of the novel on a sane level. The question of Davidson's raison d'être in Victory has been defended by John Palmer in his discussion of Conrad's fiction. Palmer argues that Davidson appears at the beginning and at the end of the novel in order to contribute to the realism of Victory, which tends toward allegorization when the action moves to Samburan from Sourabaya. George Reinecke intentionally avoids using allegory as a descriptive term for the novel, but advances the idea of realism by writing that "Conrad's own 'Author's Note' to Victory indicates that the chief characters, Heyst, Lena, Jones, Ricardo, Schomberg, all have prototypes in the author's human experience."<sup>13</sup> Many critics agree that the introduction of Mr. Jones, his secretary, and their inhuman servant and the ensuing drama begs a great deal of the reader's indulgence.

In actuality, these three messengers of ill-tidings from the mainland force Heyst and Lena to face the reality of their situation. Lena, while still in Sourabaya, had told Heyst

that she would like dearly to "forget everything that has gone before, as one forgets a dream that's done with, fright and all!" (72). Heyst responds by murmuring, "Would you really? . . . But that's not forbidden. I understand that women easily forget whatever in their past diminishes them in their eyes" (72). Thus, to make sure that Lena does not forget her past, the author has Mr. Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro break into the paradisaal isolation of Heyst and Lena. It also gives Lena the opportunity to prove her mettle by not running from an unpleasant situation for which she is partly responsible.

Isolation did not frighten Lena, as Davidson had predicted it would, but the three men who come uninvited to the island do. The three come into the young woman's life because she had incited the wrath of Schomberg back in Sourabaya when she turned down his troublesome attentions and accepted those of Heyst. The narrator makes us privy to Lena's untenable position in respect to Schomberg when he reveals to us the insensitive masculine conceit that is part of Schomberg:

. . . he had little doubt of his personal fascination, and still less of his power to get hold of the girl, who seemed too ignorant how to help herself, and who was worse than friendless, since she had for some reason incurred the animosity of Mrs. Zangiacomo, a woman with no conscience. The aversion she showed him [Schomberg] as far as she dared (for it was not always safe for the helpless to display the delicacy of their sentiments), Schomberg pardoned on the score of feminine conventional silliness. (77)

Schomberg probably should not be unduly criticized for his arrogant view of "amiable, good, gracious--and pretty" Lena's



place in his scheme of life. As a spokesman for Conrad, the narrator simply was offering a perspective of women in general that was prevalent before the Great War changed people's values. Lena was not so much "ignorant" as lacking in choices. Women were what the men in their respective lives allowed them to be.

Lena makes such a point in a conversation that Heyst and she have on their island. Lena mentions to Heyst that should he ever stop thinking of her, she wouldn't "be in the world at all." Heyst questions her meaning, which confuses Lena, and she murmurs, "You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently. I shall end by believing I am no good. . . . That I won't. I can only be what you think I am" (154). Lena carries her conviction to extremes by the end of Victory, when she loses her life in the attempt to make a sacrifice for Heyst so great that Heyst will reveal that he loves her. The three strangers, bizarre though they be, afford Lena her opportunity to connive to save Heyst without his knowledge. The author assures us that "pride," "love," "necessity," and "woman's vanity in self-sacrifice" will support her cause:

A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exultation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. Had she known of some means to put him to sleep for days she would have used incantations or philtres without misgivings. He seemed to her too good for such contacts, and not sufficiently equipped. (259-260)



## III

Mr. Jones, Martin Ricardo, and Pedro arrive at "unequipped" Heyst's dock more dead than alive. Had he not given the trio water, the three might not have survived to spoil the "undefiled" island existence of Heyst and Lena. The water jugs that had been filled by Schomberg had one that contained saltwater, which seems an odd fact if Schomberg really expected them to reach Samburan in good health. As an astonished Heyst looks down into the strangers' boat that Schomberg had provided for the trip, he could not connect their appearance with anything plausible, even though they wore "the white drill suit of tropical civilization." The trio has come to steal the fortune that Schomberg told them has been stashed away by "Baron" Heyst.

Plain Mr. Jones loathes women with a neurotic intensity; therefore, Ricardo, who knows about Lena, keeps her existence to himself. Heyst innocently plays into his hands by keeping the presence of Lena a secret to protect her reputation. So that he can seek out Lena when Heyst is not with her, Ricardo arranges for Heyst to go to Mr. Jones's cabin for a chat, while he [Ricardo] ostensibly searches for the loot that they have come to Samburan to steal. Ricardo discovers Lena alone and attacks her. Lena fights back:

This new enemy's attack was simple, straightforward violence. It was not the slimy, underhand plotting to deliver her up like a slave, which had sickened her heart and made her feel in her loneliness that her oppressors were too many for her. She was no longer alone in the world now. She

resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her--the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path. (238)

The physical struggle that successfully staved off Ricardo's attack instills in Lena a growing confidence that she will be able to save Heyst from the evil represented by the three strangers. Shaken but unbowed, Lena earns the respect of Ricardo by her cool-headed reaction to his attack. She also gains his trust. The narrator explains that "womanlike, she felt the effect she had produced, the effect of knowing much and of keeping all her knowledge in reserve" (242-43). The truth of the matter is that Lena has no information to give Ricardo about any hidden treasures on Samburan. Believing that Lena is the key to finding the island's hidden wealth, Ricardo shows her the knife that he has strapped to his leg with which he could have mastered her had he so chosen to do. Understanding the concern of Heyst over his missing gun now, Lena determines to find a means of getting the knife that Ricardo carries so as to give it to Heyst. The "means" for the author's cornered woman is "duplicity--the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too!" (243). The narrator justifies the need of Lena to resort to duplicity:

Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the



world. She was not ashamed of her duplicity. With a woman's frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt--that of her own strength. She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own. (243)

Lena, of course, is the reason that the three strangers have appeared at Samburan; ironically, not long before the trio of strangers appeared, Heyst had remarked, "Nothing can break in on us here." The arrival of Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro gives a certain credence to the exclamation that plain Mr. Jones made to Schomberg, "I can't stand women about me. They give me the horrors. . . . They are a perfect curse!" (84). It should be noted that only those who had evil designs were cursed in Victory. Lena freed Heyst. It was his choice to die with Lena.

Ricardo echoes the opinion of Mr. Jones later when Heyst returns to his own bungalow before Ricardo has had time to leave Lena's room on the occasion of the first meeting of the secretary and Lena--"Trapped! Confound it! After all, perhaps the governor was right. Women had to be shunned. Fooling with this one had apparently ruined the whole business" (246). Much later, Lena does get possession of the knife that is strapped to Ricardo's leg on the assumption that Lena is going to throw in her lot with Ricardo. During the episode, Ricardo sinks at the feet of the girl, "dog-tired" because the sparring with Lena has drained his vitality. His



whimpering and unrealistic language during the scene has been criticized; however, the language seems appropriate for such a despicable character. Alternative views of the text of Victory are very possible. Thomas Moser admits that he missed "a few hidden virtues" on his first reading of the novel.<sup>14</sup> The scene shows a Lena in command of herself and of Ricardo. As Ricardo grovels at her feet, Lena sits "unmoved. . . . Womanlike, all her faculties remained concentrated on her heart's desire--on the knife--while the man went on babbling insanely at her feet, ingratiating and savage, almost crazy with elation" (327).

While Lena is accomplishing her mission, Heyst goes to talk to Mr. Jones. When inadvertently Lena's presence on the island is mentioned, Jones knows that his rule over his secretary has ended by the intervention of one of the creatures that Mr. Jones loathes--a woman, one who "possessed the power to awaken men's disgusting folly" (319). Thus Conrad's Lena both saved the day and lost it. The bullet that Mr. Jones intends for Ricardo finds Lena, but not before she has secured the knife that she had coveted for her loved one. The immediate words that Heyst speaks to Lena reflect his momentary disgust at finding Lena and Ricardo in a compromising situation:

No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man, I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm! (334)

Lena responds that she knows no shame, that she "was thanking God with all [her] sinful heart for having been able to do it." Clinging to her triumph, "convinced of the reality of her victory over death" (336), Lena dies. In her last words she asks, "Who else could have done this for you?" (336). It is sometimes overlooked that Lena's "victory over death" refers to that death that could have been inflicted on Heyst by the knife of Martin Ricardo.

Agreeing with Thomas Moser, C. B. Cox suspects that the misogyny of Conrad subconsciously influences the author's treatment of Lena in Victory. Cox accepts that the sacrifice of Lena can be attributed to the egoism of the young girl who wants to dominate Heyst and have him completely in her power. To keep Heyst "defenseless," she disobeys his instructions to escape and appears to be convinced that she has conquered death. On the contrary, it is more reasonable to attribute the disobedience of Lena to her desire to prove her loyalty to an undemonstrative lover who has saved her from Schomberg and his ilk. Brief descriptions of the two men competing for Lena should suffice to lay to rest any notion that Lena had a prayer of surviving as a self-respecting woman unless she remained with her benefactor Heyst.

Conrad describes the lecherous hotelkeeper Schomberg as "a big, manly, bearded creature of the Teutonic persuasion. . . . He was a noxious ass" (15). Schomberg refers to himself as being "in the prime of life" (97). He believes, if he had Lena, he would be "masterful and resolute and fearless" (90).



His plans for Lena include getting rid of his wife. The other man who covets Lena is the leader of Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra. He is the one who hired Lena to go on tour with her violin. As Mrs. Schomberg explains to Davidson's question about the leader, ". . . He is a German really; only he dyes his hair and beard black for business. Zangiacomo is his business name" (33). Heyst observes Zangiacomo's "longish tousled hair and his great beard [that is] purple-black" (55-6) and concludes he is "horrible." The narrator calls him "the male creature with the hooked nose and purple-black beard" (56).

Victory relates Lena's struggle to adapt in a reasonable way to the demands made upon her by the circumstances of her life. The author at one and the same time decries man's need of woman and woman's destruction of man. Conrad expresses his anger in melodrama. The kernel of Lena's story can be perceived in a brief interchange between the two main characters, Heyst and Lena. When the three strangers appear on Samburan, Lena suggests that the evil the men represent has come to the island as a punishment. Heyst wonderingly asks, "Punishment? . . . A sort of retribution from an angry Heaven? . . . On us? What on earth for?" (291). Then he asks Lena if she is conscious of sin and adds, "For I am not. . . . Before Heaven, I am not" (291). Lena responds, "You! You are different. Woman is the tempter. You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you" (291). Lena admits that she would do it again and more, if more were possible.



Thus, victory comes to

the girl they had called Alma--she didn't know why--also Magdalen, whose mind had remained so long in doubt as to the reason of her own existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose. (302)

The victory belongs to Lena when Heyst acknowledges to Davidson, ". . . woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!" (338-339).

## Notes

- 1 F. W. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948; rpt. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 22.
- 2 Joseph Conrad, Victory (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books [1915] 1957), p. 64; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 3 Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge, England: Bowes & Bowes, 1952) p. 106.
- 4 C. B. Cox, Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1974), p. 126.
- 5 Cox, p. 126; see Albert Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 272-278.
- 6 Leavis, p. 209.
- 7 Lee M. Whitehead, "Alma Renamed Lena in Conrad's Victory," in English Language Notes, III, No. 1 (September 1965), p. 55.
- 8 George F. Reinecke, "Conrad's Victory: Psychomachy, Christian Symbols, and Theme," in Explorations of Literature, ed. Rima Drell Rock (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1966) p. 77.
- 9 Whitehead, p. 56.
- 10 Bernard Meyer, Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), p. 192.
- 11 Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," 1920, in Victory, n. pag.
- 12 Leavis, p. 209.
- 13 Reinecke, p. 71.
- 14 Thomas Moser, Achievement and Decline (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p. 2.

Part III. D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

Chapter 1. The Rainbow (1915):

A Visionary Ursula Brangwen

I

Life is a sacred trust that few writers honor as dramatically as does D. H. Lawrence in The Rainbow. Ursula Brangwen is the oldest of a generation of Brangwens whom Lawrence brings to fictional life through a wealth of self-reliant female forebears, each of whom adapted admirably to what life contemporaneously afforded them. The novel celebrates the genius of Lawrence in that its mode of presentation reveals the author's devotion "to the exhausting toil of working out new things, the developments, that as the highly conscious and intelligent servant of life he saw to be necessary."<sup>1</sup>

Ursula is the product of three generations of vital Brangwen women in whose individual lives Lawrence plays out his theory that "life shall continually and progressively differentiate itself, almost as though this differentiation were a Purpose." Enlarging on this concept, Lawrence states further:

Life starts crude and unspecified, a great Mass. And it proceeds to evolve out of that mass ever more distinct and definite particular forms, an ever-multiplying number of separate species and orders, as if it were working always to the



production of the infinite number of perfect individuals, the individual so thorough that he should have nothing in common with any other individual. It is as if all coagulation must be loosened, as if the elements must work themselves free and pure from the compound.<sup>2</sup>

Life for the Brangwen women respectively reveals itself in the manner of a rainbow, that beautiful phenomenon that is caused by the refractions of the beams of the sun in passing the drops of falling rain; the rays are separated into the prismatic colors, and they are reflected from the cloud opposite the sun and the spectator. We need not suppose that the rainbow was unknown before the Flood; but God in His great wisdom then appointed the rainbow to be the cheering seal of His covenant with the Earth,<sup>3</sup> which Lawrence implies is as steadfast as the natural laws from which the rainbow springs. It is not Lawrence's intent in The Rainbow to free the women from the "compound" of their cumulative experiences, but rather to stress the importance of stable family values. Interestingly, the rainbow comes only to women at the resolution of a stressful situation, as though to tell them: "God's in his heaven-- / All's right with the world."<sup>4</sup>

The first dim awareness of the possibilities of life in the world beyond the farm manifests itself to the Brangwen women no more forcefully than does the rainbow which begins merely as a few dabs of color in a clear sky and then refreshingly becomes an ordered array of brilliance, an indomitable arch "making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven" (495).<sup>5</sup>

The genesis of The Rainbow depicts a pastoral world in which the Brangwen men have felt "the pulse and body of the soil" on the Marsh Farm for generations. The narrator locates the Marsh Farm

. . . in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance. (7)

The Brangwen men, however, did not reach out for what was in the distance, but waited in expectancy "for what would come to them." The men were satiated with the "blood-intimacy" that bound them to the "earth and sky and beast and green plants" (9). They had no urge to reach beyond the teeming life of creation on the lands of Marsh Farm.

Like Eve before her, it was the woman who reached beyond the "farm-buildings and fields" for the knowledge available in the world of far-off cities and governments, "where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled" (9). In the history of the Brangwen family, the vicar and what he represents with his knowledge of the greater world puts an end to the idyllic life of Marsh Farm. When an ancestor of Ursula Brangwen asked herself what raised the vicar "above the common man as man is raised above the beast," she determined that it was "a question of knowledge" (10). Happily for Ursula's grandmother,



at least one Brangwen man did not have either the aptitude or the inclination to study at a college, despite his mother's fond dreams for his future; so instead, he settled down to running the Marsh Farm at the age of eighteen because he was the only one of the Brangwen sons willing to take on the responsibility when the father died.

## II

Lawrence shows a remarkable sensitivity in his portrayal of children; he attaches to both Anna and Ursula images that linger in the reader's mind as the two girls grow up and become adult women in their respective generations. Lydia Lensky, the mother of Anna and the grandmother of Ursula, was the daughter of a Polish landowner but was penniless and working as the housekeeper of the local vicar when Tom Brangwen sees her and decides that she is destined to be his wife. Little Anna Lensky adapts to her new father and new home with difficulty. When Lydia becomes pregnant, she distances herself from Brangwen, who then turns to little Anna "for her sympathy and her love. . . . So soon they were lovers, father and child" (64). When Anna, who is too young to understand why she has been separated from her mother who lies in labor, cries repeatedly, "I want my mother," Brangwen first tries to get her to submit to being undressed for bed by the servant Tilly. When he fails, he says "in a quiet voice thin with anger" that she must be undressed and proceeds to undress the "little mechanical thing of fixed will" (76-7). Uncontrollable weeping continues, however, until Tom picks



up Anna and resolves the unpleasant situation by bundling her in a warm shawl and then carrying the tiny child out into the dark and cold night to feed the animals with him. The litany that followed did indeed quiet the sobbing child. Because the scene reveals a factor in Anna's development, it is worth quoting in full.

It was raining. The child was suddenly still, shocked, finding the rain on its face, the darkness. "We'll just give the cows their something-to-eat, afore they go to bed," Brangwen was saying to her, holding her close and sure.

There was a trickling of water into the butt, a burst of rain drops, sputtering on her shawl, and the light of the lantern swinging, flashing on a wet pavement and the base of a wet wall. Otherwise it was black darkness: one breathed darkness.

He opened the doors, upper and lower, and they entered into the high, dry barn, that smelled warm even if it were not warm. He hung the lantern on the nail and shut the door. They were in another world now. . . . Outside there was the driving rain, inside, the softly-illuminated stillness and calmness of the barn.

Holding the child on one arm, he set about preparing the food for the cows, filling a pan with chopped hay and brewer's grains and a little meal. The child, all wonder, watched what he did. A new being was created in her for the new conditions. . . . She was silent, quite still.

In a sort of dream . . . he rose with the panful of food, carefully balancing the child on one arm, the pan in the other hand. . . . He balanced stiffly, rested the pan on the manger wall, and tipped out the food.

. . . [One] time, as he stooped, she freed her arm and put it round his neck, clinging soft and warm, making all easier. (78-9)

The animals fed, man and child sit and watch the animals eat until Anna gradually relaxes and the eyelids "began to sink over her dark watchful eyes" (80).

Lawrence does not reserve the soothing influences of

sleep to reduce the tension of a psychological crisis for children only; years later, after an illness fraught with fever and delirium, Ursula "gradually . . . began really to sleep."

She slept in the confidence of her new reality. She slept breathing with her soul the new air of a new world. The peace was very deep and enriching. She had her root in new ground, she was gradually absorbed into growth. (493)

The peace that Anna feels asleep in Tom Brangwen's arms is no less powerful because Anna is only about five years old. Indeed, shortly after the birth of her mother's new baby, which follows closely the episode in the barn, the child Anna is somehow brought to understand that she is no longer responsible for the well-being of her mother--Anna is free to be a child. Her new father has given her the stability and encircling warmth heretofore denied the child. Lydia had been subject to extended periods of despondency after the death of Anna's father. During these periods, the mother had retreated psychologically almost beyond the reach of the child--"her fingers [would] move over the clasped fingers of the child, she heard the anxious voice of the baby, as it tried to make her talk, distraught" (53). Thus, tiny Anna intuitively respected the mother's dark moods, and she became "curiously, incomprehensively jealous of her mother, always concerned about her."

In the months before she spied Tom Brangwen, Lydia's mind would grasp reality momentarily; then she would shrink



again, "back into her darkness, and for a long while remain blotted safely away from living" (53). Brangwen becomes both her husband and her savior. Lydia's "darkness" came not from the loss of a husband whom she had loved, but from the loss of a husband whose control over her she resented:

When she thought of him, she was always younger than he, she was always twenty, or twenty-five, and under his ideas as if she were not a person herself, as if she were just his aide-de-camp, or part of his baggage, or one among his surgical appliances. . . . And he was always only thirty: he had died when he was thirty-four. She did not feel sorry for him. . . . How she had looked up to him! . . . He had seemed so wonderful, such an authority. After her own lax household, his gravity and confident, hard authority seemed almost God-like to her. For she had never known it in her life, all her surroundings had been loose, lax, disordered, a welter. (256)

Had the narrator repeated nothing more than the complaint registered by Lensky when he heard of the deaths of his two children, "Why have they died now, when I have no time to grieve" (257), we would have sympathized wholeheartedly with Ursula's grandmother and understood the relief that must have been hers when Lensky passed out of her life.

Lawrence treats Lydia's unpleasant memories of Paul Lensky simply as a "recording of a number of possibilities which had never been fulfilled"--her first husband had been to her merely "an unfilled possibility" that lead to Tom Brangwen who became "the reality and fulfillment" (96). The child Anna senses the safe haven that her mother has found at Marsh Farm "and her soul was put at peace between" her mother and her new father. The author confessed in a letter to



Ernest Collings, "One has to be so terribly religious, to be an artist."<sup>6</sup> He demonstrates this sentiment in The Rainbow when he explains why Anna no longer feels an obligation to be her mother's caretaker:

She looked from one to the other, and she saw them established to her safety, and she was free. She played between the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in confidence, having the assurance on her right hand and the assurance on her left. She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and her mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between. (97)

Despite having learned nursing as a mark of her emancipation, Lydia never rose above "slave" status in her relationship to her first husband. She had had no life of her own, but "was to him one of the baser material conditions necessary for his welfare in procuring his ideas, of nationalism, of liberty, of science" (257). The lesson that Lydia learned from her first marriage, she subsequently passes on to Ursula when the child asks a generation after the fact, "Will somebody love me, grandmother?" The grandmother answers, "Yes, some man will love you, child, because it's your nature. And I hope it will be somebody who will love you for what you are, and not for what he wants of you. But we have a right to what we want" (260).

### III

The magic combination of a man who believes that a woman has "the right to please herself, and displease whoso-

ever she likes" (42) and a woman who believes that a woman has "a right" to what she wants creates the atmosphere in which Anna Lensky grows up and in which her daughter Ursula spends many happy hours of childhood. Tom and Lydia create the atmosphere by living in keeping with advice that the author offered a friend of his who was having marital difficulties:

One must learn to love, and go through a good deal of suffering to get to it, like any knight of the Grail, and the journey is always towards the other soul, not away from it. . . . To love, you have to learn to understand the other, more than she understands herself, and to submit to her understanding of you.<sup>7</sup>

The unselfish love and attention given by Brangwen heals the troubled mind of Lydia and provides four-year-old Anna with a healthy environ in which to acquire the strength to take control of her own life when the proper time arrives. Brangwen's understanding of his wife is, of course, far from ideal, but Lawrence gives his character a remarkable tolerance for accepting things he cannot change even though his uncomprehending nature wonders.

Brangwen blood does not flow in Anna's veins; however, Tom Brangwen was the only father in her memory, and there was a unique bond of love between the two of them. In the first year of the marriage of Anna to Tom's nephew, Anna becomes aware of the stifling quality of Brangwen family relationships when she visits a Polish relative whose charming objectivity alerts her to a "freer element, in which each person



was detached and isolated," and she asks herself if that were not her "natural element" (199). The author blames Anna Lensky's unsuccessful bid for emotional independence in her marriage on the fact that "she had lived so long in Tom Brangwen's love beforehand" and thus "was partly helpless" to resist the "strange absorption" that her husband wanted with her instead of letting her be "her own, old sharp self, detached, detached, active but not absorbed, active for her own part, taking and giving, but not absorbed" (200).

Ursula's relationship to her father, Will Brangwen, in many ways parallels that of her mother to Tom Brangwen. In both instances, the men ask of a child the psychological and emotional support that individually the Brangwen men fail to secure from their respective spouses, the "blood-intimacy" that invariably eludes Lawrence's male characters who seek it. Tom and Anna "made a little life together, they had a joint activity." And Will and Ursula share "a strange alliance. . . . He knew the child was always on his side. . . . He took it for granted. Yet his life was based on her . . . on her support and her accord" (220).

Lawrence indicates in The Rainbow that familial relationships affect the growth of individuals to a great extent when he writes that Ursula

. . . measured [others] by the standard of her own people: her father and mother, her grandmother, her uncles. Her beloved father, so utterly simple in his demeanor, yet with his strong, dark soul fixed



like a root in unexpressed depths that fascinated and terrified her: her mother, so strangely free of all money and convention and fear, entirely indifferent to the world, standing by herself without connexion: her grandmother, who had come from so far and was centered in so wide an horizon: people must come up to these standards before they could be Ursula's people. (264)

Ursula's coming of age in The Rainbow, as she battles with the limitations placed on her by the "stifling" Brangwen connections, involves many emotionally charged scenes which belie the assertion that Lawrence made about his own work, "I have no longer the joy in creating vivid scenes, that I had in Sons and Lovers. I don't care much more about accumulating objects in the powerful light of emotion, and making a scene of them."<sup>8</sup>

Ursula and Gudrun, who was born three years after her older sister, are "co-mates." Of the two girls, Ursula is "the one for realities." Thus, when her beloved father flaps a dust cloth "hard across the girl's face" (267) in retaliation for the girl having carelessly left unlocked the door to the parish room where her father has a workshop and where Ursula was allowed to retreat to read and to dream in the quiet that was not possible in the teeming Brangwen household nearby, Ursula begins the painful process of severing the "blood-intimacy" connection with her father. The unlocked door had permitted small siblings to enter and do "much damage"; for instance, Ursula's small brother "hacked notches in the [father's] fine chisels" (267).

The incident shocks Ursula into evaluating her relation-

ship to her father, who appeared to her to be surprisingly insensitive to how "vulnerable" she is, despite their closeness heretofore. The incident serves as a warning to the young girl and "she never forgot." Although merely a spontaneous reaction to a momentary irritation on Will's part, the shameful insult lit a "watchfire," so that, when time permitted Ursula to return "to her love for her father, the seed of mistrust and defiance burned unquenched, though covered up far from sight. . . . Slowly, slowly, the fire of mistrust and defiance burned in her, burned away her connexion with him" (267).

Cruel though it be, Lawrence develops Ursula's character by having her face a series of shocks to her illusions in an effort to have her find her own way to a rewarding life. Ursula, coming to grips with the disillusionment that she suffers when her father insensitively strikes her across the face with a dust cloth at first isolates herself in a world of woods and wildlife, and its undemanding enchantment as an ally salves her broken spirit. The narrator has told us that this young woman is a realist; therefore, if she is to be true to her character she must come to terms with her illusions:

The illusion of a father whose life was an Odyssey in an outer world; the illusion of her grandmother, of realities so shadowy and far-off that they became as mystic symbols:--peasant-girls with wreaths of blue flowers in their hair, the sledges and depth of winter; the dark-bearded young grandfather, marriage and war and death; then the multitude illusions concerning herself, how she was under a



spell, she was not really this Ursula Brangwen.  
(268)

The illusion of her father goes first and takes with it the possibility of Ursula again having an unquestioning faithfulness to another human being. Her father was "her strength and her greater self," until he lost his easy power over her. Thereafter, Ursula was free to be her own person. Her characteristic need for a together-yet-separate existence infects every one of her personal relationships--at home, at work, and at play. Leavis neatly singles out a passage toward the end of The Rainbow that parallels the critical examination of Ursula exploring the reaches of her ego. At the time, the young woman is a student of botany at Nottingham University College and is studying a specimen under a microscope. Her thoughts stray to a recent conversation between herself and a professor of physics who had asked, "I don't see why we should attribute some special mystery to life--do you? We don't understand it as we understand electricity, even, but that doesn't warrant our saying it is something special" (440). The professor questioned the validity of believing that life had its own special order, which arouses Ursula's curiosity:

Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul. Was she herself an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces? . . . She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move-- . . . What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for



what purpose were they unified?

For what purpose were the incalculable physical and chemical activities nodalized in this shadowy moving speck under her microscope? . . . What was its intention? To be itself? . . .

It intended to be itself. But what self? . . . Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity. (441)

#### IV

Ursula's mother gives her oldest daughter the first opportunity to become an independent self when she takes her and her sister Gudrun out of the Cossethay school and sends them to the Grammar School in Nottingham. This represents an escape from the "storm and movement" that characterizes the "small and overfull" Brangwen home. Ursula at twelve years of age has a difficulty to surmount in her search for an individual identity--that is her "fear and dislike of authority." She felt that she could always do as she wanted "if she managed to avoid a battle with Authority and the authorized Powers" (270). The narrator reported that one of the "deepest influences of her life" was the fact that she felt the "grudging power of the mob [was] lying in wait for her" because she was exceptional. She, therefore, "feigned to be less than she was for fear that her undiscovered self should be seen, pounced upon, attacked by brutish resentment of the commonplace, the average Self" (271). Knowing this about Ursula, we can appreciate more the courage it took for

her to retain her first teaching job.

Ursula's "undiscovered self" faces many challenges; not the least of which was "the cloud of self-responsibility" that troubled her as she outgrew girlhood. The thought that she must "out of nothingness . . . make something of herself" frightens her and she has no clue as to a direction. To help her, she seeks the mistress of her high school. The woman advises Ursula that she is qualified to teach elementary school with a high-school education. Strongly urging the young Ursula to keep up her studies and work for a degree, the mistress writes that the degree will give Ursula "a qualification and a position in the world, and will give [her] more scope to choose [her] own way" (358), then continues:

I shall be proud to see one of my girls win her own economical independence, which means so much more than it seems. I shall be glad indeed to know that one more of my girls has provided for herself the means of freedom to choose for herself. (358)

Ursula's choices are limited severely by her parents in the matter of the young girl declaring her economical independence and leaving their authority. The scene between Ursula and her father reveals what Ursula must endure to establish an identity other than that of a marriageable female who is waiting for a viable offer:

'Can't I . . . can't I go out to work?'  
 'Go out to work, what for?'  
 'I want some other life than this.'  
 'Some other life?' he repeated. 'Why, what other life do you want?'



'Something else besides housework and hanging about. And I want to earn something.' (359)

Ursula's choices are limited as were those of the women of her generation. Her father scoffs at the notion of her teaching. When an offer to teach "on the other side of London" arrives, her parents refuse to let her go to the interview. As an alternative, the father finds her a position in the local school. Her dream of teaching did not encompass the "hard, raw reality" of teaching at Ilkeston, "because she knew Ilkeston and hated it. But she wanted to be free, so she must take her freedom where she could" (367).

Ursula turned to education as a means of gaining the social and personal independence that she sought and of conquering "the mysterious man's world." Lawrence incorporates his own views of the educational process when he depicts the horror of Ursula's initiation into the teaching profession. His graphic revelation of authority and discipline in the school system shows how desperate Ursula must have been to leave the daily confinement of her parents' home, where she lives "without place or meaning or worth" (357). The classroom scenes at St. Philips school are an excellent example of the author's genius for developing vivid emotional situations that become starkly realistic. Thus we sympathize with Ursula when she changes from individual to impersonal Standard Five teacher whose

face grew more and more shut, and over her flayed, exposed soul of a young girl who had gone open and



warm to give herself to the children, there set a hard, insentient thing, that worked mechanically according to a system imposed.

It seemed she scarcely saw her class the next day. She could only feel her will, and what she would have of this class which she must grasp into subjection. It was no good, any more, to appeal, to play upon the better feelings of the class. Her swift-working soul realized this.

She, as the teacher, must bring them all, as scholars, into subjection. And this she was going to do. All else she would forsake. She had become hard and impersonal, almost avengeful on herself as well as them. . . . She would assert herself for mastery, be only teacher. She was set now. She was going to fight and subdue. (395-6)

The modern world and its ethics forces upon Ursula situations very unlike those experienced by either her grandmother or her mother. She could have avoided the situations had she not felt a need for "something else besides housework and hanging about." The modern woman represented by Ursula is "in revolt." Unwilling to embrace her mother's prescription for a contented life, Ursula pays "a high price out of her soul" when keeping her teaching position means caning unruly students and enduring "the sound of their blubbing and desolation, when she had broken them to order."

In the light of the narrator's comment, "she felt that somewhere, in something, she wasn't free," one is justified in assuming that Ursula's drive to be "free" is due somewhat to the political and social conditions of the times in which Lawrence writes. Through outside influences, the restless discontent that Ursula feels at home becomes focused when she enters "man's world" to earn her own living and shares confidences with the working women whom she meets--Maggie

Scholfield and Dorothy Russell are two such individuals.

Maggie is the Standard Three teacher at St. Philips school, and her friendly overtures make the "prison" environment of St. Philips endurable for Ursula who refuses "to be put down, prevented from standing free." Seventeen-year-old Ursula Brangwen makes a commitment to herself in The Rainbow to "hold her place . . . in the world of work and man's convention" (406). Her attitude at her first meeting with Mr. Harby, schoolmaster, clearly indicates the conceptions of the young woman as to her reception into the world of work are unrealistic:

She tried to approach him as a young, bright girl usually approaches a man, expecting a little chivalrous courtesy. But the fact that she was a girl, a woman, was ignored or used as a matter of contempt against her. She did not know what she was, nor what she must be. She wanted to remain her own responsive, personal self. (378)

Maggie trusted "the vote" to set women free; so she was a dedicated suffragette. For Ursula, "being free" escapes a precise formula. Lawrence obviously believed that freedom was "something" that Ursula must find within herself: "She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote" (406). By going out into the commercial, workaday world and earning her living, Ursula takes a strong step forward in defining her self, even though "her fundamental, organic knowledge had as yet to take form and rise to utterance" (406).



Ursula's contact with Dorothy Russell, a college friend, helps to differentiate further the form that Ursula's adult self will take. The most specific influence that Dorothy contributes is the determination of Ursula not to be like Dorothy, whose personality suggests to Ursula the foreboding darkness which is beyond the circle of light and sunshine in which children play, contentedly unaware of the eyes of the "wild beast gleaming from the darkness" (437). In a very real sense, Ursula outgrows Maggie Scholfield's companionship the moment that Ursula leaves St. Philips school for college. College represents another step in the author's dramatic development of Ursula Brangwen, who at this juncture of her life envisions meeting "a rich, proud, simple girl-friend, who had never known Mr. Harby and his like, nor even had a note in her voice of bondage contempt and fear, as Maggie had" (420).

Dorothy, who lives with a maiden aunt in Nottingham, spends her spare moments slaving for the Women's Social and Political Union. Although Ursula becomes very fond of her, she is afraid of her because of the young woman's intense pursuit of life, "never sparing herself." The narrator comments that the first year of college life for Ursula was "as strenuous as a battle . . . yet as remote as peace." This analogy reminds us that Lawrence was writing in the midst of the uncertainties of World war I and with them in mind reveals the uncertainty with which Ursula faces her college experience and its eventual value in her search for an independent self.



Without an organized direction toward which to aim in her search for independence and "her own self" (420) as has her friend Dorothy, Ursula falls prey to disillusionment and, as her college days near an end, she wonders:

. . . Would the next move turn out the same? Always the shining doorway ahead; and then, upon approach, always the shining doorway was a gate into an ugly yard, dirty and active and dead. Always the crest of the hill gleaming ahead under heaven: and then from the top of the hill only another sordid valley full of amorphous, squalid activity. (436)

In her last year of college, Ursula renews a relationship with Anton Skrebensky whom she had encountered briefly, but memorably, six years earlier when she was a high-school student and Anton was a twenty-one-year-old soldier on a month's leave from the Army. Nearly sixteen years old, Ursula "thought she loved everybody and believed in everybody. But because she could not love herself, she mistrusted everybody" (288). Anton pleases her because he seems so "perfectly, even fatally established" (291). The young girl is attracted particularly to his aristocratic bearing which is "self-contained [and] self-supporting" (292).

The renewed relationship uncovers for Ursula a "stronger self that knew the darkness" (452), but it does not interfere with the ways of "her everyday self." Like many of Ursula's experiences in The Rainbow, this one degenerates from a "shining doorway ahead" into another "ugly yard, dirty and active and dead." Nevertheless, it is a doorway through which

Ursula chooses to pass and learns to control in order to acquire the temperament of a well-defined woman. Lawrence makes it abundantly clear that this young woman is tempted, yet she is not overwhelmed by the idea of allowing her femininity to decide her fate. Skrebensky's comment when he hears that Ursula has not past her university final exam reflects how unattainable would be a unique identification for her should she wed her lover:

It doesn't matter. . . . What are the odds, whether you are a Bachelor of Arts or not, according to the London University? All you know, you know, and if you are Mrs. Skrebensky, the B.A. is meaningless. (474)

At sixteen Ursula's "sexual life flamed into a kind of disease within her. She was so overwrought and sensitive, that the mere touch of coarse wool seemed to tear her nerves" (333). Skrebensky, who had awakened Ursula, "left the girl out and went his way serving what he had to serve, and enduring what he had to endure, without remark" (328). Lawrence keys us into the character of Skrebensky when the author writes:

What did personal intimacy matter? One had to fill one's place in the Whole, the great scheme of man's elaborate civilization, that was all. The Whole mattered--but the unit, the person, had no importance, except as he represented the Whole. (328)

Skrebensky leaves Ursula to do his duty to the "Whole." After his departure, a vulnerable Ursula becomes intimate with one of her teachers at the high school, Winifred Inger.



The narrator remarks that Winifred is interested in the Women's Movement by way of introducing her. Worthy of note, a similar interest seems to be a common characteristic of all of Ursula's working female acquaintances in The Rainbow, but not one that the Brangwen women espouse. This is an important point because it stresses Ursula's denial of the individual being subordinate to the group. Lawrence wants us to know that Ursula has a right to be counted as an independent self, irrespective of her sex; with the right of independence, however, goes the responsibility of finding it on her own initiative by responding to life's variables intelligently. Ursula, for instance, revealingly evaluates her attachment to Winifred and her disillusionment with college life as separate "side-shows," which suggests each experience was an instructive, passing episode.

The passion that Ursula had felt for Skrebensky fortuitously revives after her love for Winifred Inger "wrenched her life." The young woman comes to believe that "through him, in him, she might return to her own self, which she was before she had loved Winifred, before . . . deadness had come upon her" (356). At the age of seventeen, Ursula is emotionally drained; and she recognizes a consuming need to have a change in her daily routine in order to nourish her independent self, thus lightening the burden of the experiences with Skrebensky and Winifred that awakened her sexuality and disquieted her soul. Neither her father nor her mother helps Ursula facilitate the change made inevitable



by Lawrence treating Ursula as a character with a soul that is bursting "day by day into fresh impulses, fresh desire, [and] fresh purpose."

Ursula's memory of Skrebensky is "like the thought of the first radiant hours of morning" and his failure to return to her, as he had said he would, after their first magical encounter troubles the young woman because she had believed that "he held the keys of the sunshine" (438). The narrator assures us that Skrebensky still holds the keys, despite his six-year absence. He will be "the doorway to her, into the boundless sky of happiness. . . . He [will open] to her, the illimitable endless space for self-realization and delight forever" (438-9). Skrebensky returns to an Ursula whose memories include the episode with Winifred Inger, the "horrors" of Brinsley Street, the friendship of Maggie, her experiences at college, and the influences of Dorothy Russell. All have a share in the development of the woman who "would not admit to herself the chill like a sunshine of frost that came over her" (442), when she first sees Anton after six years of dreaming about him and wondering how the two of them will relate to one another.

In The Rainbow, Lawrence clearly intends to impart to Ursula Brangwen the will to break the "vicious circle" of having had all her "good days by the time [she is] twenty." Her college friend Dorothy helps her to understand in what way she [Ursula] wants to relate to Anton when she asks, ". . . what do you want?" Ursula candidly admits that she

does not "care" about love, because "it doesn't lead anywhere" (475). Ursula's rejection of the "love-ideal" anticipates the message that Lawrence later propounds in Fantasia of the Unconscious:

. . . Love . . . is not the only dynamic. Taking love in its greatest sense, and making it embrace every form of sympathy . . . is not the whole of the dynamic flow, it is only the one-half. There is always the other voluntary flow to reckon with, the intense motion of independence and singleness of self, the pride of isolation, and the profound fulfillment through power.<sup>9</sup>

The offer of marriage to Ursula by Anton does not include respect for the young woman's singleness of self, if one judges from an incident that happened when the engaged couple were guests at a country home. On this occasion, Anton reveals himself to have an unreasonably possessive attitude when he reacts angrily upon discovering that his intended had enjoyed an early morning walk under the garden's blossoming plum trees without him. Anton would have been even angrier had he known what the reader knows--that Anton's return to the room assigned to him after having spent the night in Ursula's room leaves the young woman feeling "very rich in being alone, and enjoying to the full her solitary room" (459).

Lawrence leaves little doubt in The Rainbow that the great attraction Anton Skrebensky has for Ursula and she for him is physical. It never appears likely that the two of them will wed and live happily ever after. It is not that



Skrebensky is unwilling; it is more that Ursula is not willing to give up her individual self as she would surely have to do. She believes that no one "should have anything to do with her permanent self." Skrebensky himself realizes that marriage would destroy their "dark, powerful under-life" that

was so magnificently free. . . . To make public their connexion would be to put it in range with all the things which nullified him. . . . If she were his social wife, if she were part of that complication of dead reality, then what had his under-life to do with her? One's social wife was almost a material symbol. Whereas now she was something more vivid to him than anything in conventional life could be. She gave the complete lie to all conventional life. (452-3)

Ursula's knowledge of man begins with her father at Cossethay, where her adored father "had a curious craving to frighten her, to see what she would do with him" (225). He would dive from the parapet of the canal bridge with small daughter on his back. He also took her to the fair and rode with her in swingboats so high that the child became violently sick afterwards and, upon arriving back home, "crept away under the parlour sofa, like a sick little animal" (224). Her father had made her promise that she would not tell her mother that she had been sick. At the age of seventeen, the young woman endures the "horrors of Brinsley Street" in order to become independent and gain respect for her individual self. Young Skrebensky came into her life when she was nearly sixteen. When he returned to her life six years later, the two share a "dark, powerful under-life" that



can not surface because in the ordinary routine of life Anton Skrebensky and Ursula Brangwen belong to hostile worlds; Mrs. Skrebensky would not be allowed an individual self. On the contrary, she would have to maintain a civic self that followed the conventions demanded of the wife of an officer in the engineers serving time in India.

Rather than repeat the history of her grandmother's married life with Paul Lensky, Ursula breaks her engagement and returns home. Then, troubled by the fact that she is with child, she chastises herself for having wanted "that fantastic freedom, that illusory, conceited fulfilment which she had imagined she could not have with Skrebensky. Who was she to be wanting some fantastic fulfilment in her life?" (484-5). As a consequence of her traumatic experience with Anton, Ursula earns a "new deeper freedom. The world might be a welter of uncertainty, but [she] was [herself] now. . . . Before [she] had only existed in so far as [she] had relations with another being. Now [she] had an absolute self--as well as a relative self" (190).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948; rpt. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers, 1936, ed. Edward D. McDonald (New York: Viking Press, 1936; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 431.

<sup>3</sup> Bible, Genesis 9: 13-15.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Browning, "Pippa Passes" [1841], in Poetry of the Victorian Period, ed. George Benjamin Woods and Jerome Hamilton Buckley (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, c1955), p. 174.

<sup>5</sup> D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (Great Britain, 1915; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 495; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>6</sup> D. H. Lawrence, February 24, 1913; quoted in The Great Tradition, n. pag.

<sup>7</sup> D. H. Lawrence, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), II, 191.

<sup>8</sup> The Letters, I, 470.

<sup>9</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious, intro. Philip Rieff (1921, 1922; New York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 162.

## Chapter 2. Women in Love (1921)

### A Determined Gudrun Brangwen

#### I

D. H. Lawrence brings the chaos of modern times into "verbal consciousness" with his creation of Gudrun Brangwen in Women in Love. In The Reverent Discipline, George Panichas notes that "literature today is seen against, and appraised in the light of, major historical events, forces, and ideas"; and he concludes, "To a large degree, history, not literary aesthetic, dictates sensibilities and belief in twentieth-century literature."<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, let us consider what was happening in England between 1910 and 1917. Walter Allen reports in Tradition and Dream that December 1910 marked the opening of the Post-Impressionistic Exhibition where "a wide public became aware of the paintings of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso."<sup>2</sup> Between 1911 and 1915, twelve volumes of The Golden Bough by anthropologist Sir J. G. Frazer were published in England; in 1912, the novels of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky became available to a reading public in translation; and in 1913, The Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud was available. Then came the Great War of 1914-1918. In 1915, Lawrence wrote to Harriet Monroe, "The war



will go on for a very long time. . . . I feel, that even if we are all going to be rushed down to extinction, one must . . . speak for life and growth, amid all this mass of destruction."<sup>3</sup> It was during these war years that Lawrence rewrote and finished in 1917 Women in Love. As the author admits in the Foreword to the novel, "It . . . took its final shape in the midst of the period of war, though it does not concern the war itself. I should wish the time to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters"<sup>4</sup> (vii).

War certainly is apparent in the cataclysmic relationship that Lawrence creates for Gudrun Brangwen and her lover Gerald Crich. Although no cross stands for Gerald in Flanders Field, it seems reasonable to say that Lawrence intends him to be recorded as a victim of the social turmoil and downgrading of traditional values that the author depicts as this drama of a modern woman in search of her self unfolds. In Women in Love, Lawrence relies on his creative genius to point out to his reader the necessity in human relationships of coming to understand self and others. He makes the point explicit in his essay, "The Novel and the Feelings":<sup>5</sup>

Listening inwards . . . to the lowing of the innermost beasts, the feelings, that roam in the forest of the blood. . . . If we can't hear the cries far down in our own forests of dark veins, we can look in the real novels, and there listen in. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low, calling cries of the characters, as they wander in the dark woods of their destiny.<sup>5</sup>

When we first meet Gudrun, she has just returned from London where she has spent several years living the life of an artist. The narrator informs us that she is "very beautiful" and "passive," although "passive" seems inappropriate for the young woman who will soon do battle with Gerald Crich. We also learn from the narrator that she has a "look of confidence and diffidence." These terms, being contrary, stress the young woman's unsettled attitude toward her expectations from life. The townspeople call Gudrun "a smart woman" because of her cold manner. A theory put at variance with the remarkably flamboyant colors of her clothes, particularly her stockings. On the occasion of our first meeting with Gudrun, this beautiful, passive, confident, diffident, smart young woman is wearing bright green stockings and is discussing with her older sister Ursula what is to be done with their respective lives.

The discussion of the sisters centers on men and marriage. Gudrun admits she has become bored enough to consider marriage if "there did happen to come along a highly attractive individual of sufficient means" (2). she asks, "Don't you find yourself getting bored? Don't you find, that things fail to materialize? Nothing materializes! Everything withers in the bud" (2). for the lack of something better to occupy them, Ursula and Gudrun head for a local wedding; however, the two young women never get inside the church. As they approach the church, a masculine voice behind the sisters calls out, "What price the stockings!"



(7). The remark so offends Gudrun that she turns away from the entrance to the church and will not enter. Gudrun's stockings, in this instance emerald green ones, set her apart from the colliers' wives and sweethearts and make her an easy target for rude comments in her hometown Beldover. The stockings function thematically to point out an essential characteristic of the young woman. They proclaim her independent spirit and acknowledge to her personal satisfaction that she is "different" from the "ugly, meaningless people" who inhabit the colliery region.

Ursula humors her younger sister's temperament and goes with Gudrun to watch the wedding guests arrive. Standing thus outside the church, Gudrun gets her first glimpse of Gerald Crich, "his gleaming beauty" and the "lurking danger of his unsubdued temper" (9). She immediately determines to know more about him. She is given the opportunity to do so when the two Brangwen sisters accept an invitation to spend a few days at a country estate where Gerald also is a guest. On this occasion, Gudrun wears dark green stockings. The colorful stockings worn by Gudrun in Women in Love are a bellwether of the young woman's moods. Not unlike the rainbow that appeared to give spiritual support to Brangwen women at times of emotional stress in The Rainbow, the myriad of colors that cover Gudrun's legs, noted by the author on too many occasions to be chance observations, express Gudrun's expectations of a given moment in her life in Women in Love.



Uncertainty for Gudrun is wrapped in emotional indulgence, and self-interest motivates most of her actions. This was a reasonable attitude for a liberated female in the modern era of Lawrence's day to have. Lawrence reveals in the characterization of Gudrun the probability of the effort to reach equality being counterproductive. Despite a need to free her spirit from any hint of dependency, Gudrun is sensitive to the needs of others. For instance, she performs an uncharacteristically selfless favor for a friend when, without fanfare, she captures Rupert Birkin's soulful letter that Halliday and his ilk are publicly ridiculing. At this point in the novel, Gudrun has advanced quickly to a position of social equality with the Crich family and has insinuated herself into the family's wealthy environment. She is expensively costumed in fur, velvet, and silver. Appropriately, her stockings on this occasion are silver grey.

Also appropriately, Gudrun is wearing "bright rose" stockings when she first senses the excitement of the indomitable will of Gerald Crich. While walking home from school one day, the Brangwen sisters are stopped at a crossing to allow a colliery train to pass. At the same time, Gerald trots up on a red Arab mare. The unfamiliar sounds of the passing train terrify the mare, and she struggles to break away. Each time Gerald brings her back to the gate that faces the noisy train. The mare is quite literally a victim of Gerald's will.

Both man and mare are sweating with the violence when

Ursula shouts, "No----! No----! Let her go, you fool----!" (104). And Gudrun, the narrator tells us, hates her sister for losing control of herself. When Ursula adds to her shout, "And she's bleeding!" Gudrun looks, sees the trickle of blood on the side of the mare, and turns white. As Gerald brings his bright spurs down again into the very same wounds, the world that Gudrun knows reels and passes into "nothingness" (104). The author writes that, when Gudrun recovers, "her soul was calm and cold, without feeling." Although trucks continue to roll by and the man and the mare continue to fight, "she herself was cold and separate, she had no more feeling for them. She was quite hard and cold and indifferent" (104). Gerald, for his part, relaxes confidently as the episode concludes--"his will bright and unstained" (104).

The scene in which Gerald subdues the mare anticipates the power struggle to come between Gerald and Gudrun and warns the young woman of the nature of the adversary she will face in Gerald. When somewhat later she issues the challenge to him, her bright rose stockings have paled to pink as did her complexion whiten when she became aware of the trickle of blood on the side of the mare that Gerald willed into submission. In both incidents, Gudrun is emotionally drained by the intensity of the demand of Gerald that he be obeyed. The challenge that Gudrun makes to Gerald happens at a public garden party on the Crich estate. Coming upon Gudrun thoughtlessly driving his cattle up a hill, Gerald tells her that she is doing a dangerous thing

because the cattle may turn on her. In response, Gudrun strikes Gerald's face with the back of her hand. Gerald recoils from the slight blow; then he says, "You have struck the first blow." Gudrun answers, "And I shall strike the last" (162).

## II

In a discussion of 1984 by George Orwell, Daphne Patai suggests using game analogy as a model to explain the interactions of the characters in the novel. The principles that she outlines apply equally well to the relationship that Lawrence creates for Gerald Crich and Gudrun Brangwen to share in Women in Love. Patai reminds us that, when power is pursued for its own sake, it becomes a game, a competitive one:

In other words, the obstacle or difficulty that makes the game of power possible is another human consciousness. But not just any other consciousness, and especially not a weak one. . . . for the game to be relished, a relative equality between the players is needed. <sup>6</sup>

Adding the element of competition to the relationship of Gerald and Gudrun creates havoc and unrest in a purposeful way. As already noted, Lawrence intended Women in Love to be an indirect comment on the Great War of 1914-1918; therefore, it follows that the violence and dissolution in the novel depict Lawrence's contemporary world; Gudrun and Gerald are both victimized by a hopeless situation.

An especially memorable scene of bloody violence in the



novel finds Gerald subduing not a horse, but his sister's pet rabbit, that is suitably named "Bismarck." The blood that is shed belongs to Gudrun and Gerald; Bismarck seems none the worse for wear after the fray. On this occasion Gudrun is wearing pale yellow woollen stockings. The yellow stockings remind one of the sun which, in turn, reminds one of the young woman "from Berkeley" who was sacrificed to the sun in Lawrence's short story, "The Woman Who Rode Away." Curiosity and boredom with her wifely lot enticed her to leave the "lifeless isolation" of her home in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, where her adoring husband kept her in "invincible slavery." Once beyond the protection of her husband, the young woman was picked up by Indians who gave "her to the sun, so the sun [would] . . . come to the Indian again."<sup>7</sup> The author writes that Gudrun's stockings always "disconcerted" Gerald, and then he gives us a clue that what is to transpire will not destroy Gudrun:

Gudrun looked at Gerald with strange, darkened eyes, strained with underworld knowledge, almost supplicating, like those of a creature which is at his mercy, yet which is his ultimate victor. . . . [Gerald] had qualms of fear. (234)

The stockings worn by Gudrun in Women in Love, surely, broadcast her individual self. Even if Lawrence chose the colors randomly, he seems to be using the repeated appearances of the bright stockings that Gudrun wears to indicate moments of crises for her ego. Lawrence suggests this possibility when he writes in the novel's Foreword that

repetition is but the pulsing of "emotion or passion or understanding" (viii). Gudrun's stockings are brought to our attention on nine occasions--all concern emotional crises in the dramatic development of Women in Love. Specifically, the author refers to the color of the young woman's stockings when she expresses to Ursula a discontentment with life and being back in Beldover; when she visits Breadalby and meets Gerald Crich socially for the first time; when she watches Gerald's indomitable will best a spirited mare; when she challenges Gerald to psychological warfare; when Gerald subdues the aroused rabbit; when the young artist triumphantly returns from her showing in London--she wears bright red stockings; when she becomes Gerald's mistress; and when she feels the rapture stimulated by the icy slopes in the Alps. The last episode is when Gudrun gives Ursula, as a parting gift, "three pairs of the coloured stockings for which she [Gudrun] was notorious" (427).

The tension that exists between Gerald and Gudrun throughout the pages of Women in Love leaves little room for wonder that one of the two succumbs at the end of the novel. Gudrun usually appears the stronger in their interchanges, and the narrator gives the outcome away when he tells us that "the deep resolve formed in [Gudrun] to combat [Gerald]" because

one of them must triumph over the other. Which should it be? Her soul steeled itself with strength. Almost she laughed within herself, at her confidence. It woke a certain keen, half



contemptuously pity, tenderness for him: she was so ruthless. (403)

The next morning, "all scarlet and royal blue," Gudrun goes tobogganing with Gerald. In "The Woman Who Rode Away," the Indians refer to blue as "the colour that stands away off, looking at us from the distance, that cannot come near to us. When we go near, it goes farther."<sup>8</sup> Gudrun distances herself from Gerald to protect her identity, her individual self, from being lost among Gerald's extensive possessions and thus becoming merely another item of the Crich estate for Gerald to control. Lawrence introduces the mother of Gerald to enable the reader to see how the days of an industrial magnet's wife may end, which inspires sympathy for Gudrun's struggle to remain free of the domineering will of Gerald:

. . . As the years went on, [Mrs. Crich] lost more and more count of the world, she seemed rapt in some glittering abstraction, almost purely unconscious. She would wander about the house and about the surrounding country, staring keenly and seeing nothing. She rarely spoke, she had no connection with the world. . . .

And she bore many children. For, as time went on, she never opposed her husband in word or deed. . . . She submitted to him, let him take what he wanted and do as he wanted with her. . . .

She had let go the outer world, but within herself she was unbroken and unimpaired. She only sat in her room like a moping, dishevelled hawk, motionless, mindless. Her children, for whom she had been so fierce in her youth, now meant scarcely anything to her. She had lost all that, she was quite by herself. (209-10)

One is inclined to view Gudrun's treatment of Gerald as harsh and her responsibility for his death as overwhelming until one recognizes the signs that Lawrence judiciously



posts to show the inevitability of Gerald's death. Gerald is a victim of the times in which Lawrence is writing. He is victimized no less than the colliers who lose their jobs when mechanization takes over the Crich mines.

Gerald has an all-consuming motivation in life. That is, to reduce the objects of his interest to his will. He takes over the management of the Crich mines from his father and "immediately . . . realized what he could do. He had a fight to fight with Matter, with the earth and the coal it enclosed" (220). The narrator describes Gerald as having been tortured "all his life . . . by a furious destructive demon, which possessed him sometimes like an insanity" (221). So, when he replaces his father, true to character, he ruthlessly hires and fires employees to suit his new policies of efficiency, and he discontinues gratuities that he considers unprofitable for the firm. The practices of Gerald run on "the most accurate and delicate scientific method . . . the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments" (223).

The successes of Gerald in mechanizing his father's mines leads to his undoing. His success is so "perfect" that he becomes a supernumerary in its functioning. He has reached his goal with the Crich mines at great personal expense. His contact with Gudrun of the colorful stockings upsets his mechanical drive:

And once or twice lately, when he was alone in the evening and had nothing to do, he had suddenly stood up in terror, not knowing what he was. And he went to the mirror and looked long and closely

at his own face, at his own eyes, seeking something. He was afraid, in mortal dry fear, but he knew not what of. . . .

. . . In a strangely indifferent, sterile way, he was frightened. But he could not react even to fear. It was as if his centres of feeling were drying up. He remained calm, calculative and healthy, and quite freely deliberate, even whilst he felt, with faint, small but final sterile horror, that his mystic reason was breaking, giving way now, at this crisis. (224-5)

A conversation that Gerald has with his mother in the last hours of his father's life further suggests that Gerald's emotional stability is suspect irrespective of the influence Gudrun may have on the industrial magnet:

"How are you" she muttered in her strangely quiet voice, as if nobody should hear but him. "You're not getting into a state, are you? You're not letting it [the father's imminent death] make you hysterical?"

"I don't think so, mother. . . . Somebody's got to see it through, you know."

"Have they? . . . Why should you take it on yourself? . . ."

"No, I don't suppose I can do any good. . . . It's just how it affects us, you see."

"You like to be affected--don't you?" (319)

Then the mother warns Gerald to take care of himself or he'll find himself in "Queer Street" and adds, "You're hysterical, always were" (319).

In the closing pages of Women in Love, Gudrun clutches at the only relief available before her future is determined for her by the will that Gerald has to succeed. She aligns herself with the repugnant German Loerke. The two, Gudrun and Loerke, play with the past, "and with the great figures



of the past, a sort of little game of chess, or marionettes, all to please themselves":

. . . As for the future, that they never mentioned except one laughed out some mocking dream of the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of man's invention: a man invented such a perfect explosion that it blew the earth in two, and the two halves set off in different directions through space. . . . Or else the people of the world divided into two halves, and each half decided it was perfect and right, the other half was wrong and must be destroyed; so another end of the world. Or else . . . the world went cold, and snow fell everywhere, and only white creatures, Polar bears, white foxes, and men like awful white snow-birds, persisted in ice cruelty. (444)

Into this seemingly witless chatter Lawrence actually insinuates the tenor of the relationship that he has created for Gudrun and Gerald, which has reached an emotionally explosive stage at this point in the story. When Ursula and Birkin join Gudrun and Gerald for a holiday in the Swiss Alps, Gerald and Gudrun are quite literally two halves of their immediate world of two--"each [having] decided it was perfect and right, the other half was wrong and must be destroyed." The impasse that faces the two comes from the fact that neither is willing or able psychologically to give up even a modicum of individual self in order to retain the love of the other. Lawrence provides a clue to the situation when he writes later in "Love was once a Little boy":

As soon as you start with a case of "true love" between [a man and a woman today], you end with a terrific struggle and conflict of the two opposing egos or individualities. It's nobody's fault: It's the inevitable result of trying to



snatch an intensified individuality out of the mutual flame.<sup>9</sup>

Lawrence continues in the same essay to say that the ego cannot control "the subtle streaming of desire"; rather it fools itself into believing that "my love" is at my disposal. He includes a passage we can use to justify Gudrun's treatment of Gerald:

Neither man nor woman should sacrifice individuality to love; nor love to individuality.

If we lose desire out of our loves, we become empty vessels. But if we break our own integrity, we become a squalid mess, like a jar of honey dropped and smashed.<sup>10</sup>

Gudrun recognized a need to protect her individual self, her private person, by avoiding competition long before she met Gerald. In her high-school days, "when she found herself at the bottom of the class, she laughed, lazily, saying she was safe now" (Rainbow, 270). Gerald and his will threaten the young woman's natural bent for pursuing "her own intent way." Gudrun fears Gerald, but she also envies him "almost painfully." Lawrence makes us privy to this fact in the beginning of Women in Love as the two sisters watch Gerald as he swims in Willey Water:

"God, what it is to be a man!" [Gudrun] cried.

"What?" exclaimed Ursula in surprise.

"The freedom, the liberty, the mobility! . . . You're a man, you want to do something, you do it. You haven't the thousand obstacles a woman has in front of her." (40-1)

When Ursula quizzes her to be more specific, Gudrun can give

no response; instead, she suggests they suppose a situation:

"Supposing I want to swim up that water. It is impossible, it is one of the impossibilities of life, for me to take my clothes off now and jump in. But isn't it ridiculous, doesn't it simply prevent our living!" (41)

The author gives ample evidence in the novel of Gudrun's wisdom in standing clear of the inability of Gerald to accept any contrariness with equanimity. A conversation that Ursula initiates by reminding Gerald of the cruel behavior toward his Arab mare that she had witnessed is enlightening. Gerald flatly rejects the statement of Ursula that the mare had a right to her own being as Gerald has to his:

". . . I disagree. . . . I consider that mare is there for my use. Not because I bought her, but because that is the natural order. It is more natural for a man to take a horse and use it as he likes, than for him to go down on his knees to it, begging it to do as it wishes, and to fulfil its own marvelous nature." (130)

Lawrence reveals through Gerald Crich the crux of modern woman's problem in defining herself. How can she find a definitive self as long as she is locked into a "natural order," an arbitrary hierarchy imposed by man? Gerald customarily is both admired and obeyed by women. He is not able to accept Gudrun Brangwen and her modern ideas that permit her to be free of any hierarchy that is based on gender. Unlike Conrad's Emilia Gould who gladly paid the price of walking in the shadow of her husband's shadow, Gudrun must stay in the direct rays of the sun at any price.

Her independence marks her for certain death by the troubled mind of Gerald.

### III

The father of Gudrun and Ursula, whenever the opportunity offers itself, reminds us that his daughters have minds of their own and do as they please without regard to others. The father's attitude is patently unreasonable because both Ursula and Gudrun are sympathetic in their respective interactions with others, a fact that undoubtedly contributes to why the girls maintain the emotional balance in Women in Love that eludes Gerald, and even Birkin. Horace Gregory has written that the four are "scarcely human beings at all."<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Lawrence has drawn Gudrun, in particular, to represent the figure of one woman's struggle to take the initiative to become a self-responsible individual. The author has accomplished the drawing with amazing empathy. In 1912 he had written to Sallie Hopkin, "I shall do a novel about Love Triumphant one day. I shall do my work for women, better than the suffrage."<sup>12</sup> True to his word, Lawrence incorporates in the character of Ursula in The Rainbow and that of Gudrun in Women in Love ideas that he expressed when he wrote to Edward Garnett to comment on the latter's play about Jeanne d'Arc:

You cared for women not so much for what they were themselves as for what their men saw in them. So that after all in your work women seem not to have an existence, save that they are the projections of the men. . . . They have each got an internal



form, an internal self which remains firm and individual whatever love they may be subject to.<sup>13</sup>

By the nature of his calling, an artist has a freedom of self-expression and action that customarily is denied the general population. This may account for why Lawrence chose to dramatize Gudrun's plight as a modern woman by making her an artist. The author's Foreword to the novel that he wrote in 1919 to countermand America's label of eroticism neatly explains, and even justifies, the development of Gudrun in Women in Love.

The creative, spontaneous soul sends forth its promptings of desire and aspiration in us. These promptings are one true fate, which is our business to fulfill. A fate dictated from outside, from theory or from circumstances, is a false fate. . . . (vii-viii)

Lawrence refers to Women in Love as "a record of the profoundest experience in the self" (viii).

When we first meet Gudrun and Ursula in Women in Love, Gudrun is drawing "upon a board which she held on her knees" and Ursula is "stitching a piece of brightly-coloured embroidery" (1). In the end, Gudrun is proven to be faithful to her art and her sister opts for the domesticity suggested by her interest in needlework. Both women decry the ordinary lot of the contemporary woman who settles for "the little grey home in the west" and rearing children. Gudrun readily agrees with her sister that neither of them can "contemplate the ordinary life," but tells Ursula that she will be out of

it with Birkin because "he's a special case" (366). Despite the thousands of women who can "conceive of nothing else" but marriage with an ordinary man, Gudrun bluntly states her opposition to marriage:

. . . [the very thought] sends me mad. One must be free, above all, one must be free. One may forfeit everything else, but one must be free--one must not become 7, Pinchbeck Street--or Somerset Drive--or Shortlands. No man will be sufficient to make that good--no man! To marry, one must have a free lance or nothing, a comrade-in-arms, a Glücksritter. (366)

Birkin, of course, qualifies as a sort of Glücksritter, an adventurer, when he tells a somewhat apprehensive Ursula that he wants to set off with her toward a distant "nowhere," that he wants the two of them "to wander away from the world's somewheres, into [their] own nowhere" (308). Ursula seemingly will enjoy in her marriage a freedom that Gudrun could not hope to achieve should she marry Gerald. Gerald has responsibilities that Birkin does not. The Crich family and mill depend on Gerald; whereas, Birkin simply posts a statement of resignation to the Director of Education and is free to wander at will. Gudrun recognizes Birkin's nature that makes him a special case and Gerald's nature that would demand his wife to be the mistress of Shortlands and all it represents. There could be no wandering away into "the world's somewheres" for Gudrun if she marries Gerald.

Momentarily, sensing her sister's elation at being married, Gudrun succumbs to envy for the married status of her



sister. Gudrun pictures herself married to "Gerald and Shortlands--marriage and the home!" and she imagines herself in "a cosy room, with herself in a beautiful gown, and a handsome man in evening dress who [holds] her in his arms in the firelight, and [kisses] her." We can be certain that the envy of the young woman was transient because the author tells us that the unmarried woman entitled the picture "Home." Her lack of sincerity was stressed by the comment, "It would have done for the Royal Academy" (368). The fear that she will lose her self in any marriage is evident when she remarks to Gerald, "I'm sure a mistress is more likely to be faithful than a wife--just because she is her own mistress" (282).

Gudrun's artistic talents are her ticket to an independent existence and freedom from becoming merely the "projection" of a man. Her artwork literally supports her financially and spiritually. Besides earning money from the sale of her figures and drawings, she taught at the local school until Birkin suggested that the senior Mr. Crich offer her a position of tutoring Gerald's young sister Winifred. Her special talent sustains her respect for self that is so necessary to any woman seeking a singular role in modern society. The successful career as an artist wraps Gudrun in a mystique that separates her from what would otherwise be marriage to an "ordinary man" or dependent spinsterhood. She is recognized first as an artist and secondly as a woman.

Winifred Crich is a "queer child--a special child," whose father hopes to give her a formula for facing life



that will enable the child to avoid the failing of the Crich family of being "curiously bad at living." The child shows an interest in sculpting, so Gudrun is hired to train her. Later, when Mr. Crich asks how well his youngest child is doing, Gudrun admits the child has talent and "will do good things one day." Encouraged, Mr. Crich responds in a way that must have pleased Gudrun, "Ah! Then her life won't be altogether wasted, you think?" (278). Without hesitation, Gudrun answers, "Sure it won't!" She believes what Birkin previously had told Gerald, "Every true artist is the salvation of every other" (200).

Because Winifred has "a special nature," the plan is for Gudrun to "put into her way the means of being self-sufficient." To persuade Gerald to offer the position to Gudrun, Birkin reminds Gerald to think of how "awful" Winifred's "life will be . . . unless she does find a means of expression, some way of fulfilment" (200). Moreover, he advises Gerald not to leave the life of his sister to fate and marriage, which is so little "to be trusted." Birkin proves his argument by telling his friend to look at his own mother whom Birkin feels has gone wrong because she failed to find "something more, or other than the common run of life" (200). The Crich family's support of Gudrun gives the young artist breathing space, while she defines to her own satisfaction the direction she wants her life to take. The position in the Crich ménage opens the door to the inner circle of Gerald's home. It should be noted that what has been said

about the talented Winifred could be said as well about the talented Gudrun. Her art eventually proves to be Gudrun's "fulfilment."

A letter that Gudrun receives in London where she is showing some of her art makes the young woman privy to the plans that the Crich family has for her future. Winifred first relates news of Shortlands, then she writes:

"Dear Miss Brangwen, are you coming back soon, you are very much missed here. I enclose a drawing of father sitting up in bed. He says he hopes you are not going to forsake us. Oh dear, Miss Brangwen, I am sure you won't. . . .  
 "Father says we might have a studio. Gerald says we could easily have a beautiful one over the stables, it would only need windows to put in the slant of the roof. . . . Then you could stay here all day and work, and we could live in the studio, like two artists. . . . I long to be free, to live the free life of an artist. Even Gerald told father that only an artist is free, because he lives in a creative world of his own--" (269)

Reading between the lines of the letter written by Winifred, Gudrun feels that Gerald is using his sister as a decoy to bring the attractive young art teacher within his range. The idea does not offend Gudrun. The first time that she saw Gerald she had thought, "I shall know more of that man" (9). Now she is given the opportunity to do so, and the opportunity includes a studio where she will be free to work at her pleasure. Gudrun dislikes the Grammar School "thoroughly" and is quite willing, given a studio, to spend her days at Shortlands. The author tells us, "She [will] await the turn of events with complete serenity" (270).



"The turn of events" actually represents a very real paradox that modern woman had to face--how was she to balance the need for individual freedom with the loss of some that went with the traditional relationship between the sexes? By agreeing to go to Shortlands on a daily basis, Gudrun tempts fate and practically shouts to Gerald, "Here I am. What now?" Perhaps more to the point, she tests her own command of self by going into the home territory of Gerald, his estate at Willey Green.

Before accepting the assignment to teach Winifred Crich privately in the new studio at Shortlands, Gudrun had been uncertain about her future plans. She only knew that she wanted to get away from Beldover and its stifling atmosphere. She had saved a tidy sum with the intention of going to St. Petersburg to join a friend who was also a sculptor. This friend lived with a wealthy Russian. "The emotional, rather rootless life of the Russians appealed" to Gudrun. She did not want to go to Paris because the city bored her, and she was not content in London because the city was too familiar. At the time she received Winifred's letter, she was wishing she could go to Rome, Munich, Vienna, St. Petersburg, or Moscow. She had written a friend in Munich and one in St. Petersburg and was simply biding her time in London until one of the two asked her to visit. She had planned to move on as soon as she heard from one of her friends--"Her nature, in spite of her placidity and calm, was profoundly restless."

Gerald represents "the exquisite adventure, the desir-



able unknown" to Gudrun whose nature refuses to shrink from any experience that promises to enhance her individual existence. Judging from her flights of fancy, her attitude toward Gerald and what he represents is ambivalent and interferes with her ability to maintain the supreme "I." Unmarried, the two lovers take a Christmas trip to the Tyrolean Alps that conclusively resolves the issue. Gudrun, lying beside a sleeping Gerald, thinks what "a fine, independent will" he has, what "a revolution he had worked" in his father's mines in a very short time, and how easily he made "order out of confusion":

For a few moments she was borne away on the wings of ambition. Gerald, with his force of will and his power for comprehending the actual world, should be set to solve the problems of the day, the problems of industrialism in the modern world. He only needed . . . that his hand should be set to the task. . . . And this she could do. She would marry him, he would go into Parliament in the Conservative interest, he would clear up the great muddle of labour and industry. (407)

Gudrun imagines her future as "Mrs. Gerald Crich," a future in which Gerald "would be a Napoleon of peace, or a Bismarck--and she the woman behind him" (408). This "strange, false sunshine of hope in life" as the helpmate of Gerald fades into "undeniable reality" as quickly as did her earlier vision of a married self in the mental picture that she conjured up when she saw her sister Ursula contentedly married.

Reality for Gudrun is

the collier's wives, with their linoleum and their

lace curtains and their little girls in high-laced boots . . . [and] the wives and daughters of the pit-managers . . . and their terrible struggles to be superior each to the other, in social scale. (408)

Reality, in addition, is Shortlands with its "meaningless distinction . . . and the meaningless crowd of the Criches." Her cynicism recognizes "that to rise in the world [means] to have one outside show instead of another, the advance [is] like having a spurious half-crown instead of a spurious penny" (498). It also recognizes that, "in a world where spurious coin [is] current, a bad sovereign [is] better than a bad farthing" (408). As long as Gudrun maintains her identity as a sculptor, she is free of all these encumbrances that Gerald has inherited.

In Women in Love, Lawrence affords Gudrun a number of opportunities to learn how little personal space for growth she would be allowed should she marry Gerald. Gudrun wonders what Gerald means, for instance, when he responds "Just as well" to her statement that she had not sold much of her work at the successful London showing of the works that took place immediately before she and Winifred moved into the new studio above the stables on the Crich estate. On another occasion, when Gerald confesses an overpowering love for her, Gudrun withdrew--"yet this was what she wanted. Why did she so lose courage?" (322). She, obviously, sensed what the reader knows--to choose life with Gerald entails the irrevocable capitulation to the domineering will of Gerald.



Too often in their relationship, Gerald plays the intruder; and Gudrun, to her credit, manages the incidents remarkably well. Art student and teacher, having retreated to their studio to escape the gloomy celebration of death at the main house of the Crich estate, soon see Gerald appear in their "tiny world to themselves," where "the outside world . . . was completely wiped out" (328). Gerald invades their privacy without giving a bit of consideration to what the girls might want, although they both graciously accept him. Another, more appalling intrusion takes place in the home of Gudrun's father in the middle of the night. Gerald is in a state that demands attention from a drink, a woman, or Birkin. A drink does not appeal to him and Birkin is away and unavailable; so, Gerald takes it upon himself to satisfy his needs without regard to another soul and heads for the privacy of Gudrun's bedroom. The narrator tells us that he "had come for vindication" (337). Having satisfied his needs, he leaves the young woman's bedroom before the family arises. As Gudrun whispers, "Good-bye," Gerald "dutifully [kisses] her and [turns] away" (342).

The advice that Gudrun gives to her sister when the two are parting in the Alps ostensibly for Birkin to satisfy his desire for "a new space to be in" reveals the young artist is maturing and learning to view herself objectively. She agrees with Ursula about the need for an individual to have "new space," but cautions her sister by adding, "I think that a new world is a development from this world, and that to iso-



late oneself with one other person, isn't to find a new world at all, but only to secure oneself in one's illusions" (428). Loerke, the "rock bottom of all life," attracts Gudrun because he has no illusions. She notes that "everybody else had their illusions, must have their illusions, there before and after. But he . . . dispensed with an illusion. . . . There was only his work" (417).

Gudrun's decision to stay with her art is her hope for the future, as Lawrence sums up in a letter to a young poet that could apply to Gudrun: "Yes, I like the free spirit, that an artist is and must be, in you. How much you'll sail with, and how much against, the wind: that is your affair. But the wind is dead against a free spirit and a real art."<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> George A. Panichas, The Reverent Discipline (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1974), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Mansions of the Spirit, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967), p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), I, 490.

<sup>4</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Women in Love, Foreword by author, intro. Richard Aldington (1921; New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. vii; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers, 1936, ed. Edward D. McDonald (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 759-60.

<sup>6</sup> Daphne Patai, "Gamesmanship and Androcentrism in Orwell's 1984," PMLA, 97 (1982), p. 857.

<sup>7</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "The Woman Who Rode Away," in The Complete Stories (London: William Heinemann, 1955; rpt. 1958), II, 575.

<sup>8</sup> "The Woman Who Rode Away," p. 574.

<sup>9</sup> D. H. Lawrence, ". . . Love Was Once a Little Boy," in Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> ". . . Love Was Once a Little Boy," p. 177.

<sup>11</sup> Horace Gregory, Pilgrim of the Apocalypse: A Critical Study of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Viking Press, 1933), p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Letters, ed. Boulton, I, 490.

<sup>13</sup> Letters, ed. Boulton, I, 470.

<sup>14</sup> Letters, ed. Boulton, III (11 Sept. 1918).

Part IV. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Chapter 1. Mrs. Dalloway (1925):

A Sociable Mrs. Dalloway

I

In both Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf portrays women who lack the will to free themselves of the limitations imposed on them in their roles as married women in the early years of the twentieth century. Each woman individually senses an undefined emptiness in her life, a sense of somehow missing out of something; yet, neither Mrs. Dalloway nor Mrs. Ramsay attempts to reach out to find the unique self behind the married woman.

Unlike James's Isabel Archer and Conrad's Emily Gould who found compensatory activities to overcome the stereotypic role that historically and traditionally was exacted of married women, Mrs. Dalloway settles her restless discontent with life by accepting her parties as her gift to society. However shallow the goal of giving successful parties might appear to others, to Clarissa Dalloway it is the only talent she has to offer:

An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; [she] could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians



and Turks; loved success; hated discomfit; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense; and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know. (185)<sup>1</sup>

In Mrs. Dalloway Woolf explains Clarissa's offering by describing to her readers the events that take place during the day of one of Clarissa's parties--how the day begins, the events of the day in terms of the "poetic and the commonplace,"<sup>2</sup> and the ending of the party that closes Clarissa's day. Not only do we view the day from the perspective of Mrs. Dalloway, but also from the perspective of others who are exposed to the happenings that touch Clarissa. By introducing an old beau of Clarissa and several acquaintances from her younger years who show up without a formal invitation, the account that the author gives of the day easily reverts to Mrs. Dalloway's youth to point out those experiences that helped to nurture the bent that Mrs. Dalloway has for giving parties.

By observing the reactions of others to the events that color Clarissa's day, we get a picture of the twentieth-century English world that followed the Great War. Although her former beau Peter Walsh believes she is a snob who likes to have famous people about her, and her husband Richard thinks that "it is foolish of her to like excitement when she [knows it is] bad for her health" (183), what Clarissa actually likes is "simply life." Considering that the carnage of World War I indelibly marked Virginia Woolf's memories, it is no small wonder that her writing in Mrs. Dalloway reflects

the Great War's influence.

Mrs. Dalloway is a study in contrasts, life and death being the most obvious one. In a review of Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev's novels, Woolf observed that "Turgenev did not see his books as a succession of events; he saw them as a succession of emotions radiating from some character at the centre."<sup>3</sup> That is what we find in Mrs. Dalloway. Clarissa Dalloway is at the center of the novel, but she is by no means the dominant character. She dominates only in the sense that all characters are in the novel to tell us something about Clarissa that will help us to understand how she comes to accept a positive image of self. What dominates in the novel are the reactions of Clarissa and the reactions of others around her to events that impinge on human sensitivity. Woolf parallels Clarissa's search for a self that she can respect with a similar search made by Septimus Warren Smith, a young, "pale-faced and beak-nosed" (20) veteran and victim of World War I.

Through thoughts that Woolf attributes to Clarissa, we know that both author and character are victims, like Septimus, of the War. This fact is apparent in the preoccupation that Clarissa has with death and the meaning of life:

did it matter then, she asked herself, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? . . . but what was she dreaming as she looked into Hatchard's shop window? What was she trying to recover? What image

of white dawn in the country, as she read in the book spread open: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages." (12-3)

Before remarking how Clarissa's old Uncle William "had turned on his bed one morning in the middle of the War [and said] 'I've had enough,'" the narrator contributes an opinion of the prevailing mood of the world of Clarissa in the aftermath of World War I: "This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (13).

In what more appropriate world could Clarissa's parties have been a welcome respite to offset "this late age of the world's experience"? The arrangements that Clarissa makes for her parties and "this thing called life" seem to happen intuitively:

Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. (184-5)

The preparations for the particular party portrayed in Mrs. Dalloway begin about ten o'clock in the morning of a beautiful June day when Clarissa decides to walk to the shop of the florist to pick out the flowers for her party that evening. During the day and evening, Woolf introduces us to various characters and events through which we can watch the middle-aged woman come to grips with what she perceives she



has made of self during her fifty-two years of life. Peter Walsh appears in the late morning and the two old friends reminisce briefly. Clarissa's query, "Do you remember the lake?" evokes a mental picture for her in which she is a child

. . . throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said, "This is what I have made of it! This!" (63-4)

Clarissa wonders what, indeed, has she made of her life in the thirty years since she turned down Peter's proposal of marriage by telling him, "It's no use. It's no use. This is the end." She married Richard Dalloway because he offered security and support, "not that she was weak, but she wanted support." More than support even, Richard Dalloway offered her "privacy of the soul"; whereas Peter had to share everything. Clarissa believes that a little license is necessary in marriage--"a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house" (10). Richard gave this independence to Clarissa and she to him. Clarissa senses "a dignity in people, a solitude, [a gulf] even between husband and wife" that must be respected; "for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without one's losing one's independence, one's self-respect--something, after all price-

less" (181).

Probably the first opportunity that Clarissa had to make an important decision as to her life's path took place when Peter asked her to marry him. Although her father's strong objection to Peter for a son-in-law influenced her decision, the young woman seems to have based her choice for a husband as much on intuitive reservations about Peter's stability for a long-term relationship as on the fact that Richard had entered her life and offered Clarissa the possibility of becoming what Peter prophesied--the wife of a Prime Minister who would "stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess." Peter told himself that she was a "cold, heartless prude." Clarissa's bent for entertaining is enhanced by a natural gift of "knowing people almost by instinct. . . . If you put her in a room with someone, up went her back like a cat's; or she purred" (11). In retrospect, Clarissa knows that marriage with Peter would have been a mistake--"they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined."

On the day of the party described in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa reveals a momentary lapse of respect for her husband's independence and temporary misgivings for her current life style as Richard's wife when she discovers that she has not been included with Richard in an invitation for lunch at Lady Bruton's, a woman whose lunch parties are reputed to be "extraordinarily amusing." Clarissa's irritation stems not from "vulgar jealousy" but from fear of "time itself," which Lady Bruton's unintentional slight has brought to Clarissa's

awareness. In the light of time, an "unseen" and "unknown" Clarissa has been usurped by Mrs. Dalloway for whom there is "no more marrying, no more having of children" (14). Lady Bruton's slight reminds Mrs. Dalloway of the "dwindling of life,"

how year by year her share [of life] was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing room, an exquisite suspense. (44)

Having been excluded from the luncheon given by Lady Bruton, Clarissa suddenly feels "shrivelled, aged, breastless." Women, she acknowledges to herself, "at midday must disrobe." She senses an "emptiness about the heart of life" and worries that, at fifty-two years old, the purpose of her life is becoming "narrower and narrower." Woolf marks the relentless progress of passing time in the opening pages of the novel when she writes that Big Ben booms "first, a warning musical; then the hour irrevocable" (5). We are reminded constantly through out the pages of the novel of the approach of the "hour irrevocable" and the changes that follow in its wake.

Except for an occasional note from India, Peter Walsh has been absent from Clarissa's life for thirty years. His unexpected arrival in London on the day of one of her parties rekindles forgotten emotions for Clarissa. His return



makes her conscious of her past, present, and future and starts her wondering about the self portrayed in her face--"pointed; dartlike; definite." She knows that the composed side of her self centers on a woman who sits "in her drawing room" to become "a radiancy . . . in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps," a constant figure of solace who "tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her--faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions, like this of Lady Bruton not asking her to lunch" (55).

The composed self of Clarissa is not unlike the green dress that she is mending to wear to her evening party when Peter unexpectedly bursts in upon her--"by artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour . . . in the sun" (55). When Peter's visit recalls for Clarissa his way of making her feel "frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox," she summons "to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; [and] her self . . . to come about her and beat off the enemy" (65-6).

Peter Walsh has returned to London from India for the purpose of having his lawyers in the city take up the matter of a divorce for the twenty-four-year-old wife of a major in the Indian army with whom Peter has fallen in love. Peter is a widower whose first wife was an Indian woman whom he had met on the boat that took him to India soon after Clarissa had refused his proposal of marriage some thirty years earlier. He is particularly exhilarated by the fact that

the young woman is more in love with him than he is with her. He confesses to himself after visiting Mrs. Dalloway's home on the morning of her party, "At the age of fifty three one scarcely need[s] people any more." Clarissa, on the contrary, does need people. The author makes the fact perfectly clear simply by showing to what extremes Clarissa goes to bring people together and how worried she becomes when the party does not at first appear to be successful.

Clarissa worries that people will find her less enjoyable to be near as she grows old. Meeting Peter on the day of one of her parties helps her to appreciate her life as Richard Dalloway's wife and Elizabeth's mother. During one of his musings, Peter decides that a compensation of growing old is that one retains one's youthful passions and scores a gain by being given "the power which adds the supreme flavour to existence,--the power of taking hold of experience, of turning it round, slowly in the light" (119). Woolf champions the opinion of Peter when she allows Mrs. Dalloway the ability to accept with equanimity the truth of her relationship to Peter and thereby to survive strengthened and unscathed by memories. Woolf demonstrates the other side of the coin with her creation of Septimus Warren Smith who has a negative response to memories. Unable to adjust to the truth of his wartime experience that left Evans, his comrade-in-arms, dead, Septimus retreats into psychotic behavior that leads to his untimely demise.

In Mrs. Dalloway we hear Peter's evaluations of Clarissa



as a youth and we come to realize his opinions of the young woman point out her wisdom in rejecting his proposal of marriage. His opinions also show us how well Clarissa has managed her life, despite its undertones of superficiality. When Peter told Clarissa years ago that she had the makings of the "perfect hostess," she wept. Now, when he sees her after the intervening thirty years, he knows that the expression would not make her weep, but would elicit instead exclamations of pleasure for what she would take to be a compliment. Peter attributes the momentary confusion of Clarissa on first seeing him to regret for what might have been until she

forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles, and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of. (236)

Reminiscing, Peter admits that he always has admired the courage and social instinct of Clarissa. He also always has believed that her need for people causes her to fritter away her time, "lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination" (118-19). Peter credits her with being "purely feminine" and praises her genius for turning her drawing room into a sort of meeting place to promote her husband's career. It irks Peter to think that "with twice his [Richard's] wits, she had to see things through his eyes--one of the tragedies



of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard" (116).

Woolf prejudices our opinion of Peter Walsh and his opinion of Clarissa when she writes that Peter has returned to London with the expressed intention of asking Clarissa's husband to put him

into some secretary's office [or] to find him some usher's job teaching little boys Latin . . . something that brought in five hundred a year. . . . He didn't mind what he asked Dalloway. He was a thorough good sort; a bit limited; a bit thick in the head; yes; but a thorough good sort. Whatever [Richard] took up he did in the same matter-of-fact sensible way; without a touch of imagination, without a spark of brilliancy, but with the inexplicable niceness of his type. (112-13)

The author shades our opinion of the character of Peter further when she has him come begging, as it were, of former friends whose life style he freely denigrates. Peter admits to expecting Richard to find a position for him and Clarissa to find his future wife Daisy and him proper lodgings in the city. The reactions of one to such manipulations is to appreciate the wisdom shown by Clarissa in choosing Richard Dalloway instead of Peter Walsh to be her husband.

From the perspective of Clarissa, her former beau attends her evening party to watch and to criticize. His presence fills the woman with misgivings and uncertainty: "He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic" (255). She questions why he came at all if all he means to do is criticize, and she wonders, "Why always take, never

give? Why not risk one's one little point of view?" (255). Peter, she decides, draws out the negative side of life: "humiliation" and "renunciation." His attitude at her evening party revives Clarissa's memories of his "silly unconvictionality, his weakness, his lack of the ghost of a notion what anyone else was feeling that . . . had always annoyed her" (69). It is because Mrs. Dalloway is conscious of the feelings and sensitivities of others that her parties are a success.

Peter whiles away the time between his morning visit to the Dalloway home and his appointment with his lawyers by relaxing on a park bench in Regent's Park. Here, too, come Septimus Warren Smith and his wife Lucrezia to while away a time before their appointment with Sir William Bradshaw, a renowned psychiatrist. The psychiatrist has agreed to judge the mental state of Septimus and then to offer a remedy to help the troubled young man. Peter notices Septimus and his wife and assumes the two are simply "lovers squabbling." Like his pronouncements on the respective character shortcomings of Clarissa and Richard, his hasty analysis of Septimus and Rezia lacks soundness.

## II

At the time that the young married Smiths come within Peter's range of vision, Rezia has walked away from her husband in frustration at not being able to cajole him into behaving rationally. She is young, a twenty-four-year-old stranger in England. The seemingly normal soldier, whom

she married in Italy at the end of the War, is having difficulty adjusting to the past for the sake of the future. He and his wife are killing time in the park until the hour of their appointment with Sir William arrives. The Smiths are hoping that Sir William will know how to relieve the mind of Septimus which is intolerably burdened with memories of his experience in the War.

In Accent critic Isabel Gamble refers to Septimus as Clarissa's "double." Taking "The Secret Sharer" by Joseph Conrad to be a model, Gamble believes "Septimus's qualities to be indications, by contrast, of a lack or dark place in Mrs. Dalloway, much as Leggett illuminated the dim regions of the captain's psyche."<sup>4</sup> She admits, however, that the correlation between self and double is not perfect. To support her theory, Gamble offers the statement of Woolf in the author's Preface to Mrs. Dalloway that Septimus Warren Smith "is intended to be [the] double" of her heroine in the novel. Gamble strengthens her argument by writing that Woolf's early notes promote the idea that the novel shows a view of the world as "seen by the sane and the insane side by side--something like that."<sup>5</sup> If Clarissa and Septimus are doubles in truth, the one would have to look very like the other. Such is not the case. Each does have a problem with making peace with the present in light of the past, but there the resemblance ends. Clarissa's problem is strictly with self, whereas Septimus worries about the universe, as though Woolf is using him to show the state of the postwar



world.

Clarissa's control of self wavers less and less as the party day wears on. At her party under the faultfinding gaze of Peter, for instance, she catches her balance by responding to her own doubts:

Why, after all, did she do these things [give parties]? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her! burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away.  
(254-55)

She retains her sanity and finds a self she can respect by accepting the limitations of her "gift." Septimus, on the other hand, cannot make peace with his past as represented by Evans, the "sturdy red-haired" army officer with whom Septimus had shared a "deep-affection":

It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog's ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire, raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other.  
(130)

Mrs. Dalloway serves Virginia Woolf as a vehicle to disseminate her views on women's opportunity for responsible achievements in the twenties, on man's inhumanity to man, on the destructive forces remaining in the aftermath of World War I, and even on the nature of psychiatry and the help it offered to those in the twenties who sought its help.<sup>6</sup> She presents the interwoven histories of Clarissa Dalloway and

Septimus Smith, "the sane and the insane," "side by side," until the young ex-soldier breaks rank in despair of ever being understood. Woolf subtly creates a metaphysical connection between Clarissa and Septimus in keeping with a sentiment expressed by John Donne when he wrote, ". . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."<sup>7</sup>

Clarissa and Septimus never meet in person. Their respective histories are interwoven in the sense that Septimus's way of resolving his psychological problems could have been that of Clarissa had she not been able to come to reasonable terms in her relationship to the norms of society. The personal problems that the ex-soldier faces on the day of Clarissa's party and those Clarissa must face simply underline a common fact of life--every hour of every day every human being faces problems that are uniquely and specifically his or her own. How competently he or she resolves the problems rests on the individual self and the degree of support that self finds in pertinent others. Richard Dalloway was very supportive of Clarissa's individual self.

Woolf could have had Septimus in mind when she quoted a passage from a letter written by a young Englishman who fought in the Great War:

"To fight against a real enemy, to earn undying honour and glory by shooting total strangers, and to come home with my breast covered with metals and decorations, that was the summit of my hope.

. . . It was for this that my whole life so far  
 had been dedicated, my education, training, every-  
 thing. . . ." 8

Septimus had been an exemplary soldier. Septimus, who had the temperament of a poet, went to the War with the first volunteers so that he could save England, a country that meant little more to him than Shakespeare's plays. Because he had looked "weakly," his supervisor at work had suggested football to build him up. Once in the trenches, however, "the change that Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted." In fact, he became such a good soldier that he was decorated. His officer, "Evans by name," and he became inseparable comrades.

The relationship of Evans and Septimus brings to mind that of Clarissa and the friend of her youth, Sally Seton. Septimus lost his "weakly" look after exposure to the conditions of battle, which we can assume included the influences of his officer Evans; and Clarissa enriched her sheltered life after she met Sally who introduced her to Plato, William Morris, and Shelley. Sally was an extraordinary beauty whose charming ways gave license to her outlandish behavior: ". . . she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace; smoked cigars" (50). Such abandonment enthralled the young Clarissa. Reminiscing, she wonders about "this falling in love with women" and if her feelings for Sally "had not



after all, been love." She admits, however, "It was not like one's feeling for a man. . . . It was protective . . . [and] sprang from a feeling of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them" (50).

When Evans was killed just before the end of the War, Septimus was delighted with his ability to face the death of his friend without emotion:

The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won a promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. (130-31)

Leaving the trenches behind him and resuming life as a civilian, Septimus discovered that "he could not taste, he could not feel." His body had been trained to shoot "total strangers" in an exemplary way at the expense of his mind. When he returned to his old position, Mr. Brewer praised him for the "crosses" that he had won and declared, "You have done your duty; it is up to us--" But, "us" cannot help him. Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw, to whom Septimus and Rezia go for help, are callous and insensitive to the patient's needs. Mrs. Dalloway was written during the author's years that Leonard Woolf has called "Downhill All the Way," which might apply to the struggles that Septimus has in trying to tune into reality after his War experiences.

Traveling back to London after the War, Septimus looks out the window of the train and thinks, "It might be possible

. . . it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (133). Septimus is Woolf's voice of despair. His view of society is overwhelmingly negative. He is the opposite of Clarissa in this respect. To Rezia's desire for a child, the narrator responds that

One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities. . . . the truth is . . . that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. . . . They desert the fallen. (135)

One has only to be told Septimus's changed opinion of the plays of Shakespeare to know that the ex-soldier's mind is on a psychological "downhill" skid. On returning from the War, he opens Shakespeare to find "that boy's business of the intoxication of language--Anthony and Cleopatra--had shrivelled utterly":

How Shakespeare loathed humanity--the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. (133-34)

Through the irrational mutterings of Septimus, the author puts us privy to a solution to a universal problem, "Communication is health; communication is happiness. . . ." Woolf has created in Septimus a character whose disturbed mental state reflects the existing chaos in the aftermath of the War.



The signing of the Armistice between warring powers may have ended the carnage of World War I, but it could not do the impossible and return the British to the world as it was before 1914. The author indicates that death means health and happiness for Septimus when Clarissa responds to the troubled young man's unanswered needs in life by observing that his death preserved the "thing" that really mattered, "a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in [Clarissa's] own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate" (280).

### III

When Clarissa thinks of the young man whose suicide has caused the Bradshaws to be late to her party, she wonders if he had "plunged holding his treasure," and she recalls a precious moment years ago when she had said to herself, "if it were now to die 'twere to be most happy" (51). The moment of which Septimus's death reminds her took place when she was in her teens and on her way down to dinner in a white frock. Her age and "white frock" suggest the innocence that later developed into the "perfect hostess" whose prerequisites include the "effusive, insincere" attitude that Peter decries and a not infrequent exposure to the "corruption, lies, [and] chatter" of which she is aware but over which she must rise in order to say to each and every guest an equally pleasant, "How delightful to see you!" Unlike



Septimus, who cries out about "human cruelty" when he and Rezia find the cleaning girl in "fits of laughter" over the young man's personal writings, Clarissa knows that to survive she must not dwell on personal slights or relationships that try her spirit.

Two people who try the spirit of Clarissa are Dr. and Lady Bradshaw. Woolf's respect for psychiatrists is clear in her scathing picture of Sir William Bradshaw, and her contempt for the traditional role played by women in the twenties clearly stands out in her description of Lady Bradshaw. The married life of Clarissa contrasts sharply with that of Lady Bradshaw, the contrast being in whom each woman chose to marry. Lady Bradshaw's husband is characterized as one who "feasts most subtly on the human will" (152). Septimus jumps to his death rather than relinquish his priceless independence to the will of Sir William, as did Lady Bradshaw when she married the psychiatrist:

It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking . . . of her will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission; dinner in Harley Street, numbering eight or nine courses, feeding ten or fifteen guests of the professional classes, was smooth and urbane. . . . Once long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to administer to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through; so that without knowing precisely what made the evening disagreeable . . . disagreeable it was. (152-53)

Sir William figures prominently in Clarissa's discovery of self because he is instrumental in the demise of Septimus

that influences the concept that Clarissa has of self at the end of the novel. In effect Dr. Bradshaw and his predecessor Dr. Holmes--as guardians of the troubled ex-soldier's mental health--condemn their emotionally impaired patient to death by their insensitive and impersonal treatment of him, a treatment that ignores the self-respect that Clarissa believes constitutes the dignity to which every individual is entitled.

Dr. Holmes, whom Rezia first consults, "brushed . . . aside" her husband's "headaches, sleeplessness, fears, and dreams" as "nerve symptoms and nothing more." He recommends "outside interests" and "a hobby." Dr. Holmes flatly states there is "nothing whatever the matter" (137) with the young man. His recommendations are based on his belief that "health is largely a matter in our own control," and he mentions that he himself goes to a music hall or takes a day off and plays golf with his wife when he is in a "funk." His additional remedies for Septimus's lack of feeling include "two tabloids of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime" or "playing cricket" (137). "When the damned fool came again" (138) cues us into Woolf's opinion of the quality and effectiveness of the remedies that Dr. Holmes offers Septimus's "crime" of having felt nothing when his friend was killed in the war. Woolf pictures Dr. Holmes as having less sensitivity to the complaints of Septimus than to "the charming little lady his wife."

Dr. Holmes having failed the Smiths, Rezia turns to



Sir William Bradshaw, a famous psychiatrist for help. The unsympathetic treatment of the psychiatrist by Woolf is in line with the dislike of him that both of the Dalloways profess, although neither Clarissa nor Richard can give a clear-cut reason for the dislike--they simply "didn't like his taste, didn't like his smell." Woolf depicts Sir William as a man who is conscious of the social position of his patients and the lucrative nature of his practice. He allows each patient "three-quarters of an hour" in which to diagnose the condition of "what, after all, we know nothing about--the nervous system, the human brain" (149). Sir William has a reputation "not merely of lightening skill, and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis but of sympathy; tact; [and] understanding of the human soul."

After one forty-five-minute interview, Sir William orders for the well-being of Septimus "rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest" (150). The narrator assures us of the benefits of the prescription when she remarks that "a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve." Sir William is respected in England because he has "secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views," and all at the expense of his patients--if we judge by the slant that the author gives her characterization of the psychiatrist. Using the inability of Sir William to unravel the troubled mind of Septimus and the



callous attitude of the doctor, Woolf shows us that Clarissa must dispel negative thoughts of her unworthiness by dwelling less on herself and more on the pleasure that her parties give to others.

Using a milieu in Mrs. Dalloway with which she was familiar, the author cleverly contrasts the attitudes of Mrs. Dalloway with those of other characters to enlighten our perception of Clarissa's worthiness as a person. Sir William, Lady Bradshaw, Doris Kilman, and even Peter Walsh represent alternative designs for living. For example, amassing great wealth for show does not appeal to Clarissa as it does to the Bradshaws. To her party, Clarissa wears an old green dress which she has to mend before it can be worn that evening; yet, the party's guest list includes such illustrious personages as the Prime Minister of England:

. . . . Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings and a silver-green mermaid's dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed; turned, caught her scarf in some other woman's dress, unhitched it, laughed, all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element. (264)

The possessions of the Bradshaws lack any signs of wear, and one has the distinct impression that, should signs of wear appear, the item would be put out of sight--not mended as Clarissa did her dress. The low and powerful grey motor car that Sir William drives into the country "to visit

the rich, the afflicted, who [can] afford the very large fees which Sir William very properly charged for his advice" is piled high with grey furs "to keep her ladyship warm" while she waits for him, "thinking sometimes of the patient, sometimes, excusably, of the wall of gold, mounting minute by minute while she [waits]; the wall of gold that was mounting between them and all shifts and anxieties" (142-43).

Doris Kilman, who tutors the Dalloways' daughter Elizabeth, flaunts her poverty as proudly as the Bradshaws do their wealth. Her values contrast sharply with those of Clarissa. Kilman is filled with envy, hatred, and despair. Her attitude grew out of what she perceived to have been an unfair dismissal from a position at Miss Dolby's school at the beginning of World War I. Because Miss Kilman was unable "to tell lies" and "pretend that the Germans were all villains," her school-teaching days were numbered. Believing that Kilman "would be happier with people who shared her views about the Germans," Miss Dolby "turned her out" (187). She met the Dalloways when Richard hired her to teach Elizabeth history. The relationship with the Dalloways has a number of compensations for Kilman, despite her view that Mrs. Dalloway belongs to the class of "worthless . . . rich, with a smattering of culture" and should be "in a factory" or "behind a counter," instead of being free to enjoy her life of "vanity and deceit" (194). The most obvious compensation is the opportunity it affords Miss Kilman to feed her warped ego.



Two years and three months before meeting the Dalloways, "the Lord had shown her the way" (188) through the preaching of the Reverend Edward Whittaker. Now Kilman thinks of God when her hatred of the world boils over; however, she seems able to achieve only brief moments of "steady and sinister serenity" (189).

Kilman appears to be a victim of the Great War as much as is Septimus. She has a degree and prides herself on being "a woman who [has] made her own way in the world"; yet, she does not seem to have relished the task. Rather than being "delighted to see" anyone, Kilman is so busy being cross because she lacks money, pretty clothes, and an attractive body that she truly makes her life a burden and the lives of those around her a trial. The narrator lets us know that Kilman wears a mackintosh even on a sunny mid-June morning because "it was cheap" and "she was over forty; and did not, after all, dress to please" (186). Clarissa wonders why she exposes herself to the possibility of a failed party; Miss Kilman, on the other hand gives little of herself to society and resents those who do. Clarissa, in particular, is a target for her resentment. Woolf's description of Kilman gives the woman no redeeming graces, except to say that one must make allowances for those who have suffered. In both appearance and attitude Doris Kilman is as different from Clarissa Dalloway as one could possibly imagine. Clarissa worries about Kilman's influence on Elizabeth and is certain that her daughter's dog Grizzle with "distemper and tar and all the



rest of it" is better company for the young girl than "sitting mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book" (15) and Miss Kilman. Clarissa notes that "religious ecstasy made people callous . . . [and] dulled their feelings."

Kilman bemoans the fact that "never would she come first with any one" (195), but she is unwilling to make the effort to develop "the kindness and grace" that Clarissa displays in an abundance. Although a pretty face and attractive apparel make one more presentable, they contribute not one whit to "kindness and grace," which comes from within the person. Clarissa questions the appropriateness of Elizabeth's "odd friendship with Miss Kilman," then she decides the relationship shows that her daughter "has a heart." Elizabeth actually reaches a point in the relationship at which even she wearies of the incessant harping of her teacher on the teacher's disadvantages in life. On the day of Mrs. Dalloway's party, Elizabeth becomes conscious of a distasteful flaw in Miss Kilman's character: "Miss Kilman made one feel so small" (198).

Neither Miss Kilman, who believes life has cheated her and maintains a "grudge against the world" to get even, nor Peter Walsh, whose proposal of marriage was turned down, can be expected to judge Clarissa's actions objectively; so, when we read belittling comments from them about Clarissa's lack of seriousness and the frivolity of her parties, we must weigh their biased opinions against what Clarissa thinks of herself. It is, after all, her own sense of self that is

important to the good health and happiness of Mrs. Dalloway. Opinions function, as do those of Kilman and Walsh in this instance, not unlike the rooms about which Clarissa observes, "Here [is] one room; there another." In Mrs. Dalloway, the events leading up to the party and the party itself finally prove to Clarissa that her life is worth living and her talent for giving successful parties is a gift worth sharing. Peter himself attests to the value of Clarissa's parties when he decides to go to the party "because he wanted to ask Richard what they were doing in India--the conservative suffers. And what's being acted? And music. . . . Oh yes, and mere gossip" (244). Woolf registers the opportunities available to someone in Peter's position through his acquaintance with the Dalloways and their parties. Such events can serve Peter as did that "something white, magical, circular in the footman's hand, a disc inscribed with a name" (24), which permits the motor car "with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve" to pass unimpeded through a snarl of London traffic.

Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith never come face to face in the novel, but reports of his death cause Clarissa to feel once again the terror that she had felt earlier in the day when she had worried about the "overwhelming incapacity" she had to make something of the life with which her parents had entrusted her "to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely." Sir William Bradshaw brings the ghastly news of the young man who had killed himself to the

party. Sensing the psychiatrist to be capable of "some indescribable outrage," Clarissa wonders when she hears the news whether Septimus had gone to Bradshaw for help and felt the power of the doctor to "outrage the soul"--"He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up" (154). Septimus refuses to become one of the "naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless [who] received the impress of Sir William's will" (154).

Septimus had objected strongly to Sir William's statement that the young man and his wife "must be separated" for the good of the young man. When Septimus and Rezia are alone, he asks Rezia, "What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?" Clarissa, pondering the suicide of Septimus, thinks along the same line when she wonders if the young man had not decided to kill himself because the power represented by Bradshaw had made "life intolerable." Clarissa decides that the suicide of Septimus is "her disaster--her disgrace" (282), but also her salvation. She realizes that she will settle for less than being "wholly admirable." Hearing of the untimely death puts Mrs. Dalloway in touch with herself.

The recollection of Peter of the youthful Clarissa's theory about "how little we [know] people" points out a plausible relationship between Clarissa and Septimus in Mrs. Dalloway. She believed that she was "everywhere" and "to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them." Now, years later, Clarissa feels "somehow, very like him--the young man who [has] killed himself. She [feels] glad that



he [has] done it; thrown it away. . . . He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back" (283). After all, her parties do matter.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (New York: Harcourt Brace & World [1927], 1953), p. 185; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.
- <sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of Turgenev," in The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1950) p. 56.
- <sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, "The novels of Turgenev," p. 57.
- <sup>4</sup> Isabel Gamble, "The Secret Sharer in Mrs. Dalloway," Accent, Vol. 16, 1956, p. 244.
- <sup>5</sup> A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 52.
- <sup>6</sup> Howard M. Harper, "Mrs. Woolf and Mrs. Dalloway," in The Classic British Novel, ed. Howard Harper and Charles Edge (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 238, n. 14.
- <sup>7</sup> John Donne, Devotions (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press [1624], 1959), p. 109.
- <sup>8</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," in The Death of the Moth, and Other Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 156.

Chapter 2. To the Lighthouse (1927):

A Quixotic Mrs. Ramsay

I

October 18, 1918 finds Virginia Woolf writing in her diary:

Their [the Germans] Retreat goes on, and last night, beautiful, cloudless, still and moonlit, was to my thinking the first of peace, since one went to bed fairly positive that never again in all our lives need we dread the moonlight.<sup>1</sup>

This sense of well-being carries over into the unique relationship that the author creates for Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, which was published in 1927. Writing in the aftermath of the Great War at a time when civilization was physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted, Woolf listens to the "divine voice of plain common-sense."<sup>2</sup> Then she arrives at her vision of an interdependent man-woman relationship in which the competition and combative elements that vitalized Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich in Women in Love are missing.

In this novel about a family summering on an island in the Hebrides, the author celebrates the ability of the mind to filter the combustible sparks in a human relationship before they burst into destructive flame. Unlike the dynamic Gudrun that Lawrence pictured, Mrs. Ramsay possesses a bri-



dled passion in her nature that freely communicates with reason. Competition does not exist in the relationship that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay share in To the Lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay seems to have no personal goals but finds satisfaction through gracefully performing what she perceives to be her duties as wife, mother, and friend. She, like the lighthouse offshore, stands alone in her beauty, charm, dedication to duty, kindness, and guarding warmth. We discover her essence in the mental musings of others with whom she comes in contact. Her philosopher husband, for instance, glories "in his wife's beauty," feels "the sternness at the heart of her beauty," is pained "by her remoteness," believes helplessly that he actually makes "things worse for her." Her artist friend Lily Briscoe wonders why "a crumbled glove in the corner of the sofa" is recognizable as belonging to Mrs. Ramsay because of "its twisted finger" (76).<sup>3</sup>

The "twisted finger" speaks for the pent-up passion of Mrs. Ramsay. This wife, mother, and friend gives so much of herself to others that she feels she is "nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions." The one seemingly most demanding of her attention is her husband. When he approaches Mrs. Ramsay and demands sympathy, a regular occurrence, she drops whatever she is doing, quietly picks up the reddish-brown stocking that she is knitting, and solaces his ego. While her "needles flash" she assures him of his genius, fame, worthiness. Her only misgivings on these occasions is what people will think when they see him coming to her

so humbly. This discomposes her, because, she believes, people then will say that Mr. Ramsay depends on her, "when they must know that of the two he [is] infinitely the more important, and what she [gives] the world, in comparison with what he [gives], negligible."

Whenever Mrs. Ramsay's self can "shed its attachments," she retreats to the stocking and continues her knitting while her thoughts roam "on the strangest adventures." The knitting accompanies her thoughts and reflects her mood as the narrator interposes phrases such as these: "she accomplished something dextrous with her needles," "she knitted with firm composure," "she held the long reddish-brown stocking dangling in her hands a moment." Although the presence of Mrs. Ramsay is felt throughout the novel, the reddish-brown stocking is laid aside at the end of the first chapter. A brief interchange before Mrs. Ramsay puts aside her knitting indicates the undemonstrative compliance with the wishes of her husband that Mrs. Ramsay has brought to her marriage: "You won't finish that stocking tonight," Mr. Ramsay said in a matter-of-fact tone. "No," she answered. "I shan't finish it." Then Mrs. Ramsay flattens the stocking upon her knee and presumably puts it away. One is left with the feeling that had she only one more row to go she would not have finished lest she put her husband in the wrong.

The simplicity of the foregoing conversation between the Ramsays belies its importance if we take into account the comments of David Daiches on Virginia Woolf's use of



color symbolism in this novel. Daiches theorizes that "red and brown appear to be the colours of individuality and egotism, while blue and green are the colours of impersonality. Mr. Ramsay, until the very end of the book, is represented as an egotist, and his colour is red or brown."<sup>4</sup> Daiches suggests that the journey to the lighthouse through the blue-green waters of the sea is the journey from "egotism to impersonality" and "to reach the lighthouse is, in a sense, to make contact with a truth outside oneself, to surrender the uniqueness of one's ego to an impersonal reality."<sup>5</sup> As a subtle tool of the author to define character, the one pair of reddish-brown stockings that Mrs. Ramsay knits at moments throughout the first chapter of To the Lighthouse reveals a Mrs. Ramsay with an ego as "unique" as that of her husband, an ego that needs a calming influence. Her knitting calms her as she calms Mr. Ramsay when he asks for it. Her ego expresses itself in being unselfish to an exaggerated degree.

In "Modern Fiction," published in 1925, Virginia Woolf laments the preoccupation of Edwardian writers with materialism and the consequential dearth of aesthetic enrichment the practice affords a reading public. She counters what she believes to be an artistically stagnating custom by writing To the Lighthouse in a style that divorces itself from traditional conventions when she writes about the doings of the Ramsays, their eight children, a number of houseguests, and a few household servants. The group has gathered to vacation



at the Ramsays' summer home on an island somewhere off the west coast of Scotland. Scanty textual evidence suggests that the story takes place on an island in the Hebrides. Daiches attests to the uncanny reality of the setting that Woolf depicts when he notes in his Virginia Woolf that he actually tried to find the spot where the Ramsays vacationed. When he failed, he decided the place was largely the product of the imagination of the author. Isolation of place parallels the insularity that the act of knitting affords Mrs. Ramsay.

Like a benign Madame Defarge, Mrs. Ramsay sits and knits and keeps peace by never voicing controversial ideas and never overtly taking sides. As the tale of the Lighthouse unfolds, we discover a planned trip to it may have to be postponed because of bad weather. This is a heart-rending disappointment to the youngest son of the Ramsays who has been promised that the trip would be made "if it's fine tomorrow." At this point, Mr. Ramsay, whom the narrator describes as a man who "was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being," destroys the hopes of his young son for the tomorrow by saying, "But, it won't be fine." "Making some little twist of the reddish-brown stocking that she is knitting," Mrs. Ramsay tells son James that "it may be fine--I expect it will be fine" (11). And, hope is restored, particularly when James hears his mother say, "Perhaps you will wake up and find the sun shining and

the birds singing. . . . Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow" (26).

Mrs. Ramsay's opinion of self negates her public image of deriving pleasure from being selfless. Although outwardly she manages her household with intuitive calm, inwardly she is restless and longs "to be silent; to be alone." She readily admits her weariness comes from rarely being able to be herself. Celebrating the mind and the myriad expressions it receives--"trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel"<sup>6</sup>--Woolf records in To the Lighthouse the unvocalized responses of her fictional characters to happenings that involve them during two brief expanses of time that are ten years apart. She innovatively bases the novel on the "random moment" and develops its plot out of the well of memory wherein every mind stores retrievable echoes of its experiences. The secondary impression that a random moment stimulates gives Woolf a unique way to dramatize Mrs. Ramsay so as to fit her organically into a scheme of plot development despite the fact she dies before the second section of the novel takes place.

Woolf emphasizes the unsettled contentment of Mrs. Ramsay with the lot in life she has drawn through the fifty-year-old woman's gloomy thoughts about life in general. Her husband she feels can be "more hopeful" than she because he is "less exposed to human worries" and always has "his work to fall back on." Life to Mrs. Ramsay is "something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children

nor with her husband." She and life have a sort of transaction going on between them "in which she [is] on one side, and life [is] on another, and she [is] always trying to get the better of it, as it [is] of her" (92). Mrs. Ramsay frankly admits to herself that "for the most part" life is "terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you [give] it a chance" (92). She worries about the suffering, death, and poverty that is everywhere. Even on the secluded vacation island of the Ramsays, there is a woman dying of cancer. When one reads in "Time Passes" of the untimely death of Prue Ramsay who was an angel and took "one's breath away with her beauty" and that of Andrew Ramsay whose youthful gift for mathematics was extraordinary, Mrs. Ramsay's oft-mentioned lamentations about the children having to grow up become particularly poignant. Prue died "in some illness connected with childbirth" (199); Andrew was "blown up in France" (201), a victim of the Great War. Woolf shows her disdain for the War and how cheaply it weighed lives when the narrator notes that Andrew was killed by an exploding shell that took the lives of "twenty or thirty young men," an indefinite number.

## II

What her eight children and her husband, whose fame rests on one book that he wrote before he was twenty-five, expect of Mrs. Ramsay in the way of individual, undivided attention drains so much of the vitality of the woman that one is not



surprised to read in "Time Passes" that she "died rather suddenly the night before." Her one source of spiritual revival comes from the offshore lighthouse. Woolf equates Mrs. Ramsay's steadiness and dependability at the helm of her family and its friends with the third stroke of the lighthouse. The author indicates that the wedge of darkness that is pierced by the probing light is but a small portion of the great wedge of darkness that belongs to the personality of everyone. The wedge of darkness is that intensely personal part of our respective psyches. The signal of a lighthouse is for navigational purposes and is identified by the exact timing of its strokes that allow the mariner to keep on course in calm or troubled waters. Mrs. Ramsay aptly identifies with the third stroke of Woolf's Lighthouse, the last "long steady one." And she revels in her "wedge of darkness" whenever humanly possible:

Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience . . . but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir. (96)

The characterization of Mrs. Ramsay fits neatly into Woolf's profile of the "Angel in the House," a phantom with whom the author fought a winning battle in the early days of

her career as a professional writer:

[The Angel in the House] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. <sup>7</sup>

Certainly, Mrs. Ramsay excels in "the difficult arts of family life"; and, to all intents and purpose, appears to have no "mind or wish of her own." What she does have to a remarkable capacity is a sympathetic willingness to sacrifice herself for the pleasure of others in order to help them find a rewarding way of life. Although she does not envision the problems that may surface from successfully arranging another's life, her sincerity in trying cannot be faulted.

As order is important to Lily Briscoe in the painting that she works on throughout the novel, order in life is important to Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse. Lily toils to bring her design into a unified mass, and Mrs. Ramsay gives of herself to make her family a single unit with herself the center and guiding light. Believing all women must marry and have a family unit to supervise, she actively seeks husbands for both Lily and her children's friend Minta Doyle. Lily wonders if her older friend's manipulations, which are severely criticized by some, are not in actual fact innocently conceived. Rather than "wishing to dominate, wishing to interfere, making people do what she wished," Mrs. Ramsay



seems to Lily to have "knowledge and wisdom . . . stored up in [her] heart," which turn her "infallibly to the human race" to assuage life for the woman dying of cancer, for Lily and Minta, and for her husband as well as for many others.

Woolf uses Lily to point out the innocence of the interference of Mrs. Ramsay in the lives of others. During a late night conversation between the older woman and the younger woman, Mrs. Ramsay's entertaining enactment of the trivial events of the day--"Charles Tansley losing his umbrella, Mr. Carmichael snuffling and sniffing" (76)--ends and Mrs. Ramsay seriously insists that Lily "must, Minta must, they all must marry, since whatever laurels might be tossed . . . an unmarried woman . . . an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" (77). When Lily realizes that her disclaimer that "she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for [marriage]" merely persuades the older woman of the "simple certainty . . . that her dear Lily, her little Brisk, was a fool" (78), Lily bursts into "almost hysterical laughter." The young woman laughs "at the thought of Mrs. Ramsay presiding with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand" (78).

For Mrs. Ramsay there is no alternative to marriage for a woman, and this conviction blocks her ability to understand the ramifications of her penchant for matchmaking and innocent meddling. Her conviction makes her seem somewhat high-handed at times. In the case of Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, for instance, the fond mother of eight children does nothing



more than invite the two young people to her home and expose them to one another, which results in an engagement and a subsequent marriage. Lily's thought that "the deceptiveness of beauty, that [tangled] all one's perceptions, half way to truth . . . in a golden mesh" is possibly the real power behind the ability of Mrs. Ramsay to make people do her bidding. What Lily also points out is that Mrs. Ramsay's secret of persuasion really is needed for the world to go on at all, because "every one could not be as helter skelter, hand to mouth as she was." Paul Rayley confirms Lily's opinion when he recalls that "it had been far and away the worst moment of his life when he asked Minta to marry him." His first thought afterwards is of Mrs. Ramsay, and he decides he must go immediately to his hostess to tell her the news because "he felt somehow that she was the person who had made him do it. She had made him think he could do anything. Nobody else took him seriously. But she made him believe that he could do whatever he wanted" (118-19).

The admirable talent of Mrs. Ramsay for encouraging the fainthearted shows itself also in the relationship of Charles Tansley to her. It is a talent she has learned through her dedicated and loving support of an egotistical husband. In her customary sensitivity to the emotional needs of others, she invites Mr. Tansley, "the young man [that the younger group] laughed at," to join her one day on a trip to do errands in town because she knows that he feels alone and lonely. It is the nature of Mrs. Ramsay's charm

that, walking beside her and without understanding why, Mr. Tansley decides "he would like her to see him, gowned and hooded, walking in a possession. A fellowship, a professorship, he felt capable of anything" (20).

Despite an inability to "follow the ugly academic jargon, that rattled itself off so glibly" in Charles Tansley's conversation, Mrs. Ramsay listens attentively and inspires the young man's self-confidence. It pleases him to accept an insinuation in her conversation of "the greatness of man's intellect" and "the subjection of all wives . . . to their husband's labours" (20). Specifically, Mrs. Ramsay relinquishes a bit of her own independence and self-importance to assure the young man of his personal worth. On his part, Tansley ponders the "extraordinary emotion" which grows as the two of them walk to town, and under the influence of the older woman he begins to see himself and everything that he has ever known "gone crooked a little." When Mrs. Ramsay reappears to him after her visit to the bedroom of the sick woman, Tansley realizes what it is: "she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen. With stars in her eyes and veils in her hair, with cyclamen and wild violets--what nonsense was he thinking? She was fifty at least; she had eight children" (25). Nevertheless, walking back to the home of the Ramsays with Mrs. Ramsay by his side, Tansley felt an "extraordinary pride" for the first time in his life. He "felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets for he was walking with a beautiful woman" (25).

Beauty is not enough to impress Mr. Carmichael, a poet who is another guest at the summer home of the Ramsays. Mr. Carmichael's lack of response to the friendship that Mrs. Ramsay offers him upsets her and makes her conscious of the beauty that generally has helped to make people like her: "It injured her that he should shrink. It hurt her." Mr. Carmichael's attitude starts her to wondering if perhaps her helpfulness is really an expression of vanity, and she asks herself if it was "for her own satisfaction . . . that she wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, 'Oh Mrs. Ramsay! dear Mrs. Ramsay.'" She sincerely worries that she may be guilty of helping people merely to be admired. Judging from the reactions of Paul Rayley, Charles Tansley, Lily Briscoe, William Bankes, and even the man she passed on her walk to town who was digging a drain but stopped digging to look at her as she passed his way, the beauty of Mrs. Ramsay is remarkable in and by itself. The narrator leaves little doubt of her "incomparable beauty," "splendor," and "simplicity [that] fathomed what clever people falsified."

A sympathetic narrator lets no opportunity pass to comment on the beauty of Mrs. Ramsay and quotes Bankes, "much moved by her voice on the telephone, though she was only telling him a fact about a train," as saying, "Nature has but little clay . . . like that of which she moulded you" (46-7). The "something incongruous to be worked into the harmony of her face" that Bankes mentions to himself can be



explained by the balancing act that Mrs. Ramsay daily must perform to remain on the pedestal that people place her because of her breathtaking beauty while managing the down-to-earth duties of a housewife and mother of eight children. Mr. Carmichael's snub, when she offers him her attention, makes her aware of "the pettiness of some part of her, and of human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking at their best" (65-6). The reactions of everyone, save possibly the poet Carmichael, belie Mrs. Ramsay's private assessment of her beauty. She considers herself "shabby and worn out, and not presumably (her cheeks were hollow, her hair was white) any longer a sight that filled the eyes with joy."

Like Clarissa Dalloway, who questions what she has made of the life her parents gave her, Mrs. Ramsay asks herself in To the Lighthouse, "What have I done with my life?" (125). At the time of the question, she is taking her place at the head of a table that is set for fifteen, as she has done innumerable times before. She has become weary of that head place at the table and the strain that comes from the responsibility she must shoulder of making the dinner an occasion of pleasant conversation for everyone. Until she alone makes "the effort of merging and flowing and creating" (126) to bring the group together as a unified whole, she knows that each of the other fourteen at the table will sit tense and separate, waiting for someone or something to draw them together. Earlier that evening as she had dressed for

dinner, Mrs. Ramsay had "felt alone in the presence of her old antagonist, life" (120). Keeping the eyes on her neck and shoulders in the mirror, the eyes of the aging beauty avoided her face as she chose a necklace to wear that evening. Looking at her in her customary place at the head of the table, Lily notes "how old she looks, how worn she looks . . . and how remote" (127).

Lily notices what the others do not--Mrs. Ramsay is weary--but she cannot know that her friend at the head of the table is envying the newly engaged Minta and Paul and bewailing the fact that her own future holds only "an infinitely long table and plates and knives" and a husband who sits at the opposite end "all in a heap, frowning." In her dreary mood, Mrs. Ramsay wonders

how she had ever felt any affection or emotion for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, as she helped the soup, as if there was an eddy--there--and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. (125)

"Without hostility," the wife, mother, and friend feels again "the sterility of men." Knowing that Mr. Ramsay will make no contribution to bringing the group together, Mrs. Ramsay gives herself "the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking" (126), and Mrs. Ramsay accepts the responsibility of bringing the group together as hers. Woolf parallels the effort of Mrs. Ramsay to enliven her din-

ner guests with that of a sailor who "not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off again and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea" (127).

### III

In To the Lighthouse Woolf draws the portrait of a woman whose dissatisfaction with life stems basically from being subjected to the incessant demands of her husband for appreciation and "sympathy." Mr. Ramsay accepts her tribute without giving any consideration to the price it exacts of his wife with all her other duties as wife, mother, and friend. Her feelings for her husband parallel those she has "for the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts" (27). The rhythm seems to tell her, "I am guarding you--I am your support"; but sometimes, quite without warning, the fall of the waves

. . . remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow--this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (27-8)

Reminiscing about Mrs. Ramsay ten years after the death of her friend, Lily recalls how Mr. Ramsay had fits of temper



that terrorized his family. The sensation caused by the man's temper and that caused by the fall of the waves must have been very similar for Mrs. Ramsay:

He would start from the table in a temper. He would whizz his plate through the window. Then all through the house there would be the sense of doors slamming and blinds fluttering, as if a gusty wind were blowing and people scudded about trying in a hasty way to fasten hatches and make things shipshape. (296)

Lily saw firsthand how "the plates whizzing and the doors slamming" upset Mrs. Ramsay who seemed to lack the energy "to surmount the tempest calmly" or to laugh it away as the others did. Lily also recalls Mrs. Ramsay pacifying her frightened daughter Prue on one of these occasions, apparently brought on by the discovery of an earwig, by "promising her that one of these days that same happiness would be hers" (298). Considering the circumstances at the time that the mother spoke, one senses that Woolf wants us to know that "the subjection of all wives . . . to their husband's [sic] labours" has been a disappointing trial for Mrs. Ramsay, whose husband's apparent failure in his academic plans weighs heavily on both of their minds. The responsibility of keeping the incredible ego of the man intact is taken up by Mrs. Ramsay, and she valiantly works to bolster the morale of her husband while she slowly sinks under the challenge.

The motivation of Mrs. Ramsay for doing all that she does for her husband is simply "being in love." Lily, when

she sees the two of them together, observes that an amazing atmosphere "flooded them. They became part of that unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love. The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them" (72-3). It is "being in love" that sustains Mrs. Ramsay throughout the Lighthouse; the knitting and reading are really adjuncts to that unfathomable emotion. Emilia Gould in Conrad's Nostromo reasonably could be said to be the prototype for Mrs. Ramsay. The two women selflessly encourage their respective husbands in their preoccupations: making the Gould Concession a successful engineering venture for Charles Gould and reaching "R" for Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay has dedicated his life and "splendid mind" to going from "A" to "Z" in order. He is conscious of two classes of men, "the steady goers of superhuman strength who, plodding and persevering, repeat the whole alphabet in order" and "the gifted, the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in a flash--the way of genius" (55). Mr. Ramsay judges himself to be a "steady goer," but he has become stuck at "Q." Although the narrator apologizes for his lackluster academic performance by saying that "very few people in the whole of England ever reach "Q" and only one man in a generation reaches "Z," Mrs. Ramsay feels that the success of her husband has been hampered by his marriage to her and the burden of eight children. While her husband struggles to reach his goal in his chosen field, she sees to it that his private world of philosophy is not violated by mun-



dane or household worries that would interfere with his progress to "Z." Mrs. Ramsay privately confesses to be weary of her wifely duties that include

not being able to tell him the truth, being afraid, for instance, about the greenhouse roof and the expense it would be, fifty pounds perhaps, to mend it; and then about his books, to be afraid that he might guess, what she a little suspected, that his last book was not quite his best book (she gathered that from William Bankes); and then to hide small daily things, and the children seeing it, and the burden it laid on them. (62)

To be able to reach "R," or even "A," does not excite Mrs. Ramsay, who receives and expects no accolades for intellectual endeavors. She "disliked anything that reminded her that she had been sitting thinking." To avoid such an eventuality, she picks up the reddish brown stocking that she is knitting for the lighthouse keeper's boy or she picks up a book to cover the fact that her mind is busy contemplating a variety of private matters or dreams. One of the dreams reveals a woman who is yearning to help correct the social ills of her time. Her approach is almost childlike in its simplicity as she dwells on the problems that surface because of the vast differences between the rich and the poor. She plays a sort of game. She fancies herself "an investigator" of social injustices, those she sees for herself during her daily and weekly visits on the island where she summers and in London. On these visits "to this widow, or that struggling wife" she carries "a note-book and pencil" with which to record



. . . in columns carefully ruled for the purpose wages and spendings, employment and unemployment, in the hope that thus she would cease to be a private woman whose charity was half a sop to her own indignation, half a relief to her own curiosity, and become what with her untrained mind she greatly admired, an investigator, elucidating the social problem. (17-18)

The fact that Mrs. Ramsay feels compelled to pretend that she is something more than wife, mother, and friend indicates a missing element in the composition of her daily life. Despite all that she does to improve the lives of others, she lacks a sense of fulfilment in her own. The attitude of Mr. Ramsay toward women probably accounts for Mrs. Ramsay being unable to express publicly her ambition to do rewarding work outside her home. The attitude of Mr. Ramsay manifests itself in the pleasure he takes in exaggerating his wife's "ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all" (182). On one occasion as he watches her reading, he wonders if she understands what she is reading and concludes, "Probably not." She herself admits to having no time for serious reading. With the plethora of daily duties that she cannot shirk, she has never found the time even to read the books that have been given to her by the poets who wrote them. She is justifiably pleased, however, with such compliments inscribed in them as "For her whose wishes must be obeyed" and "The happier Helen of our days." It is to her credit that she masks her moments of discontent with an appearance of happiness.

There is unanimous agreement in To the Lighthouse that Mrs. Ramsay is "astonishingly beautiful." Many women might consider this enough raison d'être to provide them with a feeling of worthiness, but it is not adequate for Mrs. Ramsay. Woolf keeps our sights on the fact that beauty in and by itself does not satisfy the heroine of the novel. The inherent difference between Mr. Ramsay's egotistical freedom of self and Mrs. Ramsay's lack of an individual self, the opportunity to be herself, is voiced by Mrs. Ramsay in her silent observation that her husband seems to be

. . . made differently from other people, born blind, deaf, and dumb, to the ordinary things, but to the extraordinary things, with an eye like an eagle's. His understanding often astonished her. But did he notice the flowers? No. Did he notice the view? No. Did he even notice his own daughter's beauty, or whether there was pudding on his plate or roast beef? (107)

Woolf portrays Lily Briscoe as more than an unmarried woman and friend of the Ramsay family who is making an extended visit. She serves as Mrs. Assingham served Henry James in The Golden Bowl. She gives us a relatively objective view of the Ramsay household. Mr. Ramsay, she believes, is "petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death"; yet, in addition, he has "a fiery unworldliness; [and] he loves dogs and his children." Lily wonders why he always needs praise, "why so brave a man in thought should be so timid in life. . . . He asked you openly to flatter him, to admire him, his little dodges



deceived nobody" (70, 72). Lily does not believe that he is a hypocrite, as William Bankes had suggested, but simply so absorbed in himself that he cannot see the weariness of another self, including his faithful and adoring wife.

Mr. Ramsay repeatedly seeks out Mrs. Ramsay to give him assurances that he is not a failure; and then, upon being reassured at least temporarily, he lets his wife return to whatever occupied her when he interrupted. On one such occasion Mrs. Ramsay had been reading a Grimm's fairy tale to James. As her husband walks away after having his worthiness confirmed,

. . . Mrs. Ramsay seemed to fold herself together, one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself, so that she had only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page of Grimm's fairy story, while there throb through her, like the pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation. (60-61)

The narrator notes that, as the resonance of the twanging spring dies and his mother resumes reading to James, "Mrs. Ramsay felt not only exhausted in body (afterwards, not at this time, she always felt this) but also there tinged her physical fatigue some faintly disagreeable sensation with another origin" (61). The unwelcome sensation comes from a distaste that Mrs. Ramsay has for having to reassure her husband of his brilliance in terms that she is not absolutely certain are true. The fairy tale that she is reading to James underscores her dilemma in four short lines:



"Flounder, flounder, in the sea,  
Come, I pray thee, here to me;  
For my wife, good Ilsabil,  
Wills not as I'd have her will." (87)

In the fairy tale, the fisherman's wife insists that she will be king if her husband refuses to be. Mrs. Ramsay, on the contrary, is chagrined to be forced into such a role by her husband: "She did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband" (61).

In To the Lighthouse the status of Mrs. Ramsay's individual self is in a sort of limbo. It is neglected and forgotten by everyone. What she needed in order to feel like a real individual was the kind of lift that James was given by his father after James successfully steered the boat that was taking James, his sister Cam, and the father to the lighthouse to complete a trip that had been canceled ten years earlier because of inclement weather. The father said simply, "Well done!" (306). With his voyage to the lighthouse completed successfully, James finally is able to reconcile the vast love that he feels for his mother to that that he finds for his father. The reconciliation echoes a sentiment of Mrs. Ramsay--each love was one of those unclassified affections of which there are so many" (157).

The lighthouse, which is within rowing-distance of the home of the Ramsays, stands alone by nature of its function in the world of Man and parallels symbolically the concern of Virginia Woolf for the loneliness of man that evolves from his inability, willful or otherwise, to respond to the emo-

tional needs of another. While neither expecting nor receiving any reward for its service, the lighthouse performs its designated duty as long as the lighthouse tender keeps its prisms polished and its gears running. Woolf implies in this novel that psychological distances between individuals require more than an insensitive, automatic flash of light for crossing.

Married to a man who "never gave," Mrs. Ramsay is forced to give by virtue of her position as the wife of an unsympathetic man. Woolf concludes through Lily, "Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died" (223). To the Lighthouse registers the preoccupation of Woolf with death and the influences of death on the living just as Mrs. Dallo-way does. A May 14, 1925 entry in her Diary comments on To the Lighthouse in its embryonic stage, "This is going to be fairly short: to have father's character done complete in it; & mothers; . . . & all the usual things I try to put in--life, death etc."<sup>8</sup> Later, November 28, 1928, she notes the anniversary of the birth of her father and writes:

Father's birthday. He would have been . . . 96, yes, today; . . . but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;--inconceivable. I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing The Lighthouse, laid them in my mind. . . . I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily.<sup>9</sup>

The author's obsession with the memory of her parents parallels the reaction of Lily to the death of Mrs. Ramsay. At the end of "The Lighthouse" episode, Lily detaches her mind

from its obsession with the memory of Mrs. Ramsay, making it become simply "part of ordinary experience" (300). In her tribute to Joseph Conrad, Woolf states, ". . . it is the habit of death to quicken and focus our memories."<sup>10</sup>

Life is composed of memories and Woolf perceives it to be a "luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."<sup>11</sup> Her "luminous halo" corresponds to the "halo or penumbra surrounding the image" which William James describes in The Principles of Psychology, wherein the philosopher brother of Henry James originated the term "stream of consciousness" to define the process of thinking which never occurs in fragments but constantly flows.<sup>12</sup> William James referred to the process more specifically as "the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life."<sup>13</sup> The stream of consciousness technique allows one's mind to hold private musings while reacting conventionally to one's environment. Erich Auerbach explains the technique by writing, "The ideas arising in consciousness are not tied to the present of the exterior occurrence which releases them."<sup>14</sup>

David Lodge points out that Woolf's "modernist insistence on the relativity and subjectivity of experience undermines the redeeming power of the privileged moment, because the moment is never shared."<sup>15</sup> Although the statement of Lodge does not hold true for all human relationships in the novel, it does direct our attention to the main reason why Mrs. Ramsay has no time "to be silent; to be alone" (95):



her desires never surface for others to know. When Mrs. Ramsay asks, "What have I done with my life?" she must forfeit any misgivings in her answer to the fact that she chose the "Heaven of security" (51) represented by Mr. Ramsay, instead of accepting the responsibility for self that would have been necessary had she chosen to develop into a truly independent individual. Alice Kelley supports Mrs. Ramsay in her decision when Kelley writes that Cam Ramsay first softens her thoughts about her father when the daughter, as the group nears the landing of the lighthouse, approximates Mrs. Ramsay's "green shawl of vision" to recognize her father, "for all his occasional selfishness, is primarily a courageous defender of truth, who, while insisting on life's loneliness and ugliness, offers stability and protection for those who need it."<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Ramsay needed it.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, The Diary of Virginia Woolf, intro. Quentin Bell, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), pp. 205-06.
- <sup>2</sup> G. E. Moore, quoted in George A. Panichas, The Reverent Discipline (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1974), p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1927), p. 76; subsequent citations will appear parenthetically in the text.
- <sup>4</sup> David Daiches, Virginia Woolf (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 88.
- <sup>5</sup> Daiches, p. 86.
- <sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1925), p. 154.
- <sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," in The Death of the Moth, and Other Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 150.
- <sup>8</sup> Virginia Woolf, Diary, p. 18.
- <sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf, Diary, p. 208.
- <sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Joseph Conrad," in Times Literary Supplement, August 14, 1924, p. 493.
- <sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, p. 154.
- <sup>12</sup> Shiv K. Kumar, Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 14.
- <sup>13</sup> William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York: 1891; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 155.
- <sup>14</sup> Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), p. 541.

<sup>15</sup> David Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing (Ithaca  
Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> Alice van Buren Kelley, The Novels of Virginia Woolf  
(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 138.



## Conclusion

Isabel Archer, Charlotte Stant, Emilia Gould, Lena, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, Clarissa Dalloway, and Mrs. Ramsay by no means represent an exclusive list of women in modern fiction who possess noteworthy emotional strength. They do represent eight memorable characters who serve well the notion that Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf respectively reveal in their characterizations of the women indicated above the status of women in general as it existed in the years between 1881 and 1927, years that instance a modern world in transition. The span of years began in pronounced conservatism as regards the position of women in society and ended in a female freedom of choice in 1927 that had not been available in 1881. Using James's analogy that "as the painting is to reality, so the novel is to history" to suggest that the novel is fashioned from fact, then one is enabled to read social history into the lives of the eight women and their individual relationships to the men in their fictional lives.

Adjustment to marriage, or to the concerns of marriage, determines the ability of the women discussed to become self-reliant in The Portrait of a Lady, The Golden Bowl,

Nostramo, Victory, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse. There is no formula to assure the depth or endurance of a loving relationship because there are as many ways to love as there are people and each person contributes to a loving relationship something that is uniquely his or her own. The situations that are depicted in the lives of the eight fictional women show James, Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf to be sensitive to this fact in their sympathetic treatment of the women in these novels. No suggestion that the novels were intended to be feminist tracts is implied; however, exploring the events in the lives of the fictional women in chronological order does support the theory that women were granted more freedom of choice as the modern age evolved. None of these eight women wants to be free of men, each woman simply wants to be allowed to have an individual self.

That James, in particular, professed an interest in "the situation of women" can be noted in his Bostonians, which was published five years after The Portrait of a Lady. In a letter that was dated April 8, 1883, James sent to his publisher, J. R. Osgood, an idea for a new novel which was to be "typically American" and characteristic of contemporary social conditions. After pondering what might be "the most salient and peculiar point" in the social life of his day, James concluded that it must be the "situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf."<sup>1</sup> Thus he chose to depict a

view of the feminist movement in the late 1800s by writing The Bostonians wherein the love between a man and a woman defies the cause of feminism. At the end of the novel, the hero triumphs when Verena Tarrant accepts his proposal of marriage.

To read into The Portrait of a Lady or into The Golden Bowl any attempt on the author's part to advance the feminist movement is unreasonable if one takes into consideration James's views on feminism in The Bostonians; therefore, a brief discussion of the latter novel seems worthwhile in order to dispel any notion that Isabel Archer and Charlotte Stant represent more than two young women "affronting" their individual destinies and revealing remarkable strength of character in the process.

The Bostonians concerns an ideological struggle between Basil Ransome, who considered all women to be "essentially inferior to men and infinitely tiresome when they refused to accept the lot which men had made for them," and Olive Chancellor, a dedicated feminist. The two vie for the physical and mental possession of Verena Tarrant. Because the greater part of the action of the novel centers around Olive Chancellor and her associates, James had to find a way to provide his reader with access to Basil's world and to provide Basil with access to Olive's world. This the author does through the rapport that he early establishes between Basil and Mrs. Luna, the sister of Olive.

Adeline Luna is the only female character in the novel



whom James does not align with the feminist cause. Her role is that of a ficelle, the French theatrical term that James attached to his characters who belonged less to his subject than his treatment of it. The use of a ficelle in his novels allowed him to make known to his readers pertinent details without his having to resort to an interlude of merely referential narrative to convey the details. The ficelle works best when its character seems neither contrived nor superfluous as its actions relate to the main thread of the story. Besides acting as a communication link between the world of Basil and that of Olive, Mrs. Luna seems purposefully conscious of her female sexuality and its dependence on the opposite sex for expression. Through Basil's eyes she was described as

. . . sufficiently pretty; her hair was in clusters of curls, like bunches of grapes; her tight bodice seemed to crack with her vivacity; and from beneath the stiff little plaits of her petticoat a small fat foot protruded, resting upon a stilted heel. She was attractive and pertinent, especially the latter.<sup>2</sup>

Such a charming picture contrasts sharply with the other female characters in The Bostonians, most of whom seem to retain no trace of sexuality as their lives take on the task of publicly promoting the cause of feminism. There is, for example, Dr. Prance who somewhere in the pursuit of her medical career has left her sex behind to such a degree that Basil feels the urge to offer her a cigar when they meet and talk. There also is Mrs. Birdseye, to name another,

who had "belonged to any and every league that had been founded for almost any purpose whatever," and had become thereby an "essentially formless old woman, who had no more outline than a bundle of hay."

James unquestionably indicates in The Bostonians that he is not in sympathy with the type of women involved in the feminist movement, but he indicates an uncertainty as to Verena's future happiness when the young woman heads for her wedding with tears in her eyes. In the earlier novel, The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer marries Osmond with stars in her eyes. When she discovers that she has "misread" Osmond's character, she adapts her needs to the situation. How well she does it, we may judge individually from the facts that the fiction of James affords us. James tells us only that Isabel returns to Rome and her marriage. In his later novel, The Golden Bowl, James allows Charlotte Stant the inner fortitude to avoid tears by learning how to adapt her needs as an individual self to those of her husband.

Mrs. Gould, Mrs. Dalloway, and Mrs. Ramsay include in their search for an individual self a husband of their own choosing. Mrs. Gould has eyes only for Charles Gould. As she says when she hears of the untimely demise of Antonia's fiancé, "Antonia will kill herself!" Mrs. Gould cannot conceive of a life that does not include Charles; therefore, she must accommodate her need to be with Charles to his need to administer to his dream, the Gould Concession. This she does by being a working partner in the first year of the

venture as she traveled with Charles in his quest for laborers to work the mine and as she camped out beside him when the wilderness was exploited to open a path to the mine. That she accepts her status as mistress of Casa Gould is obvious when by the end of Nostromo we find her bejeweled and gowned in silks--"Shining! Incorruptible!"

The point about Clarissa Dalloway that is most important is the uncanny ability of the woman to learn from the death of Septimus Smith that she alone is responsible for Clarissa Dalloway and that she alone must decide what if any self Clarissa Dalloway will maintain. Woolf shares with her readers all of the difficulties that Septimus endures as he searches for relief for his troubled mind. Woolf shares with Clarissa only the message that announces the young man's suicide. The unexpected shock of the message pierces Mrs. Dalloway's inner consciousness and snaps her out of believing that her self is not important just as she is. It is perfectly reasonable for Woolf to have Mrs. Dalloway wonder what she has made of her life and if her parties really matter when one acknowledges the fact that the Mrs. Dalloways of the world shared the grief of such a momentous event as World War I that saw the destruction of one out of three young men, ages eighteen to twenty-five, but denied the women the benefits of "consolatory" action.

Mrs. Ramsay, although not precisely cut from the same mold that created Mrs. Gould, certainly enjoys the characteristic of "being in love" that belongs to Mrs. Gould.



Lily Briscoe mentions the amazing atmosphere that flooded Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay when she sees them together: "They became part of that unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love. The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them." Her "sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything" suggests that Mrs. Ramsay gives so much of herself to eight children, a husband, and friends that there is no self in the final analysis to be given to an individual self. The individual self that she feels is lacking is retained in the memories of those she leaves behind when she dies "rather suddenly" one night of no specified cause.

The image of their marriage that Isabel and Gilbert Osmond show to the public is to appear no less "exquisite" than the images of the marriages of Mrs. Gould, Mrs. Dallo-way, and Mrs. Ramsay. In private, the Osmonds live apart. Isabel Archer "was not without a collection of opinions on the question of marriage" in the days before her aunt took the young American girl to England, where Isabel met Madame Merle. James refers to Isabel's first meeting with Madame Merle as a turning-point in Isabel's life. The other turning-point that James singles out for its drama is "the extraordinary meditative vigil" that Isabel sits through "motionlessly seeing" what her marriage to Gilbert Osmond means and will mean in her future. She intelligently accepts blame for a share of the mismatch. At the time of the famous, all-night vigil Isabel does not know that her

step-daughter's parents are Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond. When the fact comes to light, it furnishes Isabel with a reason to no longer feel that she must obey Osmond's commands.

On the surface the greatest obstacle facing Isabel should she wish to dissolve her marriage to Gilbert is the fact that she is an American citizen living in Roman Catholic Italy with English money supporting her. James precludes the necessity of resolving the complicated issue by having Isabel too proud to publish the failure of her marriage. She tells her friend Henrietta that it is of herself, not Osmond, that she is thinking when she returns to Osmond and her mansion in Rome. Isabel gracefully honors her marriage vows and accommodates her views to those of her husband. Interestingly, the youthful belief of Isabel that a "woman ought to be able to make up her life in singleness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of the opposite sex" gives credence to the appropriateness of the apparent status of her marriage at the end of The Portrait of a Lady.

Charlotte Stant, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, and Lena approach the question of marriage, or simply the relationship between a man and a woman, from varying perspectives. Charlotte and Lena are orphans and have no family member of the male sex to offer them protection and guidance. Charlotte fortunately has a small income and many wealthy

friends who provide her with places to stay. As to her income and friends, she resembles Madame Merle; but, there the comparison ends. Charlotte is twenty years younger than Madame Merle and is far from being the liberated opportunist that James has made Madame Merle. Charlotte was in love with Prince Amerigo, who returned the sentiment but could not afford to marry anyone without the financial backing to support him. Charlotte could not support the Prince in the manner he desired and refused to be his mistress, so the two parted company before Amerigo becomes engaged to Maggie Verver.

After Maggie marries the Prince, she decides that her father Adam needs a wife to keep him occupied while she is occupied with her husband. Widower Adam falls into line and weds Charlotte. The latter two appear to be satisfied with the arrangement. Confusion arises in the foursome only after the former lovers, the Prince and Charlotte, become a regular twosome with respect to the social obligations that Maggie and Adam shun. The obvious happens. When Maggie finally registers, she decides the companionship of her husband means more to her than the companionship of her father. Luckily for the well-being of Charlotte, the foursome breaks up into its proper twosomes. James plots The Golden Bowl so that either of the women could have instigated the move to America of the senior Ververs. As Charlotte tells Maggie, "I want, strange as it may seem to you . . . to keep the man I've married. And to do so, I see, I must act." Thus



Charlotte sails for America with her husband Adam to open a museum in the town that Adam owns. The museum will house the valuable items that Adam has been collecting for years. Having found a husband to free her of the worry of becoming an old maid and having found a purpose in life--helping her husband--Charlotte solves her identity crisis by identifying with her husband Adam.

Lena is a very tragic figure. She has no home, no friends to offer her shelter, not even a name. Conrad, in addition, fails to accept the prerogative of the novelist that the historian lacks--the privilege of contriving a happy ending to Lena's woes. It is not a very profound statement to say that the female experience in the years between 1881 and 1927 was conditioned by social class; nevertheless, it was that that defeated Lena when she had to fend for herself after the incapacitating accident of her father. However low she falls in Victory, she retains her dream of rising above herself, "triumphant and humble," with her happiness arriving in the shape of a man whom she loves. Heyst is not the man in the beginning of their relationship. He is merely a considerate stranger who agrees to help her escape the competing clutches of the unattractive orchestra leader Zangiacomo and the equally unattractive hotelkeeper Schomberg. It begins as a business arrangement for Lena who points out to her benefactor that she is under twenty and "can't be so bad looking."

Lena's tragic plight is occasionally overshadowed by

remarks that discredit women in general. The narrator comments that "it was man who had broken the silence, but it was woman who led the way." Other derogatory statements are uncharacteristic of Heyst because he seems genuinely concerned with the situation facing Lena regardless of the fact that she is an attractive female. Heyst offers his help to Lena in the same sense that he offered help to Morrison. When Lena wishes that she could forget her past, Heyst tells her that she should be able to do so easily, that he thought women had the ability "to forget whatever in their past diminishes them in their [own] eyes." Lena's wish suggests that what she needs is not the tag of "Mrs." that pleased Charlotte, but a stable, trustworthy friend. She comes to the realization that she has found that friend in Heyst; so, when his life is threatened, she moves to save it. By doing so, she proves to herself that she has earned the love of Heyst.

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen have considerably more difficulty in finding an individual self than do Isabel Archer, Charlotte Stant, Emilia Gould, Lena, Mrs. Dalloway, or Mrs. Ramsay. They are also the two most independent of the eight fictional women discussed. It would seem, therefore, that independence is not the key to learning "how to act . . . how to become one's self . . . when one was merely an unfixed something-nothing, blowing about like the winds of heaven, undefined, unstated." Ursula tries her wings with Anton Skrebensky in The Rainbow, but she intelligently

refuses to marry him when she realizes that "out of fear of herself [she was going] to marry Skrebensky."

In the opening scene of Women in Love, the two sisters discuss marriage. Gudrun wonders if being married would not put them "in a better position." Then Gudrun asks if it is not possible that "one needs the experience of having been married." Later she adds, "Isn't it an amazing thing . . . how strong the temptation is, not to." Gudrun is tempted but avoids commitment in Women in Love. She is the only fictional woman of the eight women studied who favors singleness as the best state of being in which to express her individual self. She explains her rationale to Ursula who is now married: "I think that a new world is a development from this world, and that to isolate oneself with one other person, isn't to find a new world at all, but only to secure oneself in one's illusions."<sup>3</sup>

Illusions play an important role in resolving the identity crises of Isabel, Emilia, Lena, Ursula, Clarissa, and Mrs. Ramsay. Illusions play a lesser, but necessary, part in the life of Charlotte. Because Gudrun refused to admit illusions into her life, she "could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces"--herself and Gerald--that Lily achieved when she completed her painting in To the Lighthouse. After her traumatic experience with Gerald Crich, Gudrun believes that identifying with her art will offer her the most promising future.

Illusions help Mrs. Ramsay escape the monotonous real-



ity of day after day being faced with "an infinitely long table and plates and knives." When she goes to town to visit a needy widow or a struggling wife, she makes believe that she is more than just a wife, mother, and friend on an errand of mercy by taking with her a "note-book and pencil" with which to record "wages and spending, employment and unemployment" on the pretense that she is "an investigator" who is studying a "social problem." Mrs. Ramsay's illusions give hope to her son James when facts dispute her statement that the weather will be pleasant enough the following day for James's promised trip to the lighthouse to take place. The narrator informs us that "the extraordinary irrationality of her remark" enraged Mr. Ramsay. Of all Mrs. Ramsay's self-sustaining supports, the most illusive is a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" in her mind that is invisible to others. Within this "core of darkness," Mrs. Ramsay finds a world of "limitless experience" and "unlimited resources" and the freedom to be alone with herself.

Mrs. Dalloway's illusions save her from giving in to the despondency that comes to her when she realizes that she is getting older. She senses "how little the margin that remained [of her life] was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, [and] tones of existence." On her errand to pick up the flowers for her evening party, she thinks how she would like to be "interested in politics" if she could relive her life. She would like to have been one of those people like

her husband "who did things for themselves." Instead Mrs. Dalloway admits to herself that "half the time" she does things "not for themselves, but to make people think this or that," which she acknowledges is sheer "idiocy." When she hears the news of the suicide of the young man, she wanders away from her party and into an empty room, parts the curtains, and looks at the sky above Westminster. The sky held, "foolish as the idea was, something of her own in it." Whatever Clarissa saw, it gave her the illusion that all was right in her life despite the young man's decision to throw his away.

Charlotte Stant and Emilia Gould have much in common. They appear to need neither time out to readjust their approaches to life, as did Clarissa, nor private moments in which to pretend, as did Mrs. Ramsay. Charlotte and Emilia each masters a disillusionment with relative calm and then directs her energies into appropriate channels without regard to further illusions. Charlotte's disillusionment comes when she returns from America to test the love that Prince Amerigo had professed for her by having the two of them be together for "one small hour--or say for two" before the Prince marries Maggie Verver. Charlotte fails in her mission to interrupt the wedding plans of the Prince. When the immeasurably wealthy father of Maggie appears on the horizon, Charlotte accepts his proposal of marriage. Unlike Emilia Gould who learns to her sorrow that there is "something inherent in the necessities of successful action

which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea," young Mrs. Verver in The Golden Bowl shares her husband's "material interest" without a qualm; and, as does Emilia in Nostromo, Charlotte identifies with her husband without reservation.

Isabel Archer, Lena, and Ursula Brangwen acknowledge and resolve the crises that they face in the novels with remarkably matter-of-fact attitudes. A pragmatic approach to life allows each of them to replace shattered illusions with the optimistic views that their individual choices of action are right.

Isabel Archer admits that she "misread" Gilbert Osmond in the months before her marriage to him; nevertheless, she refuses to use the shattered illusion as an excuse to leave him. Instead, she accepts the semblance of a happy marriage to avoid the exposure of its failure. Publicly, she identifies with Osmond; privately, she retains the independence that she cherishes. Lena has few illusions beyond the assumption that she and Axel Heyst are safe from the likes of Zangiacomo and Schomberg as long as they remain on their island paradise. This illusion is shattered when the three evil men come to rob Heyst. Lena replaces the shattered illusion with one that triumphs in the end of Victory when Lena dies believing that she alone has saved the life of her lover. Ursula Brangwen in The Rainbow has many illusions to test as she grows into womanhood and acquires a self that she respects. Not the least of the illusions that she must



recognize is the notion that the headmaster of the school where she teaches should treat her with more "chivalrous courtesy" in view of the fact that "she [is] a girl, a woman." Lawrence does not approach the question of Ursula's discovery of a viable self as did James and Conrad before him. Ursula's plan to gain independence involves entering the workaday world of men on equal footing with the men.

Isabel Archer, Charlotte Stant, Emilia Gould, Lena, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, Mrs. Dalloway, and Mrs. Ramsay are only eight of any number of emotionally strong women in fiction who could have been chosen to represent the changing status of women in the years between 1881 and 1927. If the novels in which these women appear cannot be said to have changed the consciousness of women in the real world, they nonetheless dramatize the truth of D. H. Lawrence's assertion that "the novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships."<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 47.
- <sup>2</sup> Henry James, The Bostonians, introd. Irving Howe (1886; rpt. New York: Random House, 1956), p. 6.
- <sup>3</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Women in Love, Foreword by author, introd. Richard Aldington (1921; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 428.
- <sup>4</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers, 1936, ed. Edward D. McDonald (1936; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 532.

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