MONEY IN FOUR OF THE EARLY NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

APPROVED:

Howard C. Key
Major Professor

Walter Lazenby
Minor Professor

E. D. Tomlinson
Director of the Department of English

Robert B. Tomlinson
Dean of the Graduate School
MORRO IN FOUR OF THE EARLY NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

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Wilba Shaw Swearingen, B. S.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An impression long current among many students of American literature is that Henry James as a novelist was both unaware of and uninterested in financial affairs—that is, money or lack of money—and that he held to the minimum in his reference to an important aspect of man's existence. These observers usually attribute James's lack of interest to the conditions of his own life, assuming that as a child of rather wealthy parents he took money for granted and never realized the troubles of the poor. Fred Pattee calls James's characters "creatures of whim who know nothing of the bitterness of struggle, who drift from capital to capital of Europe mindful only of their own comfort."¹ Percy H. Boynton describes James's characters as those "who belong to the leisure class." Later he says, James

betrayed a lurking admiration for them, their ways, their attitude toward life. They were in his conception "civilized," by which he meant that civilization had done its work in lifting them to

¹Fred Pattee, A History of American Literature since 1870 (location and date not given), p. 192.
a plane on which they could be oblivious to what was going on in the human substrata.2

Geoffrey Tillotson refers to James's fictional milieu as "the world of wealthy people" who "live in exquisite surroundings."3 Carl Van Doren dubs James "the laureate of leisure . . . the creator of a world immensely beautiful . . . peopled by charming human beings who live graceful lives in settings lovely almost beyond description . . . a world infinitely refined, a world perfectly civilized."4

Crawford, Kern, and Needleman in a survey outlining American literature mention James's "lack of understanding of the perpetual and ruthless struggle for mere existence which absorbs the attention of a large part of the human race."5 Arthur L. Scott writes, "Not only has James distorted reality by giving us merely the cerebral portion of life among the rich, but he has falsified even this portion of life by a process of careful fumigation."6

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2Percy H. Boynton, Literature and American Life (Dallas, 1936), p. 731.
Aspects of the Novel  E. M. Forster says that James's characters

besides being few in number, are constructed on very stingy lines. They are incapable of fun, of rapid motion, of carnality, and of nine-tenths of heroism. Their clothes will not take off, the diseases that ravage them are anonymous, like the sources of their income, their servants are noiseless or resemble themselves, no social explanation of the world we know is possible for them, for there are no stupid people in their world, no barriers of language, and no poor.  

A less extreme but similar view is taken by Donald Heiney in Recent American Literature. According to him, James is not particularly interested in the economic side of life, i.e., in how goods are produced and how money is made. He is concerned instead with how money is spent; it seems to him a more interesting subject, and one not tainted with the sordid monotony of daily drudgery.  

B. A. Booth has ably answered these charges in an article which surveys the major works of James and shows briefly the calculated importance of money in the working out of plot, character, and theme. Booth finds at the heart of most of James's stories or novels a struggle for or a squabble over money. Far from being unaware, as charged, that many people are poor and that economic tensions motivate human action, James was acutely conscious of the way in which

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8 Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature (New York, 1958), p. 29.
money, or the lack of it, may dominate men's minds, creating havoc in character and personality.9

Yvor Winters has likewise noted James's interest in wealth, though he contends that James—unlike Hardy, Defoe, and a host of others—never relied upon economic determinism to explain or excuse his characters. "No one is forced to choose [writes Winters] . . . between crime and starvation . . . . The lack of money may be sufficiently great to be a temptation; but it is never sufficiently great to be compelling."10

The purpose of the study at hand is to follow up the suggestions in Winters's observations and Booth's thesis, and to examine both the extent and the nature of money and other financial considerations as these matters appear in the four most important novels of James's early period. This particular stage of James's career has been selected because it represents a time in his life, his youth, when he was less sophisticated and hence less guarded in his references to a subject that most older people are prone to approach obliquely in public.

James's early period is generally considered to extend from the time he began writing in 1866 to 1881, the

date of publication of *The Portrait of a Lady*. During
these fifteen years James wrote and published as novels,
either serially in magazines or under separate cover,
eight works. Of these, *Watch and Ward* (1871) and
*Confidence* (1880) James did not regard as important enough
to revise and include in the New York Edition of his
works. *Daisy Miller* (1878) and *The Europeans* (1878),
though popular and significant items in the James canon,
because of their brevity fall more accurately into the
genre of the novelette. These four works have, therefore,
been omitted from the present study and the four remain-
ing—*Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877),
*Washington Square* (1881), and *The Portrait of a Lady*
(1881)—have been singled out for special analysis as the
best examples of James the novelist at the beginning of
his great career.

It will be helpful, however, to consider first a few
financial facts from James’s own life before turning to
the works themselves. Henry James’s grandfather was an
Irish immigrant who made his way up in the tobacco and
dry goods businesses. He organized a savings bank and at
his death was worth around three million dollars. He left
a will stating that his children should not get their
shares until the youngest grandson was of age. He did
this because he believed “sudden wealth to be dangerous
to inexperienced heirs . . . ."11 He also felt that certain of his children should prove themselves by taking up a trade and in the case of Henry James's father that "he should become a more reliable Christian."12 The children succeeded in breaking the will, however, and received their shares upon coming of age.

James's father, Henry James, Sr., then financially secure, traveled with his family all over Europe. Although his children studied under tutors—a routine which required much money—he did not keep the children from living under [financial] strain. Strain was what he wanted them to feel, reasoning perhaps that he could introduce them to transcendent experience quite impossible for them. And he did make it impossible for them . . . .13

This situation probably remained in Henry James's mind through his mature years.

Alfred Ferguson has remarked that the great interest of James in his own personal finances is evident throughout the novelist's career. His letters to members of his family frequently exhibit this interest. To William he once wrote: "Like you, with all my heart, I have 'finance on the brain.' At least I try to have it--with a woeful

12 Ibid.
lack of natural talent for the same."\(^{14}\) James's "triple quest," as Ferguson has argued, was for fame, art, and fortune.

James seemed concerned about taking money from his parents:

> when his parents showed signs of worry about their income after the depression of 1877, he assured them of his ability to stand alone and perhaps in good times to offer them his support: "I have only to keep quietly working," he wrote, "to arrive at fame and fortune."\(^{15}\)

To James there was something vulgar in talking about money. On the other hand, he made his living through writing and had to look after his income with frugal care. On one occasion he wrote: "Excuse my appearance of vulgar greed; I am getting to perceive that I can make money, very considerably, if I only set about it right and the idea has an undeniable fascination."\(^{16}\) During the period when James was writing plays, he insisted that he did it "all and only for the dream of gold—much gold."\(^{17}\)

Even after he had a secure reputation as a writer, he still felt uneasy about his finances. After visiting James at Lamb House, Edith Wharton remarked, "... if anyone in a pecuniary difficulty appealed to James for


\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 478.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 486.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 498.
help he gave it without counting; but in his daily life he was haunted by the spectre of impoverishment."\(^{18}\) It is not surprising that a man so vitally concerned with his own fortune should allow that concern to be reflected both consciously and unconsciously in his novels.

\(^{18}\)Dupee, p. 207.
It is appropriate to begin this study of the major early novels of Henry James with *Roderick Hudson*. Not only did James consider this novel to be his first major work, but he put into it much of himself and his own hopes and fears. The poet Stephen Spender sees in Rowland Mallet, the wealthy observer of life, and Roderick Hudson, the poor young artist, two sides of Henry James.¹ James, like Rowland, felt himself an outsider because of his unusual and superior education. According to Walter Allen, Henry James, Sr., believed that conventional education made for standardization and that children should be submitted to as many influences as possible. The young James found himself at school in turn at Albany, New York, London, Paris, Geneva, Boulogne, and Bonn before going to the Harvard Law School. Rootlessness was thrust upon him; he was conditioned to the role of spectator.²

It was somewhat as a spectator that Rowland Mallet inhabited the rich Roman scene of the novel. In the character of Roderick, James expressed his own artistic


hopes as well as the fear of failure and the reason for it.

The importance of money in *Roderick Hudson* is more generally pervasive than specific. In other words, this theme is not present in the novel as a constant topic of conversation among the characters, but it is a very important element of the basic plot situation.

Rowland Mallet, a wealthy, young New Englander, deeply concerned himself with finding a worthy cause that he could support financially and thus do something morally and materially virtuous with his inherited fortune. When the book opens he was visiting his cousin, Cecilia, before leaving for Europe. She was eager to hear of Rowland's plans:

"What is it you mean to do in Europe? . . . Your circumstances . . . suggest the idea of some sort of social usefulness. You're intelligent and are well informed, and your benevolence, if one may call it benevolence, would be discriminating. You're rich and unoccupied, so that it might be abundant. Therefore I say you're a man to do something on a large scale."

". . . 'Pray what shall I do? Found an orphan asylum or build a dormitory for Harvard? I'm not rich enough to do either in an ideally handsome way, and I confess that yet a while I feel too young to strike my grand coup. I'm holding myself ready for inspiration. I'm waiting till something takes my fancy irresistibly. If inspiration comes at forty it will be a hundred pities to have tied up my money-bag at thirty."

"Well of course I give you decent time," said Cecilia. "It's only a word to the wise--a notification that you're expected not to run your course
without having done something handsome for your fellow-men."

Rowland's major interest was art, perhaps art in general. He often wished that "he had been a vigorous young man of genius without a penny. As it was he could only buy pictures and not paint them." He had no desire to make money, he had money enough; and although he knew, and was frequently reminded, that a young man is the better for a fixed occupation, he could perceive no advantage to his soul in his driving a lucrative trade.

During Rowland's visit, Cecilia showed him a statuette that her neighbor Mr. Roderick Hudson had made and given to her. Rowland thought it extraordinary and wanted to meet Roderick. When Cecilia explained that Roderick was studying law without much success, Rowland became anxious to encourage Roderick to produce more sculpture.

One day after getting acquainted with Roderick, Rowland asked him: "How would you like to go to Home?"

The obvious limitation was money.

"What's the smallest sum per annum on which one can keep the sacred fire?"
"What's the largest sum at your disposal?"

Rowland returned.

Roderick stroked his light moustache, gave it a twist, and then announced, as with due importance, "Three hundred dollars."

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5 Ibid., p. 29.
"The money question could be arranged," said Rowland. "There are ways, you know, of raising money."

"'Know?' How should I know? I never yet discovered one."

"One of them consists," said Rowland, "in having a friend with a good deal more than he wants and in not being too proud to accept a part of it."

Roderick stared a moment and his face flushed. "Do you mean--do you mean--?" He stammered, he panted; he was greatly excited.

Rowland got up, blushing a little, and Roderick sprang to his feet. "In three words, if it's in you really to go in for sculpture, you ought to get to Rome and study the antique. To get to Rome you need money. I'm fond of fine statues and busts, but unfortunately I can't make them myself. I have to order them from those who know how. I order a dozen from you, to be executed at your convenience. To help you I pay you in advance."

Rowland was aware that he was taking Roderick away from his mother and his friends, with nothing more than hope that the experiment would succeed. When Cecilia objected to the plan, Rowland's defense was:

He is made to do the things that we are the better for having. I can't do such things myself, but when I see a young man of genius standing helpless and hopeless for want of capital, I feel—that it's no affection of humility, I assure you—as if it would give at least a reflected usefulness to my own life to offer him his opportunity.  

It was difficult for Cecilia to argue against such generous self-immolation.

Before the two men left for Rome, Roderick proposed to his cousin, Mary Garland. He was optimistic about the future. "I must of course make lots of money before we

6Ibid., p. 41. 7Ibid., p. 49.
can marry . . . ." Rowland did not know about the engagement until they were well on their way to Rome. No one knew that Rowland himself had fallen in love with Mary before he left.

After three months in Rome, Roderick had proved himself.

He was changed even more than he himself suspected; he had stepped without faltering into his birthright, and was spending money, intellectually, with the freedom of a young heir who had just won an obstructive lawsuit.9

The financial simile is well worth noting.

Rowland introduced Roderick to his artistic friends in Rome. One of them was an Italian sculptor named Gloriani, who "had had money; but he had spent it recklessly, much of it scandalously, and at twenty-six had found himself obliged to make capital of his talents."10 Another was Sam Singleton, an American who had been in Rome two years. "Apparently fame and fortune had not yet come his way."11 Miss Blanchard, also an American artist, "had a small fortune, but she was not above selling her pictures."12

When Rowland left Rome for the summer, he let Roderick go his own way. The young artist "had money

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8 Ibid., p. 69.
9 Ibid., p. 73.
10 Ibid., p. 82.
11 Ibid., p. 83.
12 Ibid., p. 84.
enough that would outlast the summer; when it was spent he
would come back to Rome and find the golden mood again
awaiting him there."\textsuperscript{15}

One day Rowland got a letter from Roderick. "In com-
mon charity," Roderick wrote, "lend me a hundred pounds!
I've gambled away my last franc—I've made a villainous
heap of debts. Send me the money first; lecture me after-
wards!"\textsuperscript{14} It was not long until Rowland got another
request. "Send me another fifty pounds! I'm a bigger
donkey than ever. I will leave as soon as it comes, and
meet you at Geneva. There I will tell you everything."\textsuperscript{15}

Roderick had tried gambling and found it a wonderful
help. "The help, however, was all fallacious, for he soon
perceived that to seem to have money, and to have it in
fact, exposed an eager and confident youth to peculiar
liabilities."\textsuperscript{16} Roderick admitted his mistake and
promised to repay his friend.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 95. \textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}. \textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 102.
After returning to Rome from his summer trip, Roderick met the beautiful Christina Light. She and her mother and a man, mysteriously connected with them, visited Roderick's studio. The young sculptor immediately proposed that Christina model for him. Mrs. Light was slow to give her permission.

"Mama hesitates," Miss Light explained, "because she doesn't know whether you mean she shall pay you for the bust or you'll pay me for the sitting. She's capable of thinking that, mama. I can assure you at least that she won't pay you a sou." 18

This comment revealed a great deal about Mrs. Light. She was, in fact, the fortune hunter of the book. Rowland learned from Madame Grandoni, an old friend of his, that "Mrs. Light, having failed to make her own fortune in matrimony, has transferred her hopes to her daughter." She added that Christina had been told twenty times a day by her mother, since she was five years old, that she's a beauty of beauties, that her face is her fortune, that she was born for great things, and that if she plays her cards she may marry God knows whom. 19

After Roderick met Christina, he remarked to Rowland, "There's my fortune—on that girl's two feet." 20 The arrangements were made and Christina began sitting for Roderick. One day when Rowland was watching the young sculptor at work, Christina commented to the young men:

18Ibid., p. 113. 19Ibid., p. 117. 20Ibid., p. 114.
"Oh, I take it you know very well that we're hunting for a husband and that none but tremendous swells need apply. Surely before these gentlemen, mama, I may speak freely; they're so perfectly disinterested. Mr. Mallet won't do, because, though he's rich, he's not rich enough. Mama made that discovery the day after we went to see you, moved to it by the promising look of your furniture. I hope she was right, eh? Unless you have millions, you know, you needn't apply."

"You reduce me to the sense of beggary," said Rowland.

"Oh, some better girl than I will decide some day, after mature reflection, that, on the whole, you yourself add something to your fortune. Mr. Hudson of course is nowhere; he has nothing but his genius and his extraordinary beaux yeux."21

Christina was sullenly bitter about being "dragged about the world to be sold to the highest bidder."22

The penniless Roderick fell in love with Christina and rivaled Prince Casamassima for her attention. The Cavalier, Mrs. Light's unexplained friend, described the Prince for Rowland.

He comes of a very great family—a race of princes who for endless generations have sought brides only with some correspondence of name and condition. . . . It would be a great match, for she [Christina] brings him neither a name nor a fortune—nothing but her wit and beauty . . . . All these years his affairs have been in the hands of his reverend uncle, a man of wonderful head, who had managed them to perfection—paid off mortgages, planted forests, opened up mines. It is now a magnificent fortune . . . . And he lays it all at the feet of that little person . . . .23

Roderick's interest in Christina took him away from his work. He got to the point that he had no ideas and

21Ibid., p. 127.  
22Ibid., p. 137.  
23Ibid., pp. 163-165.
could do nothing. Rowland suggested that Roderick write for his mother and Mary to come to Europe. When they arrived, Roderick was not even there to meet them.

They had scraped together their scanty funds and embarked . . . upon the dreadful sea, only to be handed over at the end to an element still more capable of betraying them. He [Mallet] could but promise himself to be their stubborn even if disdained support.24

Eventually Christina was forced into a marriage with the Prince, and Roderick's despair put an end to his artistic endeavors. His mother appealed to Rowland to help him, but Roderick replied, "Mr. Mallet can't help me—not with all his money nor all his good example nor all his friendship . . . ."25 Roderick knew that his dreams had ended. He tried to explain it to his mother, who thought he was so prosperous when she first saw him in Rome.

"My dear mother, if you had had eyes that weren't blinded by this sad maternal vanity you would have seen all this for yourself; you would have seen that I'm anything but prosperous."

"Is it anything about money?" cried Mrs. Hudson. . . .

"Money?" said Roderick. "I've not a cent of money. Where and how should I have got it?"

"Oh, Mr. Mallet, how could you let him?"

Mrs. Hudson asked terribly.

"Everything I have is at his service," said Rowland, sick now of the scene.

"Of course Mr. Mallet will help you, my son!" the poor lady hastened to proclaim.

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"Ah, leave Mr. Mallet alone!" said Roderick. "I've squeezed him dry; it's not my fault if he had anything left!"

"Roderick, what have you done with all your money?" his mother demanded. "Thrown it away. It was no such great amount. I've done nothing this winter."26

Mrs. Hudson appealed to Rowland again when she could do nothing with Roderick.

"You know we've very little money to spend," she said while her host waited for the full expression of her idea. "Roderick tells me he has debts and has also nothing at all to pay them with. He says I must write to Mr. Striker to sell my house for what it will bring and send me out the money. When the money comes I must give it to him. I'm sure I don't know; I never heard of anything so dreadful. My house is really the principal part of my property. But that's all Roderick will say. We must be very economical."27

Mallet, of course, never permitted the Hudsons to execute this dire plan.

The group went first to Florence and then to Switzerland, where the two men saw Christina Light, now the Princess Casamassima. The day after the meeting Roderick found Rowland on a hillside.

"I should like you to do me a favour," the young man presently said. "I should like you to lend me some money."

"How much do you wish?" Rowland asked.

"Well, say a thousand francs."

Rowland considered. "I don't wish to be indiscreet, but may I ask you what you propose to do with a thousand francs?"

26Ibid., p. 275.

27Ibid., p. 279.
"To go to Interlaken."
"And why should you go to Interlaken?"
The answer came at once. "Because that woman's to be there."28

They discussed the situation some, and Roderick came back to the question.

"Now that I've answered your questions, therefore, please give me the money."
Rowland shook his head. "For that dire purpose I can't!"
"You can't?"
"It's impossible. Your idea's too great a folly. I can't help you to it."
Roderick flushed a little, and his eyes lighted.
"I'll borrow what money I can then from Mary!" This was not viciously said; it had simply the ring of passionate resolution.
Instantly it brought Rowland to terms. He took a bunch of keys from his pocket and tossed it upon the grass. "The little brass one opens my dressing-case. You'll find money in it."29

Some minutes later Roderick responded.

"I've never yet thought twice about accepting any favour of you, but this one sticks in my throat."
"It's not a favour. I lend you money only under compulsion."
"Well, then, I'll take it only under compulsion!" And, springing to his feet, Roderick marched away.30

A half hour later Roderick returned. He sat down on the grass by Rowland and said:

My mother's out of money; she's expecting next week some circular notes from London. She had only ten francs in her pocket. Mary Garland gave me every sou she possessed in the world. It makes exactly thirty-four francs. That's not enough. . . . I don't know

28 Ibid., p. 317.  
29 Ibid., p. 318.  
30 Ibid., p. 319.
what's the matter with me . . . but I've an insurmountable aversion to taking your money.\textsuperscript{51}

Roderick left on his hike over the mountains, but he failed to return. His body was discovered the next day at the foot of a cliff. At this crisis it became evident to Howland that in spite of Roderick's generally recognized unfaithfulness to Mary, her love for him had remained unchanged. Howland had hoped she would transfer her affection to him when she saw Roderick's passion for Christina, but his love for Mary would not permit him to use his money either to buy off or undermine the penniless young artist whom he had befriended and sponsored.

The various attitudes toward money in this work include that of the young artist who is largely unconcerned with money but whose art depends on the aid of a benefactor. Howland is a man who knows the value of money and who is unusual in his desire to dispose of it in some socially useful way. Christina Light, the spoiled but honest beauty, has the same attitude as Roderick; but her mother is, with respect to money, the villainness in the novel. This old lady is capable of blackmailing her own daughter by threatening to reveal that Christina is illegitimate. Her father is, in fact, the old Cavaliere who faithfully accompanies Mrs. Light but seems to have no

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid.
satisfactory official status. Christina's knowledge of her illegitimacy causes her to leave Roderick precipitately and marry the vastly wealthy, socially secure Prince Casamassima.

James is thoroughly sympathetic with the wealthy, generous, high-minded Rowland Mallet, who refuses to use his money for any nefarious or selfish purpose. This young man bears his wealth and consequent social position with as much grace as any Jamesian hero in a similar position. Indeed, when one compares him with the weak, extravagant, petulant, and unstable but talented Roderick, one wonders why James did not call the novel Rowland Mallet instead of Roderick Hudson. As a "lucid reflector" Rowland comes very near displacing the locus of the novel in the young artist corrupted by Home.

If these two characters do represent two sides of Henry James, is there not a noticeable strain of Puritanism shown in this apparent distrust of the artist and his nature? And if this novel says anything at all questionable about money, does it not say that money will not buy happiness but that it does bring responsibility? As a secondary moral, the point is made quite obvious that giving money away—no matter from what good motives—is a very risky business for both giver and taker.
CHAPTER III

THE AMERICAN

The importance of money and economic forces in The American appears in the background against which the story is told. These circumstances consist primarily of the early history of Christopher Newman.

At an early age Newman was forced to earn his own living.

His experience, moreover, was as wide as his capacity; when he was fourteen years old, necessity had taken him by the slim young shoulders and pushed him into the street, to earn that night’s supper. He had not earned it, but he had earned the next night’s, and afterwards, whenever he had none, it was because he had gone without it to use the money for something else, a keener pleasure or a finer profit.1

Newman spent four of his early years in the army. Although he came out penniless, the time had not been wasted. He had gained a "bitter sense of the waste of precious things—life and time and money . . . ."2 With a determination to have the things he wanted, he went west to seek his fortune.

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2 Ibid., p. 34.
He had known what it was to have utterly exhausted his credit, to be unable to raise a dollar, and to find himself at nightfall in a strange city, without a penny to mitigate its strangeness. It was under these circumstances that he made his entrance into San Francisco, the scene, subsequently, of his happiest stroke of fortune.3

In the western city Newman's ability was put to the test, and he scored largely. By age thirty-five he had become a millionaire, but he was tired of business.

It must be admitted, rather nakedly, that Christopher Newman's sole aim in life had been to make money; what he had been placed in the world for was, to his own perception, simply to wrest a fortune, the bigger the better, from defiant opportunity. This idea completely filled his horizon and satisfied his imagination. Upon the use of money, upon what one might do with a life into which one had succeeded in injecting the golden stream, he had up to his thirty-fifth year very scantily reflected. Life had been for him an open game, and he had played for high stakes. He had won at last and carried off his winnings; and now what was he to do with them?4

It was at this time that he decided to go to Paris and seek refuge from the life of business. Newman washed his hands of business and casually gave up sixty thousand dollars to an undeserving friend in Wall Street. It was against this background of Newman's immense wealth that James begins the story.

Soon after arriving in Paris, Newman visited the Louvre. He watched the copyists at work and decided that he should buy some paintings. He made the acquaintance of

3Ibid., p. 35.  
4Ibid., p. 36.
Mademoiselle Nioche, a young copyist, and bought one of her paintings. Newman betrayed his naïveté by agreeing to pay Mademoiselle two thousand francs for a decidedly inferior work. He even told her, "Oh, I mean to buy a great many pictures."\(^5\)

Monsieur Nioche, Mademoiselle's father, appeared and offered to teach Newman French. "It never occurred to Newman to ask him for a guarantee for his skill in imparting instructions; he supposed of course M. Nioche knew his own language . . . ."\(^6\) Newman's innocence cost him even more when M. Nioche brought him the painting. In addition to the two thousand francs for the painting, Newman gave an extra one thousand francs for a frame which would save him, in M. Nioche's words, "the annoyance so great for a person of your delicacy of going about to bargain at the shops."\(^7\) There is some irony here, perhaps unintended, about Newman's "delicacy" in a business transaction.

Before leaving the museum, Newman ran into an old army friend, Tom Tristram. Newman thought that Tom might show him Paris, but he soon discovered that he and Tom no longer shared the same interests. One of the major differences between them was their attitudes toward money. Tom's conversation turned on the point:

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 22.  \(^6\)Ibid., p. 26.  \(^7\)Ibid., p. 61.
"Made your everlasting fortune?"
Christopher Newman was silent a moment, and then with a tranquil smile he answered, "Yes."
"And come to Paris to spend it, eh?"
"Well, we shall see. So they carry those parasols here—the menfolk?"
"Of course they do. They're great things. They understand comfort out here."
"Where do you buy them?"
"Anywhere, everywhere."
"Well, Tristram, I'm glad to get hold of you. You can show me the ropes. I suppose you know Paris inside out."
Mr. Tristram gave a mellow smile of self-gratulation. "Well, I guess there are not many men that can show me much. I'll take care of you."
"It's a pity you were not here a few minutes ago. I have just bought a picture. You might have put the thing through for me."
"Bought a picture?" said Mr. Tristram, looking vaguely round at the walls. "Why, do they sell them?"
"I mean a copy."
"Oh, I see. These," said Mr. Tristram, nodding at the Titians and Vandykes, "these, I suppose, are originals."
"I hope so," cried Newman. "I don't want a copy of a copy." 8

In the same conversation Tristram brought the topic around once more:

"You're easily pleased. But you can do as you choose—a man in your shoes. You have made a pile of money, eh?"
"I have made enough."
"Happy the man who can say that? Enough for what?"
"Enough to rest awhile, to forget the confounded thing, to look about me, to see the world, to have a good time, to improve my mind, and, if the fancy takes me, to marry a wife," Newman spoke slowly, with a certain dryness of accent and with frequent pauses. This was his habitual mode of utterance . . . .

8Ibid., p. 30.
"Jupiter! There's a programme!" cried Mr. Tristram. "Certainly, all that takes money, especially the wife; unless indeed she gives it, as mine did. And what's the story? How have you done it?"9

Tom had remained the same through the years; he still liked to visit the clubs, but Newman had not come to Europe to visit clubs. Tristram suggested that Newman should meet his wife, who shared Newman's unexpected cultural interests.

At Tristram's invitation Newman paid them a visit. Though Mrs. Tristram was an American, she had been educated in Paris and was thoroughly Europeanized. She found Newman, and incidentally his money, refreshing.

She wished to do something with him—she hardly knew what. There was so much of him; he was so rich and robust, so easy, friendly, well-disposed, that he kept her fancy constantly on the alert.10

Newman enjoyed his visit and continued to go back. Tom Tristram habitually retired to his club and left Newman and his wife to have discussions of European life. It was no unusual turn for these conversations to find their way to Newman's fortune. On one occasion Mrs. Tristram remarked:

"You have what must be the most agreeable thing in the world, the consciousness of having bought your pleasure beforehand and paid for it. You have not a day of reckoning staring you in the face. Your reckonings are over."

9Ibid., pp. 33-34. 10Ibid., p. 45.
"Well, I suppose I am happy," said Newman, meditatively.
"You have been odiously successful."
"Successful in copper," said Newman, "only so-so in railroads, and a hopeless fizzle in oil."
"It is very disagreeable to know how Americans have made their money. Now you have the world before you. You have only to enjoy."

It did not take Mrs. Tristram long to come around to the marriage question. In discussing the question Newman was well aware of his strong point.

"Well," he said at last, "I want a great woman . . . . That's one thing I can treat myself to, and if it is to be had I mean to have it. What else have I toiled and struggled for, all these years? I have succeeded, and now what am I to do with my success? To make it perfect, as I see it, there must be a beautiful woman perched on the pile, like a statue on a monument . . . . I can give my wife a good deal myself. She shall have everything a woman can desire . . . . I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market."

Mrs. Tristram proposed a meeting between Newman and her aristocratic friend, Madame de Cintre. Newman and Claire met shortly before she went to her family's country home for the summer. Even from this short meeting it was clear that the major obstacle to Newman's interest would be Claire's family, the Bellegardes, with whom she had lived since the death of her husband.

Meanwhile Newman began his French lessons with Monsieur Nicoche. Their conversations were centered chiefly on money.

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11 Ibid., pp. 47-48.  
12 Ibid., p. 51.
Newman was fond of statistics; he liked to know how things were paid, what profits were gathered, what commercial habits prevailed, how the battle of life was fought. M. Nioche, as a reduced capitalist, was familiar with these considerations. ... Newman took an interest in French thriftiness and conceived a lively admiration for Parisian economics. His own economic genius was so entirely for operations on a larger scale, and, to move at his ease, he needed so imperatively the sense of risks and great prizes, that he found an ungrudging entertainment in the spectacle of fortunes made by the aggregation of copper coins, and in minute subdivisions of labor and profit.  

After returning to Paris from his European tour, Newman was anxious to see Madame de Cintré again. The American could not understand Claire's self-denying loyalty to her family. In a conversation with Mrs. Tristram he discussed this matter.

"But what do they want to get out of that poor lady?" Newman asked.
"Another marriage. They are not rich, and they want to bring money into the family."
"There's your chance, my boy!" said Tristram.
"And Madame de Cintré objects," Newman continued.
"She has been sold once; she naturally objects to being sold again. It appears that the first time they made a rather poor bargain; M. de Cintré left a scanty property."  

The financial interest which is central to the plot was expressed very clearly by the young Madame de Bellegarde when she and Newman met for the first time.

"I have made up my mind, after all," said Madame de Bellegarde, "that the great point is—how

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13 Ibid., pp. 64-65.  
14 Ibid., p. 94.
do you call it?--to come out square. I am on my knees to money; I don't deny it. If you like it, I ask no questions."15

During the same visit Newman met Claire's young brother, Valentin. He, like his sister-in-law, was not unwilling to talk of money. Valentin's conversations somewhat resemble Tristram's:

"You, evidently, are a success. You have made a fortune, you have built up an edifice, you are a financial, commercial power, you can travel about the world until you have found a soft spot, and lie down in it with the consciousness of having earned your rest. Is not that true? ... I'm right, eh? You are a success? You have made a fortune? It's none of my business, but, in short, you are rich?"

"That's another thing that sounds foolish to say," said Newman. "Hang it, no man is rich!"16

Newman received Valentin de Bellegarde many times, and the two became close friends. Newman let Valentin know that he desired to marry his sister. Newman said that he would make a generous offer:

"What would it be?" [asked Valentin.]

"Everything she wishes. If I get hold of a woman that comes up to my standard, I shall think nothing too good for her. I have been a long time looking, and I find such women are rare. To combine the qualities I require seems to be difficult, but when the difficulty is vanquished it deserves a reward."17

The next day Newman called on Madame de Cintré. The impression she made on him was that of "a very expensive

15Ibid., p. 103.  
16Ibid., p. 109.  
17Ibid., p. 127.
article . . . and one which a man with an ambition to have everything about him of the best would find it highly agreeable to possess."\textsuperscript{18}

Shortly thereafter Newman proposed to Claire. She told him she could not accept, but he asked her to reconsider, to take as long as she liked. With complete confidence in his own power, he offered her:

\begin{quote}
Everything that a man can give a woman . . . . I have a large fortune, a very large fortune; some day, if you will allow me, I will go into details. If you want brilliancy, everything in the way of brilliancy that money can give you, you shall have. And as regards anything you may give up, don't take for granted too much that its place cannot be filled. Leave that to me; I'll take care of you; I shall know what you need. Energy and ingenuity can arrange everything. I'm a strong man!\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Newman agreed not to mention his proposal to her again for six months, but during this time he was to be permitted to see her.

It was Valentin who agreed to introduce Newman to his mother and brother. The main point of Newman's first conversation with Urbain de Bellegarde was the fortune.

"I can't say I have any specialty. My specialty has been to make the largest possible fortune in the shortest possible time." Newman made his remark very deliberately; he wished to open the way, if it were necessary, to an authoritative statement of his means.

M. de Bellegarde laughed agreeably. "I hope you have succeeded," he said.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 133. \quad \textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 136.
"Yes, I have made a fortune in a reasonable time. I am not so old, you see."

"Paris is a very good place to spend a fortune. I wish you great enjoyment of yours."20

The central situation of the novel, the bid of American wealth for French culture, is expressed in a part of Newman's conversation with Madame de Bellegarde. Newman complimented Claire and stated his desire to marry her. When he asked, "Will you favor it?" the Marquise retorted:

"Favor it?" Madame de Bellegarde looked at him a moment and then shook her head. "No!" she said softly.

"Will you suffer it then? Will you let it pass?"

"You don't know what you ask. I am a very proud and meddlesome old woman."

"Well, I am very rich," said Newman. Madame de Bellegarde fixed her eyes on the floor, and Newman thought it probable she was weighing the reasons in favor of resenting the brutality of this remark. But at last, looking up, she said simply, "How rich?"

Newman expressed his income in a round number which had the magnificent sound that large aggregations of dollars put on when they are translated into francs. He added a few remarks of a financial character, which completed a sufficiently striking presentation of his resources.

Madame de Bellegarde listened in silence. "You are very frank," she said finally. "I will be the same. I would rather favor you, on the whole, than suffer you. It will be easier."21

It has been said that James did not know his Americans well enough, and such criticism has been applied to The American. Perhaps Newman's early money-making

20 Ibid., p. 150.  
21 Ibid., p. 155.
activity is left vague because James knew so little of America. In spite of all the talk about money in the novel, there is a note of modesty in Newman which does not quite fit the self-made American businessman.

He liked making up parties and conducting them to the theatre, and taking them to drive on high drags or to dine at remote restaurants. He liked doing things which involved his paying for people; the vulgar truth is that he enjoyed "treating" them. This was not because he was what is called purse-proud; handling money in public was on the contrary positively disagreeable to him; he had a sort of personal modesty about it, akin to what he would have felt about making a toilet before spectators. But just as it was a gratification to him to be handsomely dressed, just as it was a private satisfaction to him (he enjoyed it very clandestinely) to have interposed, pecuniarily, in a scheme of pleasure.22

Isadore Traschen has suggested that the "money touch is a fine probing of Newman's weakness, the more or less professed conviction that money can do just about everything . . . ."23 There is a weakness but it is not Newman's. James pointed out in a later introduction to the novel that the incredulity was that the Bellegardes would not have rejected Newman's offer.24

There is no need to review how Madame de Cintre accepted Newman's proposal, how her family finally turned

22Ibid., pp. 240-241.


against Newman, and how Newman refused to use the family secret revealed to Newman by Valentin from his death bed. Tom Tristram gave his commercial understanding of Newman's failure in an attempt to be sympathetic:

My dear boy, don't think me a vulgar brute for hinting at it, but you may depend upon it, all they wanted was your money. I know something about that; I can tell when people want one's money! Why they stopped wanting yours I don't know; I suppose because they could get some one else's without working for it. It isn't worth finding out.25

Mrs. Tristram, who like James experienced both sides as a thoroughly Europeanized American, had no difficulty summing up the reason.

They really couldn't endure you any longer. They had overrated their courage. I must say, to give the devil his due, that there is something rather fine in that. It was your commercial quality in the abstract they couldn't swallow. That is really aristocratic. They wanted your money, but they have given you up for an idea.26

Mrs. Tristram was right except for one detail. It was not entirely "for an idea" that Newman was given up. A distant cousin of Madame de Cintré, Lord Deepmere, came to Paris to make the acquaintance of his relatives. Though Deepmere was deficient in the personal qualities which might recommend him as a husband, he had the two

25James, The American, p. 361.
26Ibid., p. 271.
qualifications that the Bellegardes desired most, money and title. Urbain de Bellegarde told Newman about Deepmere.

His mother was the daughter of Lord Finucane . . . he had great Irish estates. Lady Bridget, in the complete absence of male heirs, either direct or collateral—a most extraordinary circumstance—came in for everything. But Lord Deepmere's title is English and his English property is immense. He is a charming young man.27

James made it clear that Newman was actually given up for Lord Deepmere because Deepmere had both social position and wealth.

The various attitudes toward money expressed in The American do not merely provide an interesting theme in the novel but lie at the very heart of the plot. The impoverished European aristocracy, as represented in the Bellegardes, was obsessed with money because their standing in their own social circle depended on financial resources. Their interest in money may be seen as a kind of struggle for preeminence in the aristocracy, and in this sense James was not unsympathetic. When, on the other hand, this concern corrupted moral scruples, James seemed to have detested it. James could be sympathetic with the aim of the aristocracy to acquire wealth, but he was morally indignant at the means the Bellegardes employed.

27Ibid., p. 197.
The author was clearly in sympathy with his hero. Newman had a healthy respect for wealth, but he understood that there were finer things in life than merely making money. It was for this reason that he abandoned business at the very moment he was about to make sixty thousand dollars. Perhaps the only weakness in James's conception of Newman was the novelist's meager understanding of the life and nature of the enormously successful man of business—at least as he is commonly thought of today.
CHAPTER IV

WASHINGTON SQUARE

Money is perhaps more central to the plot of Washington Square than to that of any other novel in James's early period. The action takes place in New York City, near where the author was born. The James family lived at No. 21 Washington Place, only a few houses from Washington Square.¹

The story revolves around the wealthy Doctor Sloper, his rather plain daughter, Catherine, and Morris Townsend, her impoverished but charming suitor. Doctor Sloper was a prominent physician in New York in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He was a sensible man and even considered scholarly by some. He had married Catherine Harrington, a wealthy New York girl.

It must be confessed fortune had favored him, and he had found the path to prosperity very soft to his tread. He had married, at the age of twenty-seven, for love, a very charming girl, Miss Catherine Harrington, of New York, who, in addition to her charms, had brought him a solid dowry.²

James stresses Doctor Sloper's success a little more by saying that

Even at the age of twenty-seven Austin Sloper had made his mark sufficiently to mitigate the anomaly of his having been chosen among a dozen suitors by a young woman of high fashion, who had ten thousand dollars of income and the most charming eyes in the island of Manhattan.\(^3\)

Doctor Sloper's financial acumen did not diminish after his marriage to a rich girl, for he managed to make a creditable showing for himself as a practicing physician and investor.

The fact of his having married a rich woman made no difference in the line he had traced for himself, and he cultivated his profession with as definite a purpose as if he still had no other resources than his fraction of the modest patrimony which, on his father's death, he had shared with his brothers and sisters. This purpose had not been preponderantly to make money—it had been rather to learn something and to do something. To learn something interesting, and to do something useful—this was, roughly speaking, the programme he had sketched, and of which the accident of his wife having an income appeared to him in no degree to modify the validity.\(^4\)

Doctor Sloper suffered many disappointments after his marriage. The first was the loss of a son. Two years later, his wife died after giving birth to a daughter. The child, named Catherine after her mother, later became another of Doctor Sloper's disappointments.

When Catherine was ten years old, her father invited one of his sisters, Mrs. Ponniman, to come help him care

\(^3\)Ibid. \(^4\)Ibid., p. 10.
for the girl. Since Lavinia Penniman had been left a lonely widow without fortune, she gladly accepted the Doctor's offer. She tried to fulfill all her own ambitions by making Catherine a charming young woman; however, Catherine was a plain, unsophisticated girl. Her only charm clearly lay in her position as an heiress.

Doctor Sloper soon learned not to expect anything from Catherine. He knew she was not superior, and he accepted the fact—with bitterness. As Catherine gradually developed a "lively" taste in dress, her attempt to be elegant became a point of embarrassment to the Doctor.

... if she expressed herself in her clothes, it is certain that people were not to blame for not thinking her a witty person. It must be added that, though she had the expectation of a fortune—Doctor Sloper for a long time had been making twenty thousand dollars a year by his profession, and laying aside the half of it—the amount of money at her disposal was not greater than the allowance made to many poorer girls. ... It simply appeared to him proper and reasonable that a well-bred young woman should not carry half her fortune on her back.5

When Catherine was twenty-one she attended a party at the home of Mrs. Almond, another of her aunts. Mrs. Almond, Doctor Sloper's favorite sister, gave an engagement party for her daughter, Marian. Mrs. Penniman and Catherine went to the party ahead of Doctor Sloper. When he arrived, he was surprised to find Catherine dancing.

5Ibid., p. 21.
"You are sumptuous, opulent, expensive," her father rejoined. "You look as if you had eighty thousand a year."
"Well, so long as I haven't--" said Catherine illogically. Her conception of her prospective wealth was as yet very indefinite.
"So long as you haven't you shouldn't look as if you had. Have you enjoyed your party?"6

Catherine did enjoy the party. Shortly after it began, Marian, her cousin, introduced her to Morris Townsend, a cousin of Marian's fiancé. Townsend devoted his attention to Catherine most of the evening except for the time he spent in conversation with Aunt Penniman. When the Doctor arrived at the party Townsend was talking to Mrs. Penniman. On the way home Doctor Sloper inquired about the young gentleman.

"Who was the young man that was making love to you?" he presently added.
"Oh, my good brother!" murmured Mrs. Penniman, in deprecation.
"He seemed uncommonly tender. Whenever I looked at you for half an hour, he had the most devoted air."
"The devotion was not to me," said Mrs. Penniman. "It was to Catherine; he talked to me of her."
"Catherine had been listening with all her ears.
"Oh, Aunt Penniman!" she exclaimed, faintly.
"He is very handsome; he is very clever; he expressed himself with a great deal—a great deal of felicity," her aunt went on.
"He is in love with this regal creature, then?" the Doctor inquired, humorously.
"Oh, father!" cried the girl, still more faintly, devoutly thankful the carriage was dark.
"I don't know that; but he admired her dress."
Catherine did not say to herself in the dark, "My dress only?" Mrs. Penniman's announcement struck her by its richness, not by its meagreness.

6Ibid., p. 33.
"You see," said her father, "he thinks you have eighty thousand a year."
"I don't believe he thinks of that," said Mrs. Penniman; "he is too refined."
"He must be tremendously refined not to think of that."  

Mrs. Penniman did not tell Doctor Sloper she had invited Morris to Washington Square to pay a visit, but on Sunday afternoon following the party, Morris came, accompanied by his cousin. Mrs. Penniman and Catherine received the two men, and Morris spent the brief visit in conversation with Mrs. Penniman, directing only a few comments to Catherine. After they left Mrs. Penniman said to Catherine, "It's a great secret, my dear child; but he is coming a-courting!"  

When Doctor Sloper came home later in the evening, Mrs. Penniman told him about the visitors. He requested to see Morris next time he called. But the Doctor happened not to be at home at the time. Doctor Sloper consulted his sister, Mrs. Almond, about Morris. She told him that she knew very little about the young man, but she gave him an account of Morris's widowed sister. She also gave him what she had of Morris's history from his cousin Arthur.  

"I think Arthur told me that he had inherited a small property—which was perhaps the cause of his leaving the Navy—and that he spent it all in a few years."

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7Ibid., pp. 33-34.  
8Ibid., p. 41.
He travelled all over the world, lived abroad, amused himself. I believe it was a kind of system, a theory he had. He has come back to America with the intention, as he tells Arthur, of beginning life in earnest."

"Is he in earnest about Catherine, then?"
"I don't see why you should be incredulous," said Mrs. Almond. "It seems to me that you have never done Catherine justice. You must remember that she has the prospect of thirty thousand a year."

The Doctor looked at his sister a moment, and then, with lightest touch of bitterness, "You at least appreciate her," he said.

Mrs. Almond blushed.
"I don't mean that is her only merit; I simply mean that it is a great one. A great many young men think so; and you appear to me never to have been properly aware of that. You have always had a little way of alluding to her as an unmarriageable girl."9

Doctor Sloper had never really been quite fair to Catherine. She had been found totally lacking in the brilliance, as well as the beauty, of her mother for whom she had been named. If her father was unfair to her, he at least was not negligent in his concern for her welfare.

The fact that Morris Townsend was poor was not of necessity against him; the Doctor had never made up his mind that his daughter should marry a rich man. The fortune she would inherit struck him as a very sufficient provision for two reasonable persons, and if a penniless swain who could give a good account of himself should enter the lists, he should be judged quite upon his personal merits. There were other things besides. The Doctor thought it very vulgar to be precipitate in accusing people of mercenary motives, inasmuch as his door had as yet not been in the least besieged by fortune-hunters; and lastly, he was very curious to see whether Catherine might really be loved for her moral worth.10

9Ibid., pp. 49-50.
10Ibid., p. 53.
Mrs. Penniman became Morris's ally in his fortune hunt. In conversation with her brother she said Morris was "looking for a position most earnestly . . . . He hopes every day to find one." The Doctor replied: "Precisely. He is looking for it here--over there in the front parlor. The position of a husband of a weak-minded woman with a large fortune would suit him to perfection!"  

One Sunday afternoon soon after this talk with Mrs. Penniman, Doctor Sloper encountered Townsend at Mrs. Almond's.

"I'm told you are looking out for a position."
"Oh, a position is more than I should presume to call it," Morris Townsend answered. "That sounds so fine. I should like some quiet work--something to turn an honest penny."  

After taking a more general direction, Morris came back to the point:

"Were you kindly intending to propose something for my advantage?" he inquired, looking up and smiling. "D--n his impudence!" the Doctor exclaimed privately. But in a moment he reflected that he himself had, after all, touched first upon this delicate point, and that his words might have been construed as an offer of assistance. "I have no particular proposal to make," he presently said; "but it occurred to me to let you know that I have you in mind. Sometimes one hears of opportunities. For instance, should you object to leaving New York--to going to a distance?"

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be able to manage that. I have ties--I have responsibilities here. I have a sister, a widow, from whom I have been separated for a long time, and to whom I am almost everything. I

\[11\] Ibid., pp. 66-67.  
\[12\] Ibid., p. 69.
shouldn't like to say to her that I must leave her. She rather depends upon me, you see. . . . I am helping to bring them [the nieces and nephews] up. . . . I am a kind of amateur tutor; I give them lessons."

"That's very proper, as I say; but it is hardly a career."

"It won't make my fortune," the young man confessed.

"You must not be too much bent on a fortune," said the Doctor. "But I assure you I will keep you in mind; I won't lose sight of you."

"If my situation becomes desperate I shall perhaps take the liberty of reminding you," Morris rejoined . . . .

This bit of subtle double talk shows that the two men understood each other pretty well.

Morris's awareness of Doctor Sloper's attitude toward him was revealed in a conversation with Catherine the same afternoon of his meeting with her father. He told her that he could not call on her again because her father had insulted him: "He has taunted me with my poverty." ¹³

After Morris proposed to Catherine, it was agreed that she would break the news to her father first and then Morris would speak to him. In his attempt to stop any suspicion Catherine might have of him, Morris told her that they must be ready to fight.

"Do you know the first thing your father will say to you?"

"No, Morris; please tell me."

"He will tell you I am mercenary."

"Mercenary!"

"It's a big word, but it means a low thing. It means that I am after your money."

¹³Ibid., pp. 70-71. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 73.
"Oh!" murmured Catherine, softly.

The exclamation was so deeply deprecating and touching that Morris indulged in another little demonstration of affection. "But he will be sure to say it," he added.

"It will be easy to be prepared for that," Catherine said. "I shall simply say that he is mistaken—that other men may be that way, but that you are not."

"You must make a great point of that, for it will be his own great point."

Catherine looked at her lover a minute, and then she said, "I shall persuade him. But I am glad we shall be rich," she added.

Morris turned away, looking into the crown of his hat. "No, it's a misfortune," he said at last. "It is from this our difficulty will come."

"Well, if it is the worst misfortune, we are not so unhappy. Many people would not think it so bad. I will persuade him, and after that we shall be very glad we have money."\(^1\)

Poor Catherine made her point to her father, little suspecting the small respect he would have for her judgment. The Doctor pointed out to his daughter that the chief thing they knew of Townsend was his wasting his fortune in dissipation. If a young man would spend one fortune, the Doctor suggested, there was no reason to assume that he would not spend another. Catherine attempted to defend Morris, but she got nowhere.

The following evening Morris called on Doctor Sloper. The older gentleman made no pretense of pleasure in Morris's proposal. The Doctor asked,

"Did you really expect I would say I was delighted, and throw my daughter into your arms?"

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 78-79.
"Oh no; I had an idea you didn't like me."
"What gave you the idea?"
"The fact that I am poor."
"That has a harsh sound," said the Doctor, "but it is about the truth--speaking of you strictly as a son-in-law. Your absence of means, of a profession, of visible resources or prospects, places you in a category from which it would be imprudent for me to select a husband for my daughter, who is a weak young woman with a large fortune. In any other capacity I am perfectly prepared to like you. As a son-in-law, I abominate you."

Morris listened respectfully. "I don't think Miss Sloper is a weak woman," he presently said.
"Of course you must defend her. . . . Even if she were not weak, however, you would still be a penniless man."
"Ah, yes; that is my weakness! And therefore, you mean, I am mercenary--I only want your daughter's money."

Later in the conversation Morris found occasion to deny being mercenary and to defend the honorableness of his proposal. But the Doctor had his wits about him:

"Allow me to inquire what you are living on now--though I admit," the Doctor added, "that the question on my part, is inconsistent."
"I am living on the remnants of my property," said Morris Townsend. . . . "Even admitting I attach an undue importance to Miss Sloper's fortune," he went on, "would not that be in itself an assurance that I would take care of it?"
"That you should take too much care would be quite as bad as that you should take too little. Catherine might suffer as much by your economy as by your extravagance."

After talking to Mrs. Almond about the situation, Doctor Sloper decided to talk to Mrs. Montgomery, Morris's sister. Mrs. Almond warned him before he went that

16 Ibid., pp. 88-89.  
17 Ibid., p. 92.
Mrs. Montgomery would defend her brother. The Doctor made the call and put the case very candidly:

"... I must, in conscience, remind you of the advantages a young man marrying my daughter would enjoy. She has an income of ten thousand dollars in her own right, left her by her mother; if she marries a husband I approve, she will come into almost twice as much more at my death."

Mrs. Montgomery listened in great earnestness to this splendid financial statement; she had never heard thousands of dollars so familiarly talked about. She flushed a little with excitement. "Your daughter will be immensely rich," she said softly.

"Precisely—that's the bother of it."

"And if Morris should marry her, he—he—" And she hesitated, timidly.

"He would be master of all that money? By no means. He would be master of the ten thousand a year that she has from her mother; but I should leave every penny of my own fortune, earned in the laborious exercise of my profession, to my nephews and nieces. ... I suppose it seems to you," said the Doctor, laughing, "that in so doing I should play your brother a very shabby trick."

"Not at all. That is too much money to get possession of so easily by marrying. I don't think it would be right."

"It's right to get all one can. But in this case your brother wouldn't be able. If Catherine marries without my consent, she doesn't get a penny from my own pocket." 18

Doctor Sloper then turned the conversation to Morris and his financial relations with his sister. He asked Mrs. Montgomery how Morris contributed to her situation.

"But kindly answer me a question: Don't you give your brother money? I think you ought to answer that."

"Yes, I have given him money," said Mrs. Montgomery.

18 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
"And you have not had much to give him?"
She was silent a moment. "If you ask me for a confession of poverty, that is easily made. I am very poor."
"One would never suppose it from your—your charming house," said the Doctor. "I learned from my sister that your income was moderate, and your family numerous."

Doctor Sloper inquired about Morris's help with the children. He recalled the young man's having mentioned being an "amateur tutor" to the children. Her answer was slow:

"... he teaches them—Spanish."
The Doctor laughed out. "That must take a great deal off your hands! Your brother also knows, of course, that you have very little money?"
"I have often told him so," Mrs. Montgomery exclaimed... "Which means that you have often occasion to, and he often sponges on you. Excuse the crudity of my language; I simply express a fact. I don't ask you how much of your money he has had, it is none of my business. I have ascertained what I suspected—what I wished. ... Your brother lives on you..."

Mrs. Montgomery quickly rose from her chair... "I have never complained of him," she said. "You needn't protest—you have not betrayed him. But I advise you not to give him any more money."
"Don't you see it is in my interest that he should marry a rich person?" she asked. "If, as you say, he lives on me, I can only wish to get rid of him, and to put obstacles in the way of his marrying is to increase my own difficulties."
"I wish very much you would come to me with your difficulties," said the Doctor. "Certainly, if I throw him back on your hands, the least I can do is to bear the burden. If you will allow me to say so, then, I shall take the liberty of placing in your...

19 Ibid., pp. 106-107.
hands, for the present, a certain fund for your brother's support." 20

Catherine remained passive all during this time. Her father finally approached her and told her that he was willing to listen to anything she might want to talk about, even Morris. She thanked him and said she had nothing to say just then. She wrote Morris not to come to Washington Square because her father desired that she not see him. She asked him to wait until he heard from her again. Morris had daily contact with Mrs. Penniman, who kept him posted on the situation. The romantic aunt earnestly wished that the young couple would marry secretly. She hated to suggest it to Catherine, so she arranged to have a meeting with Morris. At this time she recommended the step to him, anticipating that the Doctor would be brought to terms afterwards.

When Catherine learned of her aunt's plot she went to her father's study and talked with him. He assured her that if she intended to marry Morris after his death, she might as well not delay. Unless she promised him never to marry Townsend, even after his death, he intended to make his will against her.

"There is one thing you can tell Mr. Townsend when you see him again," he said, "that if you marry without my consent, I don't leave you a farthing of

20 Ibid., pp. 107-108.
money. That will interest him more than anything else you can tell him."

"That would be very right," Catherine answered. "I ought not in that case to have a farthing of your money."21

When Catherine saw Morris the next day, he insisted that she must choose between her father and him. She then delivered her father's message. Morris hesitated, then said,

"He was very positive about this, was he? . . . He thought such a message would annoy me terribly, and make me throw off the mask, eh?"22

Catherine agreed to marry Morris, and it was decided that the wedding should be private. James pauses in his narrative to give a view into the mind of Morris Townsend.

The ultimate reward of a union with a young woman who was both unattractive and impoverished ought to be connected with immediate disadvantages by some very palpable chain. Between the fear of losing Catherine and her possible fortune altogether, and the fear of taking her too soon and finding this possible fortune as void of actuality as a collection of emptied bottles, it was not comfortable for Morris Townsend to choose—a fact that should be remembered by readers disposed to judge harshly of a young man who may have struck them as making but an indifferently successful use of fine natural parts. He had not forgotten that in any event Catherine had her own ten thousand a year; he had devoted an abundance of meditations to this circumstance. But with his fine parts he rated himself high, and he had a perfectly definite appreciation of his values, which seemed to him inadequately represented by the sum I have mentioned. At the same time he reminded himself that this sum was considerable, that everything is

21Ibid., p. 138.  
22Ibid., pp. 151-152.
relative, and that if a modest income is less desirable than a large one, the complete absence of revenue is nowhere accounted an advantage.

These reflections gave him plenty of occupation, and made it necessary that he should trim his sail.23

Doctor Sloper asked Catherine to postpone any action for six months and accompany him on a trip to Europe. Catherine agreed. While they were gone Mrs. Penniman entertained Morris almost constantly at Washington Square. He enjoyed the "run of the house." Mrs. Almond saw and objected to such a step. The trip in the meantime was extended another six months with the intention of tiring the relationship between the two young people.

Mrs. Almond saw perhaps more clearly than any of the other characters what Catherine's future as Mrs. Townsend would be.

If he marries her, and she comes into Austin's money, they may get on. He will be an idle, amiable, selfish, and, doubtless, tolerably good-natured fellow. But if she doesn't get the money, and he finds himself tied to her, Heaven have mercy on her! He will have none. He will hate her for his disappointment, and take his revenge; he will be pitiless and cruel. Woe betide poor Catherine!24

When Catherine and her father returned to New York, Morris wasted no time in seeing her. When she told him that the Doctor had not changed his mind, Morris asked her permission to talk to him once more. He added, "I don't like to be beaten." Catherine asked:

23Ibid., p. 162.  
24Ibid., p. 174.
"How are you beaten if we marry?"

"Of course I am not beaten on the main issue, but I am, don't you see? on all the rest of it—on the question of my reputation, of my relations with your father, of my relations with my own children, if we should have any."

"We shall have enough for our children; we shall have enough for everything."²⁵

Morris saw that he was getting nowhere and remarked to Mrs. Penniman, "A man should know when he is beaten. . . . I must give her up!" He asked her to help him explain to Catherine that "I can't bring myself to step between her and her father . . . for depriving her of her rights."²⁶ Morris told Catherine that he had to go away to make six thousand dollars. She objected and offered to go with him, but to no avail. Mrs. Penniman tried to make her see that Morris was "actuated by the noblest of motives—the desire not to impoverish Catherine."²⁷

Catherine later had other proposals of marriage, but she refused them all. When her father returned from a second trip to Europe, he asked her to promise him she would never marry Morris Townsend. He told her that Morris had been back in New York and that her aunt had seen him. He added: "He has grown fat and bald, and he has not made his fortune. But I can't trust those facts alone to steel your heart against him, and that's why I

ask you to promise." 28 Catherine refused to promise, as a matter of dignity.

After Doctor Sloper's death it became clear that he had taken the necessary steps to see that Morris would never get his money. Catherine's large inheritance had been cut by four fifths. He commented in the will that her own fortune "is already more than sufficient to attract those unscrupulous adventurers whom she has given me reason to believe that she persists in regarding as an interesting class." 29

Washington Square has been generally ignored by the critics. The novel gained wider recognition when it was dramatized after James's death. Edel says that James did not consider the work very important, that he "regarded it as a trifling work, stale and flat and without the richer experimental values of his best narratives." 30 The book does, however, have a charm which derives largely from his ability to make a plain, uninteresting girl fascinating by placing her in the peculiar financial circumstances explored above.

James does not leave any question as to his attitude toward the characters nor does he fail to create the same

28 Ibid., p. 247.  
29 Ibid., p. 250.  
30 Edel, p. 23.
attitude in his readers. Morris Townsend is clearly an unprincipled young adventurer. James does not condemn him at first, but he allows him room to move until his motives become clear. By the end of the novel there is no question that Doctor Sloper’s judgment of Morris is perfectly accurate.

The author’s attitude toward Doctor Sloper invites more careful consideration. The Doctor is a prominent man in his field who has made his fortune. These are accomplishments similar to those James set for himself as a young novelist. His respect for the Doctor is also suggested by the Doctor’s being a man of acute perception and sound judgment. It is true that the Doctor is harsh with his daughter. James recognizes that Doctor Sloper’s bitterness over Catherine’s weaknesses is excessive. He even has Mrs. Almond reprimand her brother for his injustice, but the author seems to feel that the Doctor’s disappointment and resulting bitterness are to be pitied. The fact remains that the Doctor’s judgment is sound. It is interesting that the reliable Mrs. Almond does not deny a single one of the weaknesses that the Doctor sees in Catherine. She merely suggests that the girl has certain redeeming qualities which he has overlooked. In his attitude toward money, Doctor Sloper can be respected. He makes it clear that he does not mind Catherine’s marrying
a poor man, but he does not intend to allow a fortune-hunter to gain possession of his money. If there is any irony intended in Doctor Sloper's marrying a rich girl and yet objecting to Morris Townsend's doing the same, James does not dwell on it; in fact, he seems unaware of it.

James gives no evidence that Catherine is a charming girl. Like Mrs. Almond, he knows that Doctor Sloper's judgment is correct but that his attitude toward Catherine is wrong. The passive Catherine, like most of James's American girls, is ignorant of the value of money and the dangers surrounding it.

Washington Square is important not only as the work most thoroughly concerned with money but as the only one of the novels considered here written solely to make money. James published a number of short works between 1878 and 1880 in order to allow him to work on The Portrait of a Lady at his leisure, and Washington Square quite obviously falls into this category.

\[31\text{Ibid., p. 21.}\]
CHAPTER V

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Although James's concern with money in the previously discussed novels is of primary importance, his treatment of the theme is perhaps even more expanded in the next novel to be considered. As has been noted, the earlier works leave the acquisition of wealth somewhat unexplored, dealing mainly with the question of the most appropriate way of life for the rich.

The novelist expands his treatment in The Portrait of a Lady to include the acquisition of money by both marriage and inheritance. James's small contact with the commercial world made it impossible for him to examine satisfactorily the "money-making" of a man like Christopher Newman. On the other hand he could work well with an inheritance such as Isabel comes into or with the machinations of adventurers like Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond.

At the beginning of the novel Mr. Touchett, Ralph, and Lord Warburton were out on the lawn of Gardencourt, the Touchett home, having tea. Mr. Touchett had come to England thirty years before and made his fortune. As he
grew older he had become an invalid. His son, Ralph, was in poor health also. Ralph attended his father most of the time because Mrs. Touchett was always away, taken up with her own affairs. When the novel opens she was in America, but she was expected back in England soon. Lord Warburton was the Touchett's neighbor; he lived at Lockleigh a few miles away, but he frequently rode over to visit his friends. On this particular visit, while the three men were having tea, Mr. Touchett talked to the two young men about their opportunities:

"You've no excuse for being bored anywhere. When I was your age I had never heard of such a thing... I was working tooth and nail. You wouldn't be bored if you had something to do; but all you young men are too idle. You think too much of your pleasure. You're too fastidious, and too indolent, and too rich."

"Oh, I say," cried Lord Warburton, "you're hardly the person to accuse a fellow-creature of being too rich!"

"Do you mean because I am a banker?" asked the old man.

"Because of that, if you like; and because you have--haven't you--such unlimited means."

"He isn't very rich," the other young man mercifully pleaded. "He has given away an immense deal of money."

"Well, I suppose it was his own," said Lord Warburton; "and in that case could there be a better proof of wealth? Let not a public benefactor talk of one's being too fond of pleasure."

In this conversation one may find two diverging attitudes toward money. Mr. Touchett's attitude was that of

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one who had, as he said, worked "tooth and nail" with no
time for pleasure. Ralph, on the other hand, had had
money all his life. The aristocratic Warburton had lived
in wealth, too. It is quite obvious that these people are
more than merely comfortable or well-to-do, though James
has the modesty not to make them enormously, vulgarly
wealthy.

Ralph suggested marriage to Lord Warburton.
Mr. Touchett added his approval, but he hastened to
tell Warburton that he had better not try to marry
Mrs. Touchett's niece. He then explained that his wife
was bringing a niece from America with her. During this
conversation the niece, Isabel Archer, approached the
group across the lawn.

James interrupts the story at this point to give
Isabel's history. She was the youngest of three daughters.
After Isabel's mother died, Mrs. Touchett and Mr. Archer
had a disagreement. Thereafter Mrs. Touchett kept her
distance. She disapproved of the way the father brought
up the three girls, but she decided she would wait until
he was out of the way before she tried to do anything for
his daughters.

It seems that Isabel's father was often criticized by
his relatives and others for the way he conducted his
financial affairs.
Many persons had held that he carried this indifference too far, especially the large number of those to whom he owed money. . . . He had squandered a substantial fortune, he had been deplorably convivial, he was known to have gambled freely . . . if he had been troubled about money-matters nothing ever disturbed their [his children's] irreflective consciousness of many possessions.2

The virtues of thrift and competence in financial matters are emphasized or hinted at quite early in the story. But more important still, this passage indicates that Isabel has been brought up as a rich girl.

On a trip to America following Archer's death, Mrs. Touchett decided to call on her three nieces. She went to the Archer home in Albany, New York, where she found Isabel alone. It seems that Isabel was there to show the place to prospective buyers while Lily, now Mrs. Ludlow, and her husband were out shopping. After very few words of introduction Mrs. Touchett's conversation turned directly to the financial question:

"How much money do you expect for it?" Mrs. Touchett asked of her companion, who had brought her to sit in the front parlour, which she had inspected without enthusiasm.

"I haven't the least idea," said the girl [a typical reaction for a rich girl].

"That's the second time you have said that to me," her aunt rejoined. "And yet you don't look at all stupid."

"I'm not stupid; but I don't know anything about money."

"Yes, that's the way you were brought up--as if you were to inherit a million. What have you in point of fact inherited?"

2Ibid., pp. 43-44.
"I really can't tell you. You must ask Edmund and Lilian; they'll be back in half an hour."
"In Florence we should call it a very bad house," said Mrs. Touchett; "but here, I dare say, it will bring a high price. It ought to make a considerable sum for each of you."³

Here again is emphasized the fact that Isabel has been brought up as a rich girl, and has the attitudes and reactions of a rich girl.

During the conversation above, Mrs. Touchett proposed that Isabel should return to England with her, and Isabel liked the idea. With this tentative plan made, Mrs. Touchett retired to her hotel with the expectation of a visit from Lily that evening. Lily was enthusiastic about meeting her aunt, whom she did not remember ever having seen. A possible reason for her enthusiasm is reflected in an exchange with her husband:

"I do hope immensely she'll do something handsome for Isabel; she has evidently taken a great fancy to her."
"What is it you wish her to do?" Edmund Ludlow asked. "Make her a big present?"⁴

Obviously the Ludlows have already learned to regard the financial aspect as of more than passing importance.

After Isabel and Mrs. Touchett arrived in England, Ralph was anxious to talk to his mother of Isabel. Mrs. Touchett mentioned Isabel's independence where money was in question:

³Ibid., pp. 33-34. ⁴Ibid., p. 39.
Isabel herself seemed very glad to come, and the thing was easily arranged. There was a little difficulty about the money-question, as she seemed averse to being under pecuniary obligations. But she has a small income and she supposes herself to be travelling at her own expense.5

Lord Warburton, notwithstanding Mrs. Touchett's warning, took an immediate fancy to Isabel and, before long, proposed to her. In a conversation with her uncle about the proposal and her rejection of it, Isabel was told:

there's room for charming young ladies everywhere. . . . There's room everywhere, my dear, if you'll pay for it. I sometimes think I've paid too much for this [Gardencourt and its park]. Perhaps you also might have to pay too much.6

The essentially commercial approach to the moral and social question is quite in keeping with Mr. Touchett's character as a conservative and cautious banker, and shows his pervading preoccupation with monetary values. It is well to remember that both Ralph and Isabel adore Mr. Touchett.

Isabel's journalist friend, Henrietta Stackpole, who provides most of the humor in the book, arrived in London soon after Isabel and quickly sent notice of her arrival. The Touchetts, with due courtesy to Isabel, invited Henrietta to Gardencourt, and Henrietta was quick to accept. Henrietta, who was something of a working girl and therefore definitely not rich like the Touchetts, is

5Ibid., p. 57.  6Ibid., p. 161.
a comic character, rather crude and frank but certainly well intentioned.

After a short visit, Henrietta, Ralph, and Isabel went to London for a few days. While there, they met Ralph's friend Mr. Bantling, who took an interest in Henrietta. One night while the group was in London, Casper Goodwood, Isabel's rich American suitor, called on her. He had proposed to Isabel before she left America, had followed her to Europe, and, with the help of Henrietta, had traced her down in London. Isabel rejected him again and asked for two years to see the world before considering the proposal again. Here is another early instance of Isabel's cheerful indifference to money.

Ralph and Isabel returned to Gardencourt when they heard that Mr. Touchett was dying. Before Mr. Touchett died he talked to Ralph about his will. Ralph said to him:

"But I hope you've not forgotten the talk we had a year ago—when I told you exactly what money I should need and begged you to make some good use of the rest."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I made a new will—in a few days. I suppose it was the first time such a thing had happened—a young man trying to get a will made against him."

"It is not against me," said Ralph. "It would be against me to have a large property to take care of. It's impossible for a man in my state of health to spend much money, and enough is as good as a feast."

"Well, you'll have enough—and some left over. There will be enough for two."
"That's too much," said Ralph. "Ah, don't say that. The best thing you can do, when I am gone, will be to marry." Ralph felt sure his father would suggest this course, but he thought because of his health he should never marry. He told his father he had rather the will be changed to give Isabel a share in his fortune.

"But I should like to do something for her." "What should you like to do?" "I should like to put a little wind in her sails." "What do you mean by that?" "I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants. She wants to see the world for instance. I should like to put money in her purse." "Ah, I'm glad you've thought of that," said the old man. "But I've thought of it too. I've left her a legacy—five thousand pounds." "That's capital; it's very kind of you. But I should like to do a little more." Something of that veiled acuteness with which it had been on Daniel Touchett's part the habit of a lifetime to listen to a financial proposition still lingered in the face in which the invalid had not obliterated the man of business. "I shall be happy to consider it," he said softly. "Isabel's poor then. My mother tells me that she has but a few hundred dollars a year. I should like to make her rich." "What do you mean by rich?" "I call people rich when they're able to meet the requirements of their imagination. Isabel has a great deal of imagination." "So have you, my son," said Mr. Touchett, listening very attentively but a little confusedly. "You tell me I shall have money for two. What I want is that you should kindly relieve me of my superfluity and make it over to Isabel. Divide my inheritance into two equal halves and give her the second."8

7Ibid., p. 257. 8Ibid., pp. 260-261.
After several moments Mr. Touchett replied,

"Well, you seem to have thought it out . . . But I don't see why you appeal to me. The money will be yours, and you can easily give it to her yourself."

Ralph openly stared. "Ah, dear father, I can't offer Isabel money!" 9

Before concluding the conversation, which is the heart of the plot, Mr. Touchett added:

"You say Isabel wants to be free, and that her being rich will keep her from marrying for money. Do you think that she's a girl to do that?"

"By no means. But she has less money than she has ever had before. Her father then gave her everything, because he used to spend his capital. She has nothing but the crumbs of that feast to live on, and she doesn't really know how meagre they are—she has yet to learn it. My mother has told me all about it. Isabel will learn it when she's really thrown upon the world, and it would be very painful to me to think of her coming to the consciousness of a lot of wants she should be unable to satisfy."

"I've left her five thousand pounds. She can satisfy a good many wants with that."

"She can indeed. But she would probably spend it in two or three years."

"You think she'd be extravagant then?"

"Most certainly," said Ralph, smiling serenely.

Poor Mr. Touchett's acuteness was rapidly giving place to pure confusion. "It would merely be a question of time then, her spending the larger sum?"

"No—though at first I think she'd plunge into that pretty freely . . . . But after that she'd come to her senses, remember she has still a lifetime before her, and live within her means." 10

When Isabel and Ralph returned from London to Gardencourt, they found Mrs. Touchett's friend, Madame Merle, with whom Isabel became well acquainted. A conversation between Isabel and Madame Merle provides a key to the two

9Ibid., pp. 261-262.  10Ibid., p. 263.
leading characters of the novel. Madame Merle argued for the importance of possessions:

when you've lived as long as I you'll 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's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our "self"? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things! One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive.11

Isabel, in return, defended the opposite view:

I don't agree with you. I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!12

Madame Merle saw wealth as a source of freedom. Isabel, on the contrary, felt that possessions were a limitation. Frederick Crews has explained this difference as a matter of point of view: Isabel saw herself from the inside as an individual; Madame Merle saw herself from the outside only. Neither view is that of the author. Ralph represents James, who perhaps recognized the weakness of both

11 Ibid., pp. 287-288.
12 Ibid., p. 288.
extremes. Ralph did not care for Madame Merle, yet his idea of the money putting "wind in [Isabel's] sails" suggests that he believed money was a source of freedom. But, as the plot reveals, money became a source of limitation, even bondage, to Isabel rather than a means of liberation.

Mrs. Touchett never made any pretense about her feelings; she had always been a very frank and open person. She told Madame Merle about Mr. Touchett's will:

"He has left me this house," the newly-made widow said; "but of course I shall not live in it; I've a much better one in Florence. The will was opened only three days since, but I've already offered the house for sale. I've also a share in the bank; but I don't yet understand if I'm obliged to leave it there. If not I shall certainly take it out. Ralph, of course, has Gardencourt; but I'm not sure that he'll have means to keep up the place. He's naturally left very well off, but his father has given away an immense deal of money; there are bequests to a string of third cousins in Vermont. Ralph, however, is very fond of Gardencourt and would be quite capable of living there—in summer—with a maid-of-all-work and a gardener's boy. There's one remarkable clause in my husband's will," Mrs. Touchett added. "He has left my niece a fortune."

"A fortune!" Madame Merle softly repeated.

"Isabel steps into something like seventy thousand pounds."

"Ah," she cried, "the clever creature!" [Here Madame Merle almost gives away her own basic concern for money—her guiding principle.]

Mrs. Touchett gave her a quick look. "What do you mean by that?" For an instant Madame Merle's

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colour rose and she dropped her eyes. "It certainly is clever to achieve such results—without an effort!"

"There assuredly was no effort. Don't call it an achievement."

Madame Merle was seldom guilty of the awkwardness of retracting what she had said; her wisdom was shown rather in maintaining it and placing it in a favourable light. "My dear friend, Isabel would certainly not have had seventy thousand pounds left her if she had not been the most charming girl in the world. Her charm includes great cleverness."

"She never dreamed, I'm sure, of my husband's doing anything for her; and I never dreamed of it either, for he never spoke to me of his intention," Mrs. Touchett said. "She had no claim upon him whatever; it was no great recommendation to him that she was my niece. Whatever she achieved she achieved unconsciously."

"Ah," rejoined Madame Merle, "those are the greatest strokes!"

Mrs. Touchett reserved her opinion. "The girl's fortunate; I don't deny that. But for the present she's simply stupefied."

"Do you mean that she doesn't know what to do with the money?"

"That, I think, she has hardly considered. She doesn't know what to think about the matter at all. It has been as if a big gun were suddenly fired off behind her; she's feeling herself to see if she be hurt. It's but three days since she received a visit from the principal executor, who came in person, very gallantly, to notify her. He told me afterwards that when he had made his little speech she suddenly burst into tears. The money's to remain in the affairs of the bank, and she's to draw the interest."14

Isabel's astonishment or being stunned does not quite fit with her prior indifference to money. The reader may take this as a change in Isabel brought about by association with her charming and opulent relatives, or he may see it as a somewhat basic concern heretofore covered up. At any rate she has something to think about.

14James, The Portrait of a Lady, III, 297-299.
After Mr. Touchett's death the novel ceases to center upon Gardencourt. Mrs. Touchett had no intention of remaining even in London until the house was sold. She conferred with Isabel about future plans. "This failure to rise to immediate joy was indeed but brief; the girl [Isabel] presently made up her mind that to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to do, and that to do could only be sweet." Mrs. Touchett told her: "Now that you're a young woman of fortune you must know how to play the part--I mean to play it well . . . ."

The two women left London and traveled to Paris. There they met Henrietta Stackpole, who was quick to give her opinion of Isabel's inheritance.

"If Mr. Touchett had consulted me about leaving you the money," she frankly asserted, "I'd have said to him 'Never!'"

"I see," Isabel had answered. "You think it will prove a curse in disguise. Perhaps it will."

"Leave it to some one you care less for--that's what I should have said."

"To yourself for instance?" Isabel suggested jocosely. And then, "Do you really believe it will ruin me?" she asked in quite another tone.

"I hope it won't ruin you; but it will certainly confirm your dangerous tendencies."

"Do you mean the love of luxury--of extravagance?"

"No, no," said Henrietta; "I mean your exposure on the moral side. I approve of luxury; I think we ought to be as elegant as possible. Look at the luxury of our western cities; I've seen nothing over here to compare with it. I hope you'll never become grossly sensual; but I'm not afraid of that. The

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15 Ibid., p. 301.  
16 Ibid.
peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality—with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people who will be interested in keeping them up."17

Mrs. Touchett, who always abided by her plans, had the date of her departure from Paris scheduled before she arrived there. When the day was close at hand, she remarked to Isabel:

Now, of course, you're completely your own mistress and are as free as the bird on the bough. I don't mean you were not so before, but you're at present on a different footing—property erects a kind of barrier. You can do a great many things if you're rich which would be severely criticised if you were poor. You can come and go, you can travel alone, you can have your own establishment . . . .18

Isabel chose to remain in her aunt's company for a while longer. They left Paris and spent a few weeks in San Remo with Ralph, who was there for his health. The day after her arrival Isabel had a long conversation with him:

"I want to ask you something," Isabel said to the young man the day after her arrival at San Remo—"something I've thought more than once of asking you by letter, but that I've hesitated on the whole to write about. Face to face, nevertheless, my question seems easy enough. Did you know your father intended to leave me so much money?"

Ralph stretched his legs a little further than usual and gazed a little more fixedly at the Mediterranean. "What does it matter, my dear Isabel, whether I knew? My father was very obstinate."

17 Ibid., pp. 309-310. 18 Ibid., p. 315.
"So," said the girl, "you did know."
"Yes; he told me. We even talked it over a little."
"What did he do it for?" asked Isabel abruptly.
"Why, as a kind of compliment." 19

Later Ralph continued:

"You seem to me troubled . . . ."
"I am troubled."
"About what?"
For a moment she answered nothing; then she broke out: "Do you think it good for me suddenly to be made so rich? Henrietta doesn't."
"Oh, hang Henrietta!" said Ralph coarsely. "If you ask me I'm delighted at it."
"Is that why your father did it—for your amusement?"
"I differ with Miss Stackpole," Ralph went on more gravely. "I think it very good for you to have means." 20

Note that Ralph did not use the words money and rich. He said means, which has a less vulgar connotation. Means is a rather gross understatement of the million and a half dollars Isabel inherited. At the close of their conversation Isabel remarked:

"I try to care more about the world than about myself—but I always come back to myself. It's because I'm afraid . . . . Yes, I'm afraid; I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's a constant effort. I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless."
"For weak people I've no doubt it's a greater happiness. For weak people the effort not to be contemptible must be great."
"And how do you know I'm not weak?" Isabel asked.

19 Ibid., pp. 317-318. 20 Ibid., p. 318.
"Ah," Ralph answered with a flush that the girl noticed, "if you are I'm awfully sold!" Ralph was "awfully sold." Isabel was weak; she became strong only after giving up her freedom.

Before leaving San Remo for Florence, Isabel had become accustomed to feeling rich. "Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty."22

Madame Merle had told Isabel about her friend, Gilbert Osmond, and she expressed a desire for Isabel to meet this man whom she described as "exceedingly clever, a man made to be distinguished."23 After Mrs. Touchett and Isabel arrived at Palazzo Crescentini, Mrs. Touchett's villa in Florence, Madame Merle came for a month of free hospitality. She went to see Gilbert Osmond and told him that she wanted him to make a new acquaintance, one that "may prove a real interest."24

This scene provides the reader's first contact with Gilbert Osmond and shows a side of Madame Merle which has only been suspected before.

"Well, I invite you to profit by my knowledge."
"To profit? Are you very sure that I shall?"
"It's what I hope. It will depend on yourself. If I could only induce you to make an effort!"

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21 Ibid., p. 320.  
22 Ibid., pp. 321-322.  
23 Ibid., p. 281.  
24 Ibid., p. 343.
"Ah, there you are! I knew something tiresome was coming. What in the world—that's likely to turn up here—is worth an effort?"

Madame Merle flushed as with a wounded intention. "Don't be foolish, Osmond. No one knows better than you what is worth an effort. Haven't I seen you in the old days?"

"I recognize some things. But they're none of them probable in this poor life."

"It's the effort that makes them probable," said Madame Merle.

"There's something in that. Who then is your friend?"

"The person I came to Florence to see. She's a niece of Mrs. Touchett, whom you'll not have forgotten."

"A niece? The word niece suggests youth and ignorance. I see what you're coming to."

"Yes, she's young—twenty-three years old. She's a great friend of mine. I met her for the first time in England, several months ago, and we struck up a grand alliance. I like her immensely, and I do what I don't do every day—I admire her. You'll do the same."

"Not if I can help it."

"Precisely. But you won't be able to help it."

"Is she beautiful, clever, rich, splendid, universally intelligent and unprecedentedly virtuous? It's only on those conditions that I care to make her acquaintance. You know I asked you some time ago never to speak to me of a creature who shouldn't correspond to that description. I know plenty of dingy people; I don't want to know any more."

"Miss Archer isn't dingy; she's as bright as the morning. She corresponds to your description; it's for that I wish you to know her. She fills all of your requirements."

"More or less, of course."

"No; quite literally. She's beautiful, accomplished, generous and, for an American, well-born. She's also very clever and very amiable, and she has a handsome fortune."

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25 Ibid., pp. 343-345.
The early use of the word "profit" sets the tone of the conversation. The financial motive is underscored when Osmond, in due course, comes back to the question:

"Did you say she was rich?"
"She has seventy thousand pounds."
"En écus bien comptés?"
"There's no doubt whatever about her fortune. I've seen it, as I may say."26

Not even French will cover this coarseness!

Gilbert Osmond came to Palazzo Crescentini to see Madame Merle, who introduced him to Isabel. After a brief visit Osmond invited them to tea some time the next week. Isabel consented to accompany Madame Merle, but before the visit she asked Ralph his opinion of Mr. Osmond. Her cousin said little more than "He's a vague, unexplained American who has been living these thirty years, or less, in Italy. . . . He lives on his income, which I suspect of not being vulgarly large."27

The visit was a successful one; at least, Madame Merle would call it that. The Countess and Pansy were both there, but Madame Merle arranged for Osmond to be alone with Isabel for a while.

Osmond continued to visit Palazzo Crescentini. Mrs. Touchett observed the frequency of his visits and spoke to Ralph about it. They were both of the opinion that Isabel was the attraction. Mrs. Touchett remarked:

26 Ibid., p. 348.  
27 Ibid., p. 358.
"There's nothing in life to prevent her [Isabel] marrying Mr. Osmond if she only looks at him in a certain way. That's all very well; no one approves more than I of one's pleasing one's self. But she takes her pleasure in such odd things; she's capable of marrying Mr. Osmond for the beauty of his opinions or for his autograph of Michael Angelo. She wants to be disinterested: as if she were the only person who's in danger of not being so! Will he [Osmond] be so disinterested when he has the spending of her money? That was her idea before your father's death, and it has acquired new charms for her since. She ought to marry some one of whose disinterestedness she shall herself be sure; and there would be no such proof of that as his having a fortune of his own."28

Mrs. Touchett means by disinterested not interested in money or what it can buy. However, she put her finger on the weakness that was to lead to Isabel's mistake, and she saw clearly the situation that would arise if Isabel married Osmond. She described it for Madame Merle:

"Mr. Osmond has nothing the least solid to offer. . . . He has nothing in the world that I know of but a dozen or two of early masters and a more or less pert little daughter."

"The early masters are now worth a good deal of money," said Madame Merle, "and the daughter's a very young and very innocent and very harmless person."

"In other words she's an insipid little chit. Is that what you mean? Having no fortune she can't hope to marry as they marry here; so that Isabel will have to furnish her either with a maintenance or with a dowry."29

When the reader learns later that Pansy is Madame Merle's daughter, it is interesting to remember this passage where Madame Merle had to listen quietly to Mrs. Touchett call Pansy "an insipid little chit." The reason is that

28 Ibid., pp. 395-396.  
29 Ibid., pp. 397-398.
Mrs. Touchett had an income, while Madame Merle lived on her friends' hospitality.

Henrietta soon returned to Florence, preceded by Mr. Bantling. They were on their way to Rome, and Isabel and Ralph decided to accompany them. Osmond followed the group to Rome, where they had incidentally met Lord Warburton. Osmond asked them about Warburton.

"What's the character of that gentleman?" Osmond asked of Isabel after he had retired.
"Irreproachable—don't you see it?"
"He owns about half England; that's his character," Henrietta remarked. . . .
"Ah, he's a great proprietor? Happy man!" said Gilbert Osmond.50

Warburton left the group after telling Isabel good-bye. Shortly afterwards Isabel received a telegram from Mrs. Touchett saying she was going to Bellaggio on the fourth of June and if Isabel cared to accompany her, she should return to Florence immediately. Isabel made preparations for returning to Florence, and Osmond decided to remain in Rome for a while.

The night before Isabel's departure for Florence, Osmond proposed to her in apologetic terms.

"I haven't the least idea that it will matter much to you," said Osmond. "I've too little to offer you. What I have—it's enough for me; but it's not enough for you. I've neither fortune, nor fame, nor extrinsic advantages of any kind. So I offer nothing."51

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50Ibid., IV, 4.
51Ibid., p. 18.
It was this admission that Osmond had nothing to offer that appealed to Isabel's egotistical idealism and eventually succeeded in winning her hand.

Isabel, in the company of Madame Merle, visited Pansy, Osmond's daughter, before leaving Florence. Pansy asked Isabel whether her father went to Rome to see about her education at the convent. Though James treats the child as an infant, he gives her a vivid sense of financial problems:

"Papa's not rich, and I should be very sorry if he were to pay much money for me, because I don't think I'm worth it. I don't learn quickly enough, and I have no memory. . . . There was a young girl who was my best friend, and they took her away from the convent, when she was fourteen, to make—how do you say it in English?—to make a dot. . . . I only mean they wished to keep the money to marry her. I don't know whether it is for that that papa wishes to keep the money—to marry me. It costs so much to marry!" Pansy went on with a sigh; "I think papa might make that economy." 32

Some time later Madame Merle accompanied Isabel on a tour of the East. The arrangement was interesting:

It was on Isabel's invitation she [Madame Merle] had come, and she imparted all due dignity to the girl's uncountenanced state. She played her part with the tact that might have been expected of her, effacing herself and accepting the position of a companion whose expenses were profusely paid. 33

Here again Madame Merle is swallowing her pride.

When they returned to Rome, Isabel wrote her aunt and went to Palazzo Crescentini in Florence. Madame Merle

32 Ibid., pp. 27-28. 33 Ibid., p. 38.
remained in Rome. Shortly after Isabel's arrival, Casper Goodwood came to see her. Isabel had written him that she was getting married. The only other person she had told was Madame Merle. During his visit Casper inquired about Osmond.

"Is it a marriage your friends won't like?" he demanded.
"I really haven't an idea. As I say, I don't marry for my friends."
He went on, making no exclamation, no comment, only asking questions, doing it quite without delicacy. "Who and what then is Mr. Gilbert Osmond?"
"Who and what? Nobody and nothing but a very good and very honourable man. He's not in business," said Isabel. "He's not rich; he's not known for anything in particular." 34

After Casper left, Isabel told Mrs. Touchett about her plans to marry Osmond. Mrs. Touchett's feelings about the situation were clearly revealed in the conversation that followed.

"What you will marry for, heaven only knows. People usually marry as they go into partnership—to set up a house. But in your partnership you bring everything."
"Is it that Mr. Osmond isn't rich? Is that what you're talking about?" Isabel asked.
"He has no money; he has no name; he has no importance. I value such things and I have the courage to say it; I think they're very precious. Many other people think the same, and they show it. But they give some other reason."
Isabel hesitated a little. "I think I value everything that's valuable. I care very much for money, and that's why I wish Mr. Osmond to have a little."
"Give it to him then; but marry some one else." 35

34 Ibid., p. 46. 35 Ibid., p. 55.
Two days later Ralph arrived in Florence from Corfu. Mrs. Touchett related Isabel's plans to him. He was so shocked and humiliated that he moped around for days without mentioning anything about the marriage to Isabel. One morning when she returned from her outing with Osmond, she walked through the garden and incidentally came upon Ralph relaxing in the sun. She sat down and they discussed her future. Needless to say, Ralph was deeply wounded. He told Isabel, "I love you, but I love without hope . . ." Isabel, tired of having to defend Osmond to everyone but Madame Merle, said,

"Pray, would you wish me to make a mercenary marriage—what they call a marriage of ambition? I've only one ambition—to be free to follow out a good feeling. I had others once, but they've passed away. Do you complain of Mr. Osmond because he's not rich? That's just what I like him for. I've fortunately money enough; I've never felt so thankful for it as today. There have been moments when I should like to go and kneel down by your father's grave: he did perhaps a better thing than he knew when he put it into my power to marry a poor man—a man who has borne his poverty with such dignity, with such indifference. . . . Mr. Osmond's simply a very lonely, a very cultivated and a very honest man—he's not a prodigious proprietor." Osmond, in this passage, has so completely captured Isabel's imagination that she uses his language. "Great proprietor," it will be remembered, was his term for Warburton.

36 Ibid., p. 72.
37 Ibid., pp. 73-74.
Osmond was very much pleased with his prospects for the future. In a passage which provides a key to his character James says:

His egotism had never taken the crude form of desiring a dull wife; this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one—a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring.

It is generally assumed that the flaw in the character of Gilbert Osmond is greed, that he was a villain who would do anything for money. The passages in which Osmond tried to undermine any suspicion Isabel might have of his motives can be interpreted as showing the depth of his interest in money. The following conversation is an example.

"It's the difference in our fortune they don't like . . . . They think I'm in love with your money."

"Are you speaking of my aunt--of my cousin?" Isabel asked. "How do you know what they think?"

"You've not told me they're pleased, and when I wrote to Mrs. Touchett the other day she never answered my note. If they had been delighted I should have had some sign of it, and the fact of my being poor and you rich is the most obvious explanation of their reserve. But of course when a poor man marries a rich girl he must be prepared for imputations. I don't mind them; I only care for one thing—for your not having a shadow of a doubt. I don't care what people of whom I ask nothing think—I'm not even capable perhaps of wanting to know.

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38 Ibid., p. 79.
I've never so concerned myself, God forgive me, and why should I begin today, when I have taken myself a compensation for everything? I won't pretend I'm sorry you're rich; I'm delighted. I delight in everything that's yours—whether it be money or virtue. Money's a horrid thing to follow, but a charming thing to meet. It seems to me, however, that I've sufficiently proved the limits of my itch for it: I never in my life tried to earn a penny, and I ought to be less subject to suspicion than most of the people one sees grubbing and grabbing."

Instead of showing his hand inadvertently, however, Osmond was telling the simple truth. He was delighted to have money, but he was not essentially avaricious. His worst faults were not greed and stinginess but egotism and sadism. He expected complete submission to his own will.

Nevertheless Osmond shows his cold concern for money when he dealt with Fanny's suitor, Edward Hosier. This young man went to Madame Merle to get her to intercede for him. He told her about himself:

"I've a comfortable little fortune—about forty thousand francs a year. With the talent I have for arranging, we can live beautifully on such an income."

"Beautifully, no. Sufficiently, yes. . . . But her father, to the best of my belief, can give her nothing."

Rosier scarce demurred. "I don't in the least desire he should. But I may remark, all the same, that he lives like a rich man."

"The money's his wife's; she brought him a large fortune."

"Mrs. Osmond then is very fond of her step-daughter; she may do something."

"For a love-sick swain you have your eyes about you!" Madame Merle exclaimed with a laugh.

39Ibid., p. 80.
"I esteem a dot very much. I can do without it; but I esteem it."

"Mrs. Osmond," Madame Merle went on, "will probably prefer to keep her money for her own children. . . . Of course forty thousand francs a year and a nice character are a combination to be considered. I don't say it's to be jumped at, but there might be a worse offer. Mr. Osmond, however, will probably incline to believe he can do better." 40

When Madame Merle related the news of Mr. Hosier's proposal to Osmond, he merely replied: "It's misery—'genteel' misery, . . . it's not what I've dreamed of for Pansy." 41

When Hosier appealed to Isabel for sympathy, she told him:

"You're not rich enough for Pansy."
"She doesn't care a straw for one's money."
"No, but her father does."
"Ah yes, he has proved that!" cried the young man. 42

Hosier went to see Osmond, but he was met with an even colder reception and got nowhere.

After Isabel had been married for some time, she reflected over the past. She began to realize the grossness of her mistake in judging Osmond, and she also saw more clearly her own reason for marrying him:

But for her money, as she saw today, she would never have done it. . . . At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some other

40 Ibid., pp. 95-96.  
41 Ibid., p. 114.  
42 Ibid., p. 117.
conscience, to some more prepared receptacle. What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the best man with the best taste in the world? Unless she should have given it to a hospital there would have been nothing better she could do with it; and there was no charitable institution in which she had been as much interested as in Gilbert Osmond.43

After her marriage Isabel often took rides in the afternoon. On these occasions she had time to look back over the events of her life. One day while reviewing her acquaintances, she made up her mind never to think of Madame Merle again. She felt Madame Merle to be the most false person she had ever known. Speculating on her friend's motives, she thought:

Madame Merle had done what she wanted; she had brought about the union of her two friends. . . . She had therefore had a conception of gain, and Isabel asked herself where she had found her profit. . . . It came to her that Madame Merle, though she had seemed to like her from their first meeting at Gardencourt, had been doubly affectionate after Mr. Touchett's death and after learning that her young friend had been subject to the good old man's charity. She had found her profit not in the gross device of borrowing money, but in the more refined idea of introducing one of her intimates to the young woman's fresh and ingenuous fortune. . . . She found herself confronted in this manner with the conviction that the man in the world whom she had supposed to be the least sordid had married her, like a vulgar adventurer, for her money. . . . She wondered whether, since he had wanted her money, her money would now satisfy him. Would he take her money and let her go? Ah, if Mr. Touchett's great charity would but help her today it would be blessed indeed! 44

43 Ibid., pp. 192-193. 44 Ibid., pp. 329-331.
The fact that Osmond would not take her money and let her go shows that he wanted more than merely money.

Osmond sent Pansy back to the convent where she had spent most of her life. Shortly afterwards, Isabel received notice that her cousin, Ralph Touchett, was dying. Osmond made it clear that he disapproved of her going to Ralph at Gardencourt. The Countess Gemini, who was visiting them, reminded Isabel of her freedom. The Countess felt an immense desire to hear that Isabel would go to England. "Nothing's impossible for you, my dear," she said caressingly. "why else are you rich and clever and good? . . . when I want to make a journey my husband simply tells me I can have no money!"45

The Countess then proceeded to reveal the Osmond—Madame Merle relationship. Isabel asked her:

"Why then did she want him to marry me?"
"Ah my dear, that's her superiority! Because you had money; and because she believed you would be good to Pansy." . . .
"why did Osmond never marry her?" she finally asked.
"Because she had no money. . . . The only tangible result she has ever achieved—except, of course, getting to know every one and staying with them free of expense—has been bringing you and Osmond together. . . . Osmond's marriage has given his daughter a little lift. . . . Osmond of course could never give her a portion. Osmond was really extremely poor; but of course you know all about that. Ah, my dear," cried the Countess, "why did you inherit money?" She stopped a moment as if she saw something singular in Isabel's face. "Don't tell me now that you'll give her a dot. . . . She

[Madame Merle] has found a wife for Osmond, but Osmond has never lifted a little finger for her. She has worked for him, plotted for him, suffered for him; she has even more than once found money for him; and the end of it is that he's tired of her."⁴⁶

Before Isabel left for Gardencourt, she went to the convent to tell Pansy good-bye. She did not believe at the time that she would return to Osmond. At the convent she found herself face to face with Madame Merle, who waited for her after seeing Pansy. Isabel told Madame Merle she was going to Ralph.

"He has done me many services."
"Yes; but one was much above the rest. He made you a rich woman."
"He made me—?"

Madame Merle appearing to see herself successful, she went on more triumphantly: "He imparted to you that extra lustre which was required to make you a brilliant match. At bottom it's him you've to thank." She stopped; there was something in Isabel's eyes.

"I don't understand you. It was my uncle's money."
"Yes; it was your uncle's money, but it was your cousin's idea. He brought his father over to it. Ah, my dear, the sum was large!"⁴⁷

This is Madame Merle's bitter triumph over Isabel.

Isabel arrived at Gardencourt before Ralph died. She was able to help nurse him, and during this time he wanted to talk to her. There were many things Ralph wanted to know about Isabel's life, but instead she asked him:

"Is it true—is it true? . . . That you made me rich—that all I have is yours?"

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 368-372. ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 388.
He turned away his head . . . Then at last: "Ah, don't speak of that—that was not happy. . . . But for that—but for that—!" And he paused. "I believe I ruined you," he wailed.

"He married me for the money," she said. She wished to say everything; she was afraid he might die before she had done so. . . . "Yes, he was in love with me. But he wouldn't have married me if I had been poor. . . . I always tried to keep you from understanding; but it's all over."48

After Ralph's funeral, Mrs. Touchett told Isabel about Ralph's will. Referring to the various bequests she said:

"Some of them are extremely peculiar," . . . "he has left considerable sums to persons I never heard of. He gave me a list . . . and he told me they were people who . . . had seemed to like him. Apparently he thought you didn't like him, for he hasn't left you a penny. It was his opinion that you had been handsomely treated by his father."49

Isabel knew that his leaving her no money was the highest compliment he could have paid her. He had already given her too much.

In no other novel by Henry James does wealth so thoroughly reveal moral values unless it is in the more subtle and penetrating work of his last period, The Wings of the Dove. One critic has even suggested that the later work is the same story improved by leaving out the "rags to riches" theme.50

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48 Ibid., pp. 414-415. 49 Ibid., p. 423.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A detailed examination of four early novels shows clearly the tremendous importance of money in James's fictional world and reflects his own deep personal concern with financial problems. The fictional uses of money and the novelist's own attitude toward the matter are indissolubly united and of particular interest to the student of literature.

The richness of James's settings is noticeable even in the earliest works. *Roderick Hudson* is memorable for its fashionable salons, attractive Italian tourist resorts, Florentine villas, and Alpine holidays. The Parisian salons, art galleries, ancient cathedrals of *The American* breathe the charm, the glow of wealth. The American setting of *Washington Square* lacks the elegance of the old world but is centered in the most fashionable district of New York. The old English country estates, Florentine villas, and Roman palaces provide the setting for *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Money is not the main theme of *Roderick Hudson*, but it is central to the plot situation. Wealth is important in *The American*, but it is secondary to James's desire to
show the moral superiority of the American. The final disposition of the Sloper fortune pervades and dominates Washington Square. On a first reading, money seems to be the central theme of The Portrait of a Lady, but after closer examination this theme is seen to be part of a larger concern with the romantic American in conflict with European tradition.

The plot of Roderick Hudson is centrally concerned with the development of a young artist who is launched, so to speak, by his friend's wealth. It is another and larger fortune that causes the greedy and selfish Mrs. Light to force Christina into a marriage she hates. In The American the rich Christopher Newman attempts to buy, to put it baldly, a wife from impoverished French aristocrats. The author treats the matter much like a business transaction almost without love scenes. Newman is rejected because these greedy, class conscious people find an Englishman who is both rich and aristocratic. The plot of Washington Square consists of a rich doctor's successful attempt to prevent his very ordinary daughter from becoming the prey of a fortune hunter, in spite of the daughter's rather strong emotional commitment. In The Portrait of a Lady a charming young girl inherits a fortune and falls prey to two fortune hunters, whose motive is not quite clearly greed but who can use the money.
Wealth and attitudes toward wealth have much to do with character development in these four novels. In *Roderick Hudson*, Rowland Mallet is gradually seen to be the staunch, incorruptible, and generous representative of privilege and wealth. The artist Roderick tends to be spoiled by money. It distracts him from his work and encourages dissipation. Mrs. Light has long been completely corrupted by greed and ruins the life of her beautiful, intelligent daughter. The minor characters for the most part live in genteel poverty, but betray a veiled respect for wealth.

Christopher Newman of *The American*, in spite of his apparent indifference, secretly enjoys his wealth and expects it to buy anything he desires. Madame de Bellegarde and Urbain are greedy, scheming, and proud; but Claire and Valentin, aware of the family vices, refuse to subscribe to greedy motives. Tristram's view is thoroughly commercial, but Mrs. Tristram can understand the appeal of social position, as well as that of money.

Of the major characters of *Washington Square*, Morris Townsend is the only one who is greedy. He is an admitted spendthrift and shows himself to be an insincere scoundrel. The admirable Doctor Slopér has a healthy respect for his hard earned fortune. He is generous toward the poor, but he refuses to allow an adventurer like Morris
Townsend to take advantage of his daughter's too easily acquired affection. Catherine is indifferent to money. At the beginning of the book, she has no conception even of the size of her fortune.

Like Catherine, the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady* has little conception of the value of money until she inherits a fortune. Her conception of the moral obligations placed on her by the money leads her to an unfortunate marriage with Gilbert Osmond. Osmond's vice is not simply greed; it is egotism which demands control of everything in his world, including Isabel's money. Madame Merle appears to be the unrelieved villainess of the novel until it becomes clear that her scheming is motivated, at least in part, by her concern for her daughter. The Touchetts, as well as their friend Lord Warburton, have enormous wealth and a proper respect for wealth, but their well balanced sense of values allows them to see that Isabel's money has been the cause of her unhappiness.

The acquisition of money was one of the things, but certainly not the main thing, that the young James hoped to attain through his art. He knew that neither money nor virtue necessarily brings happiness but that money is necessary if one is to live to the fullest extent of his sensibilities.
All of the wealthy in James's early novels are admirable people, and if they are not thoroughly admirable, they become so through experiences involving the interaction of morality with money. Along with William Dean Howells, Henry James is one of the few American novelists who do not denigrate the rich or overpraise the poor. His vital concern with the proper use of wealth by the rich makes his work of particular interest to an affluent society and may account in some measure for his growing popularity.

James's basic respect for money is nonetheless healthy in that he knows that the world he lives in often puts too much emphasis on wealth. It is his balanced view of the matter which leads him to lack of sympathy with the greedy, materialistic characters and his ultimate approval of those who know the limitations as well as the value of money; and these, not so strangely, are often rich people.
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**Articles**


