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SYMPATHETIC OBSERVATIONS: WIDOWHOOD, SPECTATORSHIP AND
SYMPATHY IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

By

George M. Gordon-Smith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of George M. Gordon-Smith in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and departmental style requirements, (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

SYMPATHETIC OBSERVATIONS: WIDOWHOOD, SPECTATORSHIP AND SYMPATHY IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

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Master of Arts

This thesis explores the roles of widowhood and sympathy in Henry James's short and long fiction. By the time James established himself as a writer of fiction, the culture of sentiment and its formation of sympathetic identification had become central to American and British writers. Critically, however, sympathy in James's fiction has been overlooked because he chose to write about rich expatriates and European nobility. James's pervasive use of widowed characters in his fiction suggests the he too participated in the same aesthetic agenda as William Dean Howells and George Eliot to evoke sympathy in their readers as a means of promoting class unity. In this thesis I show how James's use of widowed characters places him in the same sympathetic tradition as Howells and Eliot not by eliciting sympathy for themselves, but, rather, by awakening a sympathetic response from his readers for his protagonists seeking love.

In chapter one I explore why James may have used so many widowed characters in his fiction. I cite the death of his cousin Minny Temple as a defining moment in his

literary career and argue that he may have experienced an “emotional widowhood” after her early death. I also discuss the role of widows in his short fiction, which I suggest, is different from the role of widows in his novels. This chapter is biographical, yet provides important background for understanding why, more than any other author, James’s fiction is replete with widowed characters.

Chapter two explains the culture of sentiment of which James has been excluded. It explores the theories of David Hume and Adam Smith and their influence on the aesthetic principles defining Howells and Eliot’s work. In this chapter I contend that James is indeed part of this sentimental tradition despite his renunciation of sentiment in his fiction because he tried to promote sympathy among his readers through his widowed characters.

In chapter three I do close readings of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and argue that these two texts best represent James’s attempt at sympathetic writing.

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To my late wife, Summer, who always told me that I would make a better English professor than an attorney.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For Jacques Derrida one must always go before the other. In *Politics of Friendship* (1994), he argues that the basis of all friendship is mourning; that the fundamental law of friendship and therefore relationships is that one must die before the other. Indeed, there is no friendship without this inevitability. Derrida adds that it is “in us” that the dead also speak, that it is by speaking *of* or *as* the dead that one keeps them alive, and that “to keep alive, within oneself” is, essentially, “the best sign of fidelity” (36). Fidelity thus consists of mourning, and mourning consists of interiorizing the mourned and recognizing that if one is to give anything to the dead, it must come from within. The question to ask is what can possibly be given to the dead? For George Stransom in Henry James’s “The Altar of the Dead,” it is a candle lit in remembrance of his dead fiancée and a commitment never to remarry; for Isabel Archer of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), it is recognizing that Ralph always loved her and her beginning to love him in return; for Dr. Sloper in *Washington Square* (1880), it is never letting his daughter marry anyone he or his dead wife might disapprove of; and for Merton Densher of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), it is refusing to marry Kate and giving her all of Milly’s money. It would appear that for James loss and separation, a widowhood of sorts from one another, is important in the development of his characters.

When one considers that James’s fiction is about love and relationships and that more often than not these relationships are never realized because of the death of a protagonist, widowhood seems an appropriate bridge between the dominant themes of love and death in his fiction. Indeed, James’s work is full of death, just as it is full of love, but love is a difficult term to understand, especially once articulated by an author, who some suggest,

never experienced that emotion. Perhaps this is why love is confusing in his work. Almost immediately, one notices the lack of physical affection and lurid passion prevalent in the French authors Zola, Balzac and Flaubert whom James deeply admired. This is not to say, however, that his fiction lacks “love.” Indeed, love is cognitive for James; for the man who so decidedly rejected sentiment in his fiction, authentic love represents a mental response that recognizes the value of loss in relationships. In order to understand what authentic love may have meant for James, one must look at his personal life. Recognizing that “the novelist must write from his own experience, that his characters must be real and such as might be met with in actual life,” as James says in “The Art of Fiction” (11), one turns to his relationship to Minny Temple in order to inform how James constructs love in his fiction.

Leon Edel contends that Minny Temple serves as the frame for many of James’s most famous female protagonists (33). Both Milly Theale and Isabel Archer are Minny-types who never achieve the love they long for. These two examples, who seem to represent authentic love in James’s fiction, struggle to experience a lasting relationship with anyone of the opposite sex. Milly is dying from an unknown disorder that prevents her from ever consummating a love she and Densher eventually share, and Isabel’s marriage to Gilbert Osmond is a metaphorical death as she realizes that she will never truly love him and he will never truly love her. Similarly, in James’s short stories, he often widows characters in order to prove that they are experiencing authentic love and not blinding, less sincere physical passion. For example, “Longstaff’s Marriage” reads this way when Diana and Longstaff, after finally confessing love for each other, refuse to consummate their marriage. In fact, Diana declares that their love is more meaningful without sex. Leaving Longstaff widowed at the end of the story is Diana’s ultimate act of authentic love.

This suggests two important points: first, that authentic love for James precludes physical passion and that when he speaks of love, he often means death—that is, one shows love for another not through sex but rather through abstinence made inevitable through death—and second, that widows often embody authentic love because, as Derrida notes, without mourning, “love . . . would be nothing other than the passion, the endurance, and the patience of this work” (106). What Derrida and perhaps James mean by this is that without the possibility of mourning the dead, love would simply be resigned to physical passion, something easily replaced. James was probably aware of his deficiencies in the eyes of his cousin and resigned himself to the role of spectator of Minny. Observing the young Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and Judge Advocate John Chipman Gray wooing Minny must have left James feeling deeply inadequate. Yet James, sensing, though never confessing, a deep connection to Minny, must have felt emotionally widowed, essentially causing an “interiorization or subjectification” of Minny, “undeniable in the work of mourning” (Derrida 159). Emotional widowhood is an important term in this thesis. It denotes a deep connection and need to mourn the dead even though one is not actually married to them. It is the same sense of loss one feels when a spouse dies, but without the essential act of consummation that finalizes a marriage. James must have loved Minny after she died just as George Stransom did his dead fiancée, when he declares that he “needed no priest and no altar to make him for ever widowed” (“Altar” 452).

Widowhood is not the only prerequisite for the experience of authentic love for James. Indeed, no criticism of his work is complete without a discussion of “consciousness.” This is a slippery term for James and any critic of his fiction. James himself in his essay “Is There a Life after Death?” states that “consciousness has thus arrived at interesting me too

much and on too great a scale” (229), suggesting its importance and ambiguity in his fiction. In this same essay, however, he provides some insight into how “consciousness” might help one achieve authentic love. He indicates that “[l]iving, or feeling one’s exquisite curiosity about the universe . . . illustrates what I mean by the consecrated interest of consciousness” (222). Ironically, for a man who never really experienced nor lived much, James shapes many characters after this very definition of consciousness.

Yet, many of these characters experience consciousness through their emotional or actual widowhood. In fact, James’s widows seem the most “conscious” of all his characters because of their ability to understand the meaning of authentic love in Jamesian terms; that is, they understand what it means to love someone but then to lose the loved one. Dorothea Krook argues that consciousness in James is caused by “suffering illuminated by understanding, or the passionate aspiration after understanding”; she adds that this suffering and consciousness is “redemptive” and therefore “truly exemplary and instructive” (17). If consciousness is achieved through the act of experiencing authentic love (that is, the Jamesian love described as loss and suffering or even mourning, as Derrida suggests), the widow is arguably the most conscious of James’s characters. Consequently, James holds widows in high regard, employing them to act in “exemplary” and “instructive” ways to those protagonists seeking love (Krook 17).

Two ideal examples of this are found in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Portrait of a Lady*. In these novels, Milly Theale and Isabel Archer are seeking love, and widows who have achieved consciousness and experienced authentic love surround both. Simply this fact privileges them for James, and they observe Milly and Isabel in order to help them make the correct decisions needed to achieve consciousness and the authentic love that

accompanies it. Observation becomes important for James as he describes the widow Susan Stringham accompanying Milly on her quest for authentic love. Likewise, Mrs. Touchett and the emotionally widowed Ralph follow Isabel around Europe in order to watch her achieve consciousness. Naturally, both finally achieve consciousness through suffering as they realize that they will either die, in Milly's case, or that marriage is death itself, as in Isabel's. Widows, however, observe this suffering and aid in the process of becoming "conscious." Adam Smith and David Hume suggest that the spectator feels sympathy through the process of spectatorship and removal from the observed. Based on their theories, the widow is the ideal sympathizer for James since widows often accompany protagonists through their ordeal to find authentic love and are often the only characters who witness the tragic death of a protagonist at the end of one of his novels.

Authentic love, emotional widowhood, consciousness, and spectatorship all inform James's pervasive use of widows in his short stories and long fiction. James, declaring that "the novelist must write from his own experience" and stating that "his characters must be real" ("Art" 11), was perhaps emotionally widowed by his unrequited love for Minny, of whom he acted as spectator. As he reflects on life and death in his essay on those subjects, he connects his lifelong role as spectator, the fiction it has inspired, and the emotional widowhood created through his mourning Minny, stating, "I have found in growing older . . . a process takes place which I can only describe as the accumulation of the very treasure itself of consciousness" ("Is" 221), consciousness being the cognitive element that facilitates sympathetic observation, authentic love, and emotional widowhood.

CHAPTER TWO: WIDOWHOOD IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

Compared to his contemporaries on either side of the Atlantic, Henry James employs, as either main or lesser characters, a surprising number of widows in his texts. As one observes with both Mrs. Newsome in *The Ambassadors* (1903) and Adela Gereth in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), James's widowed characters often deal with the trauma of marriage and/or remarriage after the loss of a spouse—a possible surprise considering that some critics deem James's preoccupation with the intellectual a limitation in terms of romantic attraction between his characters. These critics dismiss James as “unromantic” at best and void of “elemental passions” at worst, but assuming that James's characters are detached because he “did not know what he was talking about when he wrote about love” can be very misleading in interpreting his work (Edel *Henry James: A Life* 39). Although Leon Edel is largely ambiguous about whether James's work avoids discussing love, other critics such as Frank M. Colby suggest that James “avoid[s] passion through an elaborate, circumlocutory style” that serves as his “sufficient fig-leaf” (396). Perhaps James's celibate life has given rise to the largely unfounded but popular belief that he cared little about love. Edel observes that critics often condemn James as “unromantic” without ever having read his work (*Life* 39). They cite May Bartram's reluctance to verbalize her love for John Marcher in “The Beast in the Jungle” before she dies despite the fact that she has loved him all her life, Isabel Archer's recoiling from Goodwood's “white lightning” (503) kiss at the end of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and other characters' inability even to touch their lovers (Edel Introduction viii).

Yet these critics seem not to understand James's conception of human love as the purest and most intense expression of one's capacity to live, and his belief that full human

consciousness can only be achieved through one's capacity to love, failing to recognize that James's ironic portrayal of love serves a specific purpose in his fiction that may shed light on why widows populate his texts so extensively. A look at early reviews of some of James's works suggests that even then few critics understood how he wished to portray love in his novels. An anonymous review of "Madame de Mauvres" in 1875 doubted "whether Mr. James has not too habitually addressed himself less to men and women in their mere humanity, than to a certain kind of cultivated people, who . . . are often a little narrow in their sympathies and poverty-stricken in the simple emotions" ("Recent" 495). This critic, like others, appears to echo what Roger Gard calls "wonderfully told vicissitudes of feeling" that essentially "leave us cold" (40). An 1876 reviewer of *Roderick Hudson* (1875), described it as "beautiful, powerful, tragical" but still lacking "human feeling" ("James's" 425), a conclusion that foreshadows W. H. Mallock's labelling *The American* (1877) weak in "sensuous imagery" and "so spirituel [*sic*] . . . that he has not *sense* enough to give [his characters] form, still less flesh" (167-9).

Of course, despite their criticizing James's handling of love in his novels, all these critics praise the precision and psychological subtlety with which he paints his characters. While determining what they mean by their references to "warmth," "feelings," and "flesh" is not easy, one can assume that their vagueness is symptomatic of James's characteristic reluctance to speak directly about sex—something he avoids religiously. Probably, then, James's early reviewers were not so much concerned with the absence of "fleshiness" in his texts as they were troubled by a lack of traditional sentimentality in his works. For example, in his reading of *The Portrait of a Lady*, one critic argued that next to Sir Walter Scott's work, James's novel was "full of love scenes and motives, more or less complex, yet we

hardly remember a book of so little sentiment, at least of the effusive and old-fashioned kind” (“Mr.” 473). James was never really averse to sentiment, but he was a realistic author who recognized that emotional self-indulgence was the fastest and easiest way to ruin a story. In his review of Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), James addresses his concern about sentimentality in fiction: “A story based upon those elemental passions in which we seek the true and final manifestations of character must be told in a spirit of intellectual superiority to those passions” (“*Our*” 78). James obviously maintains that the writer of a tale had to use imagination to express fully the passions of characters, but he also believed that one had to stand beyond those passions—one was to master them and hold them up to scrutiny. James simply characterized a more reserved expression of love in his novels, and many critics are correct in arguing that his fiction lacks deep sentimental action between characters, yet this is because James was more interested in the sympathetic agenda of his realist contemporaries in America and England than the salacious physical relationships described by the many continental authors who influenced him.

In fact, James believed that physical passion should only be included for a specific reason (“Future” 38). If this is true, then his omission of said passion might also serve a specific function. Indeed, the fact that James judged that an “intellectual superiority” was paramount for his character’s relationships places on his readers a responsibility to assess the deeply psychological motivations behind his character’s actions. Understanding this illustrates how profoundly James’s texts discuss love and indicates that affection, for James, was a purely psychological phenomenon. Use of imagination, psychological subtlety in his characters, and intellectual superiority poses a preferential treatment of conscious development over physical passion that many critics may have misunderstood. That is, love,

for James, is conditional on consciousness and awareness of self, essentially relegating physical passion to a demoted state. Despite Oscar Wilde's observation that in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) James never "arrive[s] at a passion" (qtd. in Sicker 9) or Rebecca West's chastisement of Isabel Archer for marrying without the "consciousness of passion" (70), James, more than any other author of his generation, tries to explore the important idea of love as a mental process through his characters.

Love is indeed the subject of James's art. From Adam Verver to Gilbert Osmond, and Claire de Bellegarde de Cintre to Lambert Strether, James's heroes and heroines continually fall in love, and as the aforementioned examples indicate, his protagonists are often widows and widowers seeking and experiencing love.¹ For James, then, love can be defined only in terms of achieving human consciousness, not as base physical passion: as he states in his notebook, he wishes his characters to achieve "the imagination of loving" (Mathiessen and Murdock 229). Indeed, he has a tendency to imbricate the terms, "consciousness" and "love." For him, human consciousness, love, and life are interrelated and mutually dependent; one cannot live fully nor attain full human consciousness until one truly loves. The mature depiction of love—becoming conscious of life or living—then, no longer has a physical dimension: it becomes wholly psychological, and the purest and most intense expression of the human capacity to live is love. This is certainly thematic in James's fiction, as love engages a total human consciousness in many of his later novels. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), for example,

¹ James deals with both widows and widowers in his texts, and both play an important and similar role in his short and long fiction. In order to avoid the confusion and redundancy of specifying whether a character is a widow or a widower, I will refer to both as widows, include both in referring to widowhood, and rely on characters' gender to specify whether each is either a widow or widower.

loving has the ability to animate the powers of human discernment, intuition, and especially memory. Since James articulates in *The Future of the Novel* (1914) that true art is the “amount of felt life” that is conveyed (“Future” 39), he employs love as his subject in an effort to explore man and woman at their highest level of consciousness. Indeed, James “valued life and literature equally for the light they threw upon each other” and often drew upon his own life experiences as an observer of human nature in his fiction (Edel *Life* 11).

If living is the true expression of love for James, then the widow becomes an important character in his novels, and the act of loving and falling in love becomes a complex engagement of total human consciousness, as widowhood in his work moves from a mere form of characterization to a deeper understanding of love and human consciousness. Of his twenty-two novels, fifteen have widowed main or minor characters. In several of these novels, notably *Washington Square* (1880), *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Tragic Muse* (1890), *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Outcry* (1911), James includes two and sometimes three widowed main characters upon whom to base his plot. Although widows appear less frequently in his shorter fiction, at least half of it includes widows as main characters and deals closely with the experience of widowhood, unlike his novels which tend to focus more on how widows fit into cultural experiences of the nineteenth century.²

If James was obsessed with death, and in a sense all of his stories are “ghost stories,” as Leslie Fiedler mentions (303), and if his work is an exploration of love, perhaps

² “The Siege of London” and *Washington Square* have the most widowed protagonists of all James’s fiction with three each. In “The Siege of London” George Littlemore is a rich, bored widower who falls in love with the American middle-aged widow Mrs. Nancy Grenville Beck Headway, who in turn, is introduced to Littlemore’s widowed mother. In *Washington Square*, although not all protagonists, Catherine Sloper’s love revolves around what her widowed father and widowed aunts advise her about her fortune and Morris Townshend.

widowhood in it serves as a bridge between these two ostensibly disparate ideas. Fiedler suggests that James's fiction represents "evocations of a tenuous past" that essentially "haunts him in his fiction" (305). Wendy Graham relates *Roderick Hudson* to entropy and elaborates on the connection between death and love in James's fiction, discussing the notion of "vampire" love, since Christina Light sucks the life force from Hudson, eventually resulting in his suicide (119). This naturally echoes Edel's conclusion that James's vampire love motif stems from his own observations of his parents' love, as he viewed his mother and father draining each other's life forces (*Life* 16). In "A Passionate Pilgrim," Clement wishes only to worship and love his cousin Cynthia but is prevented from seeing her because of her domineering brother. Clement is really in love with Cynthia but associates her with death because his love is unrequited. He eventually dies only after finally seeing her after longingly awaiting her visit.³ In Clement's mind, the woman embodies death itself: "Let me today do a mad, sweet thing. Let me fancy you the soul of all the dead women who have trod these terrace flags which lie here like sepulchral tablets in the pavement of a church. Let me say I worship you" (264).

Worship through death is an important theme in nineteenth-century fiction, as Mario Praz contends, and, like the protagonists in the works of many of his peers, James's heroes are often so obsessed with their lovers that they worship them either through the death of a lover or through their own deaths. But James differs from his contemporaries' views of death in that instead of having it serve as a melancholy finale for love unachieved, he uses it to represent the deepest expression of love, maintaining that one does not live unless one

³ James repeats this theme in "A Most Extraordinary Case" in which a convalescing Colonel Ferdinand Mason falls in love with his niece, Caroline Hofmann, who dies, leaving Mason emotionally widowed.

loves and that death can only magnify love because it idealizes it. Death serves as the true expression of love because it acts as an intensifier and ennobler of love lost. Thus, when someone one loves no longer lives, love becomes heightened, idealized, and preserved in memory. Karen Halttunen argues that mourning was the natural response to the greatest human affliction in the nineteenth century. Death was sacred to sentimentalists as the purest and most transparent of all sentiments which proves interesting in discussing widowhood and James's notion of love through loss, since nineteenth-century views of death moved from the importance of the event of the death act to the mourning of those left behind—those widowed by death (Halttunen 124-6). Similarly, the Jamesian hero is addicted to an enlightened love, dependent not on physical intimacy but on the separation and psychological trauma that loss of love causes. This truest form of love animates the human mind, drawing itself into complete consciousness. The quest for consciousness and identity, then (the two being interdependent for James), relies upon the love of a man or woman, which is achieved, ironically, through loss.

Philip Sicker suggests that this theme is pervasive in James's fiction: a young man, a typical Jamesian hero, falls in love and withers away as his love for a beautiful, virginal, unattainable woman remains unarticulated or unrecognized (40). The themes of fear of women and the worship of women often play themselves out strikingly in James's short stories. Love in his short fiction is a threat to life itself, as the Jamesian hero, who incidentally is either widowed, becomes widowed, or is the son or daughter of a widow, finds fulfilling love only through death, thus immortalizing and idealizing said love forever. In his most depressing and disturbing short story, James paints this grim portrait of true love. "Longstaff's Marriage," published in 1878, describes the idealized love James creates in all

his fiction. Diana Belfield meets Reginald Longstaff on his deathbed, where he proposes to her. She naturally declines his offer, causing Longstaff to recover in an effort to win her. Diana later becomes sick herself and, dying, proposes to Longstaff, who accepts. The two marry. Although he sincerely loves his wife, she dies deliberately because she feels that through her death she can most tenderly show her love for him; in an effort to prove her love for Longstaff she widows him. Because James removes the physicality inherent in marriage and allows Diana to die before she and Reginald can consummate their love, Reginald is forced to immortalize her and forever remember a virginal and unattainable image, recollecting not the physical achievement of their love but the intellectual memory of what that love now means for him, i.e., a higher consciousness of life. Although this story is, perhaps, influenced by his reaction to Minny's death, this is not to suggest that James is glad when Minny dies; rather, Minny's death enabled James to become closer to her. Indeed, his memory of her facilitated a closeness greater than any possible had she been alive. Her death gives him access to her and allows him to immortalize and worship her, essentially to know her better than anyone else—even a husband—by using her as a model for so many of his heroines.

For James the death of a young, beautiful, and unattainable woman is often the finest embodiment of love. He omits physical passion and conjugal love from his texts because they do not accurately portray this love for him. Indeed, death, loss, a sense of hopelessness accompanying unrequited or unattainable love are characteristic in his fiction because for James love is dependent on distance and longing, not on physical touch. One can hardly read James's work without becoming quickly aware that his insecure, hyperimaginative, and self-defeating heroes represent oppressed and romantically frustrated men. The question, then, is

not why James does not deal with love in his work; rather, it is why does he treat it as a state nearly impossible to reach, and, beyond this, what role does the widow play in the framework of unrequited and unachievable love?

An answer to these questions may be found in James's unique relationship with his cousin Minny Temple. For many critics Minny seems to serve as a kind of muse, acting as James's inspiration in the creation of various heroines such as Isabel Archer or, more obviously, given what James said about *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly Theale. But few critics have looked beyond this probable role Minny played. According to Edel, the idea for a novel about a doomed young woman bound to die had been with James since Minny's death, reflecting the deeply autobiographical nature of many of James's texts (*Life* 77). James himself alludes to the influence on him of Minny's death: "Among the sad reflections that her death provokes for me, there is none sadder than this view of the gradual change and reversal in our relations: I slowly crawling from weakness and inaction and suffering into strength and health and hope: she sinking out of brightness and youth into decline and death" (qtd. in Edel *Untried* 326). Clearly, this influence pervades James's texts in which his male and female protagonists struggle with illness and weakness as they fight for love, often widowing each other.

James was very close to his cousin, and the year 1865 had special meaning for him. Though he does not relate specifically why he visited the White Mountains of New Hampshire so frequently that summer in *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), Minny was there, and in June of that year, she began to assume an important place in James's life. He describes her as "a young and shining apparition," graceful and slim with an "ethereal brightness of presence," and, along with many other young men of the time, he began to fall

in love with her (34). James, however, was deeply conscious of and insecure regarding his inequality among his fellows. He never articulated his love for Minny verbally and was often left to listen to her conversation with suitors, such as then Lieutenant-Colonel Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and Judge Advocate John Chipman Gray, in poignant scenes he would later reproduce in “Poor Richard” in 1887. As in much else in his life during that summer, James acted as an observer, constantly sitting on the sidelines as more eligible men engaged Minny’s attention. Edel suggests that his early and later life as a spectator is due to the “obscure hurt” that kept him out of active duty during the Civil War, yet his constant vacillation around Minny suggests that he may have felt inadequate compared to her other more masculine suitors (Edel *Life* 33). Just as his fiction suggests, he was content to worship women from a distance, and his emotional reticence prevented him from being an ardent wooer of the kind to which Minny was likely accustomed. Even so, he nonetheless loved Minny, though his was an inner kind of love, unvoiced, yet protected and magnified by his emotional withdrawal from her—a love later typified in his fiction. This is not to suggest that James was always happy with his role as spectator. Also expressed in his fiction is his frustration with never taking action, never living. In *The Ambassadors*, for example, Lambert Strether exclaims to Chad that he just “wants to live” (84), as do Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove*. In fact, in most of James’s novels one senses that his protagonist does not fully live until he or she has found someone to love.

In light of James’s description of love in his work, his latent relationship with Minny may have had an even deeper influence on his writing than simply inspiring the creation of heroines who exemplify all he loved about her. One can only guess to what extent Minny’s

death influenced James, but the life of a writer who never married, lived a celibate life, and understood that love need not be laced with fervid passion and physical contact but could indeed be the embodiment of loss and hopelessness suggests that James found with the loss of Minny a manner of justifying his distance from her and his inability to verbalize his love for her by creating another form of love that avoided the sentimental and celebrated the reality, even if removed, of what he truly experienced with Minny: loss and the actuality of the unachievable. If so, then by extension James felt himself emotionally widowed by the loss of Minny; having loved her from a distance and having lost her in life but gained her immortalized image in death, he may have felt himself widowed by her premature extinction, leading him in his fiction to articulate a new ontology of love that celebrates the loss of a loved one and the trauma of death and forces the worship of an immortal image.

James's letters reveal little evidence that he loved anyone besides Minny; like his characters, he never achieved actual love (Gordon 96), which proves interesting when one considers that, save Adam and Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*, no other couple in James's texts actually achieves the love they all desperately seek. Indeed, none of the widowed characters in his novels ever seem to *look* to remarry. (Obviously, Isabel marries the widower Gilbert Osmond in *Portrait*, but he is at first reluctant to marry her and feels pressured to do so by Madame Merle, while, rather than pursuing Charlotte independently, Adam is encouraged by Maggie to marry her). Furthermore, though some widows do remarry in his fiction, their marriages are unhappy, and they ironically cannot have children. One exception is the child Isabel conceives after she marries Gilbert, yet this nameless baby boy dies soon after his birth. What this all confirms is that widowhood occupies a sacred and

immutable place in James's fiction—an idealized representation of hopeless Jamesian love that cannot ever be recovered by loving again.

Of course, during James's life women were attracted to him, and some even pursued him, but James was often oblivious to their flirtations. For instance, Edith Wharton in her autobiography *A Backward Glance* (1934) relates her breathless preparation to meet James for the first time, only to be ignored by him (172-3). One laughs because this seems typical of James who, incidentally, never remembered meeting Wharton at the time. Critics have also discussed a possible love between fellow novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson and James, though most argue that it was largely one-sided, because James had apparently embraced his celibacy and become comfortable in his essentially "widowed" life. Obviously, he was not widowed in the conventional sense because he never married, but James never loved another woman after Minny, and although she perhaps never loved him as deeply as he loved her, or even at all, he was forever affected by the time he spent with her, and there is little doubt that the news of her death came as a violent shock. He later wrote, "I can't put away the thought that just as I am beginning life, she has ended it" (*Notes* 108). This was indeed the case: James's literary career began soon after Minny died, even as his emotional life dwindled, and he redirected his love for Minny into his art. Eventually, he went on to write *The Wings of the Dove*, immortalizing Minny in a text that embodies the emotional widowhood he experienced with her death.

As seen in his "relationship" with Minny, love for James and for his widowed characters was neither ardent nor physically passionate. Rather, it embodied a longing, a sense of loss, and a physical separation—a widowhood, in essence, that magnified itself with time and became ingrained in his work as he continued to love Minny beyond the grave. As

with the “widowed” James, in turn widows in his fiction represent the same ideal: their lives constitute the true meaning of Jamesian romantic love—it must be magnified through death. This widowhood typifies for James the final achievement of consciousness and, therefore, the true embodiment of love in at least two forms: first, in the creation of widows or widow-types who embody an emotional solitude which may or may not include defined widowhood but does include a functional widowhood since characters feel widowed after the loss of loved ones, and, second, through already widowed characters in his work. Indeed, widows best embody romantic love for James because love for a widow precludes sexual passion and symbolizes loss and trauma, which in James’s fiction constitute romantic love.

Two short stories that illustrate these ideas are “Poor Richard” and “The Altar of the Dead,” published in 1895. “Poor Richard” is important for understanding just how reflective James’s fiction is of his own life. Edel suggests that this is extremely autobiographical and evidences Minny’s role as an object of James’s unrequited affection (*Life* 77). So transparent, in fact, is the story that Gertrude, the woman Richard loves, is courted by two military gentlemen, echoing James’s insecurities, as he witnessed Minny’s flirtations with Holmes and Gray. James obviously suffered from a deep inadequacy regarding these seemingly more masculine men who occupied both Minny’s and Gertrude’s attention. In fact, James articulates this conscious “insignificance” in the presence of military suitors: “Richard . . . writhed and chafed under the polish of tone and the variety of allusion by which the two officers consigned him to insignificance” (“Poor” 152). James also discusses Richard’s feelings with the same vividness that characterized his personal experience with Minny, but what is even more important is how he is able to articulate in this story what he could never verbalize in real life. Just as he recounts Richard’s perceptible insignificance

that reflects his own imagined position in Minny's sphere, so he eliminates the reticence that prevented him from stating his own feelings to Minny years before: "'Gertrude, I adore you. I mean that I love you,'" Richard exclaims at the beginning of the story (149), giving voice to an intimacy James never admitted for Minny in person.

In addition to telling Gertrude that he loves her, Richard declares that he wishes to marry her. It is also no coincidence that Richard suffers from typhoid and that both Gertrude and Richard experience the kind of vampire love James associated with his parents' marriage; Richard declares, "'I've got my strength again and meanwhile you've been failing'" (199). Love and eventual marriage are what Richard desires from Gertrude and are not abased in his revelation of them. This is important in establishing the role of widows in James's texts because emotional widowhood cannot exist without emotional marriage, that is, a love so deep that one wishes to consecrate it with matrimonial union. Unlike James, however, Richard was able to articulate this issue with his proposal to Gertrude. She denies him, but James still addresses his failure to act upon desire. James, obviously attached to Minny, reveals not only his inadequacy next to Minny's military suitors but also his desire to verbalize his love for her, which emotionally binds him to her, so that when separated through death, as is often the case in his stories and his life, James feels emotionally widowed by the loss. Because Edel maintains that James's "Poor Richard" is largely autobiographical, James may have, in turn, felt emotionally married to Minny just as Richard did for Gertrude, and his later fiction indeed may have become deeply symbolic of that love through the emotional widowhood many of his characters experience after the loss of their lovers.

The theme of love and loss is also exemplified in the deeply disturbing but entirely fitting “The Altar of the Dead.” In this story James describes both emotional marriage and emotional widowhood in a manner that best represents the role of widows in his texts. The story begins with George Stransom’s unique situation. Affianced to him, Mary Antrim dies before they are married, propelling Stransom into a depressed and morbid state of mind in which he begins worshiping her and other loved ones who have passed. Important to note here are not only the fact that Mary dies before she and Stransom are married, intimating the significance of virginity in James’s texts, but that James essentially widows Stransom through his fiancée’s death. Stransom declares that he “needed no priest and no altar to make him for ever widowed” (452). Of particular consequence in this story is the framework for emotional widowhood James establishes by widowing Stransom even though he was never married. James wrote “The Altar of the Dead” after the suicide of his close friend Constance Fennimore Woolson. Though speculation regarding a romance with Woolson is largely unfounded, James did have a special devotion to her, and they spent much time together in both England and Italy. Sadly, her death affected him in that he was unable, as Edel puts it, to “possess” her (*Life* 399). Unlike him, however, Stransom does possess the dead by worshiping them, allowing them to remain in his consciousness after they have died. Such behavior widows Stransom because his love for Mary becomes consummated in his mindful worship of her.

How Stransom reacts to the death of his fiancée also seems significant in terms of James’s reaction to Minny’s death. Early on, Stransom reminisces about Mary in front of a jewelry store. The rubies and diamonds seem to mock him and his loss when he unexpectedly meets a widower friend accompanied by a woman. Stransom’s reaction is

disturbing: he views this interloping female as a harlot compared to the virginal and virtuous Mary. He describes this new woman with her “gross immodesty” and “monstrous character” as a “hired performer” (453). Stransom is so charged by his friend’s apparent infidelity that James reminds the reader that if Stransom’s friend could not remain faithful, Stransom certainly could, and he resolves to make an altar to those friends now dead and forgotten. Stransom’s reaction to his widower friend’s remarriage speaks for a larger understanding of James’s texts, since many of his widows either never remarry or find their remarriages unfulfilling and unsuccessful. If love for James was a measure of consciousness, perhaps that consciousness cannot be altered even by death, which would certainly lend insight into James’s own celibacy.

Stransom begins seeing himself as holy, lighting candles for the dead, eventually worshipping them, desiring death for himself, and even declaring that he finds a “strange satisfaction in death” (460). In James’s 1910 essay “Is There a Life after Death” he expresses his beliefs concerning death and the life beyond, stating that death can create two effects: it makes one desire it “*as* welcome extinction and termination,” and it can make one desire a renewal of interest, “appreciation . . . passion . . . and consecrated consciousness” (200). Stransom is obviously grappling with both of these effects. As a self-proclaimed widower, he is unsure of how to proceed with his life. He would welcome death, but he also lives with the consciousness achieved through love that feeds off the appreciation and passion he has for his late fiancée. His passion for her is purely psychological, as he remembers her and magnifies his idealized love for her through the longing and loss of widowhood, thereby sanctifying himself. Indeed, for James, there cannot be a personal “after” for those who have not experienced a “before” (202). What James articulates here is that life cannot have

meaning after death if there has been no meaningful consciousness—no love—during life. Indeed, “our impression of what we have been through, is what essentially fosters and determines. On the whole ground, our desire or our aversion” (201). The question of personal experience, then, determines whether one can accept a life after this one. In Stransom’s case, his suffering widowhood forces a belief in the afterlife, as his love for Mary evolves into a consciousness of life. As James argues, only “because of the *associations* of consciousness do we trouble and consult ourselves—do we wish the latter prolonged and wonder if it may not be indestructible” (205). James suggests, then, that Stransom understands that only through an association with consciousness or the true relation of love can one desire and create a life after this one. Stransom thus represents something deeply personal and important to James, i.e., that the widow’s situation is the embodiment of authentic love because only through death can one experience suffering, thereby generating a desire for and higher consciousness of love for a beloved spouse which essentially fosters a need for life after death. James’s sense of love, therefore, deepens and depends upon loss. It is refined by it, as are characters in his fiction. Thus, Isabel Archer cannot see Ralph’s ghost and experience a world beyond this one without having first become acquainted with suffering. Richard cannot appreciate nor realize a consciousness of his love for Gertrude until he witnesses her love for another and becomes deathly ill from his loss.

James’s work contains other examples of this situation. His use of widows to express deep conscious love through death is pervasive in many of his texts, such as the previously noted “Longstaff’s Marriage,” which illustrates the motif of vampire love where affection depends on loss and distance for both Longstaff and Diana. Indeed, they both become physically afflicted by their love for each other and confess that love on their respective

deathbeds. Longstaff recovers after Diana rejects him but finds herself becoming ill as a result of the love he shows her. Even more disturbing, Diana feels that she must widow Longstaff in order to manifest her love for him most deeply. Similar plots mark “De Grey: A Romance”⁴ and “Maud-Evelyn,” published in 1900, in the latter of which a young man imagines himself the widower of a beautiful dead girl whom he has never known.

In light of James’s views on love and his relationship to Minny, it is not surprising that Diana would die before she and Longstaff ever consecrate their marriage. Indeed, after their marriage and to his dismay, Diana declares ““Never!”” to Longstaff’s question of when he can see her again (108). But Longstaff’s misery is understandable. He has finally married the woman he loves, only to find that she must die in order to keep that love alive. ““I want her to live”” (109), he exclaims in an emotional echo of a letter James sent to his mother on 26 March 1870, after discovering that Minny had died, in which he refers to her as a “poor struggling suffering *dying* creature!” (qtd. in Horne 36). And Longstaff is forced to ask the question readers all ask: ““Did she love me or not?”” (110). James answers through Diana’s widowed companion, Agatha Josling: ““She loved you . . . more than she believed you could now love her; and it seemed to her that, when she had had her moment of happiness, to leave you at liberty was the tenderest way she could show it!”” (110). Here James attempts to answer his own question as posed in his later essay: “How can we not make much of the terrible fashion in which the universe takes upon itself to emphasize and multiply the disconnectedness of those who vanish from our sight?” (“Is” 210). In other words, in asking

⁴ In this 1868 story, Paul, the son of the widow Mrs. George De Grey, returns from Europe after the death of his fiancée. Paul soon falls in love with Margaret Aldis, the young woman comforting his mother. He is, however, drained by Margaret and eventually dies; she then goes insane—another example of how the widow can never remarry because consciousness has already been achieved through a previous love.

how one copes with death, he suggests that death can be the measure of how people love and how deep this consciousness is. Just as Longstaff discovers that Diana believes he cannot love her *now* as much as he did before they married, so James implies that idealized love can only be maintained through death because, after marriage, physical passion becomes confused with the true love of courtship.⁵ James places the importance of widowhood on Diana, killing her in order to maintain Reginald's ideal consciousness of her. As the facts that James's widows rarely remarry and those who do end up in unhappy marriages, and as James's own life indicate, a level of consciousness is achievable through love only when the loved one dies, leaving the widow, living alone, to "accumulate . . . the very treasure itself of consciousness" (James "Is" 221).

Longstaff is initially too frightened to confess his love for Diana, and his reluctance and inability to express it leave him sick with affection. Some of James's other male protagonists also fail to verbalize their love, leaving them with lives both physically empty and emotionally bruised; James repeatedly widows his male characters emotionally, as well as physically on occasion, as are both Longstaff and Stransom. In another story James portrays regret and the need to live life fully in a manner that widows his male protagonist emotionally. In 1903 in "The Beast in the Jungle" he explores the nature of regret, as John Marcher reflects on his life and his growing consciousness of opportunities lost. In the process Marcher overwhelmingly realizes that what he has most missed out on is love. Edel

⁵ James's "Maud-Evelyn" is the best example of widowhood and passionless affection in James's work since the protagonist, Marmaduke, has never met the dead woman he falls in love with. Despite this, he feels widowed as he comes to "know" her through his mind. For James, love can be achieved without passion, as indicated in the example of a dead woman and a self-proclaimed widower, similar to George Stransom, who establishes how deep love can be when achieved through mental consciousness and not physical touch.

suggests that “The Beast in the Jungle” served as a “catharsis” for James as he coped with the death of Woolson and read extensively from his brother’s 1902 book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Life 559). But the story also represents another example of James’s articulation of emotional widowhood in his fiction. Marcher, perpetually afraid of something that might happen to him, begins to realize by the end of the story that he is more afraid of actually missing something profound and meaningful in his life than of being physically attacked. He is afraid of loving fully, “destroying all further consciousness,” eventually causing this fear possibly to “annihilate” him. May Bartram with absolute insight tells Marcher what she knows but he fails to recognize: “Isn’t what you are describing perhaps but the expectation—or at any rate the sense of danger, familiar to so many people—of falling in love?” (432). Here James addresses his own fear, as a young adult, of love and marriage and his later fear, as a mature writer, of articulating love.

As an observer, James was often comfortable sitting back and watching his peers live their lives while he documented their experiences. This is certainly true with the *The Spoils of Poynton*, the idea of which James discloses in his notebooks came from a conversation he once overheard (Matthiessen and Murdock 136). But Marcher’s real fear in “The Beast in the Jungle” is not making May a widow, as one might expect, but, rather, that, because widowhood represents the true embodiment of love, his reluctance to view May romantically will widow her before she achieves true consciousness, before “knowing, before seeing,” as he says (443). Indeed, Marcher expresses his concern that the undescribed and unexpected experience he feels is doomed to plague him at any time and would cause May possible affliction if they were to marry: “His conviction, his apprehension, his obsession, in short, wasn’t a privilege he could invite a woman to share; and that consequence of it was precisely

what was the matter with him” (435). Marcher “had never felt before, the growth of a dread of losing her by some catastrophe” but states that this catastrophe “wouldn’t at all be *the* catastrophe” (443). Marcher’s concern is that she “should have to die before knowing, before seeing” (443). Ironically, it is Marcher who fails to achieve the consciousness of life that accompanies true love; James must kill May and widow Marcher emotionally for him to realize this. As if looking forward to James’s essay on life and death, May asks Marcher, as she is dying, ““what is such knowledge but suffering?”” (444). May openly declares that she would live for Marcher if she could, but she cannot because he has not suffered for and loved her as she has him. James articulates this lack of consciousness by stating, “No passion had ever touched him, for this is what passion meant; he had survived and maundered and pined, but where had been *his* deep ravage?” (459). Marcher cannot become conscious of his love for May until he has truly suffered in love—truly experienced loss, a theme James explores more deeply in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Accordingly, he must be widowed, at least emotionally—he must feel as though he has lost his spouse in order for that consciousness to be achieved. Marcher does achieve this consciousness but only in the tragic form of Jamesian love: May dies, leaving him alone. Just before he flings himself upon her grave, however, and in an act of complete loss and devotion to May, Marcher’s epiphany comes: “The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived. *She* would have lived” (460). Indeed, both would have lived, but James characteristically emphasizes his deep regard for psychological love as portrayed in a vacuous physical contact he calls passion and the widowhood, emotional or actual, that maintains it.

David McWhirter suggests some interesting conclusions regarding love and James’s execution of passion in his fiction. He argues that because so many of James’s characters are

unable to consummate their love, James, obviously, could not write about love in a positive and affirmative manner. Rather, he found the expression of physical love profoundly difficult, indicating that his fiction represents an uneasiness and inability to represent mature and fulfilling physical feelings. Although biographical readings of James's texts can result in reductive speculations about what they might mean, his work is deeply autobiographical, and because articulated and physical love was a decidedly frustrating and difficult experience for James throughout his life, his fiction often portrays this dissatisfaction. But James's texts *do* discuss love and although he declared he would never marry, stating if he were ever to marry "[he] should be guilty in my own eyes of inconsistency" (Mathiessen and Murdock 314), James chose instead to write about love rather than act on his own observations of others (McWhirter 67). McWhirter is certainly correct that James does not write about love and physical passion the way many of his continental contemporaries do; in fact, he avoids writing about sex altogether. Even his novels about adultery such as *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* make no mention of sexual activity at all. But this does not suggest that his description of love is not mature or fulfilling. In fact, where critics err is in overlooking that a lack of physical contact does not preclude love in his fiction. For James love and death are connected, and death precludes physical passion without excluding one's remembrance of a loved one. For James there cannot be deep and authentic love and affection without the emotional loss that accompanies the death of a lover. The issue is not that physical passion is absent in his texts, but, rather, that love need not be physical in order to be authentic. In fact, James's broad contexts of ethical, ontological, and psychological concerns in his fiction echo a framework of loss from his own life. Just as George Stransom is outraged by his widower friend's remarriage, James felt that his life experiences were self-defining; his experience

with Minny shaped his future work and helped him articulate his problematic expression of love through the metaphor of widowhood and the experience of loss. One can suggest that he echoes Freud's conclusion that "the aim of all life is death" because within death the memory of life can be preserved perfectly and ideally without the negative and inauthentic complications of physical passion (32). Death and, more specifically, widowhood for James creates a "desiring consciousness" that "seeks to save the object of life's poverty and finitude by loading it with rich, multiplicitous, potentially infinite value"; death becomes the impetus for love (McWhirter 6). James, therefore, employs the widow as a figure of perfected consciousness and love. As he articulates in "Is There a Life after Death," consciousness results in a consummate perception of life, which can only be achieved through a love most specifically idealized and immortalized through death. The widow embodies this love because it not only precludes the physical passion so readily destructive of James's aesthetic ideal of the realistic novel, but it also symbolizes the distance and hopelessness that keep love alive and immortal for him. Widowhood represents the love that inspires and enlivens; it is the productive love that immortalizes and makes the reality of continued love possible as it forces the maintenance of idealized and remembered affection.

CHAPTER THREE: WIDOWHOD AND JAMES'S PLACE IN THE SYMPATHETIC
TRADITION

After a brief visit by Henry James to George Eliot's home, shortly before George Henry Lewes, her common-law husband, passed away, Lewes chased after James to demand that he accept two blue volumes, declaring "Ah, those books—take them away, please, away, away!" (Edel *Henry James: A Life* 238). Apparently, Eliot had disliked the book and never finished it but had failed to realize that James was, in fact, its author. The two volumes were, of course, new editions of James's own *The Europeans* (1878). This experience must have been devastating to James, who admired Eliot, yet it captures a common critical misunderstanding about James's work: that Eliot probably viewed James's fiction as a failure. That is, Eliot may have found James's realist credentials suspect because sympathy in her fiction is a central concept in her definition of realism; it may not have lived up to her aesthetic representation of realism or the fundamental goal of sympathy in her fiction: to bridge the gap between classes. *The Europeans*, for example, characterizes the interrelationship between a decadent European nobility and American wealth; there really is no working class in this or any of James's novels. Indeed, the only bridging between the classes is found between wealthy Europeans and wealthy Americans. Perhaps Eliot was simply influenced by what so many of James's European critics had been saying for years, that increasingly his characters were becoming "cold-blooded" and "even more unsympathetic" (Hayes 11), failing again and again because his fiction was "devoid of sympathy" (17). Even some American critics called for James to supply a more "profound and universal human sympathy" in order to

“temper the severity of his scientific apprehension of the natures of men and women” (22) in his fiction.

George Eliot and William Dean Howells promoted sympathy as a key function of literary representation. Their version of sympathy drew upon a broader sentimental culture with roots in Scottish Enlightenment philosophy. In the eighteenth century David Hume and Adam Smith advanced a specific type of sympathy based upon principles of identification with an observed sufferer. Informed by Hume and Smith’s theories, Howells and Eliot made sympathy central to realism as it began to take root first in England and later in the United States. For many authors, Smith and Hume’s theories on sympathy facilitated identification between the middle-class readership and, in Eliot’s case, the working class she tried to uplift through her fiction. In “The Natural History of German Life,” Eliot states that art is “a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot” (277); essentially, Eliot advances identification between her readership and the working class she portrays in her fiction by promoting sympathy in her readers in order to minimize distance between classes. Similarly, Howells insists that literature must be absorbed in the commonplace and must befriend the needy. In *Annie Kilburn* (1889), for example, by attempting to extend sympathy for the working class to his readers by representing the factory worker realistically, Howells illustrates the growing gap between the classes in America, as Annie fails to understand fully the plight of the common laborer. In 1895, Howells even attributed “the chief part of his ethical experience” to the novels of Eliot (*My* 138), suggesting that both novelists were working within the same framework of moral sentiment.

Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759) describes sympathy as a moral sentiment actuated through the logic of mirroring; that is, the spectator, for Smith, imaginatively reconstructs experiences of the observed sufferer (whom he describes as the receiver) in order to achieve sympathy—he or she mirrors observed experiences and internalizes them in order to identify with someone who suffers: it is “by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his [the observed sufferer’s] sensations” (Smith 3). Imagining the suffering of an individual through the practice of spectatorship creates an internalized representation of said suffering, which enables the spectator to experience sympathy. Suggesting that observation is cognitive through the transformation of visualization into imagined suffering, Smith makes sympathy contingent on spectatorship. In other words, the “impression of our own sense” can only be achieved through the observation of suffering (4). Hume’s discussion of sympathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) is also dominated by the moral sense that the experience of spectatorship embodies sympathy. Sympathy, for Hume, is the process of a moral spectator making moral distinctions between what causes “pleasure” or “discomfort” and evaluating a situation as it is *seen* (299). Additionally, Hume argues that sympathy is dependent on perception and the desire to be a spectator of a situation.

Although Hume first introduces the subject of spectatorship, Smith emphasizes the importance of the visual experience in its development. Smith’s version of sympathy is thus voyeuristic because it depends on observation and distance, yet sentimental because it fosters social unity between classes. It entails observation and spectatorship with the ultimate goal of achieving what he describes as “exquisite sensibility” (3), or the joy of watching and being able to feel what the observed is feeling. David Marshall

argues that Smith's visual model for sympathy attempts to transcend "the distance and difference between people" (5). This seems to be the case when Smith argues that, "by changing places . . . with the sufferer . . . we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels" and further adds that this replacement of self with the other is demonstrated "by many obvious observations" (4). In other words, the spectator replaces himself cognitively with the receiver, or the observed, which enables the spectator to feel what the receiver feels, removing the alleged distance between them.

By the time James began writing his long fiction in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the culture of sentiment and its formation of sympathetic identification had become central to American and British novels. Yet critically, where Eliot's and even Howells's fiction has been viewed as promoting sympathy, James, although familiar with the prominence of sentiment in nineteenth-century fiction, has been largely ignored in this respect; that is, sympathy in James's fiction has been overlooked. One could argue that James's texts are assumed to be anti-sympathetic because James so explicitly denounced sentimentalism in his fiction. But Howells and Eliot's were overtly anti-sentimental despite their promotion of sympathy as an aesthetic principle. Yet notwithstanding an apparent lack of sentiment, sympathy is still critically underestimated in James's fiction. Amanda Claybaugh suggests that characterization was the most effective means of evoking sympathy in nineteenth-century fiction, an idea Eliot certainly illustrates in her work when she describes the suffering of the poor in order to teach her readership generosity and expand their sympathies. James chooses to explore class difference rather than promote class unity evoking sympathy by describing not the plight of the poor but of the wealthy yet virtuous American expatriate in a decadent yet

culturally superior Europe. This oversight is perhaps explained in the critical reception of *Daisy Miller* (1878).

Overlooked in the story is the importance of James's stereotyping of Daisy's character. Howells states that so polarizing was the effect of James's story that readers associated themselves as "Daisy Millerites" and "anti-Daisy Millerites" (qtd. in Hocks 3). The uproar, stemming from readers' reactions to whether Daisy's death was justified, divided readers across the Atlantic. As the stereotypical American woman in Europe, did Daisy die because she could not adapt to life in Europe, or did Europe, in not accepting her, simply kill her? James's view in this case is perhaps less important than what his characterization suggests: that he was cognizant of the importance of characterization in his novels and intentionally created characters who evoked sympathetic responses from his readers. James's readership's reaction to *Daisy Miller* thus represents just one example of his prominent use of characterization to promote sympathy in his fiction. Essentially exploring class difference between Americans and Europeans, James effectuates sympathy from his readers, placing him in the same sympathetic tradition of Howells and Eliot.

Where James differs from his contemporaries, although not dramatically, is in the type of characters he employs to promote sympathy. Where Howells and Eliot use class difference and realistic depictions to characterize the poor and therefore promote sympathy, James appropriates Smith and Hume's theories of moral sentiment through the characterization of widows in his texts. Widows are universally recognized as characters who evoke sympathy, and their place in the culture of sentiment is pervasive and evident in nineteenth-century mourning. Indeed, sympathy is easily assigned to widows since

they are characters perceived outside the culturally superior position of marriage, frequently requiring financial and emotional support. The widow's place in sentimental culture is clear, yet James, similar to Eliot and Howells, despised the sentimental tradition, forcing one to question his pervasive use of widows in his fiction. Perhaps this question can be answered by analyzing the very reason James is often dismissed from the same category as Howells and Eliot whose agendas so explicitly included promoting sympathy among their readers. James's agenda differs from Howells and Eliot's in that he rarely writes about the poor; his characters are more commonly wealthy Europeans or American expatriates. One can, however, still feel sympathy for the rich, and readers of James often do. This is clearly the case in *Daisy Miller* as Daisy's pursuit of love is spoiled because she cannot find her place in Europe and subsequently dies despite her wealth. It is, in fact, the theme of love coupled with the loss a protagonist inevitably experiences, as seen in *Daisy Miller* and James's other texts, that illustrates most clearly why widows populate James's texts. Indeed, in order to avoid association with the sentimental yet still evoke sympathy in his readers, James employs widows in his texts not to elicit sympathy for themselves, but, rather, to awaken a sympathetic response for the protagonist seeking love.

Consequently, there are few characters in James's fiction more uniquely suited to the task of spectatorship than widows. Because widows no longer participate in courtship and marriage, the central theme of much of James's fiction, they remain outside conventional society, serving as observers. James's other most dominant theme, death, also illustrates the importance of widows. Death and marriage intersect in the figure of the widow, and while James's protagonists seek marriage, death also drives his plots

since it frustrates a protagonist's realization of marriage repeatedly. Deathbed romances, necrophilia, and the dead as sacred, as seen in "The Altar of the Dead," indicate a connection between death and marriage for James. As the interplay between death and marriage informs his narrative structure, he places widows in the privileged position of having achieved the married state and having experienced and survived the death of a spouse. The widow's role in James's fiction is important, then, for two reasons: first, widows are removed from the married state, socially excluded and therefore ideal for spectatorship, and, second, widows are familiar with James's most dominant themes of love and death, therefore also ideally suited to provide a sympathetic perspective of the failure of romantic love.

Because widows have experienced precisely what James's protagonists are fated to experience also, Smith and Hume's theories of spectatorship and sympathy greatly inform James's version of realist sympathy. Smith suggests that sympathy is notable in the character who can "change places . . . with the sufferer" (4). For Smith, sympathy is established when people "conceive or . . . imagine that [they] are in it," when they can imagine themselves in a similar situation to that of the observed. This is, arguably, more easily achieved by having been through something similar. Indeed, Smith suggests that one can experience more effective sympathy because the observed suffering already has meaning (4). According to Eliot, this true association stems from the "raw material of moral sentiment" ("Natural" 276), that is, the recognition of having experienced something similar to that of the observed sufferer. In this sense widows, having experienced not only death and marriage but also the suffering that may accompany both, can bridge the gap between James's readership and his protagonist. In other words,

widows, privileged because of their previous experience with both marriage and death, are uniquely suited to “change places” with a sufferer, thereby illustrating for the reader how to feel sympathy for the protagonist.

In his treatise Smith proposes three specific components that must be achieved before one can attain authentic sympathy. The first of these, alluded to above, indicates that an exchange must be performed between the sympathizer and the observer that simulates “changing places,” so that one becomes conscious of another’s suffering. The second is what Marshall describes as “distance and difference” between people (5). Smith argues that compassion arises when the spectator considers what he would feel if reduced to “the same unhappy situation” of the sufferer (8). In addition to Marshall’s argument that sympathy depends on distance and Smith’s premise that it depends on a physical viewing of suffering, sympathy is contingent on a difference between the sufferer and the spectator of the sufferer. Eliot adopts this principle in her “The Natural History of German Life,” indicating that sympathy is the key to bridging the gap between the higher and lower social classes and suggesting also that sympathy cannot be attained if there is no social barrier for compassion to overcome (281). In fact, in order for the pathos of identification to be achieved, a measure of separation that is both physical and sociological must exist—physical distance and, more importantly, class separation between the spectator and the sufferer. According to Smith, distance and difference and the act of exchange by placing oneself in the position of the sufferer are conditional for a spectatorial imagination in which the sympathizer reconstructs the experience of sufferers and mirrors their suffering; authentic sympathy cannot be achieved without the observation of suffering.

According to Claybaugh, the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) marked the successful transformation of Smith and Hume's theories on sympathy to the literary marketplace. What this represents is the beginning of a culture of sentiment that moved from Smith and Hume's political philosophies to literary applications. In a way, Stowe's text ushered in the beginning of a literary marketplace, addressing the demand not only for reformist literature but also for a literature shaped by the aesthetic goals of realism and the galvanizing power of sympathy. Stowe's success portended the beginning of a transatlantic publishing tradition, as editors from Great Britain and the United States published works describing the deplorable living and working conditions of the poor, immigrants, women, blacks, and orphans. Naturally, all three authors participated in the realist tradition James became heavily invested in, since much of his work he wrote in Great Britain, but published later in both England and the United States (Claybaugh 19). The fact that Eliot and Howells wrote for an increasingly transatlantic audience, no doubt ensured a steady and ever growing readership for them, but James, too, familiar with British and American realism and the prevalence of sympathy as an aesthetic form in realist fiction, also became a product of and participated in this transatlantic exchange of ideas. Indeed, James, as a transatlantic figure, also wrote fiction that appealed thematically to a growing taste for realistic depictions of everyday life, albeit the life of the rich, shaped by the dominant culture of sentiment. That is, James wrote fiction that was also sympathetic in origin, rooted in the sentimental tradition from which he has so often been excluded.

Howells views the English novel in steady decline from the realist tradition of truthful depiction because of its "mania for romanticism" (*Criticism* 13). Of course,

Howells and James actively codified their specific brand of realism during the 1870s and '80s, arguing for what James calls the “air of reality” (“Art” 14), and what Howells labels the “truthful treatment of material” (*Criticism* 77). This brand of realism was rather subjective, but Howells, in particular, uses *taste* as the capacity to discern “a relationship with the real,” as Phillip Barrish recounts (8), which in turn suggests an individual connection to realistic descriptions in an effort to evoke an emotional response. Eliot, the chief proponent of realism in Great Britain, argues that realistic portrayals teach sympathy; in fact, her wish was only to have her readers “imagine and . . . feel the pains and joys of those who differ from ourselves” (“Natural” 275).

All three authors were connected through the aesthetic goal of realism shared across the Atlantic, committed, that is, to representing the world as it really is—a world more and more symmetrical, economically, socially, and even aesthetically. Indeed, realism and the culture of sentiment became the most coherent literary movement of the nineteenth century in which the fundamental ideas of accurate representation to “cease to lie about life” and “portray men and women as they are” united authors across the Atlantic (Howells *My* 51). Despite James’s reluctance to describe the poor as Howells and especially Eliot do, James’s place as participant in the aesthetic agenda advanced by Howells and Eliot is firmly established because he uses sympathy in his fiction, not to bridge the gap between the working and upper classes but, rather, to foster feelings of understanding and sympathy from readers towards protagonists seeking marriage who never quite realize it.

Frank Christianson suggests that Eliot’s use of the term sympathy conveys both an aesthetic and an ideological implication that questions artistic standards of the novel in

the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (56). Additionally, Claybaugh argues that Eliot participated in a realistic agenda to expand the domain of representation by depicting persons and experiences previously ignored (6). For many authors this meant writing truthfully about prisoners, prostitutes, factory workers, and numerous other characters found throughout the rapidly industrializing western world. James chose to write about a different type of emerging character, the American expatriate. Although wealthy, expatriates such as Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, and Christopher Newman, all demand a certain level of sympathy for their situation and their suffering. Feeling sympathy for many of these characters, however, is a difficult task. Financially, they are all wealthy, yet, emotionally, each is found lacking. Indeed, James characterizes his protagonists as imperfect without a spouse, whom they are, in turn, fated never to obtain. Suffering and its accordant sympathy, therefore, develop, as one realizes that James's protagonists will never experience the authentic love they long for in marriage.

Spacious European palaces, perpetual travel, and rich American expatriates, all favorite subjects for James, are hardly the topics Eliot chose to write about, but they do help explain who James is as an author. One can assume that James wrote about the expatriate experience because it was so familiar to him; his texts show surprisingly little interest in representing the working public so common in Howells and Eliot's works because his experience with such was limited. One exception, of course, is *The Bostonians* (1886) in which James discusses feminism and woman's suffrage although in decidedly unflattering terms. If *The Bostonians* serves as a representation of James's attempt to identify with his audience, he was not very successful. In it he set out to write a novel "as American, as possible" (Edel and Powers 19). Indeed, it represents his

attempt to write “a very *American* tale, a tale very characteristic of our social condition” (20). The novel failed, yet James was drawn to archetypal writing because of its ability to “represent life” (“Art” 5), and James believed that the novel must be instructive and the novelist must write from his own experience, thereby requiring him to make his characters as real as possible. Claybaugh argues that James acts as a reformer in his fiction and was attracted to realism because of its dependence on type and character (146). Additionally, she suggests that it is not the industrial machine of the factory that the author must reform through identification in fiction but the individual. The individual reader not only must feel sympathy in an emotional and imaginative sense for the sufferer represented in fiction but must also identify with a character cognitively; the reader must connect with the protagonist through the mind: “sympathy is not only affective but also cognitive. To feel sympathy with a slave or a worker is to recognize that he or she is a person in some way like oneself, and this makes his or her suffering unacceptable” (Smith 24). What this indicates is that the experience of sympathy is individual and depends upon identification with the character requiring sympathy. Eliot chooses to uplift the poor with her class of realism, and James chooses, instead, to write about wealthy expatriates who suffer not from hunger and overwork but, rather, from an inability to find happiness in love. In either case, “we need a true conception of the popular character to guide our sympathies rightly” (“Natural” 278). Indeed, as Eliot suggests and James also tries to convey in his fiction, sympathy is only possible if fictional characters, rich or poor, are portrayed realistically.

Unlike Eliot, whose notion of sympathy requires an authentic representation of the poor in order to manage the distance between the classes, James removes himself

from the sordid topics other realist authors felt compelled to treat as part of their aesthetic agendas. His place within the culture of sentiment is, therefore, tentative because he refuses to evoke sympathy for characters and types common in sentimental fiction such as the freed slave, the factory worker, or the suffering immigrant. The absence of these characters raises questions about the fundamental role of sympathy in Jamesian realism, an anomaly possibly explained by the fact that his privileged upbringing removed him from many of the issues both American and British writers felt compelled to represent in their fiction during the latter half of the nineteenth century. James's family was decidedly unsympathetic in the traditional evocation of suffering toward the plight of the commoner advanced in Eliot's work. Reflecting what Christianson calls Eliot's "rational altruism" or charitable acts motivated more out of societal obligation than sympathy (56)—action motivated by one's mind and not one's emotions—James's family is ostensibly unsentimental in its discussion of sympathy. Kristin Boudreau opines that the Jameses were aware of the "superiority of sensibility but also had ample evidence of the difficulties of sympathy in a world of diverse individuals" (167). Cognizant of the importance of sympathy in social cohesion, the Jameses also recognized the potential problems of performing sympathy within an increasingly diverse public sphere, an insecurity clearly depicted in their writing. For example, William James observes sympathy as a psychological phenomenon deeply ingrained in suffering and danger; his father, Henry James, Sr., describes sympathy as the "flatulent fruit of sentimentality" (qtd. in James *Notes* 375); and James's sister, Alice, refers to it as "philanthropic mush" (Edel *Diary* 83). Despite this familial tradition of anti-sentimentality, however, James's fiction contains blatant sympathetic elements. Boudreau argues that the Jameses dealt

with the difficulties of “performing sympathy in a public arena of alien subjectivities . . . by internalizing the sentiment” (187), suggesting that they privatized sentiment in their work because sympathy was more applicable and effective in the personal sphere than the public (167). Without abandoning the culture of sentiment developed by Smith and Hume and promulgated by Eliot and Howells, James handled sentiment in his fiction through his privatized expatriate experience and not the public experience dominated by the working class. In his case, again, this internalization is reflected in his ability to create sympathy by associating identification with the mental suffering of emerging consciousness in his characters. In doing so, he seems to have adopted his father’s Swedenborgian belief in the importance of the relationship between God and self by making sentiment and feeling sympathy a deeply personal experience, an emotion still dependent on suffering yet charged by the cognitive interaction of the self with the other.

According to Dorothea Krook, James’s fiction deals almost exclusively with suffering, though not in the class-differentiated sense that Eliot proposes. In fact, James writes exclusively about a certain social class whose “sufferings” Krook states, “is the kind peculiar to the highly intelligent and highly imaginative—full vessels of consciousness” (16). She adds that suffering and consciousness are related because “those on whom nothing is lost” and those “who are all the time exposed,” as James often described his characters, suffer because said suffering—that is, “suffering illuminated by understanding, or the passionate aspiration after understanding . . . that is redemptive” (17)—leads to enlightenment. Although this type of suffering appears different from that depicted in Eliot’s fiction, Smith is not specific about what type of suffering must be observed in order to feel sympathy; he merely suggests that

spectatorship is the key to identification, and observation of any suffering (that of both poor and rich) can lend itself to sympathy with the observed. Likewise, James's wealthy characters, although not representative of the working class, do represent American expatriate life. James's early novels, in fact, were read in Great Britain partly as ethnographic accounts of typical American men and women (Claybaugh 146). Alex Zwedling also adds that James's characters act as "specimens" and his novels as "romantic sociology" (144). James's rather anthropological description of his characters indicates that because they are depicted realistically, they can also evoke a certain sympathy in his European readers and vice versa. Suffering caused by awareness of one's surroundings, therefore, places James within the sympathetic tradition of Howells, Eliot, and other transatlantic realists that he is too often excluded from because of his refusal to write about the poor and downtrodden. Although one can speculate that Eliot would disagree with James's suggestion that the wealthy American expatriate suffers because of his or her intelligence, suffering and sympathy clearly become important elements of realistic fiction for James in his attempts to paint American expatriate life as truthfully as possible. Howells encouraged James in his efforts to write about his experiences in Europe and argued for literature's place in nurturing feelings of sympathy for various forms of human suffering among all classes. Adding to this, Howells mentions that when the novel meets its obligation to "portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know," it achieves its goal of "widen[ing] the bounds of sympathy" (*My* 17).

James may also have been attracted to sympathy in his writing because of its dependence on character and type (Claybaugh 146). In fact, in an attempt to rise above

national identity James employed specific representational figures who were familiar to readers on either side of the Atlantic. Although labeled by his contemporaries and possibly Eliot as unsympathetic, James, aware that the wealthy could more easily permeate national boundaries, reduced his characters to types no longer defined by their nation of origin. Indeed, one is often confused as to who is European and who American in many of his stories. In fact, part of James's aesthetic agenda was the removal of national identification in his characters because of the frequent dismissal he received from Europe's literati during his travels. For example, even the reputed typicality of James's novels depends on a denial of the Anglo-American world, as he discusses in his theories of the novel in "The Art of Fiction," where he states that "the English novel" is, "of course," the "American novel as well" (25).

But the other character besides the wealthy expatriate most overlooked in James's fiction, one not only central and readily recognizable within sentimental culture but also pervasive in James's work, is the widow. Paul Giles suggests that American authors reinvented aspects of English culture in an effort to advance their aesthetic designs and adds that American national identity arose partly through narratives of dislocation and alterity (1)—an association readily applicable to widows in both the United States and Great Britain. This alterity stems from widows' dislocation and inability to contribute procreative power within a community because of the death of a spouse. As characters no longer producing children, widows are often perceived as dependent on society for financial support (Lopata 16) and are, therefore, perceived as being outside of society, no longer contributing to it. Ostracized and dislocated, widows were often associated with

witchcraft, removed from, yet forced to look in on society, distancing them from conventional social paradigms that favor marriage.

Although James was never married and never conventionally widowed, Edel often describes him as the “restless analyst,” frequently “reduced . . . to his favorite pastime of watching” (*Life* 45). Indeed, James’s underlying tone in *The American Scene* (1907) is one of deracination and dislocation, relying on embedded memories of his past to define how he observes the present. In other words, having lived as an expatriate for so long, he was unsure of his place as an “American” and preferred to observe his native land as an outsider. Likewise, through dislocation within a society, widows are often forced to observe a world changed, one no longer receptive to them, resulting in their confusion about their place in it. James’s agenda involves widows as representative of dislocation in order to explain the isolation he and so many of his protagonists experience. James’s characterization of the widow and Smith’s notion that one must be distant and different from the sufferer in order to achieve sympathy are two important parallels in understanding sympathy in James’s novels. According to Helen Lopata, widows are excluded from social integration because society has no place for them. With the loss of a spouse, widows are forced to negotiate social systems and find a place within a society discriminately favorable to the marriage state. Especially during the nineteenth century, when women gained much of their social status from their husbands, widows were often seen as “somehow different or unable to participate ‘normally’ in conventional interaction” (5).

Smith discusses the importance of accurate representation and sympathy by suggesting that sympathy is dependent upon spectatorship and that it can only reach an

imperfect level of understanding if one is not informed of a situation: “Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect” (7); authentic sympathy is only achieved when the spectator has been *informed* of its cause, leading to Smith’s first component on the path to identification: exchange between spectator and sufferer. What Smith suggests by this is that sympathy can only be obtained through information gathered by observation. Applied to James, Smith’s theory cements James’s place in sympathetic writing by informing the role of widows in his fiction. In fact, suffering in his fiction further prepares James’s widowed characters for idealized sympathy as they observe James’s protagonists most exquisite suffering: the death of a spouse or lover. In the case of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), two of James’s most famous protagonists, the recently widowed Mrs. Touchett observes Isabel’s debut into European society and unhappy marriage to Gilbert Osmond, and Milly’s widowed friend, Susan Stringham, offers the most sympathy to Milly, as she navigates the love triangle of herself, Kate, and Densher. Touchett serves as spectator of Isabel and even advisor, encouraging her not to marry the widower, Osmond, while Susan accompanies Milly across Europe in her associations with her deceitful friends. Ultimately, only the widowed Susan can observe Milly’s death, and only she can provide authentic sympathy for Milly who will lose not only the ability to love but also all her money with her death. Because she is poorer than Milly and therefore of another class, Susan does what no other character can; her widowhood places her ideally in a position of spectator of Milly’s suffering, and she can offer Milly sympathy because her own

corresponding suffering best provides the exchange that Smith argues is necessary to “conceive” and “be affected by what [the sufferer] feels” (4).

Smith indicates that by “putting [oneself] in their situation,” the spectator can more perfectly sympathize with those who suffer (9). Hume also proposes that one is capable of feeling a deeper sympathy for the observed by relating to similar experiences. In other words, having experienced corresponding suffering, the spectator creates more authentic sympathy. “Relations of resemblance” (Hume 60) tie widowed characters more closely to the protagonist than any other characters in James’s fiction. Sympathy, therefore, “does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from the situation which excites it” (Smith 7). The widow, as lover of a dead spouse, understands the situation James’s protagonists find themselves in, i.e., that of forlorn characters seeking marriage and then suddenly losing it. In fact, authentic sympathy often stems from widows’ previous access to authentic love before the death of their spouses. This previous access allows widows to sympathize with protagonists because widows can more easily represent moral sentiment through Smith’s notion of accurate mirroring—having loved, lost, and suffered, widows sympathize not because they “change places,” but because they can exchange suffering for sympathy, having been in the place of suffering the protagonist feels. For example, the young and beautiful Claire de Cintre of *The American* (1877) feels sympathy for her potential lover, Christopher Newman, through repeated observations of him. She rarely speaks to him when he courts her, preferring to sit and watch him. So distraught is she when her family refuses him that she places herself in a convent and commits to becoming a nun, the ultimate act of spectatorship—removed from society, Claire arrives at an ideal position for offering

sympathy, that of the cloistered nun. Similarly, the widower, Lambert Strether, of *The Ambassadors* (1903) sympathizes with Chad's frustration with his mother's desire for him to return home and accompanies Chad for a longer period in Europe. Both of these widowed characters are deeply sympathetic, according to Smith and Hume's explication of sympathy, because they are outside of the corresponding protagonists' situations yet appear to change places with them and serve as spectators of their suffering.

Hume suggests that spectators are only informed through experiences of likeness, of "resemblance" or "vivacity of conception," and only thereby can they experience identification (317). The sympathizer experiences sentiments belonging to others in an effort to resemble their suffering and sympathize more effectively. According to Hume, "Nature has preserv'd a great resemblance among all human creatures . . . we never remark any passion or principles in ourselves"; he adds that resemblance "contribute[s] to make us enter into the sentiments of others" (318). Indeed, he argues that sympathy is only one's own experience as one perceives oneself to be like someone else; sympathy is the process through which "the mind passes easily from the idea of ourselves to that of any other object related to us" (340). Despite experiences of likeness as prerequisite for authentic sympathy, Smith also indicates that sympathy demands a level of detachment and distance from the observed. In order for the spectator to sympathize with the observed, a degree of separation for the subject of sympathy to experience the sentiments of another must exist. Indeed, sympathy represents the locus "where the mind passes easily from the idea of ourselves to that of any object related to us" (Hume 340). Smith and Hume's theories on spectatorial sympathy provide a unique insight into James's characterization of widows and firmly place him within the culture of sentiment as a

writer of fiction. Indeed, James's pervasive use of widows as characters indicates that, as a realist author keenly aware of the translatability of the widow between Atlantic audiences, his characterization of widowhood is intentional. Although overlooked in his fiction, widows earn a unique and privileged position because they foster sympathy for a protagonist and become representative of James's aesthetic agenda of establishing authentic love for his readers. Etymologically, "sympathy" derives from the Greek words "syn" and "pathos," meaning "together" and "feeling," suggesting by extension that it embodies a coming together of emotion. Widows, as described by James and informed by Smith and Hume as different and distant yet uniquely able to associate well with suffering through the exchange of like experiences, lend themselves to emotional togetherness and embody an ability to identify with the suffering of James's protagonists as the ideal spectators of suffering.

CHAPTER FOUR: SPECTATORIAL SYMPATHY IN *The Portrait of a Lady* AND *The Wings of the Dove*

According to Adam Smith's doctrine of sympathy as outlined in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), sympathy is dependent on a spectator's cognition of a person's feelings or emotions. It is the projection of a spectator's feelings that promulgates sympathy. For Smith, sympathy cannot be detached from spectatorship; the two are linked because it is spectators who sympathize. In many ways Smith echoes the conclusions of the "moral sense" philosophers, Anthony Cooper and Francis Hutcheson. But even more closely, Smith resembles David Hume's anti-Hobbesian doctrine on moral theory, as outlined in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740). Like Smith, Hume argues that sympathy is the basis of moral spectatorship; it is the product of an imaginative act that brings observed feelings into existence and sustains them. Yet for Smith and Hume there are significant differences between their concepts of sympathy. Humean sympathy is essentially a principle of communication by which a spectator comes to experience passion for the agent whom he is observing, while Smith promotes a sympathy in which one's imagination is engaged; as spectators, seeing an agent suffer forms within one's imagination a copy of such "impressions of our own sense," similar to what one experiences when having been in a situation of the kind the agent is in (3). Most important, however, is that both moral theories depend upon the presence and role of a spectator in the evocation of sympathy between agents.

Hume's moral theory involves a sequence of events beginning with the three psychologically distinct players he outlines in Book III: the moral agent, the receiver, and the moral spectator (293). The moral agent is motivated by character traits, whether virtuous or

vicious, whose actions will have an effect on a receiver who responds either positively or negatively, based upon the agent's actions (66). The spectator observes the feelings experienced by the receiver and sympathetically experiences similar feelings along with the receiver. If those feelings are positive and the receiver experiences pleasure from the agent's actions, then the spectator's sympathetic feelings of pleasure constitute a moral approval of the agent's original actions (59). For Hume, by sympathetically experiencing observed pleasure, the spectator pronounces an agent's character as virtuous, or vicious if the sympathetic response to the observed suffering of the receiver is negative. He suggests that "all enquiries concerning moral distinctions . . . make us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness from the survey of any character . . . to satisfy us why the character is laudable or blameable, virtuous or vicious" (247). Hume adds that the spectator's response to the receiver is an emotional one and thereby represents a moral approval of the agent's actions, and that rational responses, such as judgments about conceptual relations and facts, are unsympathetic and therefore invalid (59). Hume states that this moral approval is "supposed to influence our passions and actions" and therefore our sympathies and "go beyond the . . . indolent judgments of the understanding" (235), judgments he later calls "false and erroneous" (236). So important, in fact, is the moral approval of the spectator that Hume argues it produces additional feelings of love and pride within the spectator for the receiver and bridges the distance between them.

Smith's assertions are similar. He regards the origin of moral sentiment as an exchange between sympathy and passion. This process consists of placing oneself in imagination in the place of another. What Smith suggests here is that sympathy is generated when one conceives the self as undergoing the same events and, therefore, the same feelings

as another person. One does not have to experience the other person's feelings literally; rather, imagination copies one's own feelings from earlier occasions and supplies them renewed to one's mind (25). In this sense, Smith suggests that a sympathetic response is aroused more by the knowledge of a situation in which one's feelings first arise than it is by the perception of the other's feelings. To illustrate this point, Smith cites what is arguably the most poignant call for sympathy: death. "We sympathize even with the dead" (16), he states, suggesting that the exercise of sympathy brings pleasure both to those who give and those who receive it, even those who have no feeling at all, such as the dead. How effective one is as a sympathizer, however, depends on the passions of the spectator, whether a spectator makes judgments based on reason and understanding and is therefore unsympathetic or a spectator's judgments are motivated by a projection or extension of one's own feelings and not the judgments or false apprehensions of the observed. Passions originating with the body, such as greed and indifference, are objects of disgust rather than of sympathy for Smith. Those that originate in the imagination, however, such as loss or emotional suffering, can readily take on the configuration of the imagination of the person affected. For Smith these passions fall into three classifications: unsocial passions, social passions, and selfish passions. Unsocial passions are hatred and resentment. They tend to arouse feelings of enmity and rivalry and tend to drive people apart and destroy society. Social passions, such as generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, friendship, and other benevolent affections, are enjoyable to the spectator and the receiver and tend to bring society together. Selfish passions are grief and joy over particular good or bad fortune of the person by whom they are felt. These passions become neither as disagreeable as the unsocial passions nor as agreeable as the social passions (41-53).

In James's fiction widows become a vehicle through which he explores these passions. Indeed, James uses spectatorship as a means of examining the possibilities and limits of sympathetic identification between his characters, and widows serve as the nexus of spectatorship and sympathy in his fiction; how widowed and non-widowed characters exercise sympathy for each other reveals just how James may be exploring the various effects of spectatorship. In both *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) James's characterization of the widowed and the emotionally widowed serve as a meditation on the sympathetic process, a key feature in literary realism. No characters in James's texts illustrate his experimentation with sympathy and spectatorship better than Isabel Archer and Ralph Touchett. Ralph is reduced to perpetual spectatorship of his one love, Isabel, until he eventually dies of consumption, never actually realizing his love for her. Likewise, Isabel sees his ghost after he has died when she realizes that "for an instant . . . he was standing there—a vague, hovering figure in the vagueness of the room. She stared a moment; she saw his face—his kind eyes; then she saw there was nothing. She was not afraid; she was only sure" (552). Sure of what, James never says, but one can assume that Isabel has finally experienced loss, the social passion that, according to Smith, unites and binds people together (47). She knows that Ralph has always loved her, and James causes Isabel to mourn Ralph just as he has always mourned her. She is, as Simon Critchley observes, "In mourning," an experience in which "the self is consumed by the pain of the other's death and is possessed by the alterity of that which it cannot possess: the absence of the beloved" (211).

Ralph, as spectator, is interesting because his character so evidently reflects James himself. Both Ralph and James suffered from an "obscure hurt," which seems to incapacitate them their entire lives (Edel *Henry James: A Life* 57), and just as James spent most of his

days in quiet observation of others, especially his cousin Minny Temple, on whom he based Isabel Archer, likewise Ralph is also a spectator in *Portrait*. Isabel, who sees herself as an observer of sorts also, is surprised and a little disturbed by Ralph's declaration that "however much you might watch me I should be watching you more" (52). Ralph obviously means Isabel no harm and is, no doubt, the most sympathetic character in the novel, meaning his spectatorship is not selfish; it is motivated by a social passion that reflects the generosity and humanity he feels toward Isabel. But Ralph's spectatorship also embodies elements of a perverse gaze that moves beyond the ideal sympathy his emotional widowhood creates. In fact, his gaze carries elements of perversity in the Foucaultian sense, which illustrates that spectatorship can become proprietary. Laura Hinton suggests something similar. She refers to Hume's statement that "[t]he spectator is perverse, lacking fixed moral subjectivity or ontological shape. He exists representationally as a kind of mirror through which moral images are reflected and received" (54), and argues that one of the problems with Hume's theory of moral spectatorship is his failure to specify a fixed identity for the spectator (93).

The spectator, then, represents a speculum that reflects what may be perceived as morally correct. In other words, the spectator is representative of morality, but that morality is unfixed—it merely reflects the morality of the observed. In Ralph's case, his morality reflects Isabel's. That is, it reflects what he sees her do. Ralph's sympathy for Isabel is a reflection of the "softness," "fine intelligence," and "sympathy" she extends to others (156). In light of Ralph's father's comment that "there will be plenty of spectators" for Isabel, Ralph's position is precarious since he knows—similar to James's role of spectator of Minny—that he is reduced to the role of spectator because of competing suitors for Isabel's

hand, yet also like James, his emotional widowhood makes him ideally suited to the task (141). Michel Foucault comments that perverse pleasure “comes of exercising a power that . . . monitors, watches, spies, searches out . . . brings to light” but also “kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it” (45). Although Isabel’s other suitors, Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood, and the infamous widower, Gilbert Osmond, all serve as spectators to some extent, none exercises this kind of evasive power over Isabel as completely as does Ralph.⁶ He wants power over Isabel because he knows this is the only way he can maintain spectatorship of her. Isabel “likes to do everything for herself and has no belief in anyone’s power to help her” (14). In fact, at the beginning of the novel Ralph tells Lord Warburton that Isabel ““would never forgive me if I should . . . go to Liverpool to meet her”” (14); she would not approve of his seeing her without his permission. Ralph, therefore, knows that he must “evade this power” and participate in an act of voyeuristic ownership by facilitating opportunities to see Isabel without her knowing. In fact, she refuses to marry Caspar Goodwood precisely because he wants to exercise power over her: “she had felt [his] energy . . . and power,” causing the “idea of diminished liberty” to become “particularly disagreeable to her” (162). The power to observe that Ralph longs for derives from his asking Mr. Touchett to alter his will in Isabel’s favor just before Mr. Touchett dies to enable her to fulfill her dreams of seeing the world. Ralph essentially relinquishes half his fortune in order to maintain his spectatorship of Isabel, illustrating Ralph’s proprietary sense

⁶ In chapter 21 James describes a conversation between Isabel and Ralph in which she asks him whether he knew about Mr. Touchett’s generosity in his will. Ralph, the reason for this generosity, speaks for his father but also for himself and takes pleasure in being elusive about why Mr. Touchett left her half his fortune. All he states is that the money was left to her for “so beautifully existing,” to which Isabel asks, “Is that why your father did it—for your amusement” (210)? Indeed, Ralph takes pleasure and amusement from seeing Isabel “spread her wings and rise above the ground” (211).

of spectatorship. He states his intentions to her unabashedly: ““What’s the use of adoring you without hope of a reward if I can’t have a few compensations? What’s the use of being ill and disabled and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life if I can’t see the show when I’ve paid so much for my ticket?”” (140). Whether his disability or his donation of half his fortune as the high price Ralph pays for his spectatorship of Isabel is intentionally ambiguous, what is clear is that Ralph represents a model of spectatorship that is both perverse and ideal. It is perverse, even voyeuristic, because Ralph is always hidden from view, and his reason for observing Isabel and his endowment to her is hidden from Isabel. Indeed, what sort of “compensation” does Ralph want from his observation of Isabel? Yet the motivation behind his spectatorship seems innocuous despite the fact that he has essentially purchased access to her because, compared to Osmond, his spectatorship is motivated by kindness, not greed. In fact, his “passion,” as Smith describes the motivation behind spectatorship, is, in fact, social in that it is based on friendship, not resentment and jealousy, as are Osmond’s unsocial passions (47).

Ralph’s confession to Isabel is laced with additional implications, the most important of which is that he, as Foucault states, “evade[s] the power” he has over Isabel’s future by simply denying that he ever facilitated her wealth (45); he wants to give Isabel his money, but he realizes that she must never know it was his or he will cease to be a spectator—a role he is comfortable with because he knows that she can never really love him. Additionally, Ralph’s pleasure comes from seeing Isabel live her life as a wealthy expatriate. ““It was for you that I wanted—that I wanted to live. But I’m of no use to you,”” Ralph declares to her repeatedly, subverting his love for her, never actually admitting it fully, knowing full well that she could never love him in return (481). Indeed, Ralph’s primary concern and love are

for Isabel. “I must watch over her,” he declares, and he does (286), becoming the ideal spectator because his love is deep and motivated by generosity. Indeed, it transcends life; he learns to love her beyond the grave. This occurs at the end of the novel when Ralph transforms from spectator to spectre; Isabel is the first person he appears to after his death, yet she is not afraid of his ghost. As a spectre, Ralph smiles at her, suggesting that he, now dead, will continue his role of spectator only in the ethereal state of the spectre. Hume indicates that, “whenever an object has a tendency to produce pleasure in the possessor, or in other words, is the *cause* of pleasure, it is sure to please the spectator, by a delicate sympathy with the possessor” (576-77). Possession is important because it represents the distinction between Ralph and Osmond’s sympathies. Ralph possesses Isabel only in the sense that he longs to watch the object he has purchased, and this brings him pleasure. Osmond, on the other hand, possesses Isabel as one does an art object, constantly scrutinizing and criticizing it, leaving him largely unsympathetic to her.

At the beginning of the novel, Ralph and Isabel speak of the many superstitions surrounding Gardencourt, the Touchetts’ home where Isabel has settled. Isabel suggests that there may be a ghost in the house to which Ralph retorts that in order to see a spectre, one must ““have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it”” (44). Of course, she sees the spectre of Ralph at the end of the novel, but, sympathetically, the two have become intertwined; that is, their relationship becomes one based on Hume’s formula of sympathy with the interaction between the spectator and the receiver, just as Ralph sympathizes with Isabel when her marriage to Gilbert Osmond deteriorates. Ralph realizes that Isabel will never love him nor that Gilbert will ever love Isabel as he does. In this sense, Ralph experiences the same emotional

widowhood James may have experienced as a young man after his cousin Minny died. Not surprisingly, both James and Ralph try to make themselves feel better about this unreciprocated love when Mr. Touchett declares that ““on the whole, [one] had better not marry their cousins,”” resigning Ralph to a life of unmitigated spectatorship (172), as James had previously resigned himself.

Ralph’s emotional widowhood fosters an ideal sympathy that Osmond cannot replicate. As noted in chapter one, although Osmond is a widower, he has already loved and had a child with a previous lover. For James, this prevents Osmond from establishing ideal sympathy or even authentic love for Isabel, even though she is his wife. Critchley argues that for Hegel, the child symbolizes the union between a man and a woman and represents “that in which the relationship gradually passes away” (273). This is true in the case of Osmond and his daughter, Pansy, from his previous marriage, in that she represents the passing away of Osmond’s previous relationship because the manner in which he treats her is based on the trauma of loss. Pansy represents the sign of Osmond’s first wife’s own mortality, and because that wife is dead, Osmond treats Pansy as an art object that must be protected—she must be observed in a manner remarkably different from the spectatorship that promotes ideal sympathy. Pansy, although sixteen years old when first introduced in the novel, is treated as a child by Osmond and often “put into a cage” (326), just as he wishes to cage Isabel. Additionally, Osmond dislikes Isabel after they marry because she disobeys his wishes (unlike Pansy who has learned to obey), and although he is widowed and should represent ideal sympathy, his selfish financial motives and his previous marriage prevent this.

In Osmond one sees a different classification of Smith’s passions from what one sees in Ralph. Where Ralph can sympathize more effectively with Isabel because his passions are

motivated by generosity and kindness—his spectatorship is based on social passions—Osmond is clearly classified as a sympathizer through his unsocial passions. Motivated by greed (Osmond marries Isabel in order to purchase more art), Osmond resents Ralph and eventually Isabel when she proves less than a perfect purchase. Osmond's passions, although still passions of the imagination, arouse in him, as another spectator of Isabel, disappointment and resentment towards her which eventually destroy their marriage. Smith maintains that in this case, "we are concerned with both"; readers worry about the receiver of the resentment and the one feeling the resentment, "and our fear for what the one may suffer, dampens our resentment for what the other has suffered," causing sympathy to "fall short of the passion that naturally animates him" (42). Initially, readers are concerned with both Osmond and Isabel's unhappiness, yet his mistreatment and their realization that his displeasure is motivated by greed cause them to sympathize with Isabel. They learn to sympathize more deeply with her than they do with him, despite his disappointment in her, because his passions are so decidedly "unsocial" compared to Ralph's.

Where Ralph and Osmond differ, despite their love for Isabel, lies directly in the articulation of their sympathies. Ralph is the ultimate spectator because of his invalidity, that is, his inability ever to consummate his love for Isabel because his illness resigns him to mere spectatorship, and, although not literally widowed, his emotional widowhood stems from his inability to realize love with Isabel—he is forced to observe because he knows that he cannot participate. His spectatorship is heightened in response to this rejection as he experiences what Smith describes as "our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us" (5). In James's fiction the frustration Ralph experiences is only mitigated through marriage or death, both of which still allow spectatorship. Since marriage to Isabel

is impossible, Ralph's death is inevitable and delivers him from his suffering. Smith comments that this joy of deliverance "is as sincere as our grief of their distress, and our fellow-feeling with their misery is not more real than that with their happiness" (5). Isabel finally understands Ralph's suffering, as he has always understood hers. As he declares his love and she watches him die, Ralph states, "I don't know why we should suffer so much," to which Isabel responds, "we needn't speak to understand each other" (552). This suggests that just as Ralph is trapped as an invalid, he sees the unhappiness of Isabel's marriage to Osmond and responds accordingly by showing unmitigated affection for her throughout his life and beyond, declaring, "I love you, but I love without hope" (330), thus widowing himself emotionally as he realizes that he can never have Isabel. Typical of Jamesian love, this extended loss augments Ralph's affection and causes him to seek more opportunities to observe Isabel, and so he follows her across Europe.

In contrast to Ralph, Osmond is "a specimen," "fastidious . . . critical," and "irritable," one who "lived in a sorted, sifted, arranged world, thinking about art and beauty and history" (248-9) and his spectatorship is based not on affection, but criticism. Indeed, Osmond and Ralph differ in their views of love and spectatorship. For Ralph, and even James, love is impossible without spectatorship, yet Ralph's spectatorship is motivated by kindness and generosity, a spectatorship decidedly sympathetic and different from that of Osmond, who observes everything and everyone through the eyes of an art critic. In this sense, although Ralph purchases his spectatorship through his father's altered will, it is Osmond's relationship with Isabel that is proprietary and not Ralph's. Ralph's motivation behind his spectatorship of Isabel is based on the social passion of kindness and generosity, while Osmond's motivation is an unsocial passion based on rational judgments of jealousy

and ownership; Ralph wants to celebrate Isabel's life, while Osmond wants to cage her. Indeed, Osmond possesses an "appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship" (249), while Ralph simply wants to "watch over" Isabel (286). Although both are widowed, one emotionally, and the other actually, only Ralph can show ideal sympathy for Isabel because his spectatorship rests on an amiable exchange with the sufferer. As Smith states, "by many observations" and "by changing places . . . with the sufferer . . . we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels" (5). Ralph suggests that he has seen the spectre of Gardencourt, indicating that he has suffered in order to prove to the reader that he and Isabel can empathize with each other—they can change places with their suffering and "be affected" by what the other "feels." His emotional widowhood, caused by his unrealizable love for Isabel, drives his spectatorship even after he dies. His spectatorship and his emotional widowhood create in him the ideal sympathizer, suggesting to Isabel on his deathbed that he would wish death for Isabel rather than see her continue to suffer in her marriage. Typical for James, however, because of Isabel's suffering Ralph can continue to serve as spectator since, now that she has suffered, she can see him as a spectre. The ideal sympathetic exchange takes place on Ralph's deathbed when both he and Isabel realize that they have both suffered similarly and can become spectators and therefore sympathizers of each other. "I wish it were over for you," Isabel declares, adding, "I would die for you if you could live. But I don't wish you to live; I would die myself, not to lose you" (549). Here James implies that love is authenticated through death. Indeed, death is the ultimate act of love for James, and at the moment of Ralph's death Isabel begins to feel the emotional widowhood Ralph has always felt. Since only one person can live in a Jamesian ideal marriage, Ralph must die in order for ideal sympathy to continue. But in order for sympathy

to continue, so must spectatorship. This is also possible because after Ralph dies, he can see Isabel and Isabel can see Ralph even as a spectre. Sympathy and authentic love between the two characters have finally been established because one has died yet both can still observe each other. Again, only in the widowed state is this possible in James's fiction.

Paradoxically, Madame Merle, who is introduced at the beginning of *Portrait* as a widow, is arguably the character least able to sympathize. The reader is at first not familiar with her lurid past, being informed by the narrator only that she is a widow and very agreeable; she is so outwardly kind that she acts as one of Mrs. Touchett's closest friends, and both act as spectators of Isabel; both wish to help her succeed in the world. The irony here is that Mrs. Touchett, although widowed, takes "a rigidly practical view of the transformation of her niece from a poor girl to a rich one" and seems decidedly unsympathetic to Isabel throughout the novel aside Madame Merle who appears deeply interested in Isabel's happiness (200). James, however, hints that Merle is false and, indeed, untrustworthy, and the reader soon realizes that Merle is not a widow at all, nor has she ever cared for Isabel and her happiness, at least to the extent that Ralph and even Mrs. Touchett have. Although Mrs. Touchett often appears unsympathetic, she is no doubt more sympathetic than Madame Merle because her widowhood facilitates sympathy by her "[c]hanging places with . . . the sufferer" in order to "be affected by what [Isabel] feels," whereas Merle can never, having not been widowed, feel ideal sympathy for Isabel (Smith 4).

Ironically, Mrs. Touchett is rarely with her family and often travels away from them, visiting America or other parts of Europe. She selects this occupation over spending time with her family, despite her role as sympathetic spectator. Yet she seems to understand this

role. She observes from afar, writes letters, and always appears when people are dying. Mr. Touchett, as he is dying, states to his son Ralph that his death will probably not have much effect on his wife, to which Ralph responds, “‘It will probably make more than you think’” (170). Ralph is correct in this, in that, although cold and candid, Mrs. Touchett is the only person with access to the deathbed. She is by both Mr. Touchett’s and Ralph’s side when they die, and her renunciation of Madame Merle, once she discovers her plan to mislead Isabel into an unhappy marriage to Gilbert Osmond, suggests a sympathy, perhaps more covert than that of her son Ralph, yet nonetheless present. Not coincidentally, Mr. Touchett declares that Isabel reminds him of Mrs. Touchett when she was younger, suggesting that Ralph will eventually fall in love with Isabel. Indeed, he does, yet it is precisely Isabel’s predilection to sympathize that causes her to marry Osmond and care for his daughter, Pansy, and not marry Ralph later in the novel.

James further distinguishes the importance of spectatorial sympathy in the novel by describing Ralph as always watching Isabel from his window: “In bad weather he was unable to step out of the house, and he used sometimes to stand at one of the windows with his hands in his pockets” (179). Important to note is Isabel’s description of Ralph’s watching her and Madame Merle walking at Gardencourt. In this sense Ralph serves as sentinel to Isabel, for he watches with a “rueful, half-critical” look at the unsympathetic and suspicious Merle (179). Later in the novel, Isabel imagines Osmond “peep[ing] down from a small high window,” mocking her as she tries to keep up with his perceptions of the ideal wife—the perfect art object (410).⁷ The distinction, then, between these two forms of spectatorship lies

⁷ The act of observation dominates much of James’s fiction. One form it takes is watching from a tower from which widows or those emotionally widowed serve as spectators of protagonists’ actions. In many ways this represents a form of protection for

in the critic. Goodwood, too, looks at Isabel from a window, but James distinguishes Ralph from her other observers by basing his spectatorship on a concern for Isabel, where Goodwood and Osmond seem only to care for their own wellbeing.

Further, Madame Merle and Osmond can never be ideal sympathizers despite their perceived widowed status. Osmond's sister reports that Merle is not, indeed, widowed, and has, in fact, been misleading not only Isabel but also Mrs. Touchett in order to secure money for Osmond. Her dishonesty about her widowed state indicates James's reverence for the widow in his fiction, since readers lose respect for Merle because of her duplicity. Prior to the revelation of her speciousness, Merle describes herself to Isabel as one who "tries to remain in the cupboard . . . as much as I can," but once she comes "out into a strong light—then, my dear, I'm a horror" (183). Indeed, once exposed, Merle is decidedly antagonistic, declaring that her soul had "dried up" (499) and that she is a "parasite" (186), and stating that her sympathies for Isabel had evaporated, once she realized Isabel would not help Lord Warburton marry Osmond's daughter, Pansy (492).

The same can be said for Osmond. Despite being widowed, his sympathy is defunct because he lacks the principles of spectatorship that create the ideal sympathy most common in James's widowed characters. For Osmond, spectatorship is about caged observation similar to one's observation of art and not the process of exchange nor the social passions Smith promotes. Osmond is "fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior and exquisite" (290), which proves the basis of his initial attraction to Isabel. Yet he treats Isabel as a caged "convent flower," similar to how he treats his own appropriately named daughter, Pansy (242). When speaking of Lord Warburton's possible marriage to Pansy, Osmond reflects on

the protagonists, a conceit James maintains in *Wings* when he describes Susan Stringham watching Isabel as she sits in a tower surrounded by a moat.

his own marriage to Isabel, noting that he took “to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects” (290). Osmond, who sees his marriage partner as part of a collection, observes Isabel through the scrutinizing lens of the art critic. In this sense, Osmond’s spectatorship is not sympathetic; rather, it can be objectifying and even mercenary. Indeed, Osmond seems to want to possess Isabel as if she were a priceless vase, declaring to her, ““You know my opinions—I’ve treated you to enough of them. Don’t you remember my telling you that one ought to make one’s life a work of art?”” (294). He wishes further to possess her as an object and in this sense observe her through the act of purchase: “her mind was to be his—attached to his own like a small garden plot to a deer park” (412). Once Isabel realizes that in marrying Osmond she has been “put into a cage,” she declares that he ““can’t love anyone”” because his sympathies are not influenced by ““any one’s valuation of anything,”” instead ““preferring to abide by his own”” (500). Osmond, then, although a spectator, is unsympathetic because he relies on his own opinions and rational judgments to objectify his observations. He cannot fulfill the act of sympathy because spectatorship represents moral sentiment through the logic of mirroring; that is, the spectator imaginatively reconstructs the experience of the person he watches, creating a speculum for sympathy. Where Ralph can sympathize because he can mirror Isabel’s actions, Osmond, who rejects ““any one’s valuation of anything”” (500), cannot ever capture the reflection of Isabel’s sympathies; he cannot ever emulate the kindness and generosity Isabel feels for others through his spectatorship of her. Osmond’s observations embody the unsocial passions of resentment for things he does not like, much like the art critic James describes him as, while Ralph’s observations represent social passions and more easily reflect Isabel’s own kindness and generosity.

Osmond's judgments or valuations, like those of an art critic with perfect taste, are final and uninfluenced by spectatorial sympathy. He is incapable, unlike James's other widows, of observing objectively because his spectatorship is not based on mirroring; he cannot "himself feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation" (Smith 8), because everything is art to him and must be judged based on his own "valuations" and not through an exchange of "likened experiences," as Hume suggests (238).⁸ Hume observes that sympathy is essential for fundamental human cohesion; since Osmond cannot sympathize, his marriage to Isabel is doomed to fail. In typical Jamesian fashion, however, the end of the novel intimates that Isabel returns to Osmond and continues to live with him in Rome rather than die alone. Arguably, if Isabel or Osmond were to die, James would be implying that their love was, indeed, significant. Instead, he leaves them miserably married, while first widowing Ralph emotionally and then consigning him to die in order to illustrate to what extent he truly loved Isabel. Through his spectatorship of Isabel, Ralph has lived and now must die in order to cement his love for her and continue it as a spectre after his death. He declares that Isabel has helped him achieve this by stating, "there's nothing makes us feel so alive as to see others die. That's the sensation of life—the sense that we remain. I've had it—even I" (549).

Whereas in *Portrait* James explores the various passions that shape spectatorship and the sympathy it evokes, in *The Wings of the Dove* he attempts to retell the story of Minny

⁸ Osmond treats Pansy in the same manner that he treats Isabel: as a work of art. James describes her as "a little convent-flower" (242), as her name suggests, reducing Osmond's spectatorship to mere observation of art versus sympathetic exchange, whereas Ralph simply wants Isabel "to live" and not be cooped up or observed as art (481). Osmond sequesters Pansy in a convent because she loves Rossier, a suitor of whom Osmond disapproves, just as he wishes to control Isabel's mind, describing it ideally as a "small garden plot" (412).

Temple he began in *Portrait*, but here more informed with what will be a theme of *The Ambassadors* (1903), to “live all you can” (14). The question James poses in *Wings* is, what if one wants to live, but death intervenes? Obviously influenced by his deep affection for his cousin, James explores the notion later expounded in his essay “Is There a Life after Death?” that love can live beyond the grave. Widowhood, both emotional and actual, plays a major role in *Wings*. Merton Densher falls in love with Milly Theale just before she dies, but his affection for her has increased the longer he has observed her. More important than both of these, at least in terms of spectatorship and sympathy, is Milly’s companion, the widow, Mrs. Susan Stringham. Milly is seen throughout the novel through the eyes of others, or what James often calls the “successive reflectors of consciousness” (“Art” 14). In fact, Milly does not even directly appear in the novel until quite late, and even then she is often absent because of her illness. In this sense, even the reader sees Milly from afar, but Susan, Milly’s closest companion and confidante, often serves as her representative and protector when she is absent. Susan is unique to the novel, a character often overlooked, whose role in relation to Milly requires further examination.

Early in *Wings* James suggests that death can bring a higher form of consciousness. This is true with Kate who, after the death of her mother, states that “the consciousness of it was what she seemed most clearly to have ‘come into’” (22), yet Kate herself is not widowed and cannot, therefore, express deep sympathy; Kate’s sympathies are rather inadequate where Milly is concerned. Susan, by contrast, is a widow, and thus in a James work can serve as the ideal spectator of and sympathizer for Milly. As stated earlier, the widow is often privileged to observe the spectacle of death in James’s fiction, and, similar to Mrs. Touchett in *Portrait*, Susan is at Milly’s bedside when Milly dies. As spectator, Susan cannot be

rivalled. According to James, “She moved . . . in a fine cloud of observation and suspicion; she was in the position, as she believed, of knowing much more about Milly Theale than Milly herself knew” (71). Having suffered the loss of a loved one, Susan, aware of “duplicities and labyrinths” and always wary of “personal subtlety,” is ideally suited to serve as advisor to and protector of Milly Theale, who, in her naïveté, represents “the woman in the world least formed by nature” (71).

James makes very clear that Susan is an honored individual. Widowed, she is well-established as a spectator, and James often describes her as “perched,” always observing Milly, and, like a hawk, her privileged position above and outside of society as a widow vouchsafes her the ability to protect Milly. So observant is Susan that “when she saw anything at all, saw much, [she] saw everything” (72), which is particularly important, considering the role of spectatorship in the development of sympathy. That Susan sees everything indicates that her experiences as a widow—i.e., that she has lived, loved, lost, and is therefore respected—enable her to sense and feel what Milly may be suffering as she battles her way through nineteenth-century courtship. Indeed, Susan can, because of her widowed state, “feel her companion’s feelings,” essentially “feeling their impression,” as she observes Milly interact with Kate and Densher (80). This is the precise form of spectatorship to which Smith alludes, the type that stimulates sympathy for the observed because the “compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation” (8).

Uniquely suited to her spectatorial position because of her widowed state, Susan has a “way of clinging to [Milly], not less than an occupation” but as “a satisfaction in itself” (81). She enjoys seeing Milly and helping her make the right decisions in love, for, as a widow,

Susan can never love again.⁹ According to James, Susan was “*not* anybody else. She had renounced that character; she had now no life to lead; and she honestly believed that she was thus supremely equipped for leading Milly’s own” (79). Appropriately named Susan Shepherd by Milly, Susan is outside society, excluded because of her widowhood. Her ability to aid Milly stems from her own encounters with the world in which she had experienced authentic love which had then been accentuated by the death of her husband. She is therefore an ideal person to guide Milly in her courtship. Similar to Mrs. Touchett in her relationship with Isabel Archer, Susan fulfills the calling of the widow, preventing Milly from being “starved for culture,” culture being what “she herself represented for her” (76). In fact, Susan feels that observing Milly and sympathizing with her represent a certain “weight of responsibility” because she herself is so experienced in love (75).

One sees this experience at the beginning of the novel when James introduces Susan by describing a trip she and Milly take to Switzerland in order to begin her cultural exposure. Familiar with the peaks they choose to explore, Susan wakes to find Milly missing from their pension. In pursuit of Milly, she discovers a Tauchnitz edition sitting on a rock, a text that Susan “mechanically” possesses herself of every time she goes out, and which Milly had taken with her to the mountains (84).¹⁰ Susan finds Milly sitting on the edge of a cliff. In an effort not to startle her Susan sits and watches her, unnoticed, until Susan decides to return home. However, she embodies spectatorship at this moment: “the spell of watching her had

⁹ Save in *The Golden Bowl* (1904), no widow or widower in James’s fiction ever realizes a happy marriage again.

¹⁰ The significance of the Tauchnitz text is speculative, but since Tauchnitz was a German printer known for his philanthropic tendencies, and this book never seems to leave Susan’s presence, one can infer the connection between Susan and Milly in terms of philanthropy and therefore sympathy since James indicates that Susan writes short stories and has taken custody of Milly’s progression towards womanhood.

grown more than ever irresistible; a proof of what—or of a part of what—Mrs. Stringham had . . . been reduced to” (81). Indeed, Susan finds her observation “scientific” at this point and strikes herself as “hovering like a spy” in order to protect Milly from danger (81). Smith states that the fear of death most stimulates a spectator’s sympathies: “And from thence one of the most important principles in human nature, the dread of death—the great poison to the happiness [—] . . . afflicts and mortifies the individual” (9). But the spectator “guards and protects the society,” according to Smith, overcoming the effects of death (9). Arguably, James would disagree with Smith’s assertion that death is the great poison to happiness, yet in Susan and his other widowed characters he creates ideal spectators who provide authentic sympathy for his love-sick protagonists, spectators who mitigate the effects of death for them by always being by their side and showing with kindness and generosity that their sympathies are generated by social passions. Indeed, Susan, widowed and therefore familiar with death—having experienced and survived it—can help Milly know authentic love, and in typical Jamesian fashion James aids Milly in achieving this authentic love.

The widow never seems to fear death, which is important in James’s fiction since he so often intertwines death and love. This is the case in *Wings*, where Aunt Maud serves as the connection between death and marriage at the beginning of the novel when James introduces Kate and Milly. Discussing Maud, James links the “two sinister ceremonies” of “marriage and the interment” together (24). Likewise, Susan announces to Milly on various occasions, just as Ralph does to Isabel, “I’ll die *for* you” (139), suggesting what Susan has already articulated earlier: having loved and lost, helping Milly experience the same “lighted up as nothing else could do the poor woman’s history” (75)—she has nothing else to live for but Milly, because she is widowed.

Conversely, just as Madame Merle is false about her sympathies and pretends to be widowed, Kate's sympathies for Milly are also staged. She observes Milly, just as James's other characters do, but Kate suggests that one does not get to know Milly; rather, “one *sees* her” (239). Because Kate's spectatorship, like Gilbert Osmond's financially motivated spectatorship of Isabel, is based on money, however, Kate's sympathies are not genuine. Smith suggests that “sympathy may arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person” (6), yet Kate's view and understanding that Milly is dying serve as motivation to pursue her money, while Densher turns all Milly's money over to Kate after Milly has died with the proviso that their relationship be terminated, indicating that money never motivated his own sympathies. Kate's perspective is rather coldly utilitarian because she cannot realize that the “compensation of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation” (Smith 8). Instead, Kate puts aside any genuine sympathy for Milly—she never considers what it would be like to be in Milly's position—instead focusing on how Milly's illness might benefit her financially. Kate, like Osmond, displays forced sympathy because compensation for her spectatorship is not monetary. In fact, according to Hume, generally, compensation is purely the “pleasure of seeing it,” which, in turn, fosters “the most exquisite sensibility” (1); the most authentic sympathy is fostered by the pleasure of seeing pain and trying to help a sufferer cope with it.

Kate, of course, sends Densher to console Milly in order to facilitate an endowment for them. “He had been sent to see her in order to be sorry for her” (246), yet Densher's sympathy for her begins to develop and deepen through his unintentional spectatorship. Important to note, however, is that true sympathy for Densher cannot be achieved without

emotional widowhood. That is, Milly must die in order for him to feel authentic sympathy for her. Kate initially sends Densher to Milly “in the name of compassion,” but “compassion was exactly what he felt himself at the end of two minutes,” as he sat observing Milly (262-3). The result of Densher’s falling in love with Milly is, as he describes it, “the oddest consciousness as of a blessed calm after a storm” (422). Indeed, Densher, after hearing that Milly has died, achieves complete consciousness and experiences emotional widowhood, for Milly’s death magnifies his love for her. Densher observes to himself that “the last thing he wished was to be unconscious of her—what he wished was to ignore her own consciousness, tortured, for all he knew, crucified by its pain . . . what would that do but make his days impossible?” (445). Kate, well aware that Densher has fallen in love with Milly, at this point realizes that she is alone in her scheme to secure Milly’s money. Discussing Milly with Densher, Kate asks, “And what does Mrs. Stringham know?” Densher responds that Susan knows everything and adds, “she’s a person who does see” (439), suggesting that he recognizes the importance of spectatorship in the authentic production of sympathy, placing himself and Susan as authentic sympathizers, Susan through her actual widowhood and Densher through his emotional widowhood, as opposed to Kate’s position of false sympathizer.

Whether widowed emotionally or actually, James’s widows serve a surprising but important role in illustrating the sympathetic process for his protagonists. Although *Wings* and *Portrait* provide his most substantial examples of spectatorial sympathy, widows in his other novels serve similar purposes. Lambert Strether as spectator to Chad Newsome’s escapades in Paris or Claire de Cintre’s observation of her lover Christopher Newman from a convent are other examples of widows who play the important role of spectator and ideal

sympathizer. The widow, removed from the benefits of marriage and outside social convention, is best suited to these actions. That James shows such an affinity for widows is not surprising when one realizes that his fiction is replete with both death and love. The widow bridges the gap between the two. Love cannot last for James in his fiction, as it did not in his life, and in order for authentic love to exist between characters, it must never be physical, as it was not for him; rather, it must die before being consummated. The widow embodies the extreme frustration resulting from such irony: having known both love and death, the widow first experiences the joy of love, learns the tragedy of death, and then regains the further joy of authentic love that can only be realized after death.

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