

Portrait of a Lady and the Male Gaze

By Anna Phelan-Cox

When Henry James titled his novel *The Portrait of a Lady*, he indicated his awareness that the genre of the novel, like that of portraiture, provided for a type of "girl-watching" (Bentley 174). One of the many meanings that James seems to attach to "the sweet-tasting property of observation" (46) includes "an anticipation of the kind of diffusely eroticized watching that has such a central place in our contemporary popular culture" (Bentley 174). Still, what James could not have anticipated, is that "girl-watching" would be one of the motivating energies behind the history of cinema as well as the construction of "the self" in late twentieth-century films and consumer culture (specifically, advertisements). Jane Campion's 1996 adaptation of James' novel takes up this issue of the gaze. Yet, Campion's thesis does not simply attempt to draw parallels between evolving media (the written word, photographs and films) and their success at subjugating women to the male gaze. Instead, Campion complicates this notion by suggesting that the repeated subjection of women to male scrutiny in various media has ultimately resulted in women's embodiment of the male gaze. That is, what began as male observation of women in James' 1881 novel has gradually developed into female embodiment of the narcissistic gaze in late twentieth-century films and consumer culture.

The Portrait of a Lady employs omniscient narration. The term "omniscient narration" self-evidently implies an all-powerful gaze-i.e., that the all-knowing narrator directs the reader's look. "Looking", however, is not a simple, value-free activity. Michel Foucault assures that "the gaze is connected to power and surveillance: the person who gazes is empowered over the person who is the object of the gaze" (Johnson 39). In *The Portrait* the narrator makes his presence (and subsequent gaze) known by qualifying his observations. The novel begins "*Under certain circumstances, [...] in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon [...]*" (James 17, emphasis added). These subjective qualifiers of the novel's setting serve to make the reader conscious of the interpretive role of the narrator, and of the author, by extension. Thus, the role of James' narrator is not simply to relate information to the reader, but to tell the reader how to view that information. When James introduces Isabel Archer, for instance, he writes that "it may be affirmed without delay that Isabel was [...] very liable to the sin of self-esteem" (James 53). The narrator, aware of the moralizing perspective that he has invited the audience to share, asks the reader not to judge her too severely. In detailing Isabel's faults in chapter six, the narrator not only conveys information about her to the reader, but he also effectively characterizes and draws attention to himself. As such, the narrator (and the reader, by extension) establishes himself as dominant over Isabel in that he possesses the objectifying gaze over her.

The sexes of the surveyor and surveyed in *The Portrait* are not insignificant. There are gender implications to the power imbalance created by the gaze; as

Patricia E. Johnson notes, "implicit in the structures of much Western art and many classic Hollywood films is the idea of the male gazer and the female object" (39). Within this context, Linda Nochlin has argued that "the male artist's right to represent women is interconnected with the assumption of general male power over and control of women in society" (Johnson 39). This idea is reinforced in *The Portrait* by Ralph Touchett's first response to his cousin Isabel:

If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him, Ralph was conscious she was an entertainment of a high order. 'A character like that', he said to himself-'a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art-than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral [...]. I had never been more blue, more bored, than for a week before she came [...]. Suddenly I receive a Titian [...] to hang on my wall-a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney-piece. (James 63)

Through Ralph's analogies, "we can see the ways in which the male pleasure in spectatorship is interconnected with Western aesthetics generally" (Johnson 42). At the same time, this passage serves to establish James' narrative technique as analogous to what Laura Mulvey has termed the "male gaze" in cinema. Mulvey argues that "the Hollywood film structures itself around the voyeurism and scopophilia of the male gaze by denying the existence of other viewing positions" (Johnson 42). In the previous quotation, therefore, James has denied other viewing positions in his description of the scene by consciously omitting Isabel's own perception of herself in that setting or any objective description of the scene that might include observations about Ralph. Both of these possibilities, of course, would be permissible within the omniscient constitution of the narration.

It is not merely the narrator's literal observations about Isabel, however, that mark *The Portrait* as a novel told from the male perspective. The very nature of the novel, in fact, strips Isabel of any agency. James' title *The Portrait of a Lady* [my emphasis] is paradoxical when reexamined in the context of the novel's gaze. The word "portrait" implies that the novel is to be a neutral or passive observation of Isabel Archer, who constitutes the completed 'art-work'. However, by *limiting* the novel's gaze to an omniscient narrator who favours a monolithic male view, James *necessarily* fashions *action* from *observation*. Isabel's character is thus created through an objectifying gaze that transforms portrait into plot (Mitchell 98). Take, for example, her moment of greatest independence in chapter 31, when she parts from her sister at Euston Station: "and then she walked back into the foggy London street. *The world lay before her-she could do whatever she chose*. There was a deep thrill in it all, but for the present her choice was tolerably discreet; *she chose simply to walk back from Euston Square to her hotel*" (James 273, emphasis added). Here the narrator asserts his dominance over Isabel-he objectifies her by "talking 'over' her, silencing her through his own discursive ploys" (Mitchell 102).

What is significant about the paradoxical nature of James' text is that it is necessarily so as a result of the limitations of the medium itself. As a "Realist"

text, James' novel was revolutionary in that it attempted to examine, in detail, the life and experiences of an independent woman (which was uncommon up to and including the literary era which James inhabited). In fashioning a very "personal" story, therefore, James had to resort to a very careful objectification of Isabel's character. In other words, he was required to objectify her if she (and the myriad other late-nineteenth-century women coming into independence) was ever to re-emerge as a subject.

More important than this, however, is James' refusal to use the novel's narrative to reflect *Isabel's perception* of her freedom of choice. "Isabel's story is *fundamentally* a story of closure, the story of an *illusory* opening and of increasing suffocation" (Izzo 44, emphasis added). That is, Isabel believes herself to be free ["nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me" (James 201)], but the very nature of the novel preemptively negates her self-perceived freedom.² While Isabel believes that nothing external "expresses [her]", the reality is that she is only constituted externally. James' cruelty is that he creates a character who believes herself to be free, only to trap her in the ironic ramifications of that belief. Isabel's ardent desire not to define herself by anyone or anything external to her prompts her to refuse the marriage proposals of Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood; her inheritance of Ralph's fortune provides the plot contrivance and social condition required for Isabel to maintain her 'independence'. Ultimately, however, Isabel's fortune proves to be her downfall, in that it provides the motivation for her oppressor, Gilbert Osmond, to want to marry her.

Thus, Isabel is repeatedly objectified by both the characters within the novel, as well as by the omniscient narrator who describes her thoughts and actions from a monolithic male gaze. When James does give Isabel her own perspective, he uses it to effectively reinforce the dominance of his (male) gaze. Isabel tries to create room for herself as a female spectator when she says to Ralph "I don't think I want to see [life] as the young men want to see it. But I do want to look about me [...]. I only want to see for myself" (James 134). Ralph's replies, however, insist on a monolithic system with its binary poles of male subject and female object: "You're the most charming of polygons! [...] You want to see life-you'll be hanged if you don't, as the young men say [...]. You want to see, but not to feel" (James 134). Here is the two-part system clearly exemplified. "Women are women when they are objects-charming polygons. When they wish to gaze themselves, they inevitably occupy the male position-wanting to see and not to feel" (Johnson 45). Thus the ultimate and incontrovertible negation of Isabel's gaze is determined by Ralph's suggestion that to possess the subject's gaze would be to no longer be a woman.

This passage similarly serves to position James' novel within the melodramatic tradition in literature. As early as 1943, Jacques Barzun observed that James is best described as a melodramatist, given James' belief that "in acting out their feelings, people turn out either good or evil," (Kirby 14). In paraphrasing Thomas

Elsaesser, Laura Mulvey expands this definition by asserting that "melodrama is almost characterized by the presence of a protagonist whose symptomatic behaviour emerges out of irreconcilable or inexpressible internal contradictions, and these 'unspeakable' affects overflow into the *mise en scène*" (*Americanitis...* 25). For Mulvey, therefore, the melodramatic genre is necessarily tied up with compulsions that can be understood on the psychoanalytic level. That is, the subconscious urges of a given character will ultimately direct the plot, in that that character must negotiate his/her journey through a maze of dilemmas that have been externally constituted as either beneficial or detrimental to that character's development. Cinematically speaking, most melodramas, or "women's pictures," from the classic Hollywood era, focused on a single female protagonist unable to achieve a stable sexual identity. Instead, as Mulvey suggests in her essay "Afterthoughts inspired by *Duel in the Sun*", these women remained torn between "passive femininity" and "regressive masculinity" (30).

This model proposed by Mulvey can easily be adapted to *The Portrait of a Lady*. In this story, Isabel is torn between different suitors for various reasons that can be explained psychoanalytically. In fact, the very reason Isabel has so many suitors is because she continually rejects them, most likely as a result of her repressed sexuality or her fear of consummating her union with any one of these men.

Going back to Mulvey's model, then, it is clear that Isabel's marriage to her first suitor, Lord Warburton, would represent an undertaking of "passive sexuality" on Isabel's part. Lord Warburton (wealthy, docile and accomplished) is the "good" or "mature" choice for Isabel. However, in marrying him, Isabel would be forced to sublimate herself into the model of socially acceptable femininity. Osmond, on the other hand, who is passionate, temperamental and impoverished, would force Isabel into a "regressive" sexual relationship, were she to marry him (which, of course, she ultimately does). Their relationship is not based on maturity, but rather, on the avoidance of adult responsibilities: Isabel's inheritance provides them with the means to live in a sort of fairy-tale Roman villa, characterized by expensive art objects and frequently the site of parties, luncheons and balls.

Of course, Isabel's decision to marry the story's villain is, itself, congruent with the melodramatic model. Isabel's choice to ignore "the signs" and the advice of others and to marry Osmond, constitutes both her biggest act of independence, as well as her biggest mistake. In this way, Isabel's story fits somewhere in between melodrama and its subset, tragedy, in that the heroine is not rewarded for her overriding virtue, but instead punished for her vice(s), which, in Isabel's case, one can only assume to be pride. Whereas in previous melodramatic texts, such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the heroine is freed from her villainous husband by his death, in James' novel, Isabel returns to Osmond is thus arguably condemned to her husband forever. In this sense, *The Portrait* fits perfectly into a tradition of moralizing women's actions for the sake of entertainment.

Isabel's role as a form of entertainment is overtly described in the novel itself. The narrator tells us that for Ralph, "conscious observation of a lovely woman had struck him as the finest entertainment that the world now had to offer" (James 41). Jane Campion's challenge in adapting James' novel to the screen was how to make "the meaning of 'entertainment' intersect with the history of mass entertainment, a history in which the 'conscious observation of a lovely woman' carries a set of materially realized meanings [...]" (Bentley 174). A film version of James' novel, therefore, "has to be written in flesh, conveyed in the visual images of actor's bodies rather than the hieroglyphics of print" (Bentley 175). Campion demonstrates this fact by presenting the title shot of her film as a handwritten inscription on a woman's finger. The purpose of this shot is to establish the parallel gaze perspectives of both the novel and the film. On a thematic level, Campion appears to announce with this shot that the struggle for agency amid social constraints will somehow be negotiated through Isabel's literal body, as opposed to James' text as a body of work. Additionally, it shows that Campion must necessarily objectify Isabel by exploiting the visual requirements of her medium. "A 'portrait' in film, Campion seems to insist, is not a novel. Even a famous nineteenth-century text by a famously language-obsessed novelist will be fashioned out of elemental acts of looking at the faces and bodies of women once it is recreated on screen" (Bentley 175). Campion's first shot in the film is a close-up on Nicole Kidman's/Isabel Archer's eyes. Right from the start we are made aware that this film will be about *looking and seeing*, both on a literal level-and as we shall see later-a figurative level as well.

By calling such blatant attention to the act of observing women, Campion effectively grounds aesthetic or visual meaning in a syntax of gendered vision (Bentley 175). Whereas male looking asserts a "possession and mastery of visual objects, a woman's gaze is always occluded, circumscribed by the internalized effects of her position as an erotic and social subordinate" (Bentley 175). In John Berger's frequently-cited formulation, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." To demonstrate Berger's assertion that women unquestionably "watch themselves being looked at", Campion begins her film with a sequence involving contemporary women talking about love and desire. What is significant about this sequence is that when the women are speaking they do not appear on screen and when they finally do appear before the viewer, they are silent. "[This] deliberate separation of women's voices from their filmic bodies suggests that Campion recognizes a break or disjunction in film that tends to detach female subjectivity and female desire from the visual surface of a woman's cinematic 'portrait'" (Bentley 175). In another important way, Campion uses this sequence to update the late nineteenth-century Jamesian literary objectification of women to a late twentieth-century context for the continued objectification of women in film.

While the women's voices assert a form of female subjectivity or interior experience, the absence of their images reinforces the notion that the cinema is a medium of pictures-its vocabulary is uniquely visual. In response to this

sequence, the audience experiences the intended heightened awareness of the visual nature of film and asks: where are the images? When the images finally do appear, we see that the women's voices are represented by women of varying ethnicities, dressed in a casual manner. We should also note the relative attractiveness of these women. Campion is acknowledging that they are pretty—that they *must be pretty*—in order for this filmic text (like James' literary text) to be successful. In one sense, they must be beautiful to "deserve" (for lack of a better word), the visual attention that women have historically demanded in works of fine art, literature and cinema. At the same time this opening sequence, reminiscent of fashion advertisements, requires that the women depicted be attractive in order to facilitate the female viewer's desire to insert herself into the place of those women on billboards or on-screen. If the female viewer cannot exchange herself for the woman on the billboard, then the woman in the advertisement must be both idealistic enough and realistic enough for the female viewer to desire to emulate the model and similarly for her to feel that this is a feasible objective. In Campion's sequence, the pretty faces and casual clothing of the women reinforce this notion on-screen.

This opening sequence is also significant in that the women models in this segment often stare directly into the camera. This direct engagement of the viewer's gaze is common in visual advertisements, but rare in narrative cinema because it disrupts the presumed invisibility of the camera (Nadel 181). Clearly, Campion wants to make the correlation obvious between this sequence and advertising strategies.

When examined critically in the context of the rest of Campion's film, this association has important implications for the viewer's understanding of the direction of the gaze. John Berger writes that

Publicity is about social relations, not objects. Its promise is not of pleasure, but of happiness: happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour.

The spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself [sic] as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself. (Goldman 113)

Thus, in advertisements the female consumer is invited to insert herself as the object of desire and envy. When women look at advertisements they effectively internalize the male gaze and accept the premise that if the product-mediated woman in the ad can attract the male then that part must be worthy of envy (Goldman 116). Generating envy thus becomes means to an end in itself. This idea is vitally important because it explains women's voluntary self-fetishization and internalization of the male gaze. In effect, over time advertisements have "sublated the judging power of the male gaze into a self-policing narcissistic gaze" (Goldman 108). As a result, when a man is literally featured in a contemporary advertisement, he is allotted a curiously ambiguous status. "He no longer commands patriarchal status, rather his primary significance is now

merely that of a signifier of the male gaze. He has been made redundant, reduced to an ornament included in the scene simply to attest to her desirability. In fact, absorbed in the narcissistic pleasure of admiring her own fetish, the female spectator-buyer has [...] displaced the male spectator-owner" (Goldman 125).³ Ads today feature women empowered by their *own* belief in themselves as objects of desire.

In advertising, therefore, suggestions of choice and individual freedom ('feminism') "become wed to images of sexuality in which women apparently choose to be seen as sexual objects because it suits their 'liberated' interests. The female body gets reframed as the locus of freedom as well as sexual pleasure" (Goldman 133). Pampering the body "is something you do to validate yourself as an autonomous being capable of will-power and discipline; and sexuality appears as something women exercise by choice rather than because of their ascribed gender role" (Goldman 133). Today, advertising models frequently engage the female spectator-buyer directly, conveying the idea that the model has enough ego-strength to be seen as 'herself' (Goldman 150). The implication is that whatever commodity she is advertising does not define her, she defines it.⁴

A consequence of this false sense of female empowerment garnered through exertion of control over a product-mediated body is a conscious enjoyment of being observed. Henry James' Isabel, however, is unaware of her position as an object of desire. In one passage Isabel and Lord Warburton visit Gardencourt's collection of paintings. Yet, it is Isabel, not the paintings, who is the visual object and who is surveyed by Lord Warburton as well as by the narrator:

Isabel walked to the other side of the gallery and stood there showing him her charming back, her light slim figure, the length of her white neck as she bent her head, and the density of her dark braids. She stopped in front of a small picture *as if for the purpose* of examining it; and there was something so young and free in her movement that her very pliancy seemed to mock at him. *Her eyes, however, saw nothing...* (James 118, emphasis added)

Here Isabel is objectified as the primary art object; the narrative literally frames her as the portrait. The narrator's emphasis on the fact that "she is oblivious of the effect she has created and that she 'saw nothing' underlines how this moment belongs exclusively to the male gaze" (Johnson 41). Isabel's passive status as the object of a male gaze allies her to the historical status of the female nude in Western art. Berger says that the nude's body "is arranged in the way it is, to display it to the man looking at the picture. This picture is made to appeal to his sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality" (Johnson 41).

In Champion's adaptation of *The Portrait*, Isabel has an erotic fantasy that does address her sexuality. In this sequence, however, Isabel's sexuality is constituted |>as a desire to be observed, or to be objectified by the male gaze. The fact that this scene appears right after Isabel's rejection of Caspar Goodwood implies that

the very assertion of her independence arouses her sexually. This suggestion might very well originate in James' novel; he describes her rejection of Goodwood as something charged with a "throbbing" from the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power (James 44). Where *Campion* takes off from this is in her decision to depict Isabel's arousal as one heightened by the notion of being watched.

When Isabel's fantasy begins she is lying down on a bed being kissed by Goodwood. As the camera pans down the length of her body, Lord Warburton's hands and then face are revealed caressing Isabel's thighs. Suddenly Ralph appears next to Isabel on the bed, passively observing her. Isabel's fantasy does not end, however. In this way "the scene enacts a strange literalizing of the 'entertainment' Ralph finds in his 'conscious observation' of Isabel and her relationships with the two men" (Bentley 176). Their eyes meet and they pause, matching his voyeurism and her exhibitionism perfectly. Forming a part of Isabel's dream, Ralph's watching is presented as part of the makeup of her own desire. The fact that Isabel's desire is heightened by a spectator is especially significant in a filmic representation, of course. The necessity of the medium to depict things visually requires that Isabel's desire be represented physically on screen. The consequence of this, however, is that representing the female subject's desire can transform her into an object of a spectator's desire. As such, Ralph's presence in the sequence could easily represent our own presence as witnesses to Isabel's fantasy (and, indeed, to her entire life), as audience members watching the film.

This interlude, in conjunction with the opening sequence that deliberately recalls fashion advertising, demonstrates *Campion's* awareness of the shifts that have taken place in advertising and in film that mark a departure from the traditional psychoanalytic approach to explain women's motivations. Sexuality is now overt, not repressed, and narcissism has replaced subjugation to explain why women display themselves in active, yet sexually suggestive, positions. Women do not need men anymore; instead, they take pleasure in withholding their sexuality and using it to control both men and women (in that they can induce jealousy in members of the same sex). This explains why women frequently look disaffected in ads, even though they are on display. The objective is not to attract a mate, but rather to inspire desire in the spectator and have the ability to refuse them. In *Campion's* film *Isabel*, herself often seems bored and emotionally reserved. She is not a woman who uses passionate overtures to make herself noticed. At the same time, however, Isabel is excited by the prospect of herself as an object of desire.

This matter is further expounded upon later in the film when *Campion* uses an anachronistic⁵ film montage to convey Isabel's erotic fears and confusion set in motion by a kiss from Osmond:

What begins as a crude home movie designed to convey Isabel's world travels turns into a series of allusions to cinematic styles, from the look of

Valentino-era silent film (recalling the exoticism of *The Sheik*), to the bold visual patterns and odd framing made popular by Hitchcock, the bizarre effects of Surrealist film, and the isolated, stripped look that the female nude often has on the big screen. All of these brief snippets convey a similar idea; the history of film offers Campion a long menu of choices for presenting female desire as troubled, fraught, even pathological. But by presenting such disparate styles in such rapid succession, the cinematic allusions also draw attention to the fact that female sexuality is mediated, that it is visible on the screen only through time-bound conventions of representation. (Bentley 175-6)

In other words, we are seeing, not women, but portraits of women that have been continually sustained from James' novel through the various film periods Campion alludes to. These 'mini-movies' of Isabel's travels symbolically represent her journey of self-discovery. Depicting her inner struggle as a series of films, Campion makes clear how much Isabel's success or failure relies on cinematic ideals. As Isabel is about to become the articulate 'star' of her own life, Osmond is beckoning her to a role in a silent film. Campion's adaptation of James thus substitutes film for painting, defining Isabel's metaphoric portrait by the perspectives of the celluloid medium rather than the oil. If we are to interpret Isabel's travels as running away from Osmond's marriage proposal, then this sequence could be interpreted as Isabel's assertion of independence. Yet, Isabel 'asserts' or defines herself cinematically. If we keep in mind the implication of the default male perspective in cinematic representation, then in this sequence Isabel arguably opts to subject herself to the male gaze. As Berger says, Isabel constitutes herself as an object of desire for others (or specifically for Osmond in this case).

When analyzing this sequence in Campion's film, we must not ignore its purpose to implicate the audience member as a co-conspirator in the effort to make Isabel the victim of an objectifying gaze. In other words, by attempting to solve Isabel's dilemma (over whether or not she should marry Osmond) through allusions to stylistic conventions of the cinema, Campion necessarily implicates the audience member as similarly having conventional cinematically-defined 'best hopes' for her. If the audience member limits his/her hopes for Isabel to a desire for 'things to work out' for her 'like they do in the movies', the audience member is also necessarily complicit in the cinematic objectification of Isabel.

The fact that things do "work out" for Isabel, both in the film and novel, is not, in itself, insignificant. One of the conventions of the nineteenth-century Realist novel is the death of the heroine at the end. Because Realism developed by offering an increasingly complex background of social causes for human activity, Realist works tend to resolve questions about a woman's subjectivity (what does she want? Is she free to act?) by locating a social explanation-or at least a social closure-in her death (Bentley 141). One explanation for this phenomenon would be 'the world's cruelty' killed her. Or, the world's indifference to a woman's need for love. Or her inability to read social signs, etc. Anna Karenina, Lily Bart and

Tess D'Urbervilles are all examples of Realism's "cult of the beautiful corpse" (Bentley 141).

Campion, like James, chooses to keep Isabel alive. In fact, that is probably one aspect of the story that drew Campion to the character in the first place (i.e., Isabel's strength and perseverance in the face of adversity). But Campion concedes that James' decision to keep Isabel alive could be construed as an action almost as violent as killing her. This is especially pertinent when examined in a context where Isabel overtly expresses her will to die: "To cease utterly, to give it all up and not know anything more-this idea was as sweet as the vision of a cool bath in a marble tank, in a darkened chamber, in a hot land" (James 465). The point is that in both scenarios her fate is sealed and determined by the whims of the author, the narrator and the reader, by extension. She is impossibly trapped in this paradox and therefore, will never break free of the narrative constraints necessarily imposed upon her.

In initially creating a parallel between the act of writing the novel about Isabel and shooting the film about her, Campion is commenting on the necessary requirements, or limitation, of the task of writing about women. At the same time, I believe that she is commenting on women's own conflicts regarding their constitutions in fiction and in film. Campion's women are hardly ever fully formed, whether they be the women at the beginning of *The Portrait of a Lady*, given voices but not bodies, or bodies with speech, or mute Ada McGrath in *The Piano* or Isabel Archer who is ostensibly blind in this film. The film begins with a close-up on Isabel's eyes, but as the film progresses, we begin to realize that she is not actually capable of using them to her advantage. With the repeated mirror motif in the film, this idea is further demonstrated: we see Isabel's reflection, but she is never looking at it herself. Viewed in this way, we can argue that Isabel's unfortunate union with Osmond is a result of this failure to "look." Campion complicates this, though, by giving Isabel the opportunity to look. In other words, the mirror is right there, but Isabel ignores it. Instead, she prefers to be watched. Her assertions of independence and what set her apart from other heroines is her acknowledgement of a desire to be *looked at* (as sexually independent, or as having sexual desires of her own. That is, she does not use the power of her strength of character to look at herself and remain self-contained. She requires the other, the gazer, to fulfil that uniqueness of her character (i.e.: that as a nineteenth-century heroine, Campion depicts her as unique in that she has active sexual impulses rather than a passive denial of those urges).

Overall, there is an overwhelming sense that Isabel's character in James' text is not in synch with the narrative forces at work in the novel. One feels almost that her character's wants and desires are thwarted by the overriding discursive ploys of the narrator (and author, by extension). For examples of this, we can look to the aforementioned passages where Isabel leaves Euston Station, or where she expresses a wish to die, but is kept alive. The most important of these instances is, certainly, her very decision to marry Osmond-which, in the novel, could be

argued constitutes a plot development required of the narrative, simply in order to better objectify or display Isabel to the men in the novel, the narrator himself and the reader. Campion's film complicates this notion by making Isabel both aware of her status as an "art object", and, in fact, desirous of that status. Isabel's character in Campion's adaptation is thus more fully developed, in the sense that in her desire to be looked at, she is complicit in her own objectification. Seen in this light, Isabel's subsequent life decisions—such as her decision to marry Osmond—are made in order to facilitate her own objectification, and not, therefore, for the benefit of the viewer.

The anachronisms throughout Campion's film serve to exemplify the sustained problems proposed by evolving media representations of women. With the allusion to advertising styles at the beginning of the film, Campion complicates the problem of a monolithic male gaze by suggesting that over time women have internalized the gaze themselves and transformed it into the narcissistic pleasure of self-observation. Read as such, Campion's anachronisms keep female desire alive as a problem rather than a point of termination. Responding to the demands of the respective mediums prevalent during the times of James and herself, Campion has made a film that does not "try to translate a novel to the screen but attempts something closer to the reverse: a backwards displacing of the history and material conditions of film onto a narrative of nineteenth-century womanhood" (Bentley 174). In this context, we must reexamine the perpetually relevant question of "what will Isabel do" that Campion raises by leaving *The Portrait of a Lady* open-ended. If the viewer has never considered it before, s/he is now required to reflect on the probability that Campion's ending further objectifies Isabel in that it leaves her future open to the viewer's determination. Of course, the "cliff-hanger" has become a cinematic convention today amidst complaints that the over-use of technology does not leave enough up to the imagination. However, when the viewer considers that Campion's film is, in fact, a technologically updated reassertion of Isabel's objectification, perhaps s/he will forgo the luxury of making those life-decisions that Isabel Archer unwittingly forfeited.

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