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Made women: And then there was Eve... Isabel, Tess, Daisy, Brett, Caddy, and Sarah

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Rice University, 1992

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MADE WOMEN: AND THEN THERE WAS EVE . . .
ISABEL, TESS, DAISY, BRETT, CADDY, AND SARAH

by

MORAGH ORR MONTOYA

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

Made Women: And Then There Was Eve . . .

Isabel, Tess, Daisy, Brett, Caddy, and Sarah

by

Moragh Orr Montoya

The myth of the disobedient woman, along with patriarchal myths of
virginity, provide writers with what appears to be a natural alliance between
womanhood and fiction. This alliance, not natural but artificial, is between man
and fiction using woman's virginally "empty" form as a metaphorical space in
which the writer creates himself and his stories.

In The Portrait of a Lady, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, The Great Gatsby, The
Sun Also Rises, The Sound and the Fury, and The French Lieutenant's Woman male
novelists use disobedient women to tell surface narratives which appear to be
about their female heroes but which are actually about the needs, desires and
fears of the male writers, narrators, characters. The story of the woman hero,
when it exists, lies buried in the margins of the male stories, moving in secret
contradiction below the surface reflection of the male story.
The surface narrative of The Portrait is built on a series of misunderstandings of Isabel's ideas and intentions. She is judged based on these misunderstandings rather than on what she herself achieves. Similarly, Hardy’s surface narrative obscures the fact that Tess is a fierce woman whose individuality leads to her end on the gallows.

Daisy provides the perfectly silent, compliant form for tales told by Nick, Gatsby, and Fitzgerald. While Brett tells the story that Hemingway gives her to tell, she also maintains great individual power.

Caddy is usually seen as the means to a fuller understanding of her brothers, or, more recently, as a blank mirror reflecting male desire. Though she is used in both these ways inside the novel she is also a character with a strong voice and a story that I believe Faulkner meant us to hear. Sarah, often viewed as a feminist, actually has no story nor voice. Fowles’s story is of man’s fear of woman’s power to "make" man in her image.

These authors write fantasies of control that they cannot maintain. Depending on the author, what emerges is either a strong woman who tells her own story or the secret story of the writer.
DEDICATION

I began writing this dissertation for a variety of reasons but completed it for myself, for my sons Miguel Enrique and Paul Miguel, and for the daughter I hope to have.
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UNDOING THE VIRGIN'S ALLIANCE WITH FICTION

I.

When I began thinking about and then writing this dissertation I began with the man-made myth, "as old as story-telling," of the disobedient woman -- that "woman who departs from the role prescribed for her by patriarchal society" (The Female Hero, 79), whose "stubborn insistence on her own way" ironically generates so much great fiction by male writers berating her (The Madwoman in the Attic, 16) -- I strongly suspected that the story of this woman who could not obey was really a disguised story about man who had produced, piece by piece, this myth woman in order to suit his own story-telling needs. I noted at the time, and still note, that simply by using the concept of "disobedience" this woman was already placed in a structure of existing authority, the basic inequality of child to parent, the punishing father, the wayward child. I continue to refer to her then as disobedient only because that is the way she has been imagined and for the sake of simplicity. In formulating my original argument I was strongly influenced, and both attracted to and alarmed by, works like Nina Auerbach's Woman and the Demon which exposed the power lurking in even the seemingly most abject female victims of male writing. What attracted me, and still does attract me, was the switch in point of view her work taught me to make and which enabled me to see
all sorts of interesting stories being told where I had only seen one -- repression. What alarmed me and continues to alarm me was the use of female myth to counter male myth, my position being that of Roland Barthes when he writes that myth is "in the fullest sense a prohibition for man against inventing himself" (Mythologies, 155).

My stance at the time was also historical. I believed that the six novels I was working with illustrated a remarkable internal disturbance, a struggle over the dominion of forms which have characterized this myth -- her disobedience, her virginity and subsequent loss of virginity, her silences and ambiguity, her mysteriousness, her eventual downfall, and frequently her death. Here I was following Michel Foucault's idea of "effective history" which "wants to preserve discontinuity, eruption, the moment of emergence" and seeks "the point of the reversal of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it" (Lentricchia, 204). I considered James's The Portrait of a Lady and Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman examples of the myth at its most politically damaging worst, obscuring the motives of patriarchal power behind the myth with an elaborate and articulate voodoo. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, and The Sound and the Fury, I read as sometimes more, sometimes less self-conscious disruptions of the myth.

I abandoned my historical position almost immediately as I found that the evidence just didn't fit. Isabel Archer emerged from her novel as powerful as Tess or Caddy emerged from theirs. Daisy dismally failed the test I had by then
developed, and as for Brett, I still cannot make up my mind. Only Sarah fulfilled my expectations but since I had seen Fowles's treatment of her as a significant and horrible reaction in this historical process this fulfillment did not leave me with any case.

I still do think that there is one disguised story being told over and over again, in these novels, and in any novel which uses a disobedient woman, a femme fatale, a bitch, or for that matter a madonna, and that is one of the stories Auerbach uncovers in *Woman and the Demon*: women are mythologized because their power is, at least potentially, so fearsome that it can only be held in check by the imposition of a rigid mythic code. Aside from this very general expression of fear I no longer think that these novels necessarily use their women heroes as a sneaky disguise to cover up a particular and male story. What I have found with growing pleasure is that in at least three, perhaps four, of the novels the surface story's use of its disobedient woman hides not a man's story but another version of the woman's story told by herself, one in which she is not myth but a person with an individual voice. In the other two novels -- *The Great Gatsby*, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* -- I have found men's stories buried under the dead body of a woman character they have killed by mythologizing her, but in this case I've finally learned to appreciate these stories as individual too, finding interest in the hidden story told by the voice of the murderer instead of obsessing over the poor dead body which was after all, ultimately a rather useless task.
My love-hate affair with the disobedient woman and her accompanying myth almost certainly lies in a personal reliance on "disobedience" (admittedly, almost always disguised) as a way of life. I was aided and abetted in this, in regards to the dissertation, by reading Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* which helped me shape what was basically an inarticulate and undeveloped tendency to read and then to write "disobediently." Culler pays a great deal of attention to how what is simply the "norm" becomes what is privileged as "natural"; to the ways in which certain pieces and parts of texts are designated as important while others are relegated a "marginal" position; and to the way critics repeat or implicate themselves in the stories they discuss by reason of the critical positions they take. He points out that "norms are produced by acts of exclusion" (153), and that by "separating a text into the essential and marginal elements" we end by creating "for the text an identity that the text itself through the power of its marginal elements, can subvert," "the work one is studying" thus becomes "governed by other, less rich or complex texts" (215).

What was perhaps most important for me in an attempt to uncover buried or disguised stories was a twofold process which Culler describes, in the context of his discussion of an essay on the story of Narcissus in *Metamorphoses*, as

the elaboration of what must be suppressed in order for the text to achieve its narrative and thematic unity, and the investigation of how these secondary or marginal elements disrupt the hierarchy on which the thematic structure depends by reinscribing the drama in displaced terms. (255)
While I was writing the chapter on Caddy I read an article by John Duvall, "Faulkner's Critics and Women: The Voice of the Community," which provided me with company in its basic reminder of what I understood in Culler: "The key attitude is one of radical suspicion, particularly of those ways of summarizing plots or of describing character relations that seem most secure" (55).

To read "disobediently" for me meant that I began with a willingness not to believe what the father/author told me, us, what I was to understand and believe about his work (and in some cases their voices were quite insistent) and moved outward to a willingness to question what a majority of readers/critics believed, and then, necessarily, to questioning the early responses and assumptions with which I began my work. (Among other minor manifestations of this urge to disobey was my increasing reluctance to provide the writer and his narrator in each of these particular six novels with the protection that the strict separation of identities my generation of literature students were taught to accord to them. I am as uncomfortable with making them one and the same person as I am with their strict separation and so my references to them as either individuals or a unit are awkward and uneasy.)

To write disobediently is at least in part the inevitable result of so much disobedient reading. It is annoying to find out that there has been much more going on than one has been told about or permitted to discover, or permitted themselves to discover. In my own case, to be just, personal experience with both undergraduate and graduate classwork was almost never prohibitive, and usually
the opposite. It is the critical work, written about literature which, tends to be unresponsive and closed in its attitudes. But whereas I began in a passionately angry duel of an embrace with these six particular male writers over what I considered to be unconscionably horrible treatment of my beloved women heroes, I have ended by having a kind of fascinated respect, in some cases love, for them. My irritation is now limited to a kind of reading and a kind of criticism which is intolerant of possibilities, which insists on imposing one strict and exclusive reading on any given work. What perhaps sounds a little high-pitched in the following chapters is the result of a failure in the belief that to always say things calmly and in a friendly manner is necessarily the best way to say what you have to say. It is also, it seems to me, the inevitable result of writing for such a long time about women whose power is the power they have stolen from the silence imposed on them by their male writers and by many critical readers. In this context, any voice at all which comes from inside these women is more powerful than the power they have converted from silence.

II.

At the same time as I was reading Auerbach I read a short review by Peter Prescott, in Newsweek, of Updike's The Witches of Eastwick, which had just been published. What struck me was this series of three sentences: "Updike's witches are interesting; they wear their necromancy lightly, yet remain unsympathetic."
What can they see in the dreary men they go to bed with? And why, if they've decided that 'men aren't the answer', are they so permanently in heat?" (92) In the first sentence the most positive thing to be said about the witches, that they are "interesting," is also what appears closest to Updike's, their creator's name. The next, semi-positive judgement, that "they wear their necromancy lightly" is separated from Updike by a comma but is still in the same sentence. In the next judgement, presented in the form of a puzzled and mildly critical question, the witches have been separated completely from their maker and must stand alone to face the critical question. The final, most scathing and sexually degrading judgement -- "why . . . are they so permanently in heat" -- occurs at the exact farthest distance from Updike's name and so from his creative responsibility.

Stylistically, the impression made is that it is their fault that they are the way they are; that they are interesting belongs to Updike, that they resemble animals in heat is their own problem -- it is not read as a reflection of their writer or of his view of women.

I began to see this tendency to blame women characters for the faults assigned to them -- their deceptions, nasty sexual tendencies, and sheer falsity -- everywhere. Even in Auerbach, who in the essay "Alluring Vacancies in the Victorian Character," writes that "Ellen Terry's laughter . . . may have been more profoundly redemptive than were the attitudes of those vanishing visions of souls called fictional heroines, who lie about their treasure of human affections because they crave our worship" (48, my emphasis). Whether Auerbach actually holds these
visions accountable for their sneaky lies and thirst for worship is perhaps debatable but her sentence certainly suggests that she does.

While most readers/critics are like Prescott, assigning the virtuous or positive aspects of a female character to her author's creating hand, and blaming her directly for anything that is less than positive, Auerbach is much fairer, assigning both the negative and the positive to the women she discusses. She writes, for instance, that "behind the victim's silence lurk mystic powers of control" (35). (Pearson and Pope, in *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* repeat/a this understanding of woman's silence: "it is the atmosphere of secrecy that makes women seem mysterious and mythic," and woman "has power over men because she does not react to them" [55].) But the woman character's silence is not self-imposed it is imposed on her by her writer/maker so that in the space made by this silence he may tell a story, his surface narrative. Any power she may take from this silence is the result of a narrative necessity and not a natural expression of herself.

This is one of the dangers of Auerbach's myth-making. On the one hand it does uncover the fear that motivates the mythologizing of woman, but on the other it hands woman powers that are not only mythic, and as such unreal and potentially frustrating, but which are created out of male fear and so perpetuate that fear while doing nothing to develop a more real, less mythic power. Discussing du Maurier's work *Trilby* and the drawings that accompany it Auerbach says that the "women are free, mobile, and flexible, while the men appear by
nature becorseted and strangulated." About Aubrey Beardsley and du Maurier she writes, admiringly, that their women "appropriate all available vitality, whatever the demands of the ostensible context" (21). From a woman's perspective this may seem empowering but it is also dangerous to forget that the man who drew these pictures was very possibly not drawing them from a sense of admiration for woman's inherent vitality but from a fearful sense of being restricted to the point of strangulation, robbed of his share of vital air by those all-appropriating women. In an equally dangerous conversion of male horror of the female into female power Auerbach translates Bram Stoker's "darkest myth of womanhood . . . . Lady Arabella March," who happens to really be "in her true self a giant white worm" and who lives "at the bottom of a deep and fetid well that crawls with the repulsive vitality of vermin, insects and worms," into a "metamorphic power" which "seems darkly intrinsic to womanhood itself." The deep, fetid, and repulsive well is specifically translated into woman's "vaginal potency" (25). A woman's vagina is sufficiently potent in itself without deriving any extra potency from such fear.

In a chapter on "old maids" Auerbach writes that "the impassioned and protracted virginity of both [Lilith and Ayesha] is the source of their power to rule, the celibacy they lament provides them with heroic immortality" (148). The fall from grace, when it comes, is also its own reward; Auerbach refers to it as "the absolute transforming power of the fall" (160). But the impassioned and protracted virginity of Lilith and Ayesha is cast on them by a male story-teller, as
are their lamentations for a lost celibacy. What this tells us about the power of
virginity and the danger of "losing" one’s virginity cannot be trusted because it
does not originate in woman’s perception of virginity. To then reclaim a
transforming power from this fall is once more to rely on male fear and male
myth to empower woman.

Mr. Compson, from *The Sound and the Fury,* puts it very well: "Boys.
Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it
was men invented virginity not woman" (48). Virginity, fictional and otherwise, is
a physically neutral state. Making it a value insures the significance of the man
because it is the presence or absence of this man which makes a virgin or a non-
virgin. A virgin who wants to remain a virgin, Ayesha or Lilith for instance,
acknowledges and reproduces this produced value -- the man can take something
from her, can hurt her, rob her of her power, of her essence, of herself, make her
sick, even kill her. A woman who is "transformed" by her loss of virginity, "made"
a woman, again reproduces this value because the power to transform, to make a
virgin into a woman, still lies outside the woman and with the man.

Patriarchal myths of virginity provide both a physical and metaphorical
space for the male writer to create himself in. The act of disobedience in the
myth of the disobedient woman always ends up, on one level or another, to be
sexual disobedience. Not as it may seem, that the woman simply "loses" her
virginity, but that she loses it to the wrong man. In discussing Virginia Woolf’s
work Auerbach refers to what she calls "the central myth of its [Woolf’s work]
inheritance, *the profound alliance between womanhood and fiction*" (225, my emphasis). This alliance is not natural but artificial and extremely motivated, and it is the end result of that unpleasant ideal "of the alluring vacuum of uncultured womanhood waiting for the artist-male to fill her" which Auerbach mentions early in this work (20). The "profound alliance" is not so much between woman and fiction, but between man and fiction; woman's virginally empty form is what is used, "myth-woman" is what is produced.

In *William Faulkner: A Feminist Consideration* Judith Wittenberg writes that "in Mosquitoes, Faulkner's characters speak of writing as a product of male-originated desire for some elusive ideal woman, and the linkage of 'making' woman fictionally with 'making' them sexually is an intriguing one" (334). I would say that in many cases, including Faulkner's, it is not just an intriguing linkage but a crucial linkage. It is also a very misleading linkage because "making" a woman sexually, taking her virginity, does not make a woman but makes a man. (I restrict myself here to fiction though the implications and connections to the world outside of fiction are hard to avoid.) The "empty" space that is the physical virginity of the woman character, as well as the figurative emptiness of fictional virginity, a story waiting to be written, (Pearson and Pope write that "the virgin exists outside of time and process, without an ego" [25]) is not filled up when "lost" by the woman herself but by an image of this woman which is much more likely to be reflective of the writer than of the woman subject. That is why the fictional woman who "loses" herself to more than one man is all the more threatening --
the mirror that usually reflects one is reflecting two, three, and four -- the space for unique essence disappears; if she is him she cannot be me. This is Alec's and Angel's problem with Tess, Gilbert and Ralph's problem with Isabel (a spiritual whore), Gatsby's and Tom's problem with Daisy, Robert's and Jake's problem with Brett.

In *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* Pearson and Pope write that a woman may "focus not on what she sees but on how she is seen. To the degree that she does so, her cage is a mirror" (23). If we change the focus here, for a while, from this woman who "focuses . . . on how she is seen" we could focus instead on the viewer, the person who determines how this woman *is to be seen*. Kaja Silverman's essay on *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* describes this particular novel as the "traumatic apprehension of the central role played in the constitution of the subject by the language and desire of the other" (28). I would like to add "fear" to "language and desire" but at any rate, according to this "apprehension" the decision by the viewer of how a particular woman is to be seen is based in "the language and desire" of this same viewer, not in the subject-woman viewed.

What I have tried to do, in the following chapters, is to focus from exactly this angle on the male writer/maker of a disobedient woman in order to come to an understanding of how and why he constructs this woman, what story or stories he gets from the "cage" he puts her in. What he "gets," though not necessarily to the exclusion of everything else, is a reflection of himself, part of the story of who he is, because the writer/narrator's language first and foremost constructs himself,
it cannot help but reveal, when looked at from this point of view, his fears and his desires. When the woman hero of a text has no authoritative voice, no manner of subterfuge inside her novel, then the reader of this text only finds the writer/narrator's fear and desire of this woman, not a woman character in her own right. When the woman-hero, in one way or another, has a voice, practices subterfuge, then the reader receives much more than another reflection of the writer.

How does she find a voice and the means for subterfuge? My answer is not original. It lies in my disagreement with Silverman over what happens in *Tess*. What she reads, in the context of the novel, as "the coercive power of the signifier" (28), a the "traumatic apprehension of the central role . . . of the Other" I read as a battle for mastery, one who is Other, the writer/maker, against one who is both subject and Other, the character. Minrose Gwin, in her article on Faulkner, puts it in a less combative way. Quoting Cixous, Gwin calls it "the in-between . . . infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another" (244, my emphasis). It is in this "in-between" space that "the daughter's creative voice is engendered by paternal absence, the father's vanishing -- that is, his repudiation of authority, and, just as important, his willingness to vanish, to disappear into that opening as his text moves beyond its own boundaries and goes somewhere else" (244, my emphasis). Within this space exists the creative "process engendered by desire that always seeks more than it has, a force
from in the feminine space rather than one postulated by patriarchal expectation" (245).

I think that James, Hardy, Faulkner and very probably Hemingway do, in one way or another, vanish into their writing, leaving a real and virginal space where their "daughters" genuinely "make" themselves women, with their own voices they tell their own stories. The stories are there in the novels, if they are not heard it is not because they have not been told. Daisy and Sarah have no stories of their own; they really are the constructs and reflection of their writers' desire and fear which fills up any space which might have been used to become themselves. There are repressed and reinscribed narratives in these two novels but they are not about Daisy or Sarah.

In the following chapters it happens that a number of times I find various readings of these novels quite constricting. That I find them constricting does not mean that I find them simply wrong (there are some of those too) but that I believe that there are more stories to be read than they encourage reading, and that in many case, the stories they impose by their readings, on other readers, work in yet another alliance with the writer, though it is in many ways an unasked for alliance, to fill up the space the writer leaves for the woman’s self-creation; an outside Other fighting with the woman subject over who is to be created, implicating themselves once again in the story and providing yet another reinscribing of the obedient/disobedient status-quo.
I am also aware that I could be accused of being overly positive, trying to
give the writer credit for something, anything positive in terms of his female
characters' positions. But once again, this criticism focuses on the male writer and
empowers him all over again by such an insistent focus. It is a claim that the
woman/character is absolutely without the power to find a voice and command a
focus and it also forces one into a basically untenable position, implying that a
male writer could never create a female character who was strong enough to take
on her own voice as well as, by reverse logic, saying the same about female writers
and male characters.

Finally, because of the amount of affection, admiration, awe, and love I feel
for these self-made women and the men who refrained from filling those spaces
with themselves, I suspect I run the risk, when I talk and write about them, of
mythologizing them in spite of my complaints about exactly that habit. If that is
the end result, and I don't say it is, I'm not sure it can be helped because I do
believe in that space that Gwin describes.
Works Cited


ISABEL

Myth hides nothing; its function is to distort, not to make disappear. (Barthes, 121)

I.

In the prospectus for this dissertation I wrote that Isabel Archer's "trajectory through life, propelled by what she believes in as her own independence, is as thorough a demonstration of a repressive political power at work as is ever likely to be written." The first version of this chapter was filled with my fury at Henry James and ridicule of his puppet, Isabel. I was that angry because the discrepancy between what he described himself as doing in his preface and what he actually did in his novel was so large, and even angrier because very little of what I read in all that had been written about the novel came close to pointing out these glaring discrepancies.

I still do not much care for James's overbearing attempts at directing the way I should read his work. I suppose the preface was James's attempt to control the waywardness and ambiguity of his woman and his novel. Unfortunately it is frequently included as a part of the text of the novel, placed in front of chapter one as if it had been written first and not a good many years later, and read as the way of understanding the novel. I am not sure why we have given James so much
authority. Listen to the way Arnold Kettle in his essay on *The Portrait* talks about James and his novel:

You cannot control the response of your readers unless you are in complete control of your material. . . . Nothing in *The Portrait* is unconscious, nothing there by chance, no ungathered wayward strands, no clumsiness. (672)

And from Wendy Lesser's article in *The Southwest Review*:

It is important to keep in mind however, T.S. Eliot's notion that James's mind was 'so fine that no idea could violate it.' Often misappropriated as an insult, this remark is instead a wise admonition about keeping our own 'crude' ideas separated from James's infinitely painstaking workings-out. (178)

Kettle and Lesser are two of a group of critics who have made disagreeing with their views the same as disagreeing with James, and who have made disagreeing with James tantamount to an admission of ignorance and crudity: (Lesser's admonition is all the more surprising considering that two pages earlier in her essay she writes that "the Jamesian style places a premium on certain attributes that are linked to an appreciation of ambiguity: sympathy, receptivity, wit" and then turns herself around to ban all ambiguity, and, especially here, wit [176].)

A great deal of what goes on in *The Portrait* is peculiar, ambiguous, contradictory of James's preface, wayward, and even, once or twice, clumsy. In spite of all of James's attempts at controlling the "identity" of his novel and his
hero he fails. In spite of all attempts in one direction to limit Isabel to the
insignificant size he tries to insist she is, he has created a very large, very strong,
very likeable woman, and a "rich" and "complex" text which resists and subverts its
dominant and thematic surface drive towards a framed and static portrait. Isabel
as a character is both much more and much less than James has reported her to
be. In the surface drama Isabel's specialness has been trivialized by the narrator
and other characters into meaning nothing more than that she is difficult to please
in the matter of suitable marriage partners. Her real specialness, a strength and
fidelity to herself which allows her to do exactly what she says she will do--find out
for herself how to live life, gain experience--lies buried alive under piles of
interpretations which hide James's real ambivalence for much of what he finds in
her, and hides as well all of what he must have loved in her.

If the preface is read objectively instead of authoritatively it reveals all sorts
of conflicting feelings on James's part about his hero and about what he hoped to
do with her. Consider this peculiar juxtaposition: Henry James tells us at least 13
times in his 12 page preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* how inadequate, little, frail
and otherwise insignificant Isabel Archer and other members of her "type" are.
But he also tells us that Isabel is to be this novel's "center of consciousness."
Though he calls Isabel a "treasure" (8), "intelligent" (8), "complex,"
"inextinguishable" and a "charming creature" (11) her insignificance seems to cause
him a real technical problem. He reports that "millions of presumptuous girls . . .
daily affront their destiny, and what is it open to their destiny to be, at the most,
that we should make an ado about it?" When an ado is made, it always "suffers
the abatement that these slimnesses are, when figuring as the main props of the
theme, never suffered to be sole minister of its appeal, but have their inadequacy
eked out with comic relief and underplots . . . when not with murders and battles
and the great mutations of the world" (9). (Neither are Julius Caesar, Macbeth,
Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones or David Copperfield suffered to be sole ministers
of appeal for their works either—and they get their names on the cover.) In the
end though, James reports, it is actually Isabel's littleness which stimulates him:

To depend upon [Isabel] and her little concerns wholly
to see you through will necessitate, remember, your
really doing her.

So far I reasoned, and it took nothing less than that
technical rigour, I now easily see, to inspire me with
the right confidence for erecting on such a plot of
ground the neat and careful and proportioned pile of
bricks that arches over it and was thus to form,
constructionally speaking, a literary monument . . . . On
one thing I was determined; that though I should
clearly have to pile brick upon brick for the creation of
an interest, I would leave no pretext for saying that
anything is out of line, scale, or perspective. I would
build large -- in fine embossed vaults and painted
arches . . . and yet never let it appear that the
chequered pavement, the ground under the reader's
feet, fails to stretch at every point to the base of the
walls. (11, my emphasis)

James's language is revealing here. A "literary monument" for whom? He buries
Isabel and erects some kind of top heavy church on her poor body. She is the
"plot of ground" and the apparently overstretched "ground under the reader's feet" on top of which James piles "brick upon brick."

A lot of attention has been given to James's innovative use of centers of consciousness; he himself made a great deal of fuss about it in this particular preface: It is how he decides to "do" Isabel:

There is always the escape from any close account of the weak agent of such spells by using as a bridge for evasion, for retreat and flight, the view of [Isabel's] relation to those surrounding her. Make it predominantly a view of their relation and the trick is played; you give the general sense of her effect, and you give it, so far as the raising on it of a superstructure goes, with the maximum of ease. Well, I recall perfectly how little, in my now quite established connexion, the maximum of ease appealed to me, and how I seemed to get rid of it by an honest transposition of the weights in the two scales. 'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish . . . ' (10, my emphasis)

And he wrote this: "Without [Isabel's] sense of them, her sense for them, as one may say, they [her adventures] are next to nothing at all . . . (14)."

Now never mind the fact that in four consecutive pages in the preface Isabel suffers alarming transformations of her structural role as James changes her from his "cornerstone," to his "centre," to one half of a set of scales, to his "plot of ground." (8-11) And never mind that the novel's title is The Portrait of a Lady --- an artist painting his view (apparently, the definitive view) of a subject -- and not Self-Portrait of a Lady --- a subject painting her view of herself. James does
indeed say that "the centre of the subject" is to be "in the young woman's own consciousness" (10) which seems generally understood to mean that the novel will concern itself for the most part with Isabel's thinking view of her self and her world. The real difficulty is, as Nina Auerbach points out in an article in The Kenyon Review, "that the young woman has no consciousness " (44).

It is a risky practice to call attention to your own literary bravery by claiming that you have done something different than what others have done. For all his talk of other people's "tricks," escapes, evasions, retreats, and flights, James does not in fact place the center of the subject in Isabel's consciousness. Her consciousness is present (if Auerbach exaggerated just a tiny bit I find it completely understandable given the size of James's claim) most notably in her midnight vigil, but The Portrait of a Lady is much more a view of others, including the narrator's, relation to Isabel, than it is a view "of her relation to herself."

Isabel's consciousness is indeed present in the form of a number of personal ideas about love, marriage and independence. And these ideas do literally provide the "plot of ground" on which James built his self-described "literary monument," without them there could be no Portrait because there would be no reason for Isabel not to marry either Goodwood or Warburton. But the "superstructure" of this monument relies on Isabel's consciousness only in the sense that it is used as material for a series of calculated distortions. What Isabel feels and thinks, her reasons for acting as she does, disappear under a welter of interpretation of what she feels and thinks offered up by Isabel's fellow characters,
including the ever present narrator, those characters described by James as "like the group of attendants and entertainers who come down by train when people in the country give a party; they represented the contract for carrying the party on" (12, my emphasis).

These interpretations are almost always disguised as loving support of Isabel, or as loving resistance, but this is misleading. Her consciousness is only the apparent object of this support or resistance -- her course of action is never once affected. It is we who are affected by all the interpretation surrounding her which consistently interferes inside the novel in the same way that the preface does outside the novel, with the possibility of a clear objective view of Isabel's ideas, her consciousness, by always immediately designating the very specific ways we are to see and understand her. Auerbach says that "if we did not speculate incessantly about the moral content of Isabel's decisions, there would be no novel . . . " (44) and describes Isabel as a "tantalizing sequence of picturesque attitudes whom others endow with moral life" (45). It is not Isabel at all who fills the building of The Portrait of a Lady, but speculation about and interpretation of Isabel. In this sense, of course, Isabel's consciousness is very much the object of these distortions/interpretations. Having motivated or invited this transformation by providing its ideas as the material to be used her consciousness is restructured into something bigger, grander, stronger, more exotic, more perverse, more unwieldy than it really is, transformed into something somehow subtly wrong.
The early chapters of Volume 1 provide a marvelous example of how little information is actually needed to begin the work of creating Isabel through interpretation. In chapter 1 Isabel is interesting to Mr. Touchett, Ralph, and Lord Warburton precisely because of the very lack of information about her. They receive a cryptic telegram from Mrs. Touchett and immediately pick up her single word of description, "independent," and tantalize themselves with it. Without ever seeing her, and only on the basis of another person's extremely brief sketch, they, and we, have already stamped Isabel as "independent." At the end of chapter 2 Lord Warburton makes a declaration: "You wished a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman. There it is" (30). Now on exactly what evidence has "interesting" been added to "independent?" On what basis has Lord Warburton so quickly decided that Isabel is the embodiment of his idea of an interesting woman? On her looks? On her easy way of making friends with strange dogs? On her flirtatious way of not answering questions or statements addressed to her? Or because she is very interested in and impressed by her new surroundings? Had Lord Warburton never met a pretty, flirtatious woman who liked dogs and was intelligent enough to be interested in new surroundings before he met Isabel? Read over those few pages. That is all he, or we have as a basis for his judgment. Actually, as readers we believe he has more; some intangible air of being interesting that Isabel emits and that the astute Warburton sniffs out. James has Ralph corroborate our faith in this lord several pages later: "Lord Warburton had
been right about her; she was a really interesting little figure. Ralph wondered how their neighbor had found it out so soon; and then he said it was only another proof of his friend’s high abilities, which he had always greatly admired” (63). Lord Warburton’s "high abilities" are proven by his instinctual discovery that Isabel is interesting, and Isabel's interestingness is proven by Lord Warburton's "high abilities." This is all a bit circular though and not very solid.

Independent and interesting--as yet Isabel has done nothing, except show up at Gardencourt, to either prove or disprove these adjectives. But she does not have to do anything, her presence alone is apparently enough to cause an avalanche of glorifying description. The narrator tells us that "It was very probably the sweet-tasting property of the observed thing in itself that was mainly concerned in Ralph’s quickly-stirred interest in the advent of a young lady who was evidently not insipid” (46, my emphasis). And it is very clear from the leading questions he asks his mother and the quick interpretations he gives her answers that he is not only very interested in Isabel, but already sees her in a special and particular light: Ralph complains to his mother that her plans for Isabel are "rather dry" and his mother laughs -- "if it’s dry . . . you can leave Isabel alone to water it! She is as good as a summer rain, any day." Ralph asks "Do you mean she’s a gifted being?” (47) Now to say that someone "is as good as a summer rain" merely suggests that they are refreshing. And though a summer rain may come as a gift to those sweltering in the summer heat, the rain, in itself, is not gifted. So may Isabel be refreshing to those around her without necessarily being
endowed with special gifts. In this same conversation Ralph adds strong-willed, high-tempered, and "rare" to the list of adjectives describing Isabel, while his mother paints her with the suggestion of mystery and ambiguity (47-49). All of this is accomplished without Isabel or her consciousness.

Even when Isabel is actually present, in front of us, what she thinks or says is interpreted for us by the narrator and other characters. Take, for example, an early conversation between Isabel and her aunt: Mrs. Touchett, speaking of Isabel's house, says "I don't see what makes you fond of it; you father died here." Isabel answers "Yes, but I don't dislike it for that." Before we have a chance to take in this calmness for ourselves and decide on how we see it the narrator adds "the girl rather strangely returned" (35, my emphasis). Why does he qualify her answer as "strange?" If there is something in her manner that is strange the reader can be no judge of this because it is not reported as so. If he means that her answer is strange, why does he find it so? There is nothing inherently strange in her response, nor in her following remark: "I like places in which things have happened—even if they're sad things" (35). To say that the remark is "strange" when it merely shows an open attitude toward life and death is to make Isabel look "stranger" than her reply in fact shows her to be.

A conversation with Ralph is structured and interpreted in such a way as to justify yet another adjective being pinned to Isabel; "presumptuous"—an adjective which James also gives to her in his preface. Isabel wants to see the Gardencourt ghost but Ralph tells her that only those who have suffered can see it:
'but you haven't suffered, and you're not made to suffer. I hope you'll never see the ghost!'

She had listened to this attentively, with a smile on her lips, but with a certain gravity in her eyes. Charming as he found her, she had struck him as rather presumptuous--indeed it was part of her charm; and he wondered what she would say. 'I'm not afraid you know,' she said: which seemed quite presumptuous enough. (52, my emphasis)

If Isabel has no previous experience of suffering and yet announces herself to be unafraid of suffering it might be fair to call her presumptuous. In fact, what she means, as she explains a moment later, is that she is not afraid of ghosts, not something that necessarily shows presumption. Because her statement--"I'm not afraid, you know" is separated from its clarifying explanation--"yes, I'm afraid of suffering. But I'm not afraid of ghosts" by a declaration of her presumptuousness--"which seemed quite presumptuous enough" and a question which suggests she is presumptuous--"You're not afraid of suffering?" Ralph's sense of her as being presumptuous seems more credible than if James had structured it so that Isabel simply said "I'm not afraid of ghosts, you know." The only real presumption here is Ralph's when he declares that Isabel is "not made to suffer" but we don't take it as such, we accept it as another truth about Isabel against which her future suffering will seem all the more terrible.

"Strange" and "presumptuous" begin the touch work of painting into and onto Isabel the "flaw" which will eventually bring her so much suffering. Gilbert Osmond's ferocious and obviously motivated attack on Isabel's consciousness may
not seem to have anything to do with the creation/interpretation of this flaw because he is after all the accepted villain. "He said to her one day that she had too many ideas and that she must get rid of them" (359). Osmond tells her this both before and after their marriage and his motivation is clear to us; his is an immense ego which does not want to share space or time with anyone else's consciousness. When Osmond criticizes Isabel's quantity of ideas then, we take it as a negative reflection on him, not on Isabel. But Osmond does not actually say anything very different from what Ralph, Henrietta, Lord Warburton and the narrator say, all of whom in the most seemingly benign and benevolent fashion seriously undermine Isabel's consciousness throughout the novel, criticizing it in general for the quality as well as the quantity of its ideas.

Look at Ralph, for instance, who in an apparent effort to encourage Isabel to enjoy herself more, repeats Osmond's criticism in the form of advice: "Don't try so much to form you character . . . you've too much power of thought--above all too much conscience . . . (92, my emphasis). Henrietta, trying to push Isabel onto what she believes is the correct moral path, criticizes her for living "too much in the world of your own dreams . . . you've too many graceful illusions" (188, my emphasis). And Lord Warburton, courting Isabel, twice remarks on her mind in a way that suggests that it is too much: "you can't improve your mind, Miss Archer," Warburton says at one point, "It's already a most formidable instrument. It looks down on us all; it despises us" (77). Then, a short while later, as he begins to
suspect that he has little hope of winning her, "Do you know I'm very much afraid of it, of that remarkable mind of yours" (100)?

The narrator's attack on Isabel's consciousness is the subtlest and most damaging. His criticism sounds authoritative and just about everything Isabel says, does or thinks comes to us through him. In Chapters three and six he presents us with pages and pages of intimate information about Isabel's mind--from his own point of view--and then expertly sums himself, and her, up in one long and very full sentence:

Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better, her determination to see, to try, to know, her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit and the eager and personal creature of conditions: she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant. (54)

With these few graceful pages the narrator almost inevitably buys himself immunity from any and all suspicion we might harbor about his reliability and objectivity. He seems so reasonable. Certainly he is critical, but in so fond a fashion. Obviously he is amused by his heroine's foolishness, but so tenderly amused.

But as well as finding her amusing he also finds her "pervasive," "strange," and "absurd" and he has only to label her or her actions as such a certain number
of times before we come to see her in the same light without ever really looking at what is offered as proof of these qualities. This manner of presenting Isabel keeps the reader at an always somewhat unbalanced and wary distance from her as well as reproducing in us some of the same confusion that her fellow characters feel about her actions. This opaqueness, and apparent irregularity of character, is developed systematically by the narrator throughout the novel. It is an important part of the drama involving her fellow characters’ feelings and understanding of her marriage to Osmond. Likewise it becomes a part of ours: Isabel is strange; she is difficult to understand. For that reason I find it unlikely that the narrator is being ironic in the following examples. Furthermore, since he is specifically describing Isabel in these examples, and not the other characters, an ironic stance would align him with Isabel against Mme. Merle and Osmond, but to what purpose?

Look at Isabel's first meeting with Osmond, and the conversation she has with Mme. Merle following this meeting. The narrator says of Isabel's state of mind during the meeting with Osmond that "nothing could be happier in general, than to seem dazzling, but she had a perverse unwillingness to glitter by arrangement" (213). We have already been asked to accept, on good faith alone, Isabel's great independence and strength of mind, and now we are asked to forget this independence of mind long enough to consider her "unwillingness to glitter by arrangement" as perverse. Needless to say, except that the narrator does say
otherwise, it seems fair to expect that any independently minded person would not like to be arranged according to other's suggestions.

Nor is Isabel's reaction to Madame Merle a short time later, "strange." Madame Merle tells Isabel that she was "charming . . . you were just as one would have wished. You're never disappointing" and the narrator gives us his view of Isabel's reaction: "A rebuke might have been irritating, though it is much more probable that Isabel would have taken it in good part; but strange to say, the words Madame Merle actually used caused her the first feelings of displeasure she had known this ally to excite. 'That's more than I intended,' she answered coldly" (213, my emphasis). What exactly is "strange" in Isabel's reaction? She has understood without being told that she is expected to charm Osmond, and being "independent" she does not like such expectations.

There is one other thing that the narrator would have us understand about Isabel and that is that she is, ultimately, mysterious; simply impossible to explain or understand. Faced with Isabel, language and rationality are to no avail. (In Mythologies Barthes refers to this rhetorical form as "tautology . . . this verbal device which consists in defining like by like . . . the accidental failure of language is magically identified with what one decides is a natural resistance of the object." A "double murder" is committed; "one kills rationality because it resists one; one kills language because it betrays one" [152].) Responding to Warburton's declaration "Do you know I'm very much afraid of it--of that remarkable mind of yours?" the narrator reports of himself that "Our heroine's biographer can scarcely
tell why but his question made her start and brought a conscious blush to her cheek" (101, my emphasis). Since he has previously shown that he is far more intimately acquainted with the workings of Isabel's mind than she is herself it seems unlikely that the narrator really would not know why his heroine starts and blushes. But the narrator's calculated failure of omniscience only serves to deepen his heroine's mysterious character: Here is a woman truly impossible to know. Moreover, by having Isabel "start" (a guilty start?) and giving her a conscious blush he clearly suggests that she knows herself though we and the narrator cannot. Isabel's answer to Warburton, "So am I, my lord!", reported to us as "she oddly exclaimed" (my emphasis) completes the sense of her strangeness (unless one happens to think that there is nothing very odd about being afraid of one's own mind) and puts us in a defensive position along with Lord Warburton who cries out "Ah! be merciful, be merciful..." (101).

Out of nothing (there is no reason here which comes from Isabel to explain why she starts and blushes) something suggestively, perhaps dangerously deep. The Portrait of a Lady is filled with these moments where language and the narrator fail when faced with Isabel. Osmond's proposal to Isabel is another instance. After proposing, Osmond takes his "respectful leave," Isabel sits down, and the narrator tells us that

What had happened was something that for a week past her imagination had been going forward to meet; but here, when it came, she stopped--that sublime principle broke down. The working of this young lady's spirit was strange, and I can only give it to you as
I see it, not hoping to make it altogether natural. Her imagination, as I say, now hung back: there was a last vague space it couldn't cross—a dusky, uncertain tract which looked treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. But she was to cross it yet. (265, my emphasis)

What James's narrator calls "strange" here, what he says he cannot hope to make "seem all together natural" (which may seem like a graceful apology for a failure on his part but is just as likely a graceful way to call Isabel unnatural) is the failure of Isabel's "sublime imagination" to deal with the actual reality of a proposal she has previously only imagined. "Natural" is a word generally used far too loosely so I am not going to use it, but is there anything really very strange or inexplicable in the apparent failure of Isabel's imagination at such a point? Most people's imaginations either fall short of, or overshoot the major events in their lives, but as we are, by now, accustomed to thinking of Isabel as strange and inexplicable we are not likely to argue otherwise here or to suspect James's or his narrator's motivations.

James has been very tricky: Ralph, his parents, Warburton, Goodwood, Henrietta, and even Osmond seem only to be responding to Isabel; the narrator seems only to be describing her responses to them, but there is almost nothing there to respond to or describe, except previous responses and descriptions. Isabel, meanwhile, remains unaffected by others' responses to her. She does not get rid of even one of her ideas in order to suit those who are critical of what lies inside her head. But for the reader she becomes the accumulation or sum total of
all the remarks and interpretations made to and about her, all that is considered "too much" or questionable, by her husband, friends, and narrator. And it becomes almost impossible for us to see beyond the cumulative effect of this view of Isabel (a peculiarly uniform view considering how various the characters are supposed to be) presented on every page of the novel.

III.

Dorothy Berkson, in an article for *American Transcendental Quarterly* feels the need to answer critics who wonder if Isabel "need have married at all" by quoting "one of the most perceptive critics of The Portrait of a Lady, Dorothea Krook, who tells us that

> Circumstances, historical, psychological, and dramatic--in particular the dramatic--absolutely proscribe any 'end' to [Isabel's] life other than marriage, and any other duties, responsibilities or even serious interests other than those belonging to or arising out of that estate. that is part of James's donée in the story! (55)

Actually, historical circumstances in the last quarter of the century were not so proscriptive of other possibilities besides marriage as Krook suggests.

Psychologically, the proscriptives are what James decides to make them. Krook's point is well made though when she refers to dramatic proscriptives and "James's donée", *if* you look at the question backwards, from the point of view of the second half of the text. After reading the 237 pages of Volume II, which is all
about Isabel's and Osmond's courtship and marriage, it becomes difficult to
imagine *The Portrait* without Isabel's marriage to Osmond. But a donée, a given,
is generally understood to mean the base from which one starts one's argument
and so, though from Krook's point of view it may seem senseless to ask if Isabel
really need have gotten married, those critics who ask that question have very
good reasons for doing so. In both his preface and Volume I James presents his
given as Isabel's specialness and this specialness is, in the surface narrative,
expressed by and limited to Isabel's declared interest in being independent of
men, and her rejection of two opportunities to marry very comfortably, which
seems to verify that interest. To ask if Isabel need have gotten married at all is
only to take James, Isabel and Volume I at their word, even though that trust
shows some lack of suspicion in the growing number of pages devoted to Isabel's
rejections of Goodwood and Warburton as opposed to the diminishing number of
paragraphs that suggest Isabel do something more than complete her education in
the French language and learn how to take care of her clothes.

Krook's perceptiveness lies precisely (though perhaps unwittingly) in her
not taking James at his word. It is a kind of hypocrisy in James though for him to
make Isabel's apparent specialness so dependent on and so limited to her lack of
interest in marriage since his overt plot and the moral point it wants to make is
completely dependent on the inevitability of Isabel's marriage. *The Portrait of a
Lady* is filled with bad marriages; why should Isabel's bad marriage stand out?
Because before marrying Osmond she turns down two opportunities to apparently
marry more successfully. And why should Isabel's rejections of Warburton and Goodwood be so endlessly noteworthy? Only because later she chooses to marry so unsuccessfully. If she marries someone who makes her happy what would it matter how many eligible men she had rejected beforehand?

James uses Isabel's refusal of Warburton to provide the ultimate and only piece of substantial proof of all that has been said by others of her uniqueness. Appropriately, it is Isabel this time who first announces the importance of her action: "... she did her sex no injustice in believing that nineteen women out of twenty would have accommodated themselves to it without a pang ... . Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior?" (102) Isabel's statistical sense of her own importance (which actually allows for five Isabel types for every one hundred women) is verified by Ralph several pages later when he points out that "Nineteen women out of twenty... even of the most exacting sort, would have managed to do with Warburton" (132). Isabel's individuality is underlined by Ralph's corroboration of the number of women who would turn down an offer from Lord Warburton, five out of every one hundred that he should ask, unless you remember that James provides the statistics for both characters, at which point his technique may seem just a little heavy handed.

It is Ralph who serves as the most explicit advertisement of Isabel's unusual intentions at the same time as he insists on interpreting her behaviour through the lens of her inevitable marriage. Thus her unusual intentions come to mean no more than that she must be unusually hard to please, a characteristic
which is very satisfying to Ralph for his own private reasons. Very early in the novel, musing on his interest in Isabel, Ralph tells himself that

She was intelligent and generous, it was a fine free nature, but what was she going to do with herself? This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one the impression of having intentions of her own. (64)

Just a small amount of suspicion on our part should reveal Ralph's view of women as highly ironic coming from a man whose major interest in life is watching his female cousin live hers, and placed in a novel (written by a man often described as someone who preferred to watch life in favor of a more active type of participation) filled with men who spend most of their time and energy trying to get married, while all the important women in the novel are quite busy living their lives without husbands, or happily separate from their husbands. But Ralph is only reiterating James's view in the preface—what is there, after all, for women to do since they can't go to war, commit murder, launch ships or lend money at usurious rates?

Ralph suggests that Isabel is different from other women, that despite the lack of any sign from Isabel herself on this matter she has "intentions" of her own that are somehow different from other women's. This impression though is always intimately linked to an inevitable marriage. When Isabel says "I don't want to
begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do" Ralph's answer is "There's nothing she can do so well." And when Isabel says that she wants to see Europe before marrying, Ralph interprets this as a quest for someone even finer than Warburton. "You evidently expect that a crowned head will be struck with you" (134). This is a cruel and unfair interpretation which has no basis in Isabel's thoughts or actions but is nonetheless added to the color of her portrait. By the middle of the novel, observing Osmond's interest in his cousin, Ralph has translated her desire to see something of life into a ridiculously shallow and constricting form: "She had wanted to see life, and fortune was serving her to her taste: a succession of fine gentlemen going down on their knees to her would do as well as anything else" (234). Again, this is a particularly nasty, virulent translation of Isabel's desire. Isabel has not, in fact, ever said anything to suggest that "her taste" is for seeing "fine gentlemen going down on their knees to her." It is both Ralph's taste and his perception of the possibilities that supposes that a series of marriage proposals "would do as well as anything else" to give his cousin her view of life.

It may seem that as opposed to Ralph, Isabel does not accept the surface narrative's given, the inevitable direction that her life must take. She says two or three times that perhaps she will not marry, she prides herself on her independence from men, and even at the end of the novel, she is at first disappointed by Henrietta's news of her upcoming marriage because she feels her friend has "confessed herself human and feminine, Henrietta whom she had
hitherto regarded as a light, keen flame, a disembodied voice" (470). This conception of marriage, though, as well as what she first says to herself after Warburton’s initial proposal ("What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions? If she wouldn’t do such a thing as that she must do great things, she must do something greater" [102]), belong to the same line of thought as Ralph’s "she had wanted to see life, and fortune was serving her to her taste..." According to Isabel’s reaction to Henrietta’s announcement, to not marry means that you are above what is human and feminine. Likewise, if marriage to Warburton is a large and fabulous occasion, to turn down his proposal is tantamount to agreeing that you will do something even larger and more fabulous, it cannot simply mean that you are not ready to marry, or that as a couple you might not be well suited. In both cases, Isabel’s perception makes not marrying in itself something hugely extraordinary. The only difference between Ralph’s view and his cousin’s is that Ralph cannot even conceive of the possibility of such an extraordinary action, on a woman’s part, as to not marry.

The logic of James’s narrative defines Isabel as "special" in terms of her refusal to be rushed into marriage. The novel’s dramatic structure, the nature and shape of its dramatic confrontations, as well as the cohesiveness of its moral view all follow from this limited view of Isabel’s specialness. As it begins in a distorted understanding of Isabel’s desire, it continues: no one argues or responds to what Isabel actually says, they argue or respond to their interpretations of what she
says. And they cannot possibly interpret her correctly because they can only see her lack of hurry as a desire for a "better" suitor.

Isabel has very specific ideas about being an independent woman, on love, and on marriage. We know what these ideas are because the narrator has related them to us in his Chapter Six soliloquy:

It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of that state. She never called it the state of solitude, much less of singleness; she thought such descriptions weak... Henrietta, for Isabel, was chiefly a proof that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy... this young lady was not without a collection of views on the subject of marriage. The first on the list was a conviction of the vulgarity of thinking too much of it... she held that a woman ought to be able to live to herself, in the absence of exceptional flimsiness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex... Deep in her soul—it was the deepest thing there—lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive. (55-56)

We also know, again by way of the narrator, Isabel's fairly specific reasons for not marrying Lord Warburton:

What she felt was not a great responsibility, a great difficulty of choice; it appeared to her there had been no choice in the question. She couldn't marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to support any enlightened prejudice in favor of the free exploration of life that she had hitherto entertained or was now capable of entertaining. (101)
This is fairly general, but completely in line with her ideas about independence. A more specific reason, showing a good deal of self-awareness, follows on the next page: "She liked him too much to marry him . . . and to inflict upon a man who offered so much a wife with a tendency to criticize would be a peculiarly discreditable act" (102). (This particular reason lends a wonderful logic, intended or not, to Isabel’s later choice of Osmond, a man who offers so little.) Finally, Isabel herself gives a third reason directly to Warburton: "I can never be happy in any extraordinary way; not by turning away, by separating myself." Warburton asks "By separating yourself from what?" And Isabel answers--"From life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer" (119). There is no real indication that Warburton understands what Isabel has said. It takes Isabel several attempts to be this clear, she begins by saying "It’s that I can’t escape my fate" (118); and several questions from a puzzled Warburton, "I don’t understand. Why should not that [marrying me] be your fate . . . ?" before she arrives at the clarity of her final statement. And as soon as she does make herself clear she uses, apparently deliberately, something from Warburton’s response to sidetrack the conversation. But James has insured that we can understand her by supplementing Isabel’s final clarity with earlier conversations and thoughts about Warburton’s particular position. We know, even if he does not, that he is offering much more than "the chance of taking the common lot in a comfortable sort of way" (119).
As we have been receiving all this information on Isabel's thoughts and her particular reasons for refusing Warburton's proposal, we have also been receiving a great deal more. Between the time of Lord Warburton's arrival at the bench where Isabel is sitting and the moment when he begins to edge towards his proposal, the narrator relates in his own particular and ironic fashion, for about the length of a page, what Isabel is thinking. While apparently asking for a sympathetic understanding of his youthful heroine he manages to undermine exactly what it is in her that is special, her capacity to think and judge for herself. "It may appear to some readers that the young lady was both precipitate and unduly fastidious..." (94) Why should Isabel be considered precipitate for sensing Warburton's interest? She is, after all, supposed to be intelligent and sensitive. Moreover, her sense of the situation is correct; if she had been incorrect perhaps she could be called precipitate. "Smile not, however, I venture to repeat, at this simple young woman from Albany who debated whether she should accept an English peer before he had offered himself and who was disposed to believe that on the whole she could do better" (95). How has Isabel suddenly become simple? Why should she not debate her answer to a probable question? (Lord Warburton has after all, been debating the same question: "He had summed up all this... he had looked these things well in the face and then dismissed them from his thoughts" [96]) And why does the narrator, who has just presented several complicated reasons why Isabel feels disinclined to marry Warburton suddenly kaleidoscope all this into a phrase suggesting that Isabel is suffering from
a bad case of vain complacency—"and who was disposed to believe that on the whole she could do better."

The narrator's description of the proposal itself continues in the same fashion but I want to go beyond the way he directs our impressions and our judgement of the proposal to the way he and the other characters alter the essence of Isabel's ideas and intentions. Look at what happens to Isabel's very good reason for not marrying Warburton. No sooner has she made her decision clear to herself and us—"the idea failed to support any enlightened prejudice in favor of the free exploration of life" then she and the narrator take us off on a tangent: "But what disturbed her, in the sense that it struck her with wonderment, was this very fact that it cost her so little to refuse a magnificent 'chance'" (101) and from here on, rather than dwelling on or developing the real independence that makes Isabel's decision so easy, we are asked to contemplate the great peculiarity of a woman turning away a chance to marry Lord Warburton. "Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life . . . had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions?" (102)? With such a question hanging before our eyes (and hers), who is to blame all of us for forgetting that when she said "no" Isabel was merely guarding her independence and a desire to explore life, not looking for something or someone more fabulous than Lord Warburton.

*Something* or someone is immediately reduced to someone. From this point on, in discussions with her uncle, her aunt, and her cousin, it is assumed by
her fellow characters that Isabel refused Warburton because she believed she could find someone more fabulous. The possibility of "doing" something fabulous other than marrying disappears. Isabel, at the very least, permits this assumption and, at the most, on occasion, encourages it. The narrator steadily points in this same direction. Traces of the real essence of Isabel's decision surface only to be contradicted or forgotten in the following sentences.

The interchange between Isabel and her uncle, the first person she talks to about the proposal, is typical in the manner that it re-presents Isabel's reasons for not marrying Warburton:

'Ah, well, I guess you do not like him!' Mr. Touchett declared, 'You needn't pretend you don't.'

'I like him extremely; I'm very free to admit that. But I don't wish to marry anyone just now.

'You think someone may come along whom you may like better. Well, that's very likely,' Said Mr. Touchett . . .

'I don't care if I don't meet anyone else. I like Lord Warburton quite well enough.' She fell into that appearance of a sudden change of point of view with which she sometimes startled and even displeased her interlocutors. (103, my emphasis)

Isabel begins with a clear though general statement; she doesn't wish to marry anyone just now. Mr. Touchett's immediate assumption, that she is waiting for someone better, does not logically fit what Isabel has said -- she doesn't want to marry anyone just now, no matter how splendid they might be -- but though
her reply to Mr. Touchett's suggestion points out this illogicality, and is in perfect accord with what she previously said -- "I don't care if I don't meet anyone else" -- it is Isabel who the narrator then describes as appearing to be illogical. To whom does she appear to be illogical? To her uncle? If that is the case why does the weight of appearing to be illogical fall on Isabel? Her replies to him have not been at all illogical so why is it not described as a fault in his perception instead of as a quirk in her presentation of herself and her meaning? It is possible, I suppose, that the narrator only means to tell us that her fellow characters have a tendency to misunderstand her, but if this is what he is doing here it is an unusual moment for him. I think it is much more likely that he is manipulating the conversation in order to present Isabel, yet again, as difficult, perverse, and illogical at the same time as he turns Isabel's reply into an affirmation of Mr. Touchett's understanding.

Ralph's and Isabel's conversation about her rejection of Warburton is much more two-sided than the conversations she has with his parents. Once again, though, Ralph insists on understanding Isabel's desire to experience life as a quest for ever more splendid marriage offers: "You want to see life--you'll be hanged if you don't, as the young men say" (133); "You evidently expect a crowned head of Europe will be struck with you" (134); "You've told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to thrown yourself into it" (134). At the same time, Isabel is much more explicit about her reasons than she has been with Ralph's parents: "I don't wish to begin life by marrying. there are other things a
woman can do" (133). (Remember Ralph's reply, "There's nothing she can do so
well.") But no sooner is she explicit than she tries to deny Ralph's insight into her
reasons: "No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink!
I only want to see for myself" (133-134). (In effect, she denies herself in order to
remain free of Ralph's interpretation: "I don't know what you're trying to fasten
upon me, for I'm not in the least an adventurous spirit. Women are not like
men." It's peculiar; Isabel aids and abets her fellow characters' misunderstanding
of her. When Ralph shows his understanding she contradicts him. Is it Isabel as
a character who is afraid of herself or James who is afraid of his creation? I think
in this case it is Isabel, her reflexive denials seem coherent and not coerced.)
(133-134)

If Isabel's ideas on independence, freedom and marriage only surfaced with
Warburton's proposal and then disappeared under the weight of cynical
interpretation then perhaps it would be easier to understand why readers tend to
forget their existence, but this is not the case. Just a little further along in the
novel, Caspar Goodwood visits Isabel in London in order to renew his pursuit of
her. In this conversation Isabel is much clearer, much more explicit about her
ideas than in her talks with Warburton. In her efforts to shake Goodwood loose
she says, among other things, "I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me
how to live. I can find it out for myself" (140). And, "besides, I try to judge things
for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honorable than not to judge at all. I
don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know
something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me" (143). Goodwood's reply to this last speech from Isabel places him in the same company as the Touchett's: "You want simply to travel for two years . . . If that's all you want pray say so" (143, my emphasis). In this case Isabel's reply does not authorize his interpretation, though she does permit it to stand.

Isabel's true reasons for refusing Lord Warburton disappear as a result of a conjuring trick; we are distracted from looking at them by the other set of reasons being gaudily raised up around them. Her reasons for refusing Goodwood disappear in a more simple fashion; they and he are almost completely ignored. Goodwood himself ignores Isabel's reasons for refusing him, either intentionally or because he literally does not understand what she has said. And the American's courtship of Isabel takes place in a kind of vacuum; except for Henrietta, no one in the novel takes him as a serious contender for Isabel's hand. No one, not even Henrietta, asks Isabel why she does not accept Goodwood so there is no need for an alternate set of reasons to be constructed. It is the fabulous Warburton's continual presence throughout the novel which serves as the constant remainder to everyone, inside and outside the text, of what Isabel has refused in favor of Osmond, and yet the vacuum placed around Goodwood is as significant as the false front placed around Warburton. In both cases a development of the possibilities of Isabel's desire for independent experience is avoided in favor of developing the illusion that Isabel refuses Warburton and Goodwood in order to
find someone more marvelous. This illusion finds its "morally" logical and easily foreseeable fulfillment when Isabel is punished for such pride by an apparently quite horrible failure to succeed--she marries Osmond.

While the narrator lends quiet support to this illusion he is also busy suggesting, aided and abetted by Ralph, a more subtle explanation of Isabel's behavior which implicates her, as surely as Madame Merle is implicated, in her disastrous marriage to Osmond. Again, horrible failure and suffering is logically and "morally" called for. According to the narrator Isabel is guilty of a dangerous habit of not seeing correctly as well as refusing to look at reality in a sufficiently direct way. He calls her imagination "ridiculously active" and says that she frequently sees "without judging" (39). At another point, describing Isabel as a child in her "office" he tells us why she never removes the paper from the windows of a door opening onto the street: "she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side--a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror" (33). Further on in the novel he damns her much more strongly. Explaining why Isabel does not delve further into Ralph's and Madame Merle's past relations he says that "with all her love of knowledge she had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance" (294). Ralph, for his part, suggests that "it was wonderfully characteristic of her that having invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, she
loved him not for what he really possessed but for his very poverties dressed out as honors" (194). This line of logic insists that it is Isabel's great "capacity for ignorance" the evidence of which dates back to her childhood, together with her "ridiculously active imagination" and her apparently askew manner of judging any reality she does manage to get a glimpse of, which allows her to be worked upon by Madame Merle and Osmond.

I think it is accurate to say that most readers rely on the narrator's explanation of Isabel's behavior (to a large or even larger degree: Isabel is either merely innocent or she is irresponsibly ignorant) when measuring out their judgements on Isabel's responsibility and culpability. Arnold Kettle writes, with his usual awe inspiring certainty, that "the truth is that Henry James's purpose in this novel is . . . to reveal to the reader the full implications of Isabel's consciousness" (673, my emphasis). Dorothy Berkson writes that "James locates Isabel's error in choosing Osmond precisely in her failure to see beyond the surface and in her lack of experience" (41); and inspired by the narrator she goes on to tell us that Isabel's "office" from her early days "represents an important and ominous quality of Isabel's innocence: she not only likes to act on untested theories, but she frequently invests people and situations with qualities which they do not possess" (59).

Isabel's weaknesses seem obvious, unless you look at her from a point of view other than the narrator's and Ralph's. It seems to me that Isabel's "child's imagination" is quite accurate; the world outside her papered-in office is indeed a
"region of delight or of terror," as her older self finds out. (Why Berkson finds this "an important and ominous quality of Isabel's innocence" is beyond me. She has relied on the insistence of the narrator's judgement rather than on logic or accuracy. She fails to credit Isabel's accuracy of imagination and also forgets that untested theories can only be tested through action and that if Isabel is to be able to lay any claim at all to independence she must not leave the testing of her theories of life to someone else.)

Isabel's own explanation of why she does not inquire further into Ralph's and Madame Merle's relations, which comes just prior to the narrator's analysis, does not at all sound like "the finest capacity for ignorance." Isabel thinks to herself that "there was something between them... but she said nothing more than this. If it were something of importance it should inspire respect; if it were not it was not worth her curiosity" (173). I myself would be rather startled by such a puritanical lack of interest in something so clearly interesting, but I would surely only be attempting to mask my own desire to know everything about everyone if I then accused Isabel of lolling about in ignorance on the basis of her polite refusal to dig up Ralph's past with Madame Merle.

My point here is not to suggest that Isabel is not responsible for her marriage to Osmond, which would leave her a victim, but to suggest that, believing in the narrator's kindly objectivity and in Ralph's goodness and intelligence if not in his disinterest, we have accepted a version of these events which leaves several things unexamined. Look again at the charge of willful ignorance that the
narrator pins on Isabel. I, for one, believed in that charge so completely that I did not really notice until after who knows how many readings that Isabel does try, previous to becoming involved with Osmond, and in a very direct fashion, to find out more about Osmond and Madame Merle from her cousin, and that Ralph does not help her one little bit.

Shortly after meeting Osmond, Isabel asks Ralph about him:

"But why don't you ask Madame Merle about these people? she knows them all much better than I."

"I ask you because I want your opinion as well as her," said Isabel.

"A fig for my opinion! If you fall in love with Mr. Osmond what will you care for that?

"Not much, probably. But meanwhile it has certain importance. The more information one has about one's dangers the better."

"I don't agree to that -- it may make them dangers... Don't mind anything anyone tells you about anyone else. Judge everyone and everything for yourself. (214, my emphasis)"

So much for Isabel's fine "capacity for ignorance." And so much for Ralph's position as a trusted advisor. Of course his advice sounds wonderfully free and worldly. It is also dangerous, and impractical as well as being a brave-sounding impossibility and a contradiction of its own novel's style, a style which has virtually created itself out of judging Isabel for the reader. (I think Ralph gives this advice
believing that Isabel's mind is his own, or a duplicate of his, and therefore could not possibly end by judging in a way he would perceive as perverse.)

In this same conversation Isabel confronts her cousin about Madame Merle: "It seems to me you insinuate things about her. I don't know what you mean, but if you've any grounds for disliking her I think you should either mention them frankly or else say nothing at all" (215). She also asks him "if he knew anything that was not to the honour of her brilliant friend" (216). Ralph's answers to these questions are neither wrong nor misleading they are only completely unhelpful because they come voiced in his usual style of conversation which Isabel always has trouble interpreting, not for lack of intelligence but simply because it is hard to judge exactly what an ironic, cynical, dispirited person really feels and really means. Earlier, Isabel has looked at Ralph "with serious eyes. 'I wonder whether you know what's good for me or whether you care'" (192). This is a remark, not a question, and it is quite perceptive. Ralph could have been, presents himself as, a much, much better friend to Isabel than he manages to be.

Looking at what Isabel herself has to say about Osmond both before and after her marriage, reveals another problem buried in this accepted version of Isabel's irresponsible imagination. It is not, after all, that Isabel "invests people and situations with qualities they do not possess," it is that she sees the qualities they do have in a different light than those around her. (Which is very simply why she does not find Warburton's and Goodwood's offers as attractive as her friends consider them to be.) It is not that she dresses poverties as honours but that what
others perceive as poverties she sees as honours. This should not be surprising; it follows that a young woman who thought differently about marriage would think differently about any number of things. Before marrying Osmond Isabel explains herself, angrily, to Ralph:

'He's not important -- no, he's not important; he's a man to whom importance is supremely indifferent. If that's what you mean when you call him 'small,' then he's as small as you please. I call that large -- it's the largest thing I know. . . . Mr. Osmond has never scrambled nor struggled -- he has cared for no worldly prize. If that's to be narrow, if that's to be selfish, then it's very well. (292-293, my emphasis)

Three years later, in her long midnight vigil, she thinks:

He was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, anymore than she. But she had seen only half of his nature then . . . during those months she had imagined a world of things that had no substance. She had a more wondrous vision of him . . . she had not read him right. A certain combination of features had touched her, and in them she had seen the most striking of figures. That he was poor and lonely and yet that somehow he was noble . . . There had been an indefinable beauty about him . . . She had felt at the same time that he was helpless and ineffectual, but the feeling had taken the form of a tenderness which was the very flower of respect. (357)

I suppose that it would be easy to ignore the very strong possibility that saying or describing something differently very frequently indicates a way of seeing that is different; thus one could insist that since Osmond is awful it makes no
difference how you describe him. Or, being slightly more subtle, one could simply say that Isabel's manner of describing Osmond makes it clear that seeing something different in Isabel's case means that she sees things that do not exist so that, if anything, the narrator's view of Isabel's mind is by far too gentle. (Happily for this argument Isabel says that she imagined "a world of things that had no substance," and admits to having had "wondrous visions.") Certainly, Osmond remains fairly horrible no matter how you describe him (though I would no longer be surprised to find that there are others besides James who are secret admirers of the character). It seems fairly clear too, that if Isabel had only adopted Ralph's manner of seeing Osmond she could have saved herself three years plus a lifetime of misery. If we follow these arguments though we continue to take everyone else's view of Isabel and her choice except her own personal view.

There is not, after all, anything either wrong or absurd in Isabel's theoretical view of Osmond's apparent characteristics, which could, it seems to me, with a few minor changes, be a theoretical view of cousin Ralph's characteristics. Nor can this view be written off to sheer naivete -- any number of experienced people and characters hold the same set of ideas which are simply based on different values and needs than the ones held by Isabel's critics inside the novel. Isabel's trouble comes from her practical application of theory and this surely does stem from her inexperience; she cannot at the time of her engagement see that Osmond's "smallness" is not the smallness she thinks it is but an immense fraud worn to cover a giant ego.
Again though, Isabel's view of her own inexperience as well as her attitude towards it is vastly different than anyone else's. Remember that everyone in the novel, including Ralph, believes that Isabel refuses Warburton because she thinks she can find someone much better -- perhaps a crowned European head while the narrator, as well as her critics outside the novel, have taken the more subtle line of blaming her consciousness. According to either theory Isabel's marriage makes her a sad failure, but the personal logic behind the choices she makes is quite different from these communal assumptions: Isabel's whole point in not marrying Goodwood or Warburton is her lack of experience and her basic sense that marriage to them would surely shield her forever from all experience; her whole desire is for this experience, for the opportunity to learn to see beyond surfaces, something she knows cannot be done without risk: "I can never be happy in any extraordinary way: not by turning away, not by separating myself . . . from life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer" (119, my emphasis). This, remember, to the bewildered Lord Warburton. And to the equally bewildered Caspar Goodwood: "I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live. I can find out for myself" (140); "I try to judge things for myself . . ." (143). According to Isabel's own credo then, we have to judge her marriage to Osmond a resounding success in so far as she does exactly what she says she wants to do, and in doing so certainly finds out how to live, and just as certainly finds out more about human affairs than any guardian of propriety could wish her to know. The "full implications of Isabel's consciousness" intoned so
negatively by Kettle are not actually negative, only difficult; learning how to live for oneself is a painful experience. Judging for yourself carries the same risk of being wrong as letting others judge for you. And what does anyone imagine Isabel's life would have been like married to Warburton or Goodwood? I imagine it would have been just as unpleasant and very possibly much more subtly harmful -- at least marriage to Osmond keeps her alive. Finally, if you insist on living in such an unusual fashion, and are true to yourself, you cannot run away from your choices.

Isabel's apparently irresponsible inability to see the world as it is -- as the narrator, and Ralph, and Osmond see it -- structures the reasoning on one side of Isabel's marriage. On the other side lies her sadly transformed character, an equivalent distortion which proves the dire awfulness of her choice and probably serves as a suitable warning against anyone using their own consciousness to choose their marriage partner. Berkson says that "Isabel believes that she can marry Osmond and retain her independence and individuality" (61) but Berkson, and all of us, know better.

Volume II is certainly filled with the observations of her fellow characters sadly noting these telltale changes. Edmund Rosier's comment is the mildest: "She had lost something of that quick eagerness to which her husband had privately taken exception -- she had more the air of being able to wait" (310). This observation does not really even belong to Rosier as he can have no knowledge of Osmond's private objections to Isabel's quick eagerness. If anyone
is implying that Isabel has changed to suit her husband’s preference it must be the narrator.

Cousin Ralph is rather horrified:

slender still, but lovelier than before, she had gained no great maturity of aspect; yet there was an amplitude and a brilliancy in her personal arrangements that gave a touch of insolence to her beauty. Poor human-hearted Isabel, what perversity had bitten her . . . . The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent . . . . she represented Gilbert Osmond. (331)

Caspar Goodwood’s view of the changed Isabel is, for him, quite passionately dramatic: "I can’t penetrate you! what am I to believe -- what do you want me to think . . . you yourself say you’re happy, and you’re somehow so still, so smooth, so hard. You’re completely changed. You conceal everything; I haven’t really come near you" (425).

Isabel lends authority to these observations; looking backward for the beginning of her trouble she thinks that though she

had an undefined conviction that to serve for another person than their proprietor traditions must be of a thoroughly superior kind . . . she nevertheless assented to this intimation that she too must march to the stately music that floated down from unknown periods in her husband’s past; she who of old had been so free of step, so desultory, so devious, so much the reverse of professional. (361)
None of these changes are positive, none have developed naturally from Isabel's character, they are all the result of the dreadful Osmond. True enough. But the problem is that though these changes represent only a minor part of what is happening between Isabel and Osmond, Isabel's superficial willingness to fit the form of Osmond's desire, we and her fellow characters take these changes as signifying a real and horrible defeat for Isabel at Osmond's hands. Again, believing in this version means ignoring what Isabel actually says and does.

Look at the changes: Rosier's comment is not much more than an observation of a growing maturity which happens to many people with or without the help of rotten spouses; growing older one learns to wait. Caspar Goodwood's claim is dramatic but I am not sure how accurate it is as a measure of change. Has he ever, for instance, "really come near" her? Was that the time he asked her if she was refusing him merely because she wanted to travel around for a bit? Has he ever really penetrated her? Known what she wanted him to think?

The trouble with Ralph's estimate is that though he may well be able to take his cousin's outward appearance/comportment as representing a much deeper change we cannot so simply follow him without once again ignoring the Isabel who is currently in front of us, as well as the Isabel who long ago explained, with great explicitness to Madame Merle, her ideas on superficial representation. Madame Merle, like Osmond and Ralph, believes solely in what the surface view presents:

What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? Where does it end? . . . I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear . . . One's self -- for other people -- is one's expression of one's self; and
one’s house, one’s furniture, one’s garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps -- these things are all expressive. (175)

Isabel does not feel the same way:

I don’t agree with you I think just the other way. I don’t know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything is on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don’t express me; and heaven forbid they should . . . . My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don’t express me. (125, my emphasis)

Finally, long before her night-long evaluation of their marriage, Isabel has defeated her own attempts to "march" to Osmond’s stately music. "He had thought at first he could change her, and she had done her best to be what he would like. But she was, after all, herself -- she couldn’t help that; and now there was no use pretending, wearing a mask or a dress, for he knew her and had made up his mind" (357, my emphasis). Isabel knows that she has not changed, knows that she cannot change.

This ought to be obvious to readers too if they ask themselves what Osmond thinks he is getting when he marries Isabel. It is not her money, though I grant its importance to Osmond; he almost certainly would not have married her if she had not been rich. But Isabel’s richness is a mere necessity for Osmond, it is not, strictly speaking, what he marries her for. (In his list of requirements "rich" only comes third, after "beautiful" and "clever" [206].) Osmond’s sister remarks that "it’s a pity she’s so charming . . . . To be sacrificed, any girl would do. She
neendn't be superior." Madame Merle knows Osmond much better and corrects the countess: "If she weren't superior your brother would never look at her. He must have the best" (233). Osmond marries Isabel because Isabel, having "discovered" his "style" will "publish" this same style "to the world without his having any of the trouble. She should do the thing for him, and he would not have waited in vain" (260). He elaborates on this thought in a short passage that is a peculiarly revealing mixture of the narrator’s view of Osmond and Osmond’s view of Isabel:

What could be a happier gift in a companion than a quick, fanciful mind which saved one repetitions and reflected one's thought on a polished, elegant surface? Osmond hated to see his thought reproduced literally - - that made it look stale and stupid; he preferred it to be freshened in the reproduction . . . this lady’s intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one -- a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring. (296)

After three years of marriage Isabel has also come to realize what Osmond believed he was to get when he married her:

Her mind was to be his -- attached to his own like a small garden plot to a deer park . . . It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching. He didn't wish her to be stupid . . . it was because she was clever that she had pleased him. But he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour, and so far from desiring her mind to be a
blank he had flattered himself that it would be richly receptive. (362)

Does Osmond actually receive any of what he has dreamed of? No. He has Isabel's money; he has a proper chaperon for his daughter; he has splendid parties that she arranges for him; and he has a wife dressed as he would wish. He does not, though, have Isabel serving him his own thoughts for dessert from the highly polished, richly receptive receptacle of her mind. Isabel's truly "devious" mind remains as essentially untouched by Osmond and his ideas as it has remained untouched by Ralph, Ralph's parents, Henrietta and Madame Merle. And it is Isabel's mind, her consciousness which is, though never the center of her own portrait as James presents it as being, her special claim to uniqueness -- once it has been unleashed from all the "contract players" interpretations. If she has retained this she cannot be said to have really changed, and all the mourning done over her apparent tragic change only serves in yet another way to describe Isabel as the victim of her own grandiose ideas, suffering the fate she asked for, and lucky to have so many of her fellow characters so sorry for her.

It is worth considering this as well: from a dramatic point of view, as well as a "moral" one, it may make sense to suggest that Isabel is sadly changed, but this "change" is one of those finely embossed vaults which distract us from this memorials' base. Volume II would necessarily be quite different if Isabel's consciousness had really changed. If she retained her belief in Osmond there would be very little to relate at all except the shocked horror of her friends at the
sight of the sadly transformed Isabel. Moreover, as readers we might feel a bit deceived about her overall worth. If, on the other hand, Isabel woke up shortly after her marriage, realized exactly what Osmond was, and began a desperate but losing battle for her mind, then most likely Warburton would end up married to Pansy, and Isabel instead of attending Ralph on his deathbed, would end the novel locked in a nunnery for week the better to consider her sins. There is never any danger though of Isabel losing herself, willingly or otherwise, to Osmond, only the danger of readers believing the surface narrative when it suggests that this is possible.

IV.

James has created an unconventional hero and then placed her in a conventional world where she has been judged by conventional standards of behavior. Her complexity of thought and action inside the novel is straightened out and simplified into something that is available to the understanding of her fellow characters who are bright but conventional thinkers: if Isabel rejects excellent opportunities to marry well, then it is because she thinks she can do better. She is then judged by this same logic as failing to achieve what she hoped for. What seems peculiar is the extent to which this unusual consciousness has been judged by critics outside the novel in this same restrictive, limiting manner. That this happened in the early years after publication of The Portrait is
understandable but that we are still having trouble identifying her differences is irritating. It is as if we cannot find a way of responding to Isabel as she is but rather continue to respond to her as if she were the "inadequate," "insignificant" slim little thing that James presents her as in his preface.

It has not mattered whether you criticize Isabel or praise her; what has mattered is that she fit neatly inside the frame of James's portrait. Dorothea Krook's essay on Isabel claims that "Isabel has to suffer because she had not the courage to be herself . . . . Because for the sake of love she lapsed from truth . . . " (728). I think if you look at this from Isabel's point of view, she suffers exactly because she does have the courage to be herself. Dorothy van Ghent, in the same edition, says it this way: Isabel comes to have "a knowledge of human bondedness," achieves "an extension into the freedom of personal renunciation and inexhaustible responsibility" (693). This is not particularly wrong, it just completely fails to do justice to Isabel's achievements. Arnold Kettle writes that "Isabel, then, imagining herself free, has in fact delivered herself into bondage . . . . She has sought life and because she has sought it in this way she has found death" (683). If Kettle thinks Isabel has found death then he must assume that Pansy is prancing with life. Dorothy Berkson sums it all up in another way: "Caspar Goodwood's offer is a final lure that Isabel resists. He offers the kind of benevolent paternalism that Pansy who has no choice but to bow to such paternal protection, would be lucky to find. Isabel does have a choice and she chooses the role of protector and guide over the role of
dependent" (67). Again, maybe this is not particularly wrong, but it is very limiting. I do not think that Isabel’s most important choice is made in relation to her role with Pansy.

What Osmond fails to do in the novel, readers, following the characters’ directions, as well as some of James’s directions, have just about succeeded in doing outside the novel. All that is "so free of step, so desultory, so devious, so much the reverse of professional" (361) so powerful about Isabel has been turned into something quite stately and static. We have, in fact, created for her and her novel "an identity that the text itself" subverts. (Culler, 215) what has been excluded or designated as marginal first by James in the surface narrative of his novel, then again by him in his preface, and then again by readers of *The Portrait of a Lady* are all those elements, beginning and ending with what James first declared was his ‘given’, Isabel’s specialness of mind, which prevent or disrupt an easy, moral way of understanding *The Portrait of a Lady*, anything that is ambiguous about the characters and about their creator’s feelings for what he has created. Since readers who are passionate about James are frequently so because of their appreciation of the ambiguity they find in his works this may seem like a strange claim. But I still think that James has been allowed to be ambiguous only in very specifically defined, unambiguous ways, that there is a world of ambiguity in his work that has not been touched on.

What does it mean that James, in his preface, so seriously undercuts the value of his hero, that he tells us that she is not substantial enough to build a
novel on? What is there to say about the negative, condescending attitude towards women that runs throughout the novel, expressed not only by Osmond but by all the male characters including the narrator? Ralph believes that women sit around and wait to get married, and he believes that this is essentially a good idea as getting married is the best thing women can do. Osmond says of Henrietta that "I never have admitted that she's a woman. Do you know what she reminds me of? Of a new steel pen -- the most odious thing in nature (419). When he accuses Isabel of "not being trustworthy" he goes on to casually say "I don't know that its base; it's the kind of thing a woman always thinks she may do. I've no doubt you have the finest ideas about it" (396). The narrator has already said the same thing, describing an action of Isabel's like this: "It was not that it would be base or insidious; for women as a general thing practice such manoeuvres with a perfectly good conscience, and Isabel was instinctively more true than false to the common genius of her sex" (350). Madame Merle, says the narrator, "knew how to think -- an accomplishment rare in a woman . . ." (164)

If you look at James's essays they provide a wonderful source for his thoughts on women. Walter Anderson in his essay "The Finer Music and the Ass's Bray: Henry James versus American Culture," says that "James implores the American male to correct the women by taking . . . 'his stand on what pleases him' (622). In defending this position James refers to societies other than ours; in which 'the male privilege of correction springs, and quite logically, from the social fact that the male is the member of society primarily acting and administering, and
primarily listened to -- whereby . . . his "general competence" as I have called it, colors the whole air, reacts upon his companion and establishes for her the principal relation she recognizes" (91-92). Just as Osmond thinks that he should show Isabel the way, Anderson writes that "in his essays James concludes that the woman 'is never at all thoroughly a well-bred person unless he [the man] has begun by having a sense for it and by showing her the way.' She has only to take the 'truth as revealed to her and submit to his guiding competence and authority'" (622). Anderson also cites evidence of James's dislike of "women shining in the limelight" and uncovers this gem of a statement: "Isn't it everywhere written that the women, in any society, are what the men make them" (629, note #14).

Given all this, it surprises me to find so many readers who see James as a real feminist. What have they ignored in order to make this possible? Berkson believes in James's "remarkable affinity for the lives of women" (65) and says that he "takes us beyond the traditional ending, marriage, and shows us the tragedy that can face a young woman whose culture provides her with no serious alternatives to marriage and which expects her to marry before she has experienced life and gained the wisdom necessary for judgement" (69). Here Berkson wipes out Henrietta's presence in the novel -- a woman who in spite of her culture finds a serious alternative to marriage. And she erases all of Isabel's strengths, her opinions, her actions, making her simply a victim of her culture.

Adele Wiseman writes in *The International Journal of Women's Studies* that Isabel's "function is to make old men feel younger and help young men grow
older" (461). "Isabel will validate the domestic structure with her life, affirm its institutions with her pain. She will show what women are by what a woman can be. She will hold the domestic world together. After all, that's women's work" (470). Wiseman goes on to say that "James did not force an alien ideal on his heroine; he worked out, in her, a widespread ideal in action . . . . And we can be grateful to James for recognizing it and paying it artistic tribute, though we may not share his enthusiasm for it as an ideal" (470). It's true, the ideal may have not been alien to Isabel's culture, but it was certainly alien to her as she is presented to us by James. And I'm not at all grateful. Artistic tribute is a highly misleading way of describing James's perpetration and propagation of a destructive, and constricting ideal even as he called attention to its negative effects on other levels.

Lesser finds James's women "nothing short of thrilling. They leap whole from his brain as Athena did from Zeus . . . ." (178) She goes on to say that in most of James's novels "the structure relies on pitting one woman's feelings against another's, and the essential story lies in their different capacities for willed action, deep passion, renunciation, and suffering" (189). Women fighting other women over men have always made some men very happy, as has the sight of women renouncing and suffering for the sake of men. Lesser's pro-feminist argument on James's behalf is based on the "passivity" and insubstantialness of James's men. If his men are so worthless (and I agree with Lesser on this point) what does that say about the women who spend so much of their passion and energy trying to marry them? (Lesser's essay -- filled with examples of James's heroes sitting
around waiting for women to place them -- is a wonderful, if unwitting reply to
James's insistence that it is men who make women.)

Why is Isabel's consciousness, her own words and explanations, buried so
completely, particularly under the avuncular ridicule of the narrator and the
seething analysis of cousin Ralph. Because, it seems to me, that the narrator and
Ralph (and James) have at least some of the same kind of distaste for Isabel's
manner of thinking and seeing that Osmond does. A "ridiculously active
imagination," too much "seeing without judging," and "the finest capacity for
ignorance," says the narrator. Ralph, remembering "what he had said to his father
about wishing to put it into her power to meet the requirements of her
imagination" thinks "he had done so, and the girl had taken full advantage of the
luxury." Ralph feels "sick" and "ashamed," he feels "terribly sold" (294). Her
imagination has turned out not at all to match his own.

Osmond says that she has "too many ideas," "what he had meant had been
the whole thing -- her character, the way she felt, the way she judged . . . she had
a certain way of looking at life which he took as a personal offence" (359). Isabel
realizes, finally, that "the real offence . . . was her having a mind of her own at all
. . . [Osmond] had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his
opinions, his ambitions, his preferences . . . " (362, my emphasis). It is exactly this
refusal on Isabel's part to enter into their way of thinking and feeling that so
irritates the narrator and Ralph. It is exactly the way Isabel feels, the way she
judges, the way she looks at life, all independently of him, that the narrator so
frequently criticizes. When he says that she sees "without judging" he conspires to make her judgements disappear -- she does judge, it is just that he does not agree with her. When he says her imagination is "ridiculously active" he is ridiculing the imagination itself, as well as its amount of activity. If Ralph does not go so far as to think of Isabel's mind as "richly receptive" he certainly believes that her feelings, ambitions and imaginings coincide with his own. When he finds them to be quite different he feels "sold" (just as Osmond does); what he had bought -- Isabel as entertainment -- was worth much less than the price he paid for it. Ralph does not try to make Isabel's consciousness disappear, he only suggests that it is much, much less than he had hoped it would be, and to fail the magnificent, beneficent Ralph in such a way is almost worse than to be made to disappear.

It is also worth noting that women, inside and outside the text seem less likely to try to violate/annihilate Isabel's consciousness. James's creations, Henrietta and Mrs. Touchett, are both sharply critical of Isabel and her manner of thinking but their criticism acknowledges who she is rather than attempts to do away with her or make her into themselves. Henrietta, after meeting Mr. Osmond, remarks "I don't know what it's in you . . . but for a nice girl you do attract the most unnatural people" (252). Mrs. Touchett, talking to Ralph at the beginning of Isabel's relationship with Osmond, is much more keenly aware than her son of the dangers ahead, because much more keenly aware of Isabel as a consciousness very different from her own:
If Isabel wants to marry Mr. Osmond she'll do so in spite of all your comparisons. Let her alone to find a fine one for herself for anything she undertakes... There's nothing in life to prevent her marrying Mr. Osmond if she only looks at him in a certain way. That's all very well; no one approves more than I of one's pleasing one's self. But she takes her pleasure in such odd things; she's capable of marrying Mr. Osmond for the beauty of his opinions or for his autograph of Michael Angelo. (235)

Outside the novel, Dorothy Berkson's explanation of how Isabel could fall in love with and marry Gilbert Osmond is the most psychologically satisfying one that I have come across and indicates a keen awareness of Isabel's consciousness:

Isabel uses exactly the same standards to judge Osmond that she used to judge Warburton and Goodwood... They both courted her by drawing attention to what they could offer her. Gilbert Osmond plays the far subtler and clever game of self-deprecation... Isabel believes that she can marry Osmond and retain her independence and individuality. For Isabel's idea of independence is tied very closely to the concept of giving as opposed to taking. (61)

It is not just for Osmond then that "the real offence... was [Isabel] having a mind of her own." The fight inside the text is not only between Isabel and Osmond for Isabel's mind but also between Isabel and Ralph, Isabel and the narrator and perhaps Isabel and James. What Osmond hopes to find in Isabel is an empty mind, an empty richly receptive silver tray. In some ways James wants the same from Isabel. My perhaps naive assumption has always been that the value of any particular center of consciousness would begin in its own uniqueness
and its individual way of perceiving both itself and the world outside itself. But for James its value seems to lie only in its ability to perceive what richness lies outside of it, thus the center has no inherent value in itself but only in its ability to perceive value. Anderson describes James describing what he wants to have in his centers:

'in a word -- the power to be finely aware and richly responsible. Only those 'moved in this latter fashion 'get most' out of all that happens to them and ... in so doing enable us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get most.’ In his novels, this ideal guided James in shaping a center of consciousness 'capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is felt for it . . . the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away the value and beauty of the thing ' (626)

Isabel's inherent mental richness is of no more use to James than it is to Osmond. What he wants is very similar to what Osmond hopes for: "this peculiar pleasure of being at last and all of a sudden identified -- as from the hand of a great master -- by the so high and so unnoticed fact of style" (260). James purports to believe that "in the best fiction, 'Form is substance,' since 'Form alone takes, and holds and preserves, substance' (Laird, 57) but even as he writes this it cannot be. James's form takes, holds, preserves substance, it is not itself the substance and the problem for James (and then for his narrator, Ralph and Osmond) seems frequently to be how to empty Isabel of who she is so that she can take/hold/preserve/receive what James perceives to be valuable.
Exactly what James thinks is valuable is another interesting question. In his novel's title and in his preface he suggests of course that it is Isabel, but if that is the simple truth, why work so hard to empty her of who she is? I suppose because as long as she is so full of self she cannot represent him, and he (like Osmond and Ralph) wants Isabel to represent him.

There is a description of Osmond's feelings in volume II where it is difficult to see where the line between narrator and Osmond is drawn, where it becomes difficult to decide whether we are reading an exterior description of Osmond's emotions or Osmond's own view of them:

> If an anonymous drawing on a museum wall had been conscious and watchful it might have known this peculiar pleasure of being at last and all of a sudden identified -- as from the hand of a great master -- by the so high and so unnoticed fact of style. His 'style' was what the girl had discovered with a little help; and now, besides herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble. She should do the thing for him and he would not have waited in vain. (260)

Interestingly, Osmond identifies himself here as the painting, a work of art that Isabel discovers, instead of the other way around, but it is not any intrinsic beauty that is of value in the painting but that its 'style' is recognizably from the hand of a 'great master.' "His 'style' was what the girl had discovered ... and now ... she should publish it to the world ... " The referent of the possessive adjective "his" is ambiguous now -- does it refer to Osmond as the work of art, or to the great master's style? Are they separable? Who is being "published" and why use the
word "publish"? Neither paintings nor 'style' are "published"; novels are "published."

Laurence B. Holland’s essay on The Portrait, from The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James, points out that

so intimately is James implicated in the action of his novel that letters he was writing while working on The Portrait are echoed in the passages where Osmond’s mind and feelings are stirred by the workings of the plot and he proposes marriage to Isabel. James wrote that he was 'much more interested in my current work than anything else,' that he was working with great ease, relish, and success, that his work would bring $6,000 from serialization alone, that it would 'rend the veil' which covered his 'ferocious ambition,' that it would be from the finished Portrait, his most ambitious early effort, 'that I myself shall pretend to date.' (736, my emphasis)

Holland reminds us that the "desire to have something or other to show for his 'parts' . . . had been the dream of [Osmond's] youth," now it was to materialize with Isabel's help and at her expense" (736). "Just before his proposal Osmond finds himself pleased with his newly aroused 'sense of success,' feeling that his earlier successes had rested on 'vague laurels,' and that his present success was 'easy . . . only because he had made an exceptional effort'" (736). And Holland points out Ralph's double-edged observation: Gilbert Osmond's "calculated effects 'were produced by no vulgar means, but the motive was a vulgar as the art was great!'" (736).

Look now at Isabel's reflective view of her motives in marrying Osmond:
that he was poor and lonely and yet that somehow he was noble -- that was what had interested her and seemed to give her her opportunity . . . He was like a skeptical voyager strolling on the beach while he waited for the tide, looking seaward yet not putting to sea. It was in all this she had found her occasion. She would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence . . . And she had loved him, she had so anxiously and yet so ardently given herself -- a good deal for what she found in him but a good deal also for what she brought him and what might enrich the gift . . . But for her money, as she saw today, she would never have done it . . . At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind . . . . What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world. (357-358, my emphasis)

The painter wants his work of art to represent him; the subject, the person being turned into an object, a work of art, wants itself represented by the painter. Henry James expected The Portrait of a Lady and Isabel Archer to represent him, publish him, bring him fame and fortune, "rend the veil of his ferocious ambition," give birth to him in a sense -- it is from the finished Portrait "that I shall pretend to date." Gilbert Osmond expected the same thing from Isabel Archer, that she would represent him, reflect him, publish him, and certainly bring him fame and fortune. James’s and Osmond’s desires are not in conflict because the same thing is wanted from the same person. The conflict that stirs up the ground underneath this literary monument develops out of Isabel’s desires as a work of art, and as a painter. She is supposedly the object of James’s portrait -- he must make an effort to represent her, but truly representing her might mean letting substance dictate form: Isabel is too strong a creation to remain a mere vessel, or the form
holding someone else's subject, she wants to be what James promises us in the preface -- the center of consciousness. She is "stoutly determined not to be hollow" (55); "her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce; she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was" (54). Isabel would really like to produce a self-portrait. James's narrator coolly undermines all such pretension: "Many of her opinions had doubtless but a slender value, many of her emotions passed away in the utterance; but they left a trace in giving her the habit of seeming at least to feel and think . . . " (57, my emphasis).

On the other hand, Osmond and Isabel both see her as Osmond's painter -- but again the same problem arises, only in reverse. This time Isabel as the painter wants Osmond to represent her. He is to be her opportunity. She will launch his boat, be his providence, give him all her money, and he will act for her, she will have none of the responsibility of acting for herself. He will give her form, be her form, reflect her. Osmond, seeing himself as the work of art, feels quite differently. Isabel is to represent him, to be his form.

Again, the matter of objects, and who is the object of most value to James. In the preface James draws an analogy between himself and an antique dealer: "I quite remind myself thus of the dealer resigned not to 'realise,' resigned to keeping the precious object locked up indefinitely rather than commit it, at no matter what price, to vulgar hands. For there are dealers in these forms and figures and treasures capable of that refinement" (8). Who is James's precious
object, really? I think we have always assumed he was talking about Isabel. probably he thought he was talking about her too. But if he was talking about Isabel is it not odd that he proceeds to do, in the novel's plot, exactly what he says that as an artist (dealer) he would never do? Give Isabel, his precious object, into the most vulgar hands he could find -- Gilbert Osmond's. And not even for an exorbitant amount of money. He actually has to heap money on his object in order to lure Osmond into buying her.

Isabel does see herself as an object given away to an extremely vulgar buyer and kept in a box: "she had lived with it, [Osmond's mind], she had lived in it almost -- it appeared to have become her habitation . . . If she had been captured it had taken a firm hand to seize her . . ." (358); "she only felt older -- ever so much and as if she were 'worth more' for it, like some curious piece in an antiquary's collection" (276). But Isabel also sees herself as a proprietor: "The finest -- in the sense of being the subtlest -- manly organism she had ever known had become her property, and the recognition of her having but to put out her hands and take it had been originally a sort of act of devotion" (358, my emphasis). Osmond also sees himself as an object in a box: "... I took a fancy to my box myself; I thought it would be a comfortable fit" (436). In this case it's Madame Merle who Osmond sees as the dealer, and Isabel as the wealthy buyer who could afford him. If James is the dealer behind Madame Merle, the dealer "resigned to keeping the precious object locked up indefinitely rather than commit it, at no matter what price, to vulgar hands" (8), and Osmond is the precious
object, then James has found the perfect, worthy buyer in Isabel, a center of consciousness "capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is felt for it . . ." (which is certainly what Ralph and Goodwood accuse her of doing in relationship to Osmond), someone James could "count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away the value and beauty of the thing."

Other readers have noticed Osmond's similarities to Ralph, and Ralph's similarities to James. They all seem very much alike to me sometimes. While I am not saying anything so simple as that Osmond is the one James is really thinking of when he talks about his art dealer and his treasure, I am saying that if Isabel is the only treasure in James's mind what he has done to his treasure ought to be reexamined in the light of what he promised not to do with it. I think it is worth considering the possibility that James had very mixed feelings about both Isabel and Osmond and that as much as Isabel might have been his treasure, she was also his villain, and as much as Osmond might have been his villain, so was he his treasure.

The wealth that is heaped on Isabel early in the book and which enables her to buy Osmond is another one of those marginal, unquestioned parts of the novel which bothers me a little because it brings up so many contradictions, as well as providing more opportunity to deny what Isabel has said and done. In their conversation about the bequest he is to leave Isabel, Mr. Touchett says that "If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support." And Ralph is quite vehement in his answer: "her marrying . . . ? It's just to do away with
anything of that sort that I make my suggestion" (160). Now the trouble with this conversation is that Isabel has already turned down the opportunity to marry wealthily (Warburton) and shown so little interest in another wealthy suitor (Goodwood) that she has left him across the ocean with no promise to return. She has shown no interest in marrying for money, nor any sense that she should consider it as a practical part of her life. She also does not consider it at all as a necessity for an active life which leads James into one more contradiction when after she inherits a fortune she decides "that to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to do and that to do could only be sweet" (182). Critics use her uncle's bequest as one more way of wrapping Isabel and the novel in moral tissue paper: "It is the bounty poured on Isabel Archer . . . that makes her 'free' to determine her choice of action, and thus morally most responsible for her choice" (Van Ghent, 692). Again, the fact that Isabel had already picked her "choice of action" before receiving the money is completely ignored.

Why did James include Ralph's bequest in his plot? What difference would it make if Osmond was rich? Madame Merle would play a smaller part; Osmond the object could not be bought by the poor Isabel. Or what if Isabel was rich before we met her? Then she could afford to buy Osmond without Ralph's help. What if they were both rich? What if they were both poor? Mr. Touchett's bequest involves Ralph, Osmond, Madame Merle and Isabel in a kind of bizarre series of triangular relationships which muddy the differences and distinctions between all of them even more than they already are. The money also places Isabel in an
ethically questionable position: Understanding that Osmond married her to use her mind as a decorative tray to showcase himself, and finally understanding that he also married her for her money, she actually thinks that the latter is the worse crime. Some people would find the first more unforgivable. And conveniently, she forgets, as well as the rest of us, that she married Osmond in order to get rid of her money. That is not very nice either.

Culler talks about texts applying "to something else a description, image, or figure that can be read as self-description, as a representation of its own operations" and says that texts frequently demonstrate "the return in a displaced or disguised form . . . a procedure that work claimed to criticize in others . . . " (214). Remember that James wrote "that his work would bring him $6,000 from serialization alone?" As Isabel brings Osmond fame and fortune so will she bring James fame and fortune. Again I am not saying that is the whole story. I am only saying that Isabel's money is not as seamless a part of the novel as it pretends to be, and that, again, James had very mixed feelings about the model he claimed to be using for his portrait.

The preface and the text echo each other at another point in James "house of fiction," discussed in the preface, and Osmond's "house of darkness" where Isabel finds herself held captive:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million . . . every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will . . . They are but windows at best, mere holes in a
dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life . . . The spreading field, the human scene is the 'choice of subject'; the pierced aperture . . . is the 'literary form'; but they are singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher -- without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. (7)

The trouble with James’s model of the house of fiction is that the subject of fiction -- the human scene -- ends up contained inside the house with its writer’s consciousness. There is no movement outward in this sense of fiction, only a movement inward -- the subject is reshaped, distorted, coerced into an object, into "fiction" according to the shape of the artist’s consciousness -- through the form of a window, then through the eyes of a watcher, a box inside a box. "The figure has to that extent, as you see, been placed -- placed in the imagination that detains it, preserves it, protects it, enjoys it, conscious of its presence . . . ready to be seen as soon as the "wary dealer" turns his "key" in the "cupboard door" (8). There is something very suffocating, nasty, and ungenerous in this that reminds me of Isabel trying to reshape herself into a form that will fit quietly inside Osmond’s house of darkness:

she could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since . . . It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond’s beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond’s beautiful mind indeed seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her . . . (360-361)
Here too there is no movement outward, just a taking in, Isabel boxed inside the box of Osmond’s beautiful mind. (Even here I think James cannot escape his mixed feelings for Osmond; his "beautiful mind" is a horrible irony for Isabel but the word "beautiful" still identifies it with the antique dealer’s rare and valuable piece.)

Finally, there is Henrietta Stackpole who was, says James, "in her super abundance not an element of my plan, but only an excess of my zeal" (15, my emphasis). She is only a wheel on a coach, she has to run alongside the coach, she has to cling to the coach (here, in his effort to disassociate himself from Henrietta, James seems to have become confused about the exact way coaches and their wheels relate to each other) and he even calls her a "fishwife." "The only thing is that I may well be asked ... why ... I have suffered Henrietta (of whom we have indubitably too much) so officiously, so strangely, so almost inexplicably, to pervade" (13). Why? Henrietta, the female form of Henry, a writer, and like her male counterpart and creator Henry, a studier of the human scene -- like the wicked stepmother in Snow-White she is made ugly to scare away anyone from looking too closely. Mocked, made fun of, and ignored so that no one will see that she takes all of our excuses for Isabel and breaks them into pieces:

The American girl’s independence and freedom can be established only in the moral and spiritual arena, for physical and social freedom are denied her precisely because she is female ... . Because there is no physical escape for the American girl, her moral initiation requires that she change and adapt. (Berkson, 54)
Thus our heroine Isabel. Henrietta has never heard anything like that; she is the person Isabel wants to be, and the person that the narrator, Ralph, Osmond, Warburton and Goodwood suspect and fear because she is so absolutely full of herself, so super abundant that she could not possibly hold, carry or reflect them. And she is another perfect example of James's mixed feelings -- he insists on drawing attention to her marginality by his over-insistence, and not only does she put her in his novel, his "literary monument," but he gives her his name, his profession, and the one chance of a happy marriage that the book contains.

The things that make Isabel such an attractive person, and so fascinating to others are the same things that bring her punishment in the form of marriage to Osmond -- this is a very serious, very threatening message. It is not by any means James's wholehearted and only message, but perhaps the same set of reasons, fears, superstitions that kept him so busy burying Isabel as he and she created her are the same set of reasons that keep us burying her. Unearthed, she is really quite amazing, very likeable, single-minded and as powerful a hero as you could wish for.
Works Cited


TESS

... every day and everywhere man [woman] is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his [her] place ... and assigns to his [her] activity the narrow limits within which he [she] is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world ... (Barthes, 155)

I.

Thomas Hardy, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles like James in The Portrait of a Lady, promises to do one thing in his preface (or rather promises that he has done something, as Hardy's preface, like James's, is written after the fact) and then does something very different in his novel. Hardy wants to show us that seduction need not be "fatal" for a hero, nor "the virtual ending of her enterprises and hopes" (1). A hanging, though, does seem to be about as fatal as you can get. It's certainly the end of all enterprise and hope. As one critic of the time put it:

For the first half of his story the reader may indeed conceive it to have been Mr. Hardy's design to show how a woman essentially honest and pure at heart will, through the adverse shocks of fate, eventually rise to higher things. But if this were his original purpose he must have forgotten it before his tale was told ... for what are the higher things to which this poor creature rises? She rises through seduction to adultery, murder, and the gallows. (NCE, 382)
There are other similarities between the two novelists and their two novels. Both stories contain a grim tale of a woman’s crime and punishment masked by their writers’ apparent support. The individuality of both Isabel and Tess as characters is constantly given at the same time as it is consistently denied -- for the sake of narrative and thematic unity I suppose as well as for who knows what other motives. Separated from their controlling structures these two characters tell very different tales than the ones they are supposed to be telling; "reinscribing" their separate dramas in "displaced terms" (Culler, 255).

In The Portrait Isabel’s mind is appropriated by all her fellow characters and the novel structured on a series of distorted representations of her consciousness; the novel becomes on one level an argument over which male desire Isabel will represent. In Tess of the d’Urbervilles Tess’s body is appropriated by the narrator, a hero--Angel, and a villian, Alec; the individuality of her mind and body ignored. The novel builds its surface around a series of distorted interpretations of her body, and her character as a whole is inferred according to each interpretation: she is "pure" sex, "pure" innocence, "pure" temptress. Again, the novel becomes, on one level, an argument over what male desire Tess’s body will represent.

Even the titles seem related to me -- involved with each other in a peculiar clash of male desire; though this may only be my imagination. James the artist gives us not only a portrait, but The Portrait, of a lady -- Isabel. Ten or so years later Hardy presents us with Tess of the d’Urbervilles (immediately she is placed,
possessed by the male and by history: she is of the D'Urbervilles, not of herself), a Pure Woman Faithfully Presented by Thomas Hardy -- Hardy resigns his name as artist in his subtitle and assures us of his faithfulness. The two novels offer us a choice between a "lady" and a "woman." A "lady" in ladylike fashion would never give her name up so publicly, thus we have only The Portrait of a Lady. A "woman" is more aggressive, so we have Tess though of the d’Urbervilles. In either case what matters is that they do not present themselves, they are dependent on their artist to represent them -- how he sees them is how they will be shown to the world as character and art object.

I sometimes wonder if James's markedly venomous comment on Tess of the d’Urbervilles -- "But oh yes, dear Louis [Stevenson] she is vile. The pretence of 'sexuality' is only equalled by the absence of it, and the abomination of the language by the author's reputation for style" (NCE, 388) -- was at least in part inspired by a sense of threat to his beloved Portrait, and Lady? Was Hardy at least in part answering the sexual sterility of Isabel's ladylikeness with his own aggressively (for that time, maybe even for now) sexual portrait of a woman?

- And for those who would like to believe that Hardy's novel shows him to be an exemplary supporter of women I would suggest that they need only read his poetry to find their assumptions disproved. Like James in his essays ("isn't it everywhere written that women, in any society, are what the men make them.") Hardy, in his poetry, reveals a quite different bias than he claims in Tess, a bias that Virginia Woolf described as "a fundamental part of Hardy's vision . . . . The
woman is the weaker and the fleshlier, and she clings to the stronger and obscures
his vision" (NCE, 402). In "The Well-Beloved" Hardy writes:

'O fatuous man, this truth infer,
Brides are not what they seem;
Thou lovest what thou dreamest her;
I am thy very dream!'

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

When I arrived and met my bride
Her look was pinched and thin,
As if her soul had shrunk and died,
And left a waste within. (NCE, 348)

Here the woman not only suffers from, but is essentially blamed for (as if her soul
really had shrunk) her fiancé's philosophical tendency to idealize; as if it is her
fault that a grown man believes in and can only see the ideal or its horrible
opposite. In "The Supplanter" a young woman tempts a grieving man into dancing
the night away with her. When he wakes up and realizes what he has done he
immediately and completely transfers his guilty feelings of betrayal into her sin of
temptation:

. . . .
'Now could I kill thee here! he says,
'For winning me from one
Who ever in her living days
Was pure as cloistered nun!'

No trace of self-incrimination here. A year later he returns and the woman begs
for his love and willingly shoulders not only her own share but his share of guilt:
'I own my sin; I've paid its cost,
Being outcast, shamed, and bare:
I give you daily my whole heart,
Your child my tender care,
I pour you prayers; this life apart
Is more than I can bear!'

The year, for his part, has taught him nothing:

... . . .

He turns--unpitying, passion-tossed;
'I know you not!' he cries,
'Nor know your child. I knew this maid,
But she's in Paradise!
And he has vanished in the shade
From her beseeching eyes. (NCE, 340)

Remember Angel who, the narrator tells us, "as a balance to these austerities . . .
was carried off his head, and nearly entrapped by a woman much older than
himself, though luckily he escaped not greatly the worse for the experience" (99,
my emphasis). As Angel himself says to Tess "I would have no more to say to
her . . . " (189). I always tend to forget that this older woman only exists in
fiction. I worry about her. I wonder if Angel left her pregnant? if she was
pretty? if she was desperate? or malicious? or simply practical? If she schemed
I forgive her because no one in the novel acknowledges her presence or seems to
worry about her while her counterpart Alec gets a starring role.
II.

I will say here, right away, that I think Tess Durbeyfield is not at all a passive character, that she is quite responsible for what happens to her, and that she herself thinks she is guilty. In *On Deconstruction* Culler discusses the various ways texts undermine or subvert themselves by using hierarchical oppositions which actually only exist because the first, seemingly more powerful term is held in its position by a second, apparently weaker term (213). Hardy’s *Tess of the D’urbervilles* on one level absolves Tess of any guilt or even any involvement in her own life by privileging history, fate, nature, etc. as the powerful first term of his argument. His surface narrative suggests that Tess’s life is the direct result of her individual confrontation with the insurmountable odds of what Dorothy Van Ghent refers to as "antagonistic earth" (NCE, 435). The conflict here is seemingly external and Tess’s part in it purely reactive.

This is the world view by which Hardy both exonerates and celebrates his hero. But Hardy’s narrative also exposes something very different, a Tess whose coherent and consistent sequence of actions and decisions leads her to and implicates her in her death on the gallows. This reversal of hierarchies of power inside the novel is repeated outside the novel: Just as it is Tess’s individual character which leads her where she goes, which makes her own fate, it is Hardy’s specific plan which gives nature, history and fate "dominance" over Tess. In providing for Tess’s innocence, and by inscribing his own philosophy in the text
Hardy puts himself in the position that he and his novel criticize the most -- that of a heedless and arbitrary god, the creator of Tess. Just as ironically, while the surface of the novel suggests that cold coincidence can shape a life, Hardy uses painstaking plan -- which philosophically the novel rejects -- disguised as chance to shape his story and exonerate Tess.

It is by chance that the vicar discovers that the Durbeyfields are really d'Urbervilles, by chance ("whim") that he discloses this information to Tess's father (by chance a drunk), by chance that Angel does not dance with Tess when he first meets her, by chance that Tess falls asleep and the family horse is killed (this being the only chance in the whole novel which I can believe in as it happens in the middle of the night after Tess has danced all afternoon), by chance that she falls under Alec's careless influence. While Tess is being seduced in the background, Hardy in the foreground asks "why so often the course appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man?" and provides his own answer -- "'It was to be.' There lay the pity of it" (63). As Tess hangs from the gallows he tells us, with bitter irony, that "'Justice' was done, and the President of the immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess" (330).

Time and again chance confronts Tess and her conscience and time and again chance wins. Dorothy Van Ghent in her essay on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* neatly sums up this manner of understanding the novel's plot:
We have said that the dilemma of Tess is the dilemma of moral consciousness in its intractable earthy mixture; schematically simplified, the signifying form of the Tess-universe is the tragic heroism and tragic ineffectuality of such consciousness in an antagonistic earth where events shape themselves by accident rather than by moral design; and the mythological dimension of this form lies precisely in the earth's antagonism . . . (435)

The narrator presents Tess's individual, moral consciousness in order to remind us that it is only individual. It is ineffectual because it pits itself against fate. It is harmful because it confronts what it is senseless to confront -- her natural self:

... this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fantasy -- a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason.

... Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (73, my emphasis)

And it is false because it is social, not innate:

She might have seen that what had bowed her head so profoundly -- the thought of the world's concern at her situation -- was founded on an illusion. She was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensation, to anybody but herself. To all humankind besides Tess was only a passing thought . . . . Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (77, my emphasis)
What is moral and mental in Tess, according to the narrator's construction of her, is a creation of fancy, shreds of convention, an illusion. She belongs to the environment, her innate sensations are the correct ones. Her attempt to make the conflict an internal one is an unnecessary war which nevertheless apparently provides the shape of the novel's tragedy. (It's true that if Tess took life more like her mother takes it we would have quite a different novel, something maybe akin to Moll Flanders.)

The sheer density of physical description that the narrator applies to Tess duplicates the narrator's insistence that it is an external conflict and excludes the possibility that either he, or Alec, or Angel will ever get past a view of Tess's physical self. (The idea that the narrator [and Hardy] is in love with and obsessed by his hero is not new; it is only startling for me to see the various ways readers have sometimes explained away his physical interest in Tess as his identification with her, or as fatherly concern.) Erotic and impassioned descriptions of Tess's eyes and mouth, her skin, her figure, her voice fill the novel, ceaselessly calling our attention as well as Alec's and Angel's attention to Tess as a physical body which literally provides the surface on which the narrator focuses two conflicting male desires.

Alec sees Tess in terms of his purely personal, purely sexual pleasure. As the novel presents him he is incapable of seeing Tess in any other way. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that he is indeed in love with her -- as he sees her, as a reflection of his desire -- but he has no interest in nor understanding of her
mind or her morality. Angel for his part views Tess's body as a physical reflection of a spirituality, an ideal: "What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!" (102) he says to himself. She is, depending on the time of day, the light of the sun or moon, the presence or absence of fog, mist, and rain, either a goddess incarnate, or simply a feminine soul incarnate: "The brimfulness of her nature breathed from her . . .," it was a "moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; [this moment being specifically 3 o'clock in the afternoon, after a nap when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation" (143, my emphasis, the physical always takes the outside place in Tess, it is inescapable). But it is only Angel's own particular idealism, his brand of spirituality that is reflected in Tess's physical body, not hers, and he never separates these mental abstractions from their physical representation through Tess's body. In this sense Angel is much more of a hypocrite than Alec who simply denies Tess's mind and conscience in favor of a wholehearted enjoyment of her sexuality while Angel for his part denies Tess's sexual, sensual side while depending on it entirely to represent his idealistic nature.

By focusing this conflict -- male desire for sexuality vs. male desire for spirituality - on one female body -- Tess's -- the narrator/Hardy furthers the impression that the conflict is an external one. The tragedy which culminates in Alec's murder and Tess's hanging appears to result from a conflict which, always centered metaphorically on Tess's body is now brought into real physical proximity
by Angel's change of heart which puts him in the same city, even the same house as Alec. The pressure of their conflict of desires -- carried physically by Tess -- is so intense as to cause her to snap mentally. She murders Alec which leads to her hanging which leaves Angel or what is left of him alone with the more spiritual Liza-Lu.

Just as Hardy and his three characters create, according to their individual desires, distorted constructions of Tess inside the novel, splitting pieces of her off from their center, so have readers reproduced the same splitting action and so reproduced the same conflicts over Tess outside the novel, implicating themselves in the novel's drama.

I've already quoted Van Ghent's summation of what I find to be Hardy's authorial attitude towards Tess -- a heroically conscious victim of fate. Van Ghent's view of Tess's murder of Alec provides support for Hardy's view by essentially repeating the narrator's support of Hardy -- instinct, the "natural," the "physical" is what is important in Tess; her attempts to be consciously moral are doomed to failure. Van Ghent writes that Tess's

stabbing of Alec is her heroic return through the 'door' into the folk fold, the fold of nature and instinct, the anonymous community . . . . Tess is finally creative by the only measure of creativeness that this particular novelistic universe holds, the measure of the instinctive and the natural. Her gesture is the traditional gesture of the revenge of instinct. . . . (438, my emphasis)
Tess's mythical or folkloric stature, according to Hardy, the narrator, and Van Ghent, is not the result of any intrinsic individuality but from her anonymous, instinctive, natural "gesture." Can anyone seriously consider murder in terms of being a "gesture?" When Van Ghent does so she very subtly detracts from Tess's power, making a real and murderous deed much less powerful and much less threatening for us. While this view does not present Tess as exactly passive it does deny her effectivity, it buries her as an individual human force.

Essays written about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in the late 1970's and the 1980's explicitly underline the contradictions of the novel as well as what they see as contradictions in Tess's character but each interpretation also repeats Hardy's denial of Tess as an individual force. Linda Claridge's article in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* is a striking example of this as she points out in a number of ways our tendency "to downplay at best or, in some cases suppress the startling portrait of Tess as assertive, shrewd young woman that surfaces throughout" and to ignore or deny Tess's complicity in her own fate (326). She writes, for instance, that in Tess's later relationship with Alec Hardy reveals her "understanding to be as limited in its way as is Angel's. Tess is not the victim here, as the narrative line suggests, but the victimizer. She dangerously fails Alec in charity -- charity that would in fact have saved her as well as him from destruction" (332). Among various other examples Claridge also points to an interesting "conflation of identity wherein Tess takes on snakelike characteristics . . . a double identity that serves both to underscore the historically negative implication of 'being Eve' and to
emphasize her kinship with Alec at a deeper, more essential level than the mere literal relationship that she originally claims . . ." (330). But no sooner has she finished showing us Tess's individual involvement in her own fate than she takes it away by handing it all over to Hardy;

... Tess's complicity in her fate ... points more towards Hardy's confusion over sexuality than to any formal position Tess is meant to embody. Man falls but Woman seduces, perhaps against her will, compelled by an inner sexuality that in fact defines her as female. woman becomes, in some sense, the first term of the argument ... (331, my emphasis)

Tess's involvement in her life is not really her own but the result of Hardy's sexual confusion. What appears to be an essay criticizing Hardy for his lack of "textual unity" (330) and for "the inconsistency" which "marks a novelist's confusion of parts" (326) is also an essay that denies with this same criticism Tess's active involvement in her own life thus repeating Hardy's initial move characterizing her as nature's victim. For Claridge she is Hardy's victim. (Claridge's position also means that like Angel she must enlarge Tess into representative woman in order to underline Hardy's "confusion over sexuality.")

Janet Freeman and Kaja Silverman duplicate Claridge's stance -- on one level criticizing Hardy and on another level denying Tess any individual, self-determining force, leaving her a mere object or victim. For Freeman, in her essay "Ways of Looking at Tess," it is a simple matter of how Tess is seen: "Tess Durbeyfield's visible beauty is the shape of her destiny: from having once been
seen all the rest will strictly follow" (313); "Thus is her fate decided: on whether and how she is seen . . ." (315). "Tess’s physical appearance is supremely powerful. It shapes her destiny" (321). It is not that I disagree with Freeman. I think the surface plot depends on exactly her point; the conflict results from different men seeing her in very different ways. It is just that by stopping at the level of Tess’s physical appearance Freeman does exactly what the narrator, Alec and Angel do; she denies Tess’s moral and intellectual force, leaving her an object, a victim in Hardy’s hands:

... without *Tess to look at*, Hardy’s one skill is useless. 
... His presence in the novel, after all, his identity as the only perfectly attentive eye depends on having Tess to observe: *She is the instrument that calculates for him his own peculiar value* . . . Losing Tess brings Hardy’s need for her out in the open and makes plain that his own way of looking -- for all its close attention -- is yet another form of possession. (323, my emphasis)

In other words Hardy uses Tess to reflect himself just as Alec and Angel do. True enough; but Freeman’s argument leaves Tess not much more than a mere mirror.

I found Kaja Silverman’s article in *Novel*, "Figuration and Female Subjectivity" to be provocative and very helpful in shaping my ideas about *Tess* but still she leaves Tess in the same position as the others -- only a victim, not a force. Like Freeman Silverman finds that Tess functions as a reflection of the male gaze, "as the surface upon which a pattern is imposed . . ." (8):
The passage recounting the night in the forest makes unusually explicit that what is at stake in the representation of Tess as a surface upon which certain things are figured is precisely her accessibility as image -- that whereas John Durbeyfield is posited as having a stable and knowable appearance . . . his daughter has no integral visual consistence . . . (9)

Like Claridge, Silverman finds that any confusion over Tess and her actions is not due to an inner confusion on Tess's part but to "a contradiction at the level of narrative desire." She suggests that Tess is

split less between the corporeal and the spiritual than between two compositional poles . . . what it really entails are two contradictory notions of 'the feminine' and the conflicting narratological desires behind those notions: woman as image or text . . . and woman as undifferentiated, 'intact' terrain. (23)

The trouble is that though Silverman writes "as several Hardy critics have remarked, Tess is curiously 'absent' from most of the key events in the novel" and explains this as a "kind of resistance or defense against the demands of representation" (21), she also with this explanation repeats the narrator's move of abstracting Tess from any involvement in these key events and inserts, as he does himself, the narrator into the primary position of action:

I would like to suggest that the action taken by Alec in the druidical darkness of The Chase has assumed the status of a seduction in some analysis . . . not so much because Tess's own sexuality seems at any point engaged, as because the narrator entertains a complexly ambivalent relation to that action. (9, my emphasis)
Tess is, according to this explanation, not even involved minimally in her own seduction -- not in the novel where the narrator does indeed foreground himself, and not in Silverman's thesis where she foregrounds the narrator -- it is narratological confusion not Tess's sexuality which is the major issue. Silverman asks "what constitutes the 'real' Tess" and answers by suggesting that "this mirror relay between male gaze, female exteriority, and female interiority renders the distinction between Tess's body and her soul largely irrelevant" (22-23, my emphasis). To believe that is to take exactly the stance, structured by their different desires, that Hardy, the narrator, Alec and Angel all take: You can ignore what is not physical in Tess and the physical Tess is who you want her to be, is who you see her as. She "must be painted, imprinted and patterned" by others "in order to be seen." She has no individual force, no intact self.

Elizabeth Ermath's essay, "Fictional Consensus and Female Casualties," discusses something I think is very important to the novel and to an understanding of Tess -- the "conflict between body and idea," (15) Tess's "struggle to exist as something more than a figment of other people's ideas. . . ." (16). Ermath writes that "no one, including Tess's three friends, looks at her as she feels herself to be . . ." and that "to belong to the community at all she must belong to the communal idea of her" (13). Just as the others do though, Ermath repeats an action outside the novel that she has criticized inside the novel: "inclusiveness can be deceiving. So intolerant can a consensus become, so like a rule of force, that it simply makes invisible any view that seriously challenges it" (9). What Ermath
allows to remain invisible is that while most of the world around Tess is not all that interested in her life and does not question that she is indeed a virgin, Tess believes in her own guilt and is driven by the loss of her virginity. Ermath fails to see Tess "as she feels herself to be" just as her friends and lovers fail.

III.

Hardy sees Tess as a victim of history, fate, chance, nature. We either agree or we see her as Hardy's victim. For a long time I thought there were two Tesses -- one more or less passive, and victimized, the second not at all passive and not at all a victim, actually a very strong girl who was acting out quite independently of the dominant narrative line and theme. Lately though I think there is indeed only one Tess and that the victimized one is a creation of the multiple voices in and out of the novel who were attempting to produce and direct Tess Durbeyfield. To see Tess as a victim robs her of her own personal judgement of herself, it robs her of her own personal character because, forced by the narrative line to see her as victim but also able to see her real implication in the events that happen to her, any aware reader ends up feeling that Tess is an incoherent mess of conflicting desires at the service of Hardy and his narrator.

J. T. Laird's essay in the Thomas Hardy Annual mentions an article by Bernard Paris which "draws attention to the need for the reader to distinguish between 'the rhetoric of Tess' (which focuses our attention not upon Tess's
character, but upon Hardy's celebration and deference of it) and 'Tess as a mimetic portrait'" (53). If we make this distinction it becomes fairly easy to see what Claridge refers to as the "startling portrait of Tess as an assertive, shrewd young woman" (as opposed to Hardy’s other portrait of her as a pure, natural, victim of fate), and to find the "subtext" which she rightly says "insists upon a great deal of at least subtle complicity on Tess's part." Tess as she is presented by Hardy, the narrator, and herself is both coherent and consistent; she always acts in character. It is just that Hardy's "celebration and defence" of Tess continually tries to cover up what the same writer is creating in his "mimetic portrait."

Who is Tess Durbeyfield and what kind of person is she? First, if she is not actually vain, she is certainly very conscious of her appearance, likes adornment and actively works to call attention to herself. In the Mayday celebration, where we first see her, "she wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment" (11, my emphasis). We learn at various times that she carries a "pocket looking glass" (233) and that she "had been accustomed to wear a little white collar" (235). She wears her pinafores "tight" (273) and dresses in pink when every other woman wears gray or white. Wounded by the unknowing talk between Angel's brothers and Mercy Chant Tess throws "up her veil . . . as if to let the world see that she could at least exhibit a face such as Mercy Chant could not show" (251). Receiving the diamonds from Angel's parents she wastes no time in putting them on: "as if by magic she had already donned them -- necklace, ear-
rings, bracelets, and all" (185). And, even in the midst of unhappiness she thinks of her death not in terms of the end of her sorrows, but as the end of her looks: "She suddenly thought one afternoon, when looking in the glass at her fairness, that there was yet another date . . . that of her own death, when all these charms would have disappeared . . . " (84, my emphasis).

Tess is not only aware of her attractiveness but also aware of the power it gives her. When offered a ride by a stranger she accepts it "ignoring that its motive was a mere tribute to her countenance" (86). Driven by her conscience to try to hold herself back from Angel because "in the eyes of propriety" she is "far less worthy of him than the homelier ones whom he ignored" she also knows herself "to be more impassioned in nature, cleverer, more beautiful than they . . . " (125). And she knows herself "to have the preference. Being more finely formed, better educated, and though the youngest except Retty, more woman than either, she perceived that only the slightest ordinary care was necessary for holding her own in Angel Clare's heart against these her candid friends" (116).

Tess frequently flirts. With Alec her messages are mixed, probably because her feelings about him are mixed. "'How could you be so treacherous' said Tess, between archness and real dismay . . . " (60). There is nothing mixed about the messages she sends to Angel: "... she turned her eyes ... full of sly inquiry upon him. 'Mr. Clare you have ranged the cows!' she said, blushingly; and in making the accusation symptoms of a smile gently lifted her upper lip in spite of her so as to show the tips of her teeth, the lower lip remaining severely still" (103, my
emphasis; the narrator's intense involvement with Tess's physical self is obvious here, given the specificity of the detail, but he is nonetheless describing what she is doing). After rescuing the other three milkmaids from the mudpuddle which stands between them and church "Angel's eye at last fell upon Tess, the hindmost of the four; she being full of suppressed laughter at their dilemma, could not help meeting his glance radiantly" (121).

She is uninhibitedly sexual when in love: "Having seen that it was really her lover who had advanced, and no one else, her lips parted and she sank upon him in her momentary joy, with something very like an ecstatic cry" (127). At another point "she clasped [Angel's] neck, and for the first time Clare learnt what an impassioned woman's Kisses were like upon the lips of one whom she loved with all her heart and soul, as Tess loved him" (160).

Mentally, she is both very critical and very aggressive: Considering the baptism she has provided for Sorrow she reasons "that if Providence would not ratify such an act of approximation she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity -- either for herself or for her child" (81). She is also verbally critical and aggressive: When she discovers that her father is off drinking rather than resting in preparation for his journey later that night she becomes very angry: "'Get up his strength!' said Tess impetuously . . . Go to a public house to get up his strength!' Her rebuke and her mood seemed to fill the room . . ." (18). When asked by her younger brother about what kind of life they would have led on a different, healthier star, she answers "Well, father wouldn't have coughed and
creeped about as he does, and wouldn't have got too tipsy to go this journey; and
mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never getting finished" (26). She
tells the text painter than his words are "horrible," "crushing," and "killing" and
challenges the Bible's veracity -- "'I don't believe God said such things!' she
murmured contemptuously . . . " (68, my emphasis). Leaving Alec, she says, "'I
didn't understand your meaning till it was too late.'" His reply -- "That's what
every woman says" -- makes her furious -- "'How can you dare to say such words!'
she cried, turning impetuously upon him, her eyes flashing as the latent spirit . . .
awoke in her. 'My God! I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your
mind that what every woman says some women may feel?''' (65, my emphasis).

Tess is also physically aggressive, murdering Alec being only the most
obvious sign of this. When Alec tries to put his arm around her at the beginning
of their ride into The Chase she pushes him away "with one of those sudden
impulses of reprisal to which she was liable . . . " (59, my emphasis). When he
irritates her on the hayrick "without the slightest warning she passionately swung
the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior's,
and it struck him flat on the mouth " (275, my emphasis -- it is the narrator's
choice to describe Tess's glove as like a "warrior's" -- by implication, if she has a
warrior's glove she is a warrior). At yet another point, angry at him again, "with
stormy eyes she pulled the stay-bar quickly, and, in doing so, caught his arm
between the casement and the stone mullion " (295, my emphasis). Then, of course,
she gets really mad at Alec and stabs him in the heart with a carving knife.
In contrast to these strong indications of an independent, critical, aggressive, strong personality Tess has always been, and is still described as malleable, submissive, tractable, passive -- these words function as both criticism and explanation: If she just wasn't so damn passive she wouldn't end up murdering Alec! Actually Tess is none of these things and I am not sure that either the narrator or Hardy ever really present her as such -- all of her actions and nonactions which have been judged as passive are narrated as being a matter of choice based on emotion or reason or both.

When Tess allows her mother to dress her up in preparation for her first journey to Trantridge she does so with "calm abandonment" and "to please her parent" (40). To abandon something calmly or otherwise is an active choice made for a reason, in this case a wish to please her mother. (Much later, when the farmer at Flintcomb Ash reprimands her, Tess takes it "with the greatest coolness, that sort of attack being independent of sex" (264, my emphasis). This is not passive acceptance of mindless authority but a calculated decision about the quality of danger involved.) Tess does not end up in The Chase with Alec because she is too timid to say no to him or because she is afraid of him. She is neither timid in front of him nor afraid of him. (Remember how she escapes from riding with him by tricking him with her hat?) She ends up alone with him late at night because she finds herself in a humiliating situation and wishes to triumph over those who are causing her the humiliation:
At almost any other moment of her life she would have refused such proffered aid and company, as she had refused them several times before . . . But coming as the invitation did at that particular juncture when fear and indignation at these adversaries could be transformed by a spring of the foot into triumph over them, she abandoned herself to her impulse . . . (58, my emphasis).

It is Tess’s impulse to take the easy, spectacular way out of her dilemma and she chooses to follow it. This is not passive behavior. And, as she rides off with him she is "still panting in her triumph" (58, my emphasis). Can you imagine the genuinely passive Pansy of The Portrait "panting in triumph"?

This same impulse -- to solve her problems not only quickly but in a manner which attracts attention to her is still very much a part of her personality at the end of the novel. Alec comes to Flintcomb Ash to offer her marriage and

. . . she did for one moment picture what might have been the result if she had been free to accept the offer just made her of being the monied Alec's wife. It would have lifted her completely out of subjection, not only to her present oppressive employer, but to a whole world who seemed to despise her. 'But no, no!' she said breathlessly; 'I could not have married him now! He is so unpleasant to me.' (265, my emphasis)

Tess’s reasoning here calls attention to itself because it is not in fact accurate.

The real reason she cannot marry Alec is strictly legal; she is already married to Angel. (The actual reasons why Tess does return to Alec are as carefully hidden from the reader’s view as were her reasons for participating in the seduction.)
This same desire of Tess's to triumph over those who have humiliated her by intention or otherwise is related to her desire to have what others do not have. When Tess returns to Marlott from Trantridge it is her friends "chatter, their laughter, their good humored innuendos, above all their flashes and flickerings of envy [which] revived Tess's spirits . . . " (71, my emphasis). The narrator later tells us that Tess "loved Angel Clare, perhaps all the more passionately from knowing that the others had also lost their hearts to him . . . " (123, my emphasis). And, slowly but surely, losing her inner battle against her love for Angel, she cries out "I shall give way -- I shall say yes -- I shall let myself marry him -- I cannot help it! she jealously panted . . . on hearing one of the girls sign his name in her sleep. 'I can't bear to let anybody have him but me!'" (151, my emphasis).

Tess's decision to marry Angel may sound passive rather than active when the narrator writes that "In reality, she was drifting into acquiescence" but the rest of this passage contradicts any impression of a passive drifting:

Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with nature in revolt against her scrupulousness. Reckless, inconsiderate acceptance of him; to close with him at the altar, revealing nothing, and.chancing discovery; to snatch ripe pleasure before the iron teeth of pain could have time to shut upon her: that was what love counseled; and in almost a terror of ecstasy Tess divined that, despite her many months of lonely self-chastisement, wrestlings, communings, schemes to lead a future of austere isolation, love's counsel would prevail. (150, my emphasis)

This is not passive drifting but an agonizing inner war.
Tess's behavior after her marriage to Angel, I mean her complete acceptance of his behavior, is frequently criticized as almost mindlessly passive. Hardy and his narrator have gone to great pains though to show that Tess is not at all passive in her willingness to accept and follow Angel's dictate. Before the marriage the narrator tells us that "Clare knew she loved him -- every curve of her form showed that -- but he did not know at that time the full depth of her devotion, its single-mindedness, its meekness, what long suffering it guaranteed, what honesty, what endurance, what good faith" (180). In other words, Tess behaves as she does out of her passionate love for Angel, not out of an inherent passivity: "The firmness of her devotion to him was almost pitiful; quick-tempered as she naturally was, nothing that he could say made her unseemly . . . (202, my emphasis).

When Angel, sleep-walking, carries her over the river and into the churchyard" . . . she found herself conjecturing on the matter as a third person might have done . . . . it pleased her to think he was regarding her as his absolute possession to dispose of as he should choose " (208, my emphasis). Again, this is a conscious decision to see herself as someone's possession, it does not come from a naturally passive personality who could not, in fact, make such a conscious decision but would simply exist as an obsession. Of her long refusal to ask for help from either her own parents or from Angel's, the narrator writes "this self-effacement in both directions had been quite in consonance with her independent character of desiring nothing by way of favour or pity to which she was not entitled
on a fair consideration of her desserts. She had set herself to stand or fall by her qualities . . . " (245, my emphasis). And, once again, in reference to her continued acceptance of Angel's decrees, he writes that "despite her natural fearlessness, she asserted no rights, admitted his judgement to be in every respect the true one, and bent her head dumbly thereto" (282, my emphasis). This is an active subjection of personal desire for a specific reason -- passionate (if very unhealthy) love -- not a passive acceptance of fate.

Last but not least, in case there should be any doubt about it, murder is not a passive act, it is not a "gesture" even in self-defense, and certainly not when it involves a carving knife. (A pistol would have been a less actively physical murder, for instance, as it could be achieved by standing at a distance from the victim, and young men of that time in England frequently carried pistols around with them. Alec's was probably lying on the night table.) Tess, Angel and the narrator more or less collaborate here -- the murder is presented as the act of a mind unhinged by love, but actually it fits the pattern of Tess's previous actions -- a dramatic, spectacularly quick solution to a problem she finds herself facing, with little or no thought to the consequences which may follow.

This coherent character, Tess, as presented by the mimetic portrait of her, is involved in quite a different drama than the one going on at the surface of the novel. If Hardy wishes to present Tess to us, a pure woman woefully mistreated by fate, Tess's main purpose seems to be to mark herself as an individual. Her posture towards life, as her posture towards Alec, is "victim," but her entire
personality subverts this stance, everything she says, does, or thinks is an aggressive attempt to wrest her life from Van Ghent's "anonymous community" of folk people.

When Tess returns home from Trantridge she begins what is in some sense a writing of her personal history: "She philosophically noted dates as they came past in the revolution of the year; the disastrous night of her undoing at Trantridge with its dark background of The Chase; also the dates of the baby's birth and death, also her own birthday; *and every other day individualized by incidents in which she had taken some share*" (83, my emphasis). By noting these dates Tess builds her own very personal history, not a history that is of the d'Urbervilles.

Angel "half-teasingly" calls Tess by the names of various goddesses but she dislikes it because she does not "understand them." "'Call me Tess'" she tells him, and he obeys. Goddesses are foreign to her experience, she does not know them; what she knows is herself -- Call me Tess. Angel offers to teach Tess history but history in its general sense is exactly what Tess feels so threatened by:

> Because what's the use of learning that *I am one of a long row only* -- finding out that there is set down in some old book *somebody just like me*, and to know that *I shall only act her part*; making me sad, that's all. *The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands' and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'*! (107, my emphasis)
Tess's sense of a suffocating future "history" ("you seem to see numbers of to-morrws just all in a line . . . they all seem very fierce and cruel and as if they said, 'I'm coming! Beware of me! Beware of me!'" [105]) is as annihilating to her sense of self as is past history. "It intensified her consciousness of error to a practical despair . . . Bygones would never be bygones till she was a bygone herself" (254). After Angel leaves her death seems to Tess the only way out of an annihilating past and future.

Looked at from the point of view of what Tess requires to stay alive -- a sense of herself as an individual and some recognition of this from the world around her, it is Angel who kills Tess, not the hangman. When Alec denies Tess's wholeness by his inability to see her as anything but an object of sexual pleasure, she leaves him -- wounded but not mortally so. He has little power over her because she is not all that much in love with him. What she has lost by his limited view of her she sets about to regain by continuing to live her life. What society robs her of -- either by their indifference to or ignorance of her personal tragedy, or by their unquestioning acceptance of her apparent maidenhood, does not effect her that strongly either because society does not directly contradict what she knows to be true. But Tess is absolutely and completely in love with Angel and though she knows that his love for her is an idealized one, having no relationship to herself -- "'O my love, my love, why do I love you so!' she whispered there alone; 'for she you love is not my real self, but one in my image, the one I might have been!'" (181) -- she manages to convince herself that the opposite is true --
"I thought Angel, that you loved me - me, my very self" (192). It is Angel's reply, "I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you" (192) that essentially kills her: "... her mouth had almost the aspect of a round little hole " (a bullet hole), "the horrible sense of his view of her so deadened her that she staggered " (192, my emphasis). Falling in love with Angel as she does gives him the power to define her; unfortunately his definition annihilates Tess because it excludes almost everything that she is. When Tess returns to Alec she is repeating, thus giving authority to, Angel's murder of her real self. Not so amazingly, Angel's somewhat scanty understanding of this shows not a trace of irony, self-awareness, or guilt: "... he had a vague consciousness of one thing ... that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers -- allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will" (314).

In Mythologies Roland Barthes writes that "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification ..." Myth "abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences ..." (143). And he refers to what he calls "the privation of history":

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History . . . . We can see all the disturbing things which this felicitous figure removes from sight: both determinism and freedom. Nothing is produced, nothing is chosen: all one has to do is to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace of origin or choice has been removed. (151)
"This miraculous evaporation of history" (151), the evaporation of her individual history, is what threatens Tess. Hardy insists that Tess is a "pure woman" and insists that we talk about her: there is "something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe" (1). And he proceeds to give Tess all the "natural and eternal justification" she could possibly ever need. By doing so he robs her of the personal history she is trying to gather together as a shield against Hardy's mythological history. It is true that the novel uses history, time and again, but as an essence, not as a process; and it is a mythical, romanticized, genetic history: Tess is one of a long line of d'Urbervilles, what she does, how she lives is a simple reproduction of a genetic type. When she strikes Alec the narrator writes that "Fancy might have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised."

Tess's strength here, as a warrior who draws blood, is not hers, but of the d'Urbervilles. Her pride does not belong to her either: "Pride, too, entered into her submission -- which perhaps was a symptom of that reckless acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole d'Urberville family . . ." (212). And her seduction does not belong to her: "Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time" (63). Angel is "embittered by the conviction that all this desolation had been brought about by the accident of her being a d'Urberville" (217). Tess's "slight incautiousness of character" is "inherited from her race." Even her act of murder does not belong to her: "what obscure
strain in the d'Urberville blood had led to this aberration . . . " (319). Moreover, her act of murder is already myth -- the story of the d'Urberville coach and four.

Tess is given no past individual history which might explain why she is what she is. And her present history is constantly being obscured by Hardy and his narrator. Tess is a complex character; she is intelligent, morally conscious and also morally lazy; she is very sensual, very proud, and very interested in herself as an individual. She does make a series of both small and large choices or decisions (beginning with the decision to go to Trantridge to please her mother, knowing that it is a foolish idea) which lead her eventually to the decision to stab Alec, and so to the gallows. Most of these choices are there for us to see, as Barthes says, "Myth does not deny things." Tess decides to go with Alec because it is a quick way out of a bad situation. She allows herself to be seduced by him, (she herself refers to him as her seducer, not her rapist, another way her voice is ignored when the question of whether or not she was raped or seduced is raised). She decides to marry Angel because she is desperately in love with him and can bear no one else to have him. She decides to live by his conditions out of love and pride. She decides to return to Alec, and she decides to murder him. We do not see or do not pay attention to Tess's decisions by which she makes her life because they are obscured by a barrage of excuses, equivocations (for instance, trying to explain why Tess does not notice that Alec has passed the road to Trantridge the narrator writes that "Whether on this account [the fog], or from absent-mindedness, or from sleepiness, she did not perceive that they had long ago passed the point at
which the lane to Trantridge branched from the highway" [59]), and justifications on the side of an endlessly cyclical nature and history.

There is no better example of "all soiling trace of origin or choice" being removed than what you can find in Hardy's treatment of Tess's seduction, her decision to return to Alec, and her murder of Alec. In the first two cases Hardy does not permit Tess to say one word in explanation of her actions. The seduction is glossed over by Hardy's or the narrator's explanation: careless gods. Not one word is said by either Tess or Hardy about why she returns to Alec but clearly we are to blame Angel's thoughtless cruelty which drives Tess into desperate necessity. (This is rather hard to believe in on a serious level.) Tess is allowed to ramble on about why she murdered Alec but here Hardy uses those very ramblings -- her mind is apparently unhinged -- to disguise the fact that no real reason exists for the murder apart from a very personal reason felt by Tess, which could only be recounted to us by Tess.

Tess's silence about these three occurrences is crucial because it is her relationship with Alec that creates her individual story and the novel's story. What Hardy avoids by holding Tess silent on these three actions is the peculiarly intimate, complex and implicating nature of the relationship between her and Alec. As Irving Howe puts it in "Tess -- At the Center of Hardy's Achievement" "... there is a frightful intimacy in their conversation, the intimacy of sinners." (NCE, 451). I'd reject the word "sinner," which seems rather facile, but intimacy between them, yes. From their first moments together at Trantridge Tess reacts
to Alec with mixed signals, she does not do so with anyone else. And though the narrator lets Tess speak for herself at great length regarding her feelings for Angel, he permits no such freedom with Alec; all we are allowed to hear and see are snatches of conversation and interaction which are highly ambiguous and guaranteed to raise questions, not answer them. Tess tells her mother that she despises Alec but she is never on any other occasion so clear.

On the ride into The Chase Tess answers or doesn't answer Alec's insinuating questions in a manner which implicates her in the seduction. He asks, at one point, "(I haven't offended you often by lovemaking?"

And she answers: "(You have sometimes.) If Tess despised Alec, she would answer something like, "Yes, often, actually you always offend me!" Instead she cuts his 'often' into something smaller -- 'sometimes.' Then he asks if he has offended her "(Every time I have tried?)" And Tess remains silent, leaving her position open. When Alec asks her if she is "(quite sure)" that she does not love him, she answers "(I am angry with you sometimes!)") (59) an answer guaranteed to attract attention because it does not even pretend to answer what has been asked. If Tess is in no doubt as to her negative feelings towards him her answer would be easy. He asks, "(Mayn't I treat you as a lover?)" and while the innocent answer would be "absolutely not' Tess hems and haws, then comes very close to saying yes: "(I don't know -- I wish -- how can I say yes or no when . . . "'); he then puts his arm around her and "Tess expressed no further negative" (60, my emphasis).
As she makes her way back to Marlott and Alec stops her briefly, Tess draws attention to her own share of involvement or guilt, not his: "'If I had gone for love o'you, *if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still*, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now . . . . My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all'*" (65, my emphasis). What the language leaves open here is the distinct possibility that Tess, for a short while, did 'love' Alec to a greater or a lesser degree: "She bowed to him slightly, *her eye just lingering in his*, and then she turned . . . . 'See how you've mastered me!'" (66, my emphasis). If she hates the sight of him why do her eyes linger in his? What contact does she want, does she keep open, by letting her eyes linger in his? "'See how you've mastered me!'" like her much later cry of "'Now, punish me! . . . Whip me, crush me . . . . Once victim, always victim -- that's the law!" (275) is a self-dramatizing overstatement which seems to me to deliberately call attention to its own falseness. I mean, I think they both know that it is not true, (she is leaving him and he wants her to stay; in the second case she has just smashed his lip open) but that they are involved in playing a rather bitter and intimate game of master and victim.

After the actual incident where Tess strikes Alec, he returns to the field in the late afternoon and when he sees her look forward him "waved his hand urbanely to her, while he blew her a kiss. *It meant that their quarrel was over*. Tess looked down again . . . " (276, my emphasis) Who calls it a "quarrel"? Tess
or the narrator? In any case, enemies do not have an end to their quarrels, it is one long war. Lovers quarrel, and then the quarrel is over.

As Angel Clare, at the end of the novel, begins his search for Tess, the narrator has him pass the Cross-In-Hand, "the unholy stone whereon Tess had been compelled by Alec d'Urberville... to swear the strange oath that she would *never willfully tempt him again*" (307, my emphasis). This is not exactly what Alec made Tess swear to: "'swear that you will never tempt me -- by your charms or ways,'" he says (258). The narrator's addition of "willfully" and "again" marks his attitude towards Tess's relationship with Alec as being something other than a simple defense of her innocence.

When Angel arrives at the boarding house to find Tess has returned to Alec her language again acknowledges and supports, by omission, the reality of her relationship to Alec: "'I never loved him at all, Angel, *as I loved you* '" (318, my emphasis); "'He has won me back to him.'", and "'I hate him now, because he told me a lie... '" (313, my emphasis).

Tess never denies Alec. Moreover, the crises in her life are the result of their confrontations; his seduction of her, her return to him, her murder of him. She loses Angel because of Alec, not Alec because of Angel. As much as she loves Angel he fails to motivate her. And as much as Angel loves Tess, in his fashion, he completely misses her, who she is, from the very beginning of the novel when he fails to notice her in time to dance with her in spite of her bright red ribbon. Or perhaps, considering his over-refined sensibilities, it is exactly because
of her red ribbon that Angel fails to pick her out, the red already marking her in some way as sexually ready. There is no intimacy between the two of them as there is between Tess and Alec, not even sexually. Tess's sexual desire for Angel is never reciprocated by him, he seems almost overwhelmed by her sexuality, while Alec and she are dangerous to each other precisely because of their sexual attraction. Hardy and the narrator do not deny Alec anymore than Tess does; they give us all the evidence, even point to it sometimes, and then cover it all up by once again declaring Tess an innocent victim.

Outside the novel we repeat this same action, both commenting on and ignoring the implication of Alec's and Tess's intimacy. That is, we call attention to it and then act as if it has no meaning, or, going further, absolutely deny it. Remember Silverman's comment: "I would like to suggest that the action taken by Alec . . . has assumed the status of a seduction . . . not so much because Tess's 'own' sexuality seems at any point engaged, as because the narrator entertains a complexly ambivalent relation to that action" (9, my emphasis). That the narrator's attitude is "complexly ambivalent" does not at all have to mean that Tess's 'own' sexuality is not also involved but Silverman completely dismisses this possibility, at the same time as she removes Alec's presence by substituting the narrator into the position of seducer/rapist -- a rather revealing move, I think:

To the degree that the narrator's desire for figural disintegration predominates, Alec's 'mastery' of Tess will be perceived as a rape. However, in so far as priority is given to the narrator's erotic gratification at
the re-emergence of Tess as image, Alec's action will assume the status of a seduction. (11)

One problem with this explanation is that from another point of view one could argue exactly the opposite: That seduction is a merging, melting disintegrating confusion of individual desires, while rape involves a very strict, sharp division, a lining up on two very different, very visible sides, of desire.

I think it is also important to note again that while the surface drama absolves Tess of guilt, and while the very existence on another level of Tess's personal drama depends on Hardy's and the narrator's ambivalent feelings towards her (actually, ironically this personal drama is more dependent on real positive feelings about her, rather than negative ones) Tess herself is not ambivalent about her own culpability. In fact, it is vastly important to her; it is what makes her who she is, and what stands in the way of her happiness. She finds herself guilty from the start even though she also feels that the punishment is incredibly harsh. That Tess allows herself to be seduced is for her the individualizing moment of her life and yet everyone and everything refuses to acknowledge its importance or its effect. "Nature" makes her look innocent, a virgin -- so anyone who does not know her history, including Angel, believes she is a virgin. When Angel does learn of her story he simply says that she is not who he loves. Those who know about it do not give it any importance: Alec sees nothing in it whatsoever. And her own expressions and feelings of guilt which give her a sense of individuality are tenderly ridiculed by her narrator and the man
who is "faithfully" presenting her; her guilt is "a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy."

Everyone's denial of Tess's guilt, or if not her guilt, of its importance and significance, is like Van Ghent referring to Tess's murder of Alec as a "gesture," a condescending way of getting rid of the rather demandingly large characterization of a particular woman who Hardy created. Tess d'Urbeyfield did put a red ribbon in her hair to go dancing; she did remain resentful for the rest of her life because Angel failed to notice her on this particular day; she did allow herself to be seduced; she did hide this fact from her future husband; she did smash her first lover in the face; she did return to this same man and live with him as his mistress; she did wear the expensive clothes he bought her and eat the expensive food he gave her. And she did indeed stab him in the heart with a carving knife. Year ago, when Van Ghent and some of her other colleagues first pointed out that we could look at Tess's life and novel as a folk ballad and Tess as a folk heroine; it provided another handy way for readers to control Tess and the mixed feelings she provoked. Tess is innocent, nature's, history's victim; Tess is guilty but Hardy made her do it; Tess is mythic, Tess is folkloric, the fact that she is a murderer is what makes her a heroine -- she was following her real and natural instincts. All of this singsong does indeed "assign" to Tess's activity "the narrow limits within which [she] is allowed to suffer without upsetting" us.
Kaja Silverman writes that "with its insistence upon relational identity and the coercive power of the signifier, figural history in Tess of the d'Urbervilles would finally seem to be nothing other than a nightmarish view of the symbolic order -- a traumatic apprehension of the central role played in the constitution of the subject by the language and desire of the Other" (28, my emphasis). I would agree with Silverman that Tess relies heavily on figural history, and that it certainly is "a nightmarish view of the symbolic order." Silverman takes for granted, though, the success of what she refers to as the "symbolic castration" of both the male and female heroes inside the novel as well as automatically giving "the Other" complete dominance over "the Subject", whereas I think that the issues are not nearly so settled. It seems to me, for instance, that Silverman's 'Other' can only hope with any certainty to construct itself by its own language and desire (to which I would add another word that I think is important -- fear). It cannot construct a subject unless it encounters a weak or vacant 'Other' that accepts the first's construction rather than making its own. A perfect example of this can be found in Gilbert Osmond's and Pansy's collaboration in constructing themselves. Certainly she is constructed by him, but he is also. If she were to refuse his construction he could no longer be the perfectly aesthetic father/producer of the perfectly aesthetic little girl. Alternatively, it could construct a subject that will not argue with it, that pretends, according to its construction, to exist a-priori to the
construction -- in the case of Silverman and Hardy -- *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* view/use of figural history ("With [figural history's] insistence upon relational identity and the coercive power of the signifier") which tries to suggest by its force of language that figural history is something a-priori and not itself relational, but in fact can only provide a self-definition. It cannot make a phenomenally real "figural history" which then commits a phenomenally real "symbolic castration" of Alec, Angel, and Tess.

At one moment Silverman demonstrates how "the Other" uses language (fueled by desire, fear, etc.) to construct a subject -- Tess for her has no identity apart from the constructs of the narrator, Alec, and Angel -- and then tells us how languages uses us:

Symbolic castration entails not only the aphanisis or fading of the phenomenal real under the pressure of meaning, but the subjects insertion into a pre-existing discursive network which confers upon him or her a strictly relational identity, and so challenges any assumption either of self-presence or self-determination. (27, my emphasis)

As if this "discursive network" operated by itself on its own initiative, while her next sentence clearly shows her operating language -- "Lacan emphasizes the inescapability of that network . . ." to make her "subject" re-present her point. Again she writes that:

To the degree that Tess conforms to male desire and vision, the male subject is able to locate himself on the side of the enunciation rather than the enounced -- to
align himself with the agency rather than the object of articulation. In so doing he seems to master his own lack, to move from a passive to an active relation to representation. (27, my emphasis)

And again this suggests that there is something stable which can be located across a stable line on "the side of the enunciation" called "the agency of articulation" and that puts us all, if we are to be honest, in a passive relation to representation.

Then in a sentence that counters both the 'Other's' power to construct a subject, and the discursive network's power to symbolically castrate us all into subjects, she writes that "Angel insists upon Tess's absolute identity with the image he cherishes of her . . . . When Tess tells Angel about the night in The Chase she thus not only calls into question the absolute authority of his gaze to construct her, but discloses the gap separating desire from its ostensible object" (14, my emphasis). And she tells us that:

already alarmed by the d'Urberville likeness that he has traced in Tess's face, he is totally distraught by the revelation that she has been previously marked by another man's desire. He retreats from this unacceptable information by simply denying any possible relation between Alec's erotic construction, with which he now identifies Tess, and his own by driving a wedge between past and present, and so disputing the very concept of the figural . . . (14, my emphasis)

(Actually, there is indeed no relation between Alec's construct and Angel's as their desires structure Tess as two completely different women.) In this same section, she points out that "Once again the imaginary viewer is at his post, but far from
mastering the spectacle through his gaze, he is now mastered by it" (14, my emphasis).

It seems to me that what Silverman's essay exposes is that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is much more of an active battle for mastery, one 'other' over an 'other' than her surface argument suggests," -- a nightmarish view of the symbolic order -- a traumatic apprehension of the central role played in the constitution of the subject by the language and desire of the Other." And, it is Silverman's surface argument that "symbolically castrates" Tess, not Hardy or his novel: "This mirror relay between male gaze, female exteriority, and female interiority renders the distinction between Tess's body and her soul largely irrelevant" (23, my emphasis).

Writing one text about another text you tend to pick up key words, even actions, from the original. Nina Auerbach picks up Tess's first attack on Alec when she writes that "the more aggressively iconoclastic Hardy flings his heroine's purity as a gauntlet at hypocritical social taboos . . ." (*Women and the Demon*, 168), and I find myself half-consciously hypnotized and playing with Hardy's words from his subtitle -- "pure," and "presented" -- over and over again, trying to make them expose their variety of meanings. Silverman's word is "master" and while the language of her essay aggressively tries to master us, to do to us what she finds figural history to do inside the novel, I find the word that haunts her extremely apt for the novel, more central certainly than "pure" which really may not be much more than a decoy planted by Hardy, even if it has proven to be an extremely successful decoy. The fight for mastery in *Tess* is really all about whose language
and desire and fear will be represented and in the end I think that both Hardy and Tess end up masters, while Alec and Angel are clearly mastered.

Tess's fear of being "one of a long row only" and her desire to make herself individual is probably Hardy's fear and desire. When the narrator refers to Tess's infant as a "little prisoner of the flesh" (78) or writes that to Tess "and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify . . . " (297, my emphasis), or says that the milkmaids "writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law . . . " (124, my emphasis), writes that Angel is the victim of "the vulpine slyness of Dame Nature " (204), and concludes "So does Time ruthlessly destroy his own romances" (284, my emphasis) who is actually constructed, revealed, re-presented, reflected? Who feels the world in this way? Only the narrator/Hardy whose language coerces us into seeing the world his way -- and it does coerce us into exactly that: After reading and rereading two of his novels, Tess and Jude the Obscure in high school and college I could not bear to read another one of his novels. It was too depressing. I felt too horribly "mastered" by what I thought was the reality of "figural history." Even cows suffered from Hardy's bleak outlook, passing to "an oblivion almost inconceivable in its profundity" (89). Nevertheless, Hardy has not created a phenomenally real "figural history" -- 15 years after I stopped reading his work I started again and now I can point to the "gap separating" his fear from its "ostensible object." What he has done, at least for the space of the novel, is mastered History, Fate, and
Nature by writing a novel where they must do exactly what he tells them to do. He has become the powerful 'Other' constructing them as 'Subject'; they can not argue with him.

Tess does not argue with him either; she argues for him, I think, inside the novel, which is why I have to forgive him for all the other ways he mistreats her. Tess, not Alec nor Angel, wants to "master," have control over, her own life. It is easy to see Alec, Angel, and the narrator as split-off pieces or projections of Hardy and I think that is probably true. It is more difficult to see Tess as a projection of Hardy as well, but I think she very likely is, precisely because she is the only one inside the novel who shows the same fierceness as he does in writing it. In a discussion on the appearance of a writer's name inside his text, Culler writes that "the inscription of the proper name in the text is above all a version of the signature. In theory signature lies outside the work, to frame it, present it, authorize it, but it seems that truly to frame, to mark, or to sign a work the signature must lie within, at its very heart" (192, my emphasis). It happens that one of the almost comic things in Tess is the compulsive way versions of the name "Hardy" ("hardly," "hard," "hardily") appear within the same sentence as Tess's name, often within one or two words of her name, as soon as either Alec, Angel, or even the narrator approach her. As Culler says "at its very heart" -- in one way, clearly, Tess has his heart, and the hearts of Alec, Angel, and the narrator -- they are all in love with her; and Hardy's name next to hers in the novel is a jealous man's way of naming and claiming his woman. But perhaps Tess also is
his heart -- what keeps him alive -- inside the novel, and when Angel or Alec or the narrator approach and try to mark her, construct her, make her represent them, he steps in with his name to claim himself.

Of course, making Tess into Hardy allows me to dodge a question which plagues me: if they are not each others' representatives, does Tess master Hardy or Hardy master Tess? I suppose that her powerfully subversive existence is its own answer. I am in no doubt, however, as to whether she masters Alec and Angel; she does. In Tess's relationship with Alec, as I said earlier, their posturing is master/victim but except for the initial seduction where Alec is at least on the obvious level the initiator, it is Tess who directs their relationship, who constructs -- through her fear -- who Alec is. Claridge very shrewdly points out that

In her former lover's reflective state of redressing past iniquities lies Tess's chance for safety, but rather than seek refuge there, she (and the demands of the text) requires that he remain a villain. *Tess continues to define Alec only as a sexual threat until he resumes, almost in response to her expectations, his role as predator.* (335, my emphasis, and I would eliminate the word "almost".)

Claridge also points out that when Tess kills Alec it is "unnecessary"; "Tess could run away with Angel without killing Alec" (335). Given Angel's chastened state I think that is absolutely true -- except that Tess's perception and fear of Alec as a sexual threat to her is so strong and his compliance in her construction of him so complete that she has to murder him -- the external representative of her internal sexuality which is and always would be, from her point of view, unacceptable to
Angel -- who is the construction of herself that she wants, the external representative of her spirituality -- because it is unacceptable to her. (Here, take me, in the form of my more spiritual sister, liza-Lu.) To put it crudely, Tess masters Alec -- the sexual desire which put a hole in her at the beginning of the novel -- by putting a hole in him at the end of the novel: "The wound was small, but the point of the blade had touched the heart of the victim, who lay on his back . . . " (317, my emphasis, quite phallic and masterful). She has also mastered, by this "gesture," her own sexual self, insuring that it will die on the gallows.

If Tess makes Alec into the external representative of her sexuality, she makes Angel into the representative of her spirituality. (I'm not suggesting, by the way, that Alec is not already himself sexual, or Angel not already spiritual; they are, but this only makes them more open to being 'subject' to Tess, the stronger 'other'.) Her mastery of him is a more difficult job because in her need to be the individual who makes herself, and who is a nonvirgin, she cannot undo herself and be who he (and she) wants -- a virgin. From his point of view she cannot represent him, be his subject, because she already represents Alec. But from Tess's point of view she is not representing Alec, but herself. (The fact that she uses little or none of her sexuality to try and win Angel back to her is a sign of how unacceptable a mixture of the two desires is for her.) For Tess then, she cannot master Angel, have him as representative of her spirituality, until she has killed off the man who represents her sexuality. Angel though, for his part, has had his own independent spirituality mastered by Brazil and the Amazon and
perhaps, too, by Tess's fiercer spirituality which, even when at war with her more physical side, leads her to love and so to desire and so to construct Angel, so comes back ready to be mastered by Tess in whatever way she desires. The funny thing is that by killing Alec, Tess makes it possible, according to her inner vision of herself, to "win" Angel, to have him represent her completely. But in the moment that the masterful 'Other' allows the 'subject' to be his sole representative then the places are somehow switched, the 'Other' becomes dependent on the 'Subject's' faithfulness. Tess does this willingly, though, thus giving Angel all that he once wanted -- Tess as his representative. Only now, the Tess who represents him is not only a non-virgin but also an adulteress and a murderer. Tess masters Angel, and not as her spiritual 'subject,' in spite of herself; her fierceness or her passion to control is stronger than him or anything else in the text.

Except perhaps the narrator, who I think is afraid of her, and so keeps his safe distance, controlling her effect on him, trying to control her effect on their mutual readers. He describes her, eroticizes her, obsesses over her -- but always from a distance. He is the living representative inside the novel of all that Tess feels suffocating her. She cannot master him because his distance insures that she never sees him, only feels his creeping, mythologizing, deadening effect everywhere she sets her foot. He goes before her and before us like the text painter, insisting that we read and see the world the way he writes it.
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DAISY AND BRETT

One must never look at things from the point of view of the signification, but from that of the signifier, of the thing which has been robbed. . .
(Barthes, 145)

A long time ago while I was still taking classes for my graduate degree I wrote a paper on Daisy Faye and Brett Ashley and was lightly reprimanded for overstating my case when I suggested that Daisy was "a woman formerly thought of as a treacherous bitch . . ." Preparing to write this chapter I reread my old paper as well as the article that had inspired me to make my claim and found that actually I had been remarkably restrained. Leland Person, in "'Herstory' and Daisy Buchanan" reels off a list of insults from the entries in what he calls "the unofficial competition of maligning Daisy's character: Marius Bewley refers to Daisy's 'vicious emptiness' and her 'monstrous moral indifference'." Robert Ornstein calls her "'criminally amoral'." Alfred Kazin judges her 'vulgar and inhuman' and Leslie Fiedler "sees Daisy as a 'Dark Destroyer,' a purveyor of 'corruption and death . . . '" (250). Wendy Martin in her article "Brett Ashley as New Woman in The Sun Also Rises" has compiled a similar list on Brett: Allen Tate calls her "hard-boiled"; Theodore Bardake "a woman devoid of womanhood"; Jackson Benson, "a female who never becomes a woman"; Edmund Wilson "an exclusively destructive force"; and John Aldridge, a "compulsive bitch" (69). There
is something bizarre in the vicious and ready vehemence of the insults that all
those male "critics" hurled at Brett and Daisy. There is no pretense here of
sounding coolly intellectual, no apparent reason to feel that they should perhaps
control themselves. Hemingway and Fitzgerald had tapped into a vein of
contagious fear and aggression that must have been waiting for an outlet since
burning witches was first declared illegal.

But these critics, like Hemingway's aging bullfighter Belmonte, who has
sold his greatness in advance by picking out the bulls he is to fight, have picked
out, in Daisy and Brett, some very safe bulls. In spite of all the nasty names, in
spite of the fact that Daisy is referred to several times as an icon, an idol, the
king's daughter in her high tower, and that swashbuckling Brett is specifically
identified with and aligned to man-killing bulls, these two women are narratively
powerless. Hemingway's description of the compromises that Belmonte has made
provides a perfect comment on what he himself has done with Brett and what
Fitzgerald has done with Daisy: "Belmonte imposed conditions and insisted that
his bulls should not be too large, nor too dangerously armed with horns, and so
the element that was necessary to give the sensation of tragedy was not there . . ."
(214).

Daisy and Brett, bodies and souls, have been distilled into essences --
Daisy's magic voice, Brett's bewitching eyes. And what was the motive behind this
distillation? I don't think it was to provide the strength of pure essence, which is
the way it might seem, but rather a secret and unconscious way to weaken them,
stylistize them out of all that is human into art objects meant to capture and reflect the various dreams of their makers. What kind of murder was committed on the woman behind the description of Daisy’s voice, behind the tender description of Brett’s eyes:

She was looking into my eyes with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes. They would look on and on after everyone else’s eyes in the world would have stopped looking. She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things. (26)

A part has been substituted for the whole; the whole too dangerous, too impossible to control. Isabel and Tess are whole and escape time and again from their narrators and their makers. They present whole stories that move in flagrant contradiction below their polite surface reflection of the male "Other’s" version of the stories, creating counter narratives and counter structures opposed to their novels’ dominant stances. Brett and Daisy make no attempts at escape and they only make the faintest attempts (Daisy once, Brett twice) to even tell us how they feel or who they are. When the male narrators deny them that right they accept and fall silent; their voices never escape to wander away, no matter how briefly, from the controlling narratives.

Romero can fight his bull for Brett without "any loss to himself"; and he can fight Brett too, without fearing any real loss. In an encounter with Isabel or Tess he would have been, Hemingway would have been, in much more danger.
He would have lost something of himself, just as Ralph, Osmond, Warburton, Alec, and Angel lose something of themselves, just as James and Hardy periodically lose control when something in the woman inside the mask refuses to be structured by the Other behind the mask and takes over the moment. James and Hardy make me angry, because, I think, what happens to Isabel and Tess, at least on an individual level, is tragic. Fitzgerald and Hemingway just make me cranky.

I.

Fitzgerald had a certain attitude about women which Mary A. McCay -- try as hard as she does to be objective -- succumbs to in her article "Fitzgerald's Women: Beyond Winter Dreams." McCay criticizes Judith Fetterley for what she says is an oversimplification of "Fitzgerald’s attempt to show that the emptiness of many women’s lives, Daisy’s included, leaves them with a nervous pointless energy that can only be destructive to themselves and others. They are not passive, their energy is abundant but unfortunately misdirected" (312). In the first place, McCay never tries to prove either that Fitzgerald really did believe "that the emptiness of many women’s lives . . . leaves them with a nervous, pointless energy . . . " or shows how she sees him attempting to develop this thesis. Secondly, McCay’s language authorizes and accepts this thesis as a sociologically correct one -- women’s lives are empty, this leads them to be nervous, pointless and destructive -
- which allows her to avoid asking some crucial questions: Who says women's lives are empty? What interest is there in finding women's lives empty and women filled with nervous, pointless, destructive energy?

McCay wants to show us that Fitzgerald is on a quest which "is not, as Fetterley asserts, one for a romantic ideal, a grail quest for the unattainable, but rather a constant struggle to reconcile a world part of him felt should exist with a world he saw around him and for which another part of him longed" (312). It could be argued that given the extreme differences between Fitzgerald's two different worlds, that it all comes down to the same thing but the real problem for me lies again in McCay's language. By referring to something as a "constant struggle" she not only shows her sympathy for this struggle but she asks for ours as well. And when she says it is a struggle "to reconcile" two different worlds she suggests that this struggle is internal. But her previous sentence reads like this: "How he used women and their experience is the key to what Fitzgerald is saying about women" (312, my emphasis). She then goes on to show us exactly how he uses women with no apparent awareness of any of the irony involved. His "constant struggle" to reconcile the two different worlds he finds himself attracted to actually involves using women as excuses for failure: "it is the man who has the vision and the woman who would distract him"; "weakness masking itself as beauty and drawing brave young men to wreck like sirens -- these women are Fitzgerald's true tormentors" (316); "the girl with money is herself a trap. She will drag the hard-working young man away from his dream as Fitzgerald claimed [this
"claimed" is McCay's brave attempt at not buying Fitzgerald's whole argument] Zelda dragged him so often away from his writing . . . " (318). (The logic, or rather the lack of logic, involved in this widespread male proposition -- weak women are the principle cause of the destruction of strong men -- is beyond me but never seems to bother its proposers.) Every now and then a woman can also save a man from the failure brought on him by other women: "Fitzgerald saw her [Kathleen in The Last Tycoon ] as someone who could save the dying Stahr just as he saw Sheila Graham as someone who had the power to save him" (322).

Again, McCay shows no awareness of irony or contradiction when she discusses Fitzgerald's letters to his daughter Scotty. These letters, she writes, "show how clearly the father monitored, criticized, and tried to influence the behavior of his child. At times the letters reveal an almost authorial pressure, as if the father were trying to create in the daughter the female character he could be proud of -- something he had never achieved in his fiction . . . . Fitzgerald wants his daughter to form her own character, not to become like so many women who people his novels -- empty, beautiful shells who must be filled up by men " (313-314, my emphasis). Now a father who truly wants his daughter to form her own character does not at the same time exert "an almost authorial pressure" on her through his letters which is, in itself, nothing but a disguised attempt to fill up Scotty from the outside. If this same father writes novels peopled by empty, beautiful women-shells all waiting to be filled up by men then they are empty, beautiful shells because that is how he perceives women, it is his fear and his
desire. It is not because women exist in this state "naturally." This perception of women provides the plots of his novels as well as the plot of his life.

McCay exposes Fitzgerald's manipulative use of female forms but she works hard at covering up what she has exposed. And while she has tried to put an objective distance between her analysis and Fitzgerald's position her surface argument valorizes his position.

II.

The funny thing about *The Great Gatsby* is that Jay Gatsby is himself an empty, beautiful shell created and filled up first by Nick's and Fitzgerald's romanticism, and then by their projection of Daisy. What is it that we know about Gatsby after all that has not come to us created and structured by Nick's theatrical, idealizing, romanticizing language? Nick Narrator tells us that "the truth is that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" but I think it is closer to the truth to say that Jay Gatsby sprang from Nick's/Fitzgerald's platonic conception of himself. (One of the reasons I suspect this is because Hick's presentation of himself -- the objective, down-to-earth, practical honest, open-minded, witness/reporter of strange events -- is so palpably self-serving, false, contradictory and unaware that it strongly suggests something haphazardly exchanged, in order to provide the necessary type
of narrator, for the real platonic conception of himself that has gone into the creation of Gatsby.)

Nick colors every scene with his own romantic viewpoint. He reports for instance that at the end of one of Gatsby's parties "a sudden emptiness seemed to flow from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell" (37). "Seemed" is a crucial word -- for Nick and for us. This seeming emptiness can thus only seemingly endow isolation. Gatsby is abstracted to "the figure of the host," and his gesture made "formal." The overall effect is a dramatic, distant loneliness but what can actually be said here about Gatsby separated from Nick's presentation? Only that at the end of one of his parties he stood outside and waved goodbye. A little earlier Nick tells us that "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers abut him from those who had found little that was necessary to whisper about in this world" (29). Again, Nick creates Gatsby for us not based on anything that his hero has done or is, but on whispers which we are to value all the more highly because they come from "those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about . . ." The "testimony" that he offers us as one of his proofs of Gatsby's greatness is empty, a trick; it creates in itself what it claims to already exist.

Nick laughs at Gatsby's attempts at autobiography -- "After that I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe . . . collecting jewels, chiefly rubies,
hunting big game . . . trying to forget something very sad that had happened to me long ago" (43) -- but his biographical writing is just as bad, tainted by all the same impulses. Reporting to us what Gatsby has told him of his early days he says that Gatsby's "brown, hardening body lived naturally through the half-fierce, half-lazy work of the bracing days. He knew women early, and since they spoiled him he became contemptuous of them, of young virgins because they were ignorant, of the others because they were hysterical . . . " (65). He tells us about Gatsby's decision to kiss Daisy: "Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw the blocks of the sidewalk really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees -- he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (74). And he describes for our benefit Gatsby's seduction of her: "he took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously -- eventually he took Daisy one still October night, took her because he had no real right to touch her hand . . . . He might have despised himself . . . . But he didn't . . . . now he found that he had committed himself to the following of a grail . . . " (99). Nick's vision of Gatsby's life makes it into a bizarre cross between a pirate novel, a Harlequin romance, and a crusade epic. And it is a very juvenile mind which can turn a matter for possibly finding oneself despicable into the following of a grail, but Nick recounts all of this with a very straight face.

Nick is also almost solely responsible for interpreting Gatsby's feelings for Daisy. In particular, he fills the second half of the novel with the suggestion that
Gatsby is disappointed with Daisy's actual, real presence: "Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever . . . .
Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one" (62, my emphasis). In other words, Daisy does not add to his count, nor can she replace the significance of the green light with her own significant self; her presence causes him, according to Nick's reading, to lose something. Nick sees an "expression of bewilderment" on Gatsby's face and he tells us that it is "as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness . . . . There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams -- not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion" (53, my emphasis). Nick assigns to Gatsby a preference for an absent dream over a present woman. What's more, he does it in a way that suggests that Gatsby's preference is the result of a failure on Daisy's part, not an immense failure of maturity on Gatsby's part. As readers we have accepted Gatsby as having this preference solely on the basis of Nick's conjectures, not on anything concrete that comes to us directly from Gatsby.

We cannot know whether Gatsby actually prefers his dream over the real Daisy but Nick makes his own preference for dream women perfectly clear even if he does so unwittingly. An affair with a real woman is allowed to "blow quietly away" because "her brother began throwing mean looks in my direction" (37). He likes
to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. (38, my emphasis)

Nick's affair with Jordan is accepted as his own substitute for an unattainable dream woman: "Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs, and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms" (53, my emphasis). Even as he makes, and apparently accepts, the substitution -- "Suddenly I wasn't thinking of Daisy and Gatsby any more, but of this clean, hard, limited person . . . who leaned back jauntily just within the circle of my arm" -- he turns this reality into a romantic quest based on the unattainable -- "A phrase began to beat in my ears with a sort of heady excitement: 'There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy and the tired'" (53, my emphasis).

"Disembodied" is a strange and revealing word once it is extracted from the rest of Nick's dreamy description. From the subject's point of view to be disembodied, figuratively or literally, would be quite traumatic. The word's secret violence connects itself with the extremely vivid and violent description of Myrtle Wilson's dead body which lies in marked contrast to everything else in the novel, including the description of Gatsby's dead body: "They saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart
beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long" (92). I wonder what Myrtle represented to Fitzgerald that made him have to rip her body up so thoroughly. Remember that Nick describes her face as containing "no facet or gleam of beauty, but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smoldering" (17). Perhaps real and vital bodies threaten Fitzgerald and Nick; what they do to real and vital bodies to get rid of them could frighten anyone into willing shell-like emptiness.

III.

It is difficult to separate Daisy from the presentation of her offered by Nick and Jordan. Essentially she is the shiny sum of Nick's fears and desires reflected through Gatsby and then onto her. As with Gatsby though, it's possible to know a little. What appeals to me most is that unlike the people who surround her, including Nick, and contrary to everything that is suggested about her, she is honest. Caught between Gatsby's and Toms demands that she deny one or the other she does not lie. "I did love him once -- but I loved you too."; "Even alone I can't say I never loved Tom . . . " (89). I suspect that this passage is usually read as Daisy betraying Gatsby; I think that it is Daisy, just once, refusing to betray herself. And we know that when Gatsby was to be sent overseas that Daisy
tried to run away to New York to say goodbye to him. We also know that she
tried, at the last minute, not to marry Tom.

*The Great Daisy* does not sound, somehow, quite as good as *The Great
Gatsby*, and something more alliterative like *Darling Daisy* is too soft, Mrs.
Dalloway as a flapper -- but either of those two names might be more honest than
*The Great Gatsby*. Though it is clear that for Fitzgerald and Nick, Jay Gatsby is
the valuable one with a story worth telling, it should also be clear that without
Daisy, Jay Gatsby’s story would be very different, perhaps a sort of negative
Horatio Alger novel but definitely not *The Great Gatsby* as we have it. Nick
admits this to himself and us fairly early in the novel: "I had talked with him
perhaps six times in the past month and found, to my disappointment, *that he had
little to say*. So my first impression, that he was a person of some undefined
consequence, had gradually faded and he had become simply the proprietor of an
elaborate road-house next door" (42). It is not until Jordan tells Nick about
Gatsby’s love for Daisy that he finds him a worthy subject for his imagination:
"Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June
night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless
splendor" (52). Gatsby without Daisy is of no serious consequence. This is true
on an imaginative level for Nick -- 'He came alive to me' -- because his romantic
imagination is not kindled by splendor with is based without dream. It is also true
on the narrative and thematic level. The plot of *Gatsby* is based entirely on the
last stages of Gatsby’s search for a lost love, and its overt theme and surface claim
to be more than just another love story is the valorization of just such a romantic quest. So, no Daisy, no Gatsby. Of course, it is also possible that you might say no Gatsby, no Daisy, but no one has yet claimed that Daisy is more crucial than Gatsby, though perhaps we should, while Fitzgerald and Nick do pretend the opposite.

Leland Person points out in "Herstory and Daisy Buchanan" that "at the same time that she exists as the ideal object of Gatsby's quest . . . Daisy becomes his female double." She is as romantic as Gatsby and "the important point to recognize is that Gatsby is as much an ideal to Daisy as she is to him. Only Gatsby looks at her -- creates her, makes her come to herself -- 'in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at some time'." What is usually ignored is that he does not live up to her fantasies any better than she does to his (251, 253). This twinship goes beyond a mutual tendency to idolize each other, and beyond the parallel between the "deathless song" of Daisy's voice and Gatsby's smile with its "quality of eternal reassurance." But its importance to me lies not so much in itself as in the different treatment they are given by Nick and Fitzgerald. Jay Gatsby is the only one exempt from Nick's moral scorn. Not only is he not a member of the "rotten crowd," he is "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (103). Daisy, on the other hand, is relegated to the ranks of that "rotten crowd," part of "what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams" (2), one of a pair of "careless people" who "smashed up things and creatures and
then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness . . . and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . ." (120).

Gatsby's narrative and thematic dependence on Daisy is never repeated after Nick first makes it explicit. Meanwhile, Nick's presentation of Daisy subtly accuses her, through his language, of much that cannot be proven, even as his language creates her. The ostensibly romantic eye that paints Daisy for us is engaged in constantly and seriously betraying her.

Describing her charm becomes at the same time a clever way to describe her insincerity: "I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming" (6, my emphasis). If it was truly irrelevant to the novel, specifically to the picture that Nick is drawing of Daisy it would not be there for us to read. (The same can be said of Nick's later comment on Jordan's dishonesty: "it made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply -- I was casually sorry, and then I forgot" (39). If it makes no difference to Nick or to Fitzgerald then why is it there except to mark him as the kind of large-minded man who isn't bothered by women's little sins. And if it makes no difference then why does this same page contain a declaration of Nick's amazing and unusual honesty?)

Daisy's charming but perhaps manipulative murmur might be forgotten except that just a few pages later Nick accuses her of being more specifically manipulative, and on a grander scale: "I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said . . . . as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a
contributory emotion from me" (12). It seems extremely likely, given what we have learned about Tom, that Daisy is very unhappy and has every reason to feel bitter about the birth of her little girl. But I think most readers accept Nick's judgement of Daisy's falseness and from this point on in the novel will be wary of everything she says and does and so all the more ready to see her as the one who betrays Gatsby.

That Daisy might have anything sincere about her seems out of the question for Nick. When he sees an "expression of bewilderment" on Gatsby's face, during Daisy's first visit to his house, he reads it as "a faint doubt . . . as to the quality of his present happiness . . . . There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams . . . " (63). On the other hand, Daisy's doubts about Gatsby which are first evident when she attends one of his parties, are not taken as a sign that perhaps Gatsby tumbles short of her dreams as well but again only as a lack in Daisy, the mark of an essential falseness -- she prefers complicated gestures to simple, raw emotion: "But the rest offended her -- and unarguably, because it wasn't a gesture but an emotion. She was . . . appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms . . . She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand" (71). "High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl . . . " (80). This is Nick's and Gatsby's dream view of Daisy -- the untouchable, beautiful princess protected by birth from the world. The sentence covers up what should be obvious; Daisy is all
too vulnerable to touch, and no one (especially not cousin Nick) is protecting her at all, not now and not when she was 17.

Nick's construction of Daisy as irresponsible and dangerously careless is another trick; it hides the fact that her carelessness is a narrative and thematic necessity. During the horrible scene in the hotel Nick tells us that Daisy's "eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing -- and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late" (88, my emphasis). Daisy is blamed here for what is a structural requirement of her part as "grail": If she were to have planned to do something -- say, for instance to run off with Gatsby, or to remain with Tom -- whether she succeeded or not, the outcome could not have been so dramatically simple and in favor of a tragic Gatsby. For one thing we would have to have more of Daisy herself. Meanwhile those two "as thoughs" ought to remind us that Daisy's "carelessness" is not an objectively established truth.

The hotel scene plays a second trick on us. In spite of all the noisy fighting over Daisy, who loves her more, who she loves more, who is going to take care of her, the issue is really a false one. It is not so much that Tom "wins" Daisy, or that Daisy chooses Tom over Gatsby, but that they are left together by default. Nick's and Fitzgerald's romantic viewpoint is insistently in favor of the absent dream over any present reality. Gatsby and Daisy could not end up together in
Fitzgerald's novel. The brief time they spend with each other only proves its real impossibility.

Nick's description of Gatsby's seduction of Daisy is perhaps the most amazing example of the way he manipulates language in order to make Gatsby marvelous and Daisy selfish and guilty:

He took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously... took her because he had no real right to touch her hand.... He might have despised himself, for he had certainly taken her under false pretenses... But he didn't... now he found that he had committed himself to the following of a grail.... She vanished into her rich house... leaving Gatsby nothing.... When they met again... it was Gatsby who was breathless, who was, somehow betrayed... (99-100)

Not only does Nick transform an unscrupulous false act into "the following of a grail" but he manages to imply that the victim of this false act is the one to blame -- it is Daisy who somehow has betrayed Gatsby, leaving him with nothing. What, I would like to know, has Gatsby left her? Apart, that is, from leaving her to Tom Buchanan?

Daisy's absolute essentialness to Gatsby's story disappears under all this subtle and not-so-subtle criticism. More than that; with Jordan's help Nick not only turns the structure upside down -- so that it becomes Gatsby who has created Daisy -- but manages to suggest that by creating Daisy Gatsby loses the most valuable part of himself: "He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again
like the mind of God . . . Then he kissed her. *At his lips' touch she blossomed for him* like a flower and *the incarnation was complete*" (74, my emphasis). Unlike Persons, who sees Daisy as Gatsby's double, no one inside the novel ever sees this as a dual process, that they create each other; Daisy is always the lucky, guilty, created one. And somehow, though "unutterable" is not the same as "imperishable" Nick makes it sound like it is when he "weds" Gatsby's "unutterable visions" with Daisy's "perishable breath." Alone, without Daisy, Gatsby would live forever, romping with God. Only alone can Gatsby "suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (74). Listening to Gatsby talk Nick gathers that "he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (73). Gatsby, a son of God, kisses Daisy, becomes a mere man, is doomed now to die. Meanwhile, Daisy kissed by Gatsby, blossoms and comes alive.

But into what kind of fictional life or half-life? If Gatsby is "incarnated," Daisy is incarcerated, turned into a living grail. She is not even given a real body of flesh, bone and blood, but left as a flutter of breeze and cloth. Only her voice is important and not because of anything concretely real in it (which is why choosing her voice is such an obviously perfect choice) but because it is just the sort of thing necessary to cater to Nick's and Gatsby's capacity for "infinite hope," their unlimited capacity to value what is absent over what is present. Daisy's voice is a dream that "couldn't be over-dreamed -- that voice was a deathless song" (64). It is a "singing compulsion, a whispered 'listen,' *a promise* that she had done gay,
exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour." It is "an arrangement of notes that will never be played again" (6-7, my emphasis).

The character that Gatsby eventually assigns to this dream voice is an unconsciously revealing indication of the narrowness of his and Nick's romanticism. When Gatsby, who has up until this point not offered his personal interpretation of Daisy's voice, says that "Her voice is full of money" (80) he tells us a great deal about himself, what he thinks is valuable, what he wants, what he believes that Daisy represents. He does not tell us anything that we can take as reliable about Daisy or her voice, though it has been taken as such. Nick immediately agrees with Gatsby: "That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money -- that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it..." (80). Nick's agreement reveals that his romantic imagination is as cheap as Gatsby's; what he finds to be inexhaustibly charming has its roots in money -- who has it and who doesn't.

Everything about Daisy that attracts Gatsby, as well as those ghosts, Nick and Fitzgerald, is tied up for him with money and richness: "She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life... Her porch was bright with the bought luxury of star shine... and Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and reserves... Of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (99-100). Nick authorizes Gatsby's poor-boy construction of Daisy by narrating it without a trace of irony or a
comment to the contrary. And most readers seem to have accepted it too, even though any reader who paused for just a second would realize that star-shine is not a bought luxury no matter how lyrical it may sound being described as such; that wealth, even in *Gatsby*, has not and cannot imprison and reserve youth; and that Daisy struggling through the intense heat of August is not safe and proud about the struggles of the poor but engaged in a very unpleasant struggle in her own life.

*Gatsby* defines Daisy as wealth; and as one of Silverman's masterful "Others" *Gatsby* does *make* Daisy -- "she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete." But he does not lose himself because he "makes" her. And Daisy does not "betray" *Gatsby*. He has betrayed himself; first by making her the single representative and sum of all his dreams, and then by assigning to this representative such an impoverished and limiting definition -- money. He has made himself completely dependent on her. Like Osmond and Pansy they are locked in a mutual agreement which could break at any moment and destroy the other: He could cease to make her "blossom," she could cease to "blossom" for him. This is, as a matter of fact, exactly what happens. He leaves, but takes his definition/creation with him in his head. She looks for someone else to "make" her. Away from her and their mutual creating of each other the wealth *Gatsby* amasses takes on his own thoroughly modern, excessive, vulgar, splendid character. It is this wealth that comes back to claim Daisy only to find that she has been claimed, or more likely, reclaimed, by a completely different kind of wealth.
Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;  
*If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,*  
*Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high bouncing lover,  
*I must have you!"* (Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, iii)

Fitzgerald's epigraph to his novel suggests neither a grail quest nor any other kind of romantic odyssey. It resembles a circus act -- with the man a virtual clown and the woman a collector of flashy prizes -- and it seems a rather cynical comment. In the light of this epigraph, Fitzgerald's dedication, "Once Again To Zelda," sounds tired and depressed -- one more trick I've done for you.

And the whole novel is a wonderfully skilled trick. Remember that when Gatsby first tells Nick the purpose of the lunch he has planned for him and Jordan he says "Oh, It's nothing underhand . . . . Miss Baker's a great sportswoman, you know, and she'd never do anything that wasn't all right" (47). Actually, we know, as well as Nick, that Jordan cheats and lies. Nick, for his part, has said that he wanted the world "at a sort of moral attention forever" (1) but his own sense of morality seems as loose and sloppy as every else's in the novel. (One of the amazing things that Nick suggests, at the end, is that Gatsby disappear for awhile until everything calms down.) What Gatsby wants is underhanded -- Nick's and Jordan's help in getting Daisy together with him -- but neither of his two accomplices ever see it this way.
It's worth remembering this. Gatsby's and Daisy's story, the apparent all that gives us the novel, comes to us through two characters (Jordan is responsible for much of Daisy's side of the story, as well as some of Gatsby's) whose sense of honesty and sportsmanlike behavior lead them to initiate and then encourage a series of events that end up leaving three people dead. And Nick claims that it is Tom and Daisy who are "careless people." Late in the novel, after the hotel scene, Nick tells us that Jordan, unlike Daisy, "was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age" (91). Maybe so. Or maybe it is just that Fitzgerald does a great job of projecting the well-remembered dreams of two relatively full characters onto two beautiful but empty shells who mirror the dreams back to us through Nick's narrating voice.

It is Nick who says of Daisy that "the instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me" (12). He could as well be commenting on his own activity and that of the novel as a whole. It is his lyric, romantic voice that convinces us of the beauty of Daisy's voice, of the wonder of Gatsby's smile, of the whole romantic shebang: "the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us... boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (121). It is his voice that plays Fitzgerald's trick and exacts a contributory emotion from us.
Wendy Martin's essay "Brett Ashley as New Woman in The Sun Also Rises" tells us that Fitzgerald advised Hemingway to get rid of the first fifteen pages of The Sun Also Rises, "in which he made it clear that the novel was about Brett. The original opening of the novel begins: 'this is a novel about a lady. Her name is Lady Ashley and when the story begins she is living in Paris and it is spring'" (70). I am not surprised that Fitzgerald would suggest getting rid of something that might have given Brett a little more position; nor do I suppose that those fifteen pages, left intact, would have made the novel any more about Brett than it is anyhow. But it is interesting to me to know that Hemingway, at least at one point, conceived the novel as being about Brett, "a lady," because I don't think it's necessarily the impression that readers come away with. What is almost always noted first about the novel is the impotence and disaffection of its men. Brett is seen, usually, as one cause of their sickness -- placed in importance either before or after W.W.I. depending on the particular reader's capacity for misogynistic imaginings -- or an effect of their sickness, she is the way she is, poor thing, because of them.

In "this very masculine novel" (Davidson, 102) Brett has no importance to herself or to us, no relationship to herself or to us except as she is used, along with her friends the bulls, as the focus or touchstone of masculinity. Remember that Jake tells us that "I had been having Brett for a friend. I had not been
thinking about her side of it" (148). When Brett wants to talk about her unhappiness Jake literally stops her mouth by kissing it. And remember, too, that Brett wants to dance at the festival "but they did not want her to. They wanted her as an image to dance around" (155). If the novel were truly about Brett, or even if Brett had some importance in herself to the novel, her mouth would not be shut with kisses, what she wanted could not be so simply dismissed, and "her side of it" might be opened up a little more. The active energy that drives the narrative does not come from Brett as a person/character, or from her bed-hopping. It comes from the clash between two apparently very different male "Others" represented on one side by Robert Cohn and on the other by the members of Jake's group -- Jake himself, Bill Gorton, Michael, and Brett. Their differences are not so clearly cut as they would like to believe and the novel is spent trying to shore up and stop the slippage of masculinity from one side to another. Brett and the bulls stand in for each other while various men prove their manhood or lack of it, depending on how they handle these two, purely formal, dangers.

What does it mean, after all, that those original 15 pages telling us that the novel was about Brett were followed, and later completely replaced, by 20 more pages all about Robert Cohn? And Jake, who is an insecure and defensive narrator, begins his narrative by denying Cohn's importance to him: "Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn" (13).
Davidson quotes a work by David Wyatt pointing out that Cohn "emerges as a massive projection of the speaker's anxieties' and that 'the dominant emotion' in Jake's account 'is rage at Cohn's inability to appreciate a potency that he possesses and the narrator lacks'" (92). At the same time, Jake has to acknowledge his closeness to Robert: "'Everybody behaves badly . . . . Give them the proper chance'" he says to Brett, about Cohn's bad behavior. "I'd be as big an ass as Cohn . . . " (181). Brett denies this but Jake has made himself as sick as Cohn over Brett, he has only hidden it a little better, crying alone instead of publicly. He has also beaten Cohn up verbally (as well as enjoying watching others do the same), substituting that method of saving his honor for the more physical method Cohn uses with Romero.

Jake's fear of himself is reflected in his dislike of Robert's apparent passivity in the face of women, and in his homage to Pedro. Describing Romero's last bullfight with the killer bull, carried out in honor of Brett, Jake says that:

Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and did it for himself too, as well as for her. Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her too. But he did not do it for her at any loss to himself. He gained by it all through the afternoon. (216).

The seesaw language of these sentences is painful in its anxiety and obsession with expressing the ideal and manly way for a man to give something of himself to a woman.
His description of the telegram he sends to Brett, which could also be a description of his view of the novel, expresses a dream of control over women which he does not have: "That seemed to handle it. That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love. That was it all right" (239, my emphasis). But Jake did not send Brett off with Robert. He did not have any say at all in that relationship; she went off with him on her own accord. He does introduce Brett to Pedro but because she insists. And he does bring Brett back, after waiting to be called by her to do just that.

Jake and all of his friends are in a strange no-man's-land of uncertain masculinity and they are joined in the end by Pedro. Davidson says that "bulls and bullfighters are defined by their sexuality only when they abstain, only when they flirt with the opposite of sexuality, death." Jake reduces an icon of bullfighting -- Romero -- "to a mere individual, a man with human sexual appetites . . . " and by doing so "challenges the very code by which the club and the bullfight exist" (96, 97). Jake sabotages Pedro's masculinity and the masculinity of bullfighters everywhere by seducing him away from his bulls and Brett is the bait he uses to insure that he and Robert and the rest of his friends are kept company.

Robert Cohn is doing something more in this novel than supplying the necessary romantic fool; Pedro Romero is not simply the romantic, masculine hero whose presence provides Brett and the novel with the necessary climax; and Jake is not himself a bullfighter -- he pays money in order to watch others fight bulls.
The real drama in *The Sun Also Rises* is male-centered and as self-referential as the bull-fights, that "peculiar drama in which males take all the parts" (Davidson, 96). Brett serves as a badge of masculinity, a test of masculinity, a sign of the bankruptcy of 20th century masculinity as well as an excuse for it; I also think she may well serve something of the same function served by that word of Hardy's -- "Pure" -- as a decoy, a stand-in, a proxy, the only means by which all these men can contact each other. I'm not interested, by the way, in suggesting homosexuality; it's not to the point. My point here is the way a woman character is used and the way that use is disguised.

VI.

*The Sun Also Rises* seems to present a complete reversal of sexual stereotypes so I suppose it's possible to see Brett as having a lot more power than Daisy, or Tess and Isabel. Martin says that "the new woman's radical challenge to the traditional social structure is seen in Lady Brett Ashley, who has stepped off the pedestal and now roams the world" (68). Instead of the sexually active man jumping from one bed to the next using worn out but time honored excuses -- I can't help it, it's the way I'm made; don't tie me down' it doesn't mean anything, it'll do her good; what she needs is a good fuck -- while a loyal woman remains at home, standing by her man, and crying, Hemingway offers us Brett, the sexually active woman hopping from one bed to the next and using the same excuses while
a group of loyal men cry in their beds and then fight publicly over her, across tables (cafe, not kitchen) filled with saucers (of liquor, not coffee).

Then, of course, there are all the parallels between Brett and those very powerful bulls which would also seem to indicate Brett's dominant status. Like the bulls, Brett cannot be alone, she needs the company of "steers" to keep her calm. When she first appears she is with a group of homosexuals, and for the rest of the novel she is kept company, if not kept exactly calm, by Robert, Michael, and Jake. Like the bulls Brett is dangerous to men. When Pedro cuts off the ear of the man-killing bull he presents it to Brett, another man-killer. Like them, color catches her eye, the green of Pedro's trousers. Even a critic puts her in an "arena" built by men for spectacles: "If Brett has gained a measure of freedom in leaving the traditional household, she is still very much dependent on men, who provide an arena in which she can be attractive and socially active as well as financially secure" (Martin, 71). And, of course, bulls may have any number of sexual partners; so does Brett.

On the other hand, as one of the cafe waiters says, "'All for sport. All for pleasure. . . . What are bulls? Animals. Brute animals" (197). If bulls are so powerful why do they end up being killed in a public spectacle? Bull-fighting, especially as described by Hemingway, seems to me to be a peculiar, violently erotic sport, a man bull trying to stab to death -- fuck to death -- an animal bull while a lot of people pay money to watch. Bull-fighting is all about dominance and about being unreachable: "Romero . . . dominated the bull by making him
realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing" (168, my emphasis). The dead bull stands in for a living woman in this August fiesta in Pamplona" says Davidson (96). If you are prepared to go this far you might as well go a little further and specifically insert Brett as the live bull into this game; it does not make a very pretty picture -- the image to dance around, the spectacle to watch. She is the image, the spectacle that the plot of the novel dances around, fuck, dominates, the plot the control for which will always be unattainable for her, the novel we have paid money to read. And if symbolically Brett is associated with the bulls (even down to a draw match with the great young bull-fighter in his green pants) structurally her role is the age-old female role, the role of the cow, the hen, the mare, the bitch, the lady: wait around quietly while a number of males fight noisily about who gets the female. And while she waits the point of the fight may become as much the fight itself as it is her.

It's true that Brett does not seem to wait for anyone; in fact she keeps going off with men -- with Robert to San Sebastian, with Michael to San Sebastian and Pamplona, with Pedro to Madrid. And she seems to initiate each action. But the novel doesn't move with Brett; it stays with Jake. There is no conflict between Brett and each of her men; the conflict lies within the circle of men, focused on Brett but not touching her. She may roam the world but this autonomy is superficial.

It is also true that Brett may not seem very quiet; in fact, she talks quite a bit. But to what effect? As the Count says, she speaks in half sentences. And as
she says, she lets her listeners finish them as they wish. She tells Michael, over
and over again, to quit being an idiot -- but he pays no attention. His idiot
voice/noise contributes to the increasing tension, not her voice telling him to stop.
The unhappiness she gives voice to twice is essentially ignored. Jake's response to
Brett's first "Oh, darling, I've been so miserable" is to kiss her -- literally shutting
her mouth -- and then the issue can then be ignored, buried in a discussion of
their physical dilemma, the focus of which is Jake, not Brett (24). Her second cry,
"Oh, darling . . . I'm so miserable," completely exasperates and upsets Jake who
proceeds to tell us how he feels instead of investigating the cause of Brett's misery
(64). In either case, if Jake were to encourage Brett to talk about her pain that
pain might become the real issue and The Sun Also Rises might really be about
Brett. As it is, I bet the unspoken assumption on Jake's and Hemingway's part, as
well as on ours, is that she is miserable because she is sexually free, because she
does not have one real man. (Just a little warning to readers everywhere.) The
only thing that Brett says which has an actual effect on the plot is her request that
Jake help her meet Pedro Romero, and though this request clearly belongs to her
it is also conveniently in line with the movement of the plot.

VII.

Nothing has really changed in the overall scheme of power. In "An Image
to Dance Around: Brett and Her Lovers in The Sun Also Rises," Sam Baskett says
that "the value each [of her lovers] affixes to Brett is a function of his value of himself and the life he is able to live" (46, my emphasis). It is the lover who affixes value to Brett, not Brett herself. Because she has no authoritative voice inside the text by which she could offer a counter representation of herself, we take her as her lovers present her. But what they present to us, first and foremost and regardless of whether we pay attention to it or not, is an unwitting representation of themselves.

Sibbie O'Sullivan says that Robert Cohn is a "traditional, romantic, chivalric, and backward-looking character" who "represents the dual concepts of manly adventure and romantic love so important in the nineteenth century" (81). I don't disagree with this description of Cohn but I think there is a problem with the assumption that follows from it. Most readers tend to see Cohn's attitude towards Brett as romantic and reactionary -- a model, even then, of an outdated power structure that limits women's freedom, sexual and otherwise. I suspect that something different is going on with Cohn, that it is not that his desire is reactionary but that it appears to be revolutionary: He does not want to make Brett, he wants her to make him. That is his radical departure from the other men in the group who still insist on their age old right to "affix" the value of a woman. That is why they can see Cohn as a "steer" and still see themselves, in all their poverty, as "bulls."

From Jake's point of view Cohn has always been this way, formed by women. He says that Cohn "had been taken in hand by a lady," and describes
Frances as "the lady who had him" (5, my emphasis). He tells us that "internally he had been molded by the two women who had trained him . . ." and that "until he fell in love with Brett, I never heard him make one remark that would, in any way, detach him from other people" (45, my emphasis). Just as previous women (unremarkable ones) have molded him into an unremarkable man, Brett (a remarkable woman) remolds him into a slightly more remarkable man. Cohn offends other men because he seems to have handed over the traditional, male, god-like power to create/mould/make woman.

In Cohn's affair with Brett it is not that he wants to turn Brett into a lady, she already is a "lady," it is that he wants to be turned into a knight: "It was his affair with a lady of title" and he is "ready to do battle for his lady love" (178). The trouble is that Brett does not show any desire to be rescued so he has no way of earning his knighthood. He tries to take value for himself from his association with her: "He could not stop looking at Brett. It seemed to make him happy. It must have been pleasant for him to see her looking so lovely, and know he had been away with her and that everyone knew it. They could not take that away from him" (146). Only "they" can take value away, or at least Brett can. Cohn tells Jake that "when I met her down here Brett treated me as though I were a perfect stranger. I just couldn't stand it. We lived together at San Sebastian" (194). And Brett has already confirmed their affair's lack of value to Jake -- "He can't believe it didn't mean anything." It is the man who usually decides on this zero value; again Cohn lets Brett decide.
It is true that much of what we know of Cohn comes from Jake who is only slightly more lenient towards Cohn than everyone else. But Cohn's own actions, words, and lack of words bear Jake out. Cohn believes that a trip to South America, in itself, could remake his life. He sits passively while Frances abuses him, painting him as a weak villain. And in a switch from the lady-knight theme Mike reports that Cohn calls Brett "Circe" and "a sadist." The point again is not that he wants to make Brett into either Circe or a sadist, but the power to transform others that he believes rests in Circe and sadists. "'He calls her Circe,' Mike said. 'He claims she turns men into swine'" (144, my emphasis). Sadists turn people who love them into masochists, willingly or otherwise. Cohn is, in the end, not being anymore revolutionary than Fitzgerald who uses women as the excuse for his men's failures. In either case it is just a sneaky way of absconding on personal responsibility while holding on to the original power as maker/creator because it is still the man who first names through his desire, fear, necessity, his maker, which naming preordains what she is to make him -- failure, pig, or masochist.

Brett is as uncomfortable with Robert's attempt to make her the apparent coercive Other as the rest of her friends are. What she is comfortable dong is serving as a perfect mirror reflection of their various bankruptcies -- mental, emotional, physical. When she introduces Mike to Bill, Brett tells him that "this drunkard is Mike Campbell. Mr. Campbell is an undischarged bankrupt" (79). A little later Mike reports that Brett "tells all the stories that reflect discredit on me"
(35, my emphasis). Mike is with Brett because she reflects him so perfectly. Brett is with Mike because she has accepted his bankruptcy as her own: "He's so damned nice and he's so awful. He's my sort of thing" (248). It's interesting, though, that at a later point Brett says that Mike "didn't need to be a swine" (181, my emphasis). Her language absolves her of any Circe-like responsibility for his bad behavior but he might argue that the way she treats him leads him to act in a swine-like manner. Of course, once he argues this he crosses over to Robert's side of the question.

Jake defines his relationship with Brett according to a principle based on what he does not have: "I suppose she only wanted what she couldn't have. Well, people were that way. To hell with people" (31). The superficial logic of this sentence pretends to define Brett -- she is one of those who only wants what she cannot have; but the underlying logic is the opposite. It is Jake who defines himself and his value here by what he cannot give -- he is sexually bankrupt -- she is with me because of what I am not. Brett serves again as merely the reflection of a discredit -- Jake's sexual lack and his deeper lack of belief in himself. Again, when Hemingway has Jake confuse Brett's voice with the voice of the prostitute who he had been with earlier in the evening ("Then I heard Brett's voice. Half asleep I had been sure it was Georgette. I don't know why. She could not have known my address" [32].) he suggests, not very subtly, a comparison between the two women, but unavoidably this also serves as another reflection of Jake -- a man whose companions are prostitutes.
In this scheme of things Brett is not a person in herself; she is the reflection of these various men. She is not who she is but who they are. If they were richer she would be richer as she originates in them. Theirs is still the male power to say what is to be. But the logic of this reflection is sneaky. Brett's "shocking" appearance of masculinity makes it look like she is the cause of their bankruptcy -- she is stealing, has stolen their domain from them -- the right to wear short hair, and hats, to smoke and to bed-hop. Lady Brett is no lady even if she is "in the stud - book and everything" (76). Being "in the stud-book and everything" is really just another trick to emphasize Brett's lack of femininity; only men are "studs" in the stud book. She would be in the stud book only as a wife or mother. "'Hello, men'" Jake says to the group, including Brett. "'Hello, gents!'" says Brett, including herself by answering for all of them (165).

Appearing to be the emasculating cause of all this male lack, Brett works to protect her fellow characters from self-knowledge and self-blame. Jake thinks he is defining Brett, not himself, when he says she only wants him because she cannot have him; Mike says that she tells stories that reflect discredit on him without admitting that there probably are no stories to his credit or that her stories originated in his actions. Readers, especially the early ones, have also used Brett to protect these male heroes, blaming her for their poverty. ("An exclusively destructive force" said Edmund Wilson [Martin, 69].) So even while masquerading as a man, and criticized for playing a man's part, the role her mannishness provides for is the woman's role of protective mother/lover castrator. Again, this
same logic also hides another reiteration about being male, being female, and having power: Only males have power. It's assumed that Brett is powerful because she looks like a man and acts like a man. If she looked like a woman and acted like a woman no one would be threatened.

VIII.

Brett's apparent autonomy and mannishness have led to her being seen lately as the prototype of what has been described as the "new woman." Lady Brett Ashley "has stepped off the pedestal" proclaims Wendy Martin (68). Such a positive reading is a bit too much for me. As I've already suggested, this pedestal business is a large question. Did she step off? Was she pushed off? Or were there just no more pedestals" What kind of pedestal could a group of men like Brett's friends hope to erect?

Martin supports her thesis by suggesting that "Brett breaks up relationships when her lovers try to claim her. She even leaves the bullfighter Romero -- a man to whom she is overwhelmingly attracted -- when he shows signs of wanting to domesticate her" (71). Actually, no reason is given for Brett's rejection of Robert; she goes off with him, and leaves him, away from our view. But the whole thing seems to have been for her a very casual affair, not a relationship, conducted on her part from a very, shall we say "old woman's" point of view, the desire to nurture: "I rather thought it would be good for him" (83). More importantly,
Brett does not leave Romero because he wants "to domesticate her." He does indeed want that -- to have her grow her hair, to marry her -- but that isn't why she leaves him. As she tells Jake, "he got over that. He wasn't ashamed of me for long" (242). Brett leaves Romero not because he insists on her changing (he does not) but because she believes it would be bad for him if she were to stay: "You know I'd have lived with him if I hadn't seen it was bad for him. We got along damned well" (243). When Jake asks "Why didn't you keep him?" Brett says "I don't know. It isn't the sort of thing one does. I don't think I hurt him any . . . . He shouldn't be living with any one. I realized that right away" (241, my emphasis). This is not a "new woman's" reason for leaving a relationship; it is not any kind of woman's reason but only one more woman mouthing yet another valorization of the age old belief held by some men that love inevitably, alchemically, irretrievably alters an artist's (any kind of artist -- including bull-fighters) creative juices into sperm which rush madly out of his body into his love's body causing her to bloom and him to wither. Witness Daisy and Gatsby.

Brett sacrifices possible happiness for the sake of the future of bull-fighting. It's true that Hemingway suggests that it is an ethical decision on her part related to a reestablishing of self-worth. Going off with Pedro erases, for Brett, going off with Robert Cohn, and having to stay with Michael. And leaving Pedro, "deciding not to be a bitch" makes her "feel rather damned good," "sort of what we have instead of God" (245). But look at what is involved here. Brett determines her self-worth according to the worth of who she goes to bed with, thus accepting and
reaffirming the authority of the male right to use her as a reflection of male value. Moreover, the worth of who she sleeps with is never set by her and always set by men -- each man sets his own worth and sets a value on the men around him. Robert is not valued as a man by the other men, Michael has only a very low value; Pedro, on the other hand, is valued very highly by all the men. (And again Brett serves another cliche -- all that "compulsive bitch" [John Aldridge quoted by Wendy Martin, 69] needs to make her a (Good) Woman is a good fuck delivered by a real (valued) man.)

Martin also believes that Brett has what she calls "freedom of choice" and writes that "it leads to what I would call an anxiety of opportunity, and her response is regressive. Ironically, in spite of her many options, when she does choose for herself, she selects Romero, a traditional man in the person of a nineteen-year-old bullfighter" (77). It is true, I suppose, that on the fictional surface the narrative has established Brett as a woman who chooses who she will go to bed with. But even on this level what are her possible choices? Bill Gorton? She has already chosen Robert and Michael. (Martin's phrasing -- "when she does choose . . ." presents Romero as Brett's first choice, this allows her to highlight what she sees as a regressive choice, but it is not accurate; Pedro is not by any means the first man Brett has chosen as her partner.) Jake is out of the question, the only men left to choose from are Pedro and Bill. Bill seems no less a traditional man than Romero but he is less distinguished and he does not wear green pants. Underneath the immediate narrative surface Brett has no
freedom to choose so to criticize her choice, no matter in how generous a light, as "regressive" is unfair. She simply acts according to the demands of the narrative which requires that she go off with Pedro in order that some kind of climax may be achieved. She always acts according to the demands of the narrative. And perhaps she is also responding to a hidden demand from her friends, particularly Jake. Pedro is now less valuable, he has lost status with the aficionados and he has not kept Brett; he has become much less threatening, much more available; another slippage. Brett, on the other hand, is more valuable after she has been with Pedro and so can reflect more value back onto her friends. Again, if this is true, it marks a slippage across the line into Robert's apparently passive surrender of the responsibility of creation. (It may be that Jake's and Bill's absolute dismay at finding out that Michael has been enjoying Brett without being able to pay for her stems from Jake's realization that if Brett is with a man who is so literally bankrupt, worth absolutely nothing, then ultimately Jake who is also with her is not only a fool -- because he has been paying for another man's enjoyment -- but also worth nothing himself, because he is also with Brett. If this is true it marks yet one more slippage across lines because Jake is mirroring himself with Brett and not the other way around.)
IX.

Of all the narrators I like Jake by far the best. Actually, he's the only one I like. I think it is partly because he is so open about his confusion: "I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it" (148); it's a desire easy to identify with. Partly it is because, out of all the narrators, he seems to do the least harm to the woman he is entrusted with to guide through the novel. Martins says that "by leaving his heroine free and relatively intact both emotionally and physically, he [Hemingway] disengages from the destruction of the female protagonist in American fiction . . . ." (80). I think she is right. (It's an important disengagement and Jake is a part of it. I am just not sure why or how it happens, why Brett is allowed to escape "relatively intact," what it means that she escapes, and so I remain a little suspicious, suspecting something that is there that I do not see.

I do like Brett because in spite of everything negative I've said about her not having narrative power, she does seem to have a strong sense of herself. When Jake wants them to live together and Brett refuses, she says "'It's my fault, Jake. It's the way I'm made" (55, my emphasis). When she becomes nervous inside a church and has to leave she knows why and is unapologetic: "'I can't help it. I've never been able to help anything" (183). And leaving Romero, as unhappy as she is, she has the sense of herself as a strength that has effect on people: "'I don't think I hurt him any" (241). I may seem to be contradictory
here. The way Brett is made is the way Hemingway made her. If her face is not
the madonna face required for religion but something more asexual, ambisexual,
pagan, it is a face fashioned for her by Hemingway. Still, she inhabits her form
with real zest, makes it her own. Perhaps this is where Brett runs away from her
maker/writer -- she provides no counter plot like Isabel or Tess but instead
embraces herself -- the form Hemingway gives her -- as a threatening, sexual
pagan woman, in such a way as to fill it up and make the danger she is much
more real than the purely formal dangerous woman Hemingway required and
used for his story.

It also seems possible that Brett represents a type of woman who at the
time may have seemed to be pure renegade, and her existence on the scene may
have caused Hemingway and others to write her into stories which both explained
her and blamed her in terms of their current male condition -- by novelizing her
giving the impression that she is subject to their gaze, created by them. All of
these male writers, by writing their women, are searching/living a dream of control
that does not exist: If I write you into a story I can make you into the way I say
you are -- relative to my story as I want you to be. You are not your own story.
It is a way of trying to coerce "reality" into a personal shape; a way to make the
"Other" --these women-- into subjects, using the authoritative gaze to construct
them relative to their needs, fears, desires. The difference between Isabel and
Tess on the one hand and Brett on the other is that the first two are not who or
what they are told to be, not who or what we are told they are, while Brett may
be who Hemingway says she is, but not why he says she is, perhaps not the
reflection of their weaknesses, not a bull because they are rather steer-like, but a
bull because she is a bull. In other words, I say Brett is only superficially
powerful, that underneath she is dictated to by male need, acquiesces in reflecting
the poverties they insist she reflect, but that is only the story Hemingway tells us.
It may simply be a clever way of trying to control her after witnessing her.
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CADDY

... the daughter's creative voice is engendered by paternal absence, the father's vanishing -- that is, his repudiation of authority, and, just as important, his willingness to vanish, to disappear into that opening as his text moves beyond its own boundaries and goes ... somewhere else. (Gwin, 244)

I.

It's funny how one writer, James for instance, can tell the world in a preface what he thinks he has done, what he thinks is important about a work, and the world believes him, while another writer can tell the world, over and over, what he considers the most important thing in a specific novel and then have this completely ignored by his critical readers. It is not simply a matter of believing or not believing what a writer says but that when a writer makes a point of marking something, what is marked is bound to be revealing in one way or another. Faulkner told his readers in at least one hundred different ways that Caddy was what mattered the most to him about The Sound and the Fury and yet for years after it was published no pen came near Caddy Compson.

The Sound and the Fury was, for the longest time, all Quentin and Time and the Negro in Faulkner; then it was Quentin and Time and the Black Man in

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Faulkner. Readers dealt with Caddy, if at all, the same way they dealt with Daisy and Brett -- Catherine Baum cites these examples of excessive stone-throwing: Charles Anderson calls her a "promiscuous nymphomaniac" (can a nymphomaniac not be promiscuous?); Carvel Collins says she is "a twisting of the libido's normal development toward full sexuality"; Powell refers to "the darkness of her soul"; and Foster accuses her of being "given to bitchery from her early teens" (35). It has been safe now to talk about women in Faulkner, and about Caddy, for quite some time though maybe it feels safe because from whatever space or vantage point in the interpretive community Caddy is approached, she is seen not as a person/character in her own right but as essentially a blank -- filled in and colored by the needs and desires of her brothers and her writer.

Judith Bryant Wittenberg, in "William Faulkner: A Feminist Consideration," writes that

"all the hyperbolic women in Faulkner's fiction are the Others of the author, the narrators, or the characters. André Bleikasten has written of the way in which Caddy Compson is an empty signifier *that speaks the desire of men*, a 'blank screen' onto which her brothers project their longings and fears, their love and hate" (333, my emphasis).

Philip M. Weinstein, in his "Meditation on the Other: Faulkner's Rendering of Women," says that "a Caddy wholly presented through male optics is a Caddy wholly answerable to male emphasis . . . *there is no leakage here, nothing expressed that is not relevant to the sibling crises through which she is perceived*" (84, my
emphasis). In "Faulkner's Hen-House: Woman as Bounded Text," Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz writes that "'woman' as fictional construct exists by virtue of the words chosen, of sentence structures selected and arranged by the writer who determines the viewing position, the angle from which woman as object of representation is to be seen" (238, my emphasis). For Diaz-Diocaretz 'woman' is "systematically confined by individual and collective assumptions expressing a glimpse of presupposed 'truth'," and "named by a male-oriented ideology that speaks to itself and in the process the image in which she is to be seen is created. What she is named she becomes" (260, my emphasis).

Readers who approach the novel from a less feminist, less structuralist stance, from a more thematic or characterological point of view, repeat this presentation of Caddy as a blank by seeing her primarily as a focus for her brothers, again implying that without this "job" she would not exist. Olga Vickery ("The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective") believes that the novel's "sequence of events is not caused" by "Caddy's surrender to Dalton Ames" but "by the significance which each of her brothers actually attributes to it" (294). In "Faulkner, Childhood, and the Making of The Sound and the Fury," David Minter writes that "Faulkner thus seems to have discovered Caddy as he presents her through the felt needs of her brothers" (386) and that ". . . it is in Caddy that each of her brother's discontent finds its focus, as we see in their various evocations of her" (382). John T. Matthews argues that Caddy -- "the 'little girl' 'manufactured' by the text -- never achieves the presence or substance of a 'real' character; she is
memorable precisely because she inhabits the memories of her brothers and the novel . . ." (395, my emphasis). And eight or so years ago I wrote this: "The 'beautiful and tragic little girl' that Faulkner imagines, he imagines so he can write, and then he sacrifices her voice, and her tragedy, to her brothers, who wear her away not with their kissing but with their voices." Seeing Caddy as a focus, as the primary means of access to her brothers' stories even though it does not insist that she herself is a complete blank does tend to make everything of her that does not speak for her brothers simply disappear.

It is not that I find this view of Caddy as a "manufactured" object of male desire wrong, I just find it very limiting -- to Caddy, to Faulkner, and to readers. Because of its near ubiquity and almost unanimous support I also find it very suspicious. As John Duvall says, in "Faulkner's Critics and Women," "consensus does not always signify a movement toward the truth of Faulkner's texts; rather, it often places us squarely in the prison house of masculinist ideology, where we condemn the fully sexual female subject out of our insecurities and fear" (55). Caddy, I think, is a "fully sexual female subject" and we have condemned her to being only an object created by male desire out of a variety of insecurities and fears including our horror at what happens to her. To actually let ourselves feel the power of Faulkner's account of what is done to Caddy is almost too painful. It is easier and much more comfortable to see her as "an empty signifier" which feels no pain.
Interpretive criticism can only see Caddy's "blankness" because it is trapped into a way of looking at her which duplicates her brother's and Faulkner's positions, thus they simply reproduce Faulkner's and her brothers' interpretations. Like it or not, and even when the intention is the reverse, reading Caddy only in this way is a subtle reinscription of "male" power: masculine desire, need, language, etc. is so powerful that it can literally "make" woman. Likewise it is a denial of "female" power, the "female" subject is not powerful enough to "make" herself. Feminist structuralist criticism, for its part, sees Caddy's blankness as a perfect example of the male production of "female" or "woman" but this stance repeats and reiterates exactly what it criticizes by insisting that Caddy (or any female character) is only and exactly what her male writer and male characters say she is, desire her to be. She has no power, no desire, no language of her own to resist, let alone make herself; and the male writer has no power to create above, over, around, and more (or less) than what he seems to be saying.

Caddy does, in fact, have a great deal of power and language. She is filled with desire too, and it is not for her brothers. But "narrative and thematic unity" in The Sound and the Fury insists that we see everything in terms of loss, shame, absence, doom, dishonor, family disintegration and "the harsh flowing of time" (222). Seeing Caddy apart from her function as the focus/catalyst of all this is a matter of imaginatively moving one's viewpoint from inside the hierarchical circle of theme and narrative and Compson family craziness to a position outside the circle and separated from the controlling narrative presentation. But "what must
be suppressed" in the novel is first of all this very possibility of seeing Caddy and her life from outside the Compson family.

Caddy works structurally in the novel as well as in her family not as Diaz-Diocaretz says as a "tale told by a man" (269) but as a virgin. Her literal absence in Faulkner's life -- the sister he never had, the daughter he was to lose -- is translated into the apparently unoccupied space of her virginity, a missing person, a woman not yet made, absent from herself because not inhabited by a man. And each brother sees in this apparent absence an invitation to make himself in her. Each of the brothers' chapters is an account of an attempted incestuous, emotional-sexual relationship with their sister. The absence which is created by her refusal of herself to them provides an alternate hole in space where they can create themselves whole in the howls and bellows of their thwarted desire. Her kindness, gentleness, courage, intelligence, sexuality, practicality, fierceness and curiosity do not exist as who she is but only as what she has refused to give her brothers. And the guilt heaped on Caddy, especially by Quentin and Jason, obscures what should be structurally obvious -- it is not that she only exists through them but that they only exist as they are inside her absence. To separate Caddy as the absence she is in the family, from this family in order to show exactly how present she is to herself, is to threaten the already precarious existence of her brothers.

When Weinstein writes that "there is . . . nothing expressed that is not relevant to the sibling crises through which she is perceived" he is forgetting that it
is a reader's choice to see what is expressed as only relevant to the sibling crisis, and not relevant to a way of seeing Caddy as an individual character. When he claims that "there is no leakage here" he forgets that finding a leak in something is quite often a simple matter of where you look. In "(Re)Reading Faulkner as Father and Daughter of His Own Text" Minrose C. Gwin decides to look at Caddy as a voice in her own right. She reads Caddy not as a "linguistic or cultural construct" which only serves surface narrative and thematic intention, but as "woman who speaks difference from the position of subject, as she who can say desire, loss, absence, and so who can draw us into the process of productivity in Faulkner's texts . . . " (240). She suggests that

if we can imagine Caddy as the space of multiple and generative libidinal energies, a space that cannot be fixed or mastered. . . then we may begin to hear her voice from within the folds of Faulkner's text and from within our willingness to be absorbed into the concentric and bisexual spaces between the 'manifest text' of Faulkner's male creative consciousness and the 'unconscious discourse' of its own feminine subjectivity. (247)

The first place to look for Caddy's "voice" is in her climb up the pear tree. The "doom" that Faulkner reads and writes into Caddy's muddy drawers obscures almost completely the action which exposes them: she is climbing the tree in order to see what is going on, in order to look at death which is another way of looking at life. " . . . in The Sound and the Fury I had already put the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much: Caddy climbing the pear tree to
look in the window at her grandmother's funeral while Quentin and Jason and Benjy and the negroes looked up at the muddy seat of her drawers" (220, my emphasis); "I saw that they had been sent to the pasture to spend the afternoon to get them away from the house during the grandmother's funeral in order that the three brothers and the nigger children could look up at the muddy seat of Caddy's drawers as she climbed the tree . . . " (223, my emphasis); "that -- the explanation of that whole book is in that. It began with the picture of the little girl's muddy drawers, climbing that tree to look with her brothers that didn't have the courage to climb the tree waiting to see what she saw" (242, my emphasis). Over and over again, in everything he said or wrote about this novel Faulkner sets up for us the two poles of his desire for Caddy which he has caught himself in. The story begins because of an imagined pair of muddy drawers -- caught in sex -- but the drawers are visible not because Caddy is playing around sexually but because she has "courage" and wants to "see"; moreover, the drawers aren't "muddy" as a result of sexual play but from the play of a lively child. Specifically, they are muddy because when she takes off her wet dress in order for it to dry Quentin, who objects to her taking the dress off (even at that early age worrying over and guarding her sexuality), slaps her and she slips and falls into the water. To say that her "brothers are waiting to see what she saw" is generous but not the sense I get from their accounts of the story, or even from Faulkner's repeated phrasing of the situation. What her brothers see and later continue to remember are her
muddy drawers. The only child who asks Caddy what she sees is Frony, the other girl present at the time.

Caddy's climb up the pear tree is just as laden with symbolism and prophecy as the muddy drawers; it is also tremendously revealing, if looked at closely, in the way in which it contradicts the traditional assignment of guilt to Caddy for her apparently rampant sexuality. It is Caddy who climbs up the tree, in order to see, prefiguring her later climb up and out of the Compson family. It is her brothers who remain on the ground hypnotized by their sister's muddy drawers. And somehow, their sexual "guilt," which resides only in their gaze, is completely outside of and apart from their sister, is transferred to her, the one wearing the dirty drawers, dirty because of one of the brother's actions.

II.

Perhaps it is easier to think of Caddy as "male construct" or "an empty signifier that speaks the desire of men" than to feel the agony of her entrapment, betrayal, and desperation inside her family. In an early incident Quentin slaps Caddy in the face, perhaps more than once, because she has kissed "some darn town squirt" (81). And in an effort to make her give in, to "say calf rope" he mauls her even more: "What do you think of that scouring her head into the. Grass sticks criss-crossed into the flesh scouring her head. Say calf rope say it" (81). In
a similar incident, it may in fact be the same incident, Quentin attacks Caddy
again because she will not take notice or care about what he does with Nathalie:

She had her back turned I went around in front of her
the rain creeping into the mud flatting her bodice
through her dress . . . She turned her back I went
around in front of her . . . I don't give a damn what
you were doing You dont you dont Ill make you give a
damn. She hit my hands away I smeared mud on her .
. . I wiped mud from my legs smeared it on her wet
hard turning body hearing her fingers going into my
face . . . (83, my emphasis)

Quentin is not the only brother who physically tries to coerce her into
recognizing him. There is a revealing moment in Benjy's monologue when Dilsey
tries to put Benjy to bed without Caddy:

'You a big boy . . . Caddy tired of sleeping with you.'
Hush now . . . I didn't hush . . . 'Hush.' Caddy said.
'I'm coming' . . . and Dilsey turned back the spread
and Caddy got in between the spread and the blanket.
She didn't take off her bathrobe. 'Now.' she said.
'Here I am.' (27-28)

What is not said here is still perfectly explicit. Caddy avoids getting right into bed
with Benjy, she keeps her bathrobe on as well as a sheet between them. She does
not want to be in bed with Benjy and complies because of his need. Her parents
make no effort to protect her or help her out of a situation she is trapped in. At
a later point, when she is in the swing with Charlie, Benjy finds them and not only
screams but physically tries to pull Caddy away: "... and I hushed and held to
her dress and tried to pull her away ... and I cried and pulled at Caddy's dress ...
. . . I pulled at Caddy's dress" (29). Faulkner's repetition here should surely tell us as much about the physical pressure being exerted on Caddy as it does about Benjy's jealousy, fear, and need.

Benjy's account of his attempt one night to stop Caddy from going out with Ames is sad if looked at from the point of view of Benjy's need, but it is horrifying if it is looked at from the point of view of what is being done to a 16 or 17 year old girl, and done in front of her parents and another brother: "I went toward her crying, and she shrank against the wall . . . and I cried louder and pulled at her dress. Her eyes ran" (42);

Caddy was still looking at me. Her hand was against her mouth and I saw her eyes and I cried. We went up the stairs. She stopped again, against the wall . . . she went on and I came on . . . and she shrank against the wall . . . She opened the door to her room, but I pulled at her dress and we went to the bathroom . . . Then she put her arm across her face and I pushed at her, crying (42-43).

Quentin's account of the same incident is even more harrowing because, it seems to me, infected with venom. Benjy is simply reacting with jealousy while Quentin, who cannot allow himself such an obvious, physical expression of his jealousy, lets Benjy react for him:

One minute she was standing in the door the next minute he was pulling at her dress and bellowing his voice hammered back and forth . . . and she shrinking against the wall and getting smaller and smaller with her white face her eyes like thumbs dug into it until he pushed her out of the room . . . (76)
A little later he goes back to the same incident: "they went into the hall and up
the stairs yelling and shoving at her up the stairs to the bathroom door and
stopped her back against the door and her arm across her face . . . and trying to
shove her into the bathroom . . . . her eyes like cornered rats" (90-91).

Caddy is trapped not only by her love and pity for Benjy but trapped and
coerced by him physically. He is yelling, screaming, hammering, bellowing at her
with his voice, and pushing, pulling, and shoving at her with his body, committing
the equivalent of rape but in reverse while her parents and her brother stand by
and watch as he does their dirty work for them, keeping Caddy within the family
at no matter what cost: "Mother lay back in her chair . . . Father hasn’t moved he
still sat beside her holding her hand the bellowing hammering away like no place
for it in silence" (105). And Quentin, who records his parents passivity forgets to
mention that he himself did nothing to help his sister. But are we supposed to not
take notice of his complicity?

When Diaz-Diocaretz says that woman, Faulkner’s woman, Caddy, is
"systematically confined by individual and collective assumptions" she does not see
how her own assumption -- "what she is named she becomes" -- repeats the
confinement -- denying Caddy the possibility of existing before and apart from
male naming. When Weinstein writes that "woman . . . by being known only as
the object of the male gaze, loses the intrinsic, moment-by-moment freedom of
own subjective self-awareness . . . . she assumes her identity from without -- as a
foreclosed immanence, a completed symbolic text whose terms are imposed by the
male" (98, note #3) he plays a rhetorical trick which unavoidably implies that woman, "she" actively permits from inside of herself this extrinsic and male imposition whereas it is only from the outside that she can be known "only as the object of the male gaze". It is not that "woman" *assumes* (which is active) her identity from without, it is that that identity is given her; it is a way of reading her, interpreting her, ignoring what in her does not fit the outside gaze.

"Woman" could in fact consciously or unconsciously choose to be "known only as the object of the male gaze," to "assume" the identity assigned to her by the "male gaze" but this is not by any means universal and even in this case it cannot be said with any certainty that she "loses the intrinsic, moment-by-moment freedom of own subjective self-awareness" because what she knows of herself, however much or little, intrinsically, has been made, by her choice, unavailable to the outside gaze. Weinstein could write "woman . . . *who knows herself only* as the object of the male gaze, loses the intrinsic moment-by-moment freedom of own self-awareness . . . she has assumed her identity from without . . .," or he could write *when we define woman extrinsically, we know her only* as the object of the male gaze, *we lose our view* of her intrinsic, moment-by-moment freedom of her subjective self-awareness. *We provide her* with an identity from without, *we make her* -- for our purposes -- into a completed symbolic text . . ." but it is both unfair and inaccurate to simply write "she assumes her identity from without." Caddy does not ever assume her critical identity as "male construct" or "empty signifier," nor does she ever assume the various symbolic identities forced on her by her
brothers. She is assigned these identities; if you look closely you can see that she also rejects them.

I think we tend to read each brother’s section only from his point of view, or in the case of Benjy’s from Faulkner’s point of view as expressed in the Appendix and interviews. It’s hard not to read this way, even when we might not like the brother, because their voices are so insistent. Nevertheless, if we separate from them for awhile, and not for the purpose of judging them which is relatively easy, but for the purpose of actually trying to objectively see what is going on, we can find Caddy and her story and her point of view. In the appendix, for instance, Faulkner writes that Benjy "could not remember his sister but only the loss of her" (234, my emphasis) which is a dramatic way to articulate the sense of loss and absence which seems to permeate Benjy’s section, only it does not happen to be accurate. This section is filled with very specific memories of Caddy including a number of memories structured around her absence and subsequent return to him: "'Why Benjy,' she said. She looked at me and I went and she put her arms around me. 'Did you find Caddy again.' she said. 'Did you think Caddy had run away. Caddy smelled like trees.'" (26) If Benjy was only capable of remembering Caddy’s loss, of knowing her only in her absence, he could not remember to go to the gate each day to meet her as she comes from school, nor would he continue to go to the gate every day for years and years waiting for her return, long after she has left the family. Benjy’s memories of Caddy are actually specific memories of her presence and of the ways he seemed to be able to hold Caddy to him -- his
cries would always bring her back to him, bring her into his bed to put him to sleep, get rid of the perfume that interfered with her smell, banish all intruders who threatened his access to her. Gwin points this out when she writes that "for what Caddy's voice says out of the maternal space created for it in Benjy's mind is precisely opposite to what Benjy's narrative as a whole seems to be saying -- that originary plenitude can never be regained . . . " (248, my emphasis).

It is possible that it is our sense "that originary plenitude can never be regained" picked up from Quentin and Faulkner which we allow to infect Benjy's section. Faulkner, in interviews, his introductions, and the appendix emphasizes Benjy's loss: "I saw that peaceful glinting of that branch was to become the dark, harsh flowing of time sweeping her to where she could not return to comfort him . . . " (222), and "he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her . . . " (234). Quentin, on his part, uses Benjy as a primary weapon in his attempt to keep Caddy from marrying: "Can you think of Benjy and Father and do it not of me" (75); "The less you say about Benjy and Father the better when have you ever considered them Caddy . . . You needn't worry about them you're getting out in good shape" (65). And Caddy's own feelings of guilt for leaving Benjy make Quentin's use of them absolutely easy: "Are you going to look after Benjy and Father . . . Promise I'm sick you'll have to promise" (65); "What else can I think about what else have I thought about . . . "; "Father will be dead in a year they say . . . and then they'll send Benjy to Jackson I can't cry I can't even cry" (76). But what Benjy's monologue tells us is that Caddy is always with him, not that she is
lost to him forever; he carries Caddy's fullness inside himself. If we for our part insist on only seeing Caddy's love for Benjy as what he has lost we cannot see what she has given him nor how her love for him makes her suffer, ties her down, exposes her to all their selfish abuse.

Quentin's section is the most obviously, or at least the most conventionally expressed, representation of an incestuous desire for his sister but while we learn a great deal about Caddy as a result of Quentin's desire for her what is surely most explicit is that Caddy does not fit Quentin's desire. She is too practical, too unromantic. Quentin smears mud all over her in an attempt to make her care about his kissing Nathalie and he is still trying to make her care -- "do you care now do you do you" long after her anger has passed and she is laughing: "My Lord we sure are in a mess get up . . . . I tried to scratch your eyes out my Lord we sure do stink . . . ." (84). Obsessing over her relationship wit Dalton Ames Quentin says "I wish you were dead" which Caddy hardly bothers to answer -- "do you you coming in now.'" Threatened by him with death -- "I'll kill you do you hear" -- she apparently responds by trying to stop his tears -- "I'm not crying do you say I'm crying" (98). Quentin's romantically negative story about Herbert -- "A liar and a scoundrel Caddy was dropped from his club for cheating at cards . . . . that blackguard . . . ." runs up against her pure practicality -- "well what about it I'm not going to play cards with" (75).

Quentin wants to merge himself with Caddy, wants to live in her, wants Caddy as a reflection of his ideal self, "some concept of Compson honor" (229).
His physical struggles with her over the years result from his continuous attempt and her continuous refusal to make her his reflecting Other. He cannot see her as a separate entity. Even when he slaps her for not caring enough about who she kisses the slap as well as punishing her becomes another way for him to put himself inside her: "My red hand coming up out of her face"; not the mark of his hand left on her face but his hand coming up from inside her (81). I suspect that any relation Caddy has with another man Quentin feels as a horrible threat to his being because from his point of view Caddy then becomes the expression and reflection of the other man and Quentin is displaced. After Caddy loses her virginity to Ames, Quentin perceives her as "blurred," "talking about him bringing . . . him between us until the shape of her blurred . . . " but it is Quentin's narcissistic image of himself in Caddy that is blurred when she brings Dalton into the space between herself and her brother (90, my emphasis). And her displacement of him literally threatens his life as it is so tied up, for him, with his sister.

Quentin's absolute surprise when he finds out that Dalton "wasn't thinking of me at all as a potential source of harm but was thinking of her when he looked at me was looking at me through her" indicates the extent of his narcissism (106). It's also interesting because it reveals Dalton to be Quentin's opposite. If Ames is using Caddy as Quentin uses her, as a reflection of himself, a proof of his existence, then he would certainly perceive Quentin as "a potential source of harm," a potential usurper of his mirror (106). He would not be able to see
Quentin as a troubled human being through Caddy, because he would only see himself in Caddy. Quentin would be a direct threat to this position and the situation would result in a conventional fight between two men over a woman, just as it does between Quentin and Herbert, who would happily kill Quentin if he could get away with it. Dalton Ames's view though not only respects Caddy as a separate entity but also empowers her as it makes her the powerful Other who creates Quentin for Ames understanding.

For all the fuss that Quentin makes about Caddy's virginity as "the frail doomed vessel" of Compson "pride" it's worth noting that the "honor" he is so concerned about is rejected by his father, a Compson, but still held by his mother, a Bascomb. It is from his mother that Quentin learns how to perceive Caddy's sexuality -- "she not only drags your name in the dirt but corrupts the very air your children breathe" (64); "like that time she happened to see one of them kissing Caddy and all the next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil . . . crying and saying her little daughter was dead . . ." (138). It is his mother who banishes Caddy, and it is his mother, with her belful of keys, who is the keeper of the dungeon, the same kind of dungeon that Quentin would like to keep Caddy in -- "it was to isolate her out of the loud world," "the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me . . . walled by the clean flame . . ." (71). It is the mother's daughters, Caddy, then Miss Quentin, who escape from her dungeon, while the sons remain imprisoned. And it is the mother who is noteworthy for her absolute indifference to her children's or her husband's well-
being, a description which is more or less reproduced for Quentin in the appendix: "he himself was incapable of love" (229). It is not his sister, not even his sister’s body, that Quentin loves, but the concept of himself he insists that she reflect.

John T. Matthews section on Jason in "The Discovery of Loss in The Sound and the Fury" provides an explanation of this particular brother’s relationship to Caddy. Matthews argues that Jason "driven like his brothers to supplement [his mother’s] insufficiency . . . finds Quentin in Caddy’s arms and Benjy in her bed" (397). Jason’s "writing . . . pursues -- all the while deferring -- a representation of Caddy in his life. Jason’s language covertly manufactures the sister he never had" (397). Because he is "the nearest thing to a father’ to Quentin, Jason insinuates himself into a heavily disguised intimacy with Caddy. His transactions with her enable him to maintain perverse contact with her" (404).

The sadistic pleasure that Jason takes in Caddy’s frustration and fury at being trapped and out-maneuvered by him also unwittingly makes available to us one more account of Caddy’s power measured not only by the rational control she can exert over herself but also by the physical way her body expresses its fury in spite of being under control:

When we were little when she’d get mad and couldn’t do anything about it her upper lip would begin to jump. Everytime it jumped it would leave a little more of her teeth showing, and all the time she’d be as still as a post, not a muscle moving except her lip jerking higher and higher up her teeth. (125)
And he tells us that "her hands were hot as fever . . . and me feeling her eyes almost like they were touching my face . . ." (126).

III.

Donald Kartiganer in an essay on The Sound and the Fury says that "Benjy's monologue . . . does not constitute an interpretation at all; what he tells us is life, not text"; it is "never less, or more than the truth" (366). It is this transparency that makes it relatively easy to find various aspects of Caddy expressed here and unaccompanied by judgement. She is always curious: "'Why must we be quiet, Father . . . Why do we have to be quiet tonight'" (15). And persistent -- when no one will tell her why everything is different "tonight" she climbs the tree to find out. She is independent: "Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said, It's not supper time yet. I'm not going (11). She is proud: "'I reckon we can turn all the lights on without company, if we want to.' Caddy said."

Disobedient: "'He cut up all Benjy's dolls' . . . 'Mother said to not call him Benjy,' Quentin Said" (41). Fierce: "'He cut up all Benjy's dolls.' Caddy said. 'I'll slit his gizzle.' 'Candace.' Father said. 'I will.' Caddy said. 'I will.' She fought. Father held her. She kicked at Jason. He rolled into the corner . . ." (40).

The kindness, love, loyalty and patience that she explicitly feels for Benjy run all through this section. She takes him everywhere she goes, she puts him to sleep every night long after the age where she can feel comfortable doing so has
passed, she makes toys for him, plays with him, defends him from Jason and her mother, works hard to figure out what upsets him and then to avoid it, does not defend herself physically from him when his jealousy takes physical shape, and even tries to wash out of herself and off of herself the attraction she feels towards men outside her family. Even at her wedding, on the verge of escape, she runs out of the ceremony to find him and comfort him. To insist that this kindness and love do not constitute part of a real character because she is first imagined as the answer to Benjy's desire or need ("then I became interested in the relationship of the idiot to the world that he was in but would never be able to cope with and just where could he get the tenderness, the help, to shield him in his innocence . . . . And so the character of his sister began to emerge . . . " [237-238]) is like insisting that Mr. Compson is an alcoholic because the demands of the narrative insist that the children had ineffective parents. Or it is to insist that once this kindness is created, imagined, it still does not exist apart from its function of fulfilling or denying Benjy's desire. If we do not know it apart from Benjy it is because we have not looked for it apart from or separated from his desire and his need. And if Caddy's kindness only functions in relationship to Benjy's needs then how do we explain the "leakage" of this kindness into Caddy's empathic awareness of the pigs -- who do not desire her in any way -- "I expect they're sorry because one of them got killed today,' Caddy said" (3), or its "leakage" into Caddy's patience and gentleness with her mother -- who is incapable of responding to it or appreciating it: "She drew Mother back in the chair and Mother lay crying . . . . 'Hush,
Mother' Caddy said. 'You go upstairs and lay down, so you can be sick. I'll go get Dilsy'' (40). (This same kindness is a consistent part of her attitude toward Quentin, even though he rejects it, kindness is not what he needs from her. And, as selfish as he is, she even offers it to Jason when he can only see the breakup of Caddy's marriage as the loss of his job: "Oh,' she says, 'that job.' She looked at the grave. 'I'm sorry about that Jason'' (122).

Benjy's section also reveals that his brothers are caught and bound by rules, limits, and the fear of punishment which they not only accept but use in an effort to curb or bind their sister. Jason's refrain is a constant "don't do that/I'll tell on you" ('I told her not to climb that tree.' Jason said. 'I'm going to tell on her.'"

[28]) Quentin, for his part, looks for ways of concealment -- "'if we walk slow it'll be too dark for them to see.' But Caddy's approach to what is fearsome or restrictive is confrontational:

and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh said, 'Your mommer going to whip you for getting your dress wet.' 'She's not gong to do any such thing.' Caddy said . . . 'She said she was' Quentin said . . . . 'Now I guess you're satisfied.' Quentin said. 'We'll both get whipped now.' 'I don't care,' Caddy said. 'I'll run away.' . . . 'Maybe we'll be dry by the time we get to the house.' Quentin said. 'It was all your fault.' Caddy said. 'I hope we do get whipped.' . . . 'He wont tell.' Quentin said . . . . 'Are you going to tell, Jason.' Caddy said . . . 'He cant tell her.' Quentin said. 'She's sick. If we walk slow it'll be too dark for them to see.' 'I dont care whether they see or not.' Caddy said. (11-13)
Caddy does not want to follow rules, she wants to make her own and make others follow her: "'Let them mind me tonight, Father.' Caddy said. . . . 'There . . . Now I guess you'll mind me.'" (15-16) Quentin's chapter reveals the same imperious and confrontational temperament: "What did you let him for kiss kiss I didn't let him I made him watching me getting mad" (81). Quentin remembers Caddy's response to a picture that scares and troubles him: "you know what I'd do if I were a king? she never was a queen or a fairy she was always a king or a giant or a general I'd break that place open and drag them out and I'd whip them good" (105).

Mrs. Compson tells Jason that "when Quentin started to school we had to let her go the next year, so she could be with him. She couldn't bear for any of you to do anything she couldn't. It was vanity in her, vanity and false pride" (157, my emphasis). Mrs. Compson's remark does not in fact show Caddy's vanity and false pride, which is after all only the mother's way of seeing her daughter, a way of seeing that should be as transparently false for us as her praise of her favorite son is. What it does tell us about again is both Caddy's closeness to Quentin and her driving sense of competition, the unbearable, for her, of limits.

To really hear Caddy's "moment-by-moment freedom of own subjective self-awareness" you have only to separate her voice from her brothers: "It's not supper time yet. I'm not going." (11) "He cut all Benjy's dolls . . . I'll slit his gizzle . . . " (40) "You know what I'd do if I were a king? . . . . I'd break that place open and drag them out and I'd whip them good" (105) "It's still raining
... I hate rain. I hate everything.' And then her head came into my lap and she was crying, holding me. "(35) "I didn't let him I made him ...." 'I wont ... I wont anymore, ever Benjy. Benjy ...' and Caddy took the kitchen soap and washed her mouth at the sink, hard. ...." (30) "I tried to scratch your eyes out my Lord we sure do stink ...." (84) "I am dont cry Im bad anyway" (96) "let me go Quentin please let me go let me go ... yes I can tell him I can make him believe anytime i can make him ...." (99) "There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could se it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces its gone now and I'm sick .... Don't touch me dont touch me ...." (68) "When they touched me I died" (90) "I cant even cry I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know then what I meant I didn't know what I was saying .... but now I know I'm dead I tell you .... and then they'll send Benjy to Jackson I cant cry I cant even cry" (75-76) "Damn you ... Damn you ...." (124) "Oh, I'm crazy ... I'm insane. I can't keep her ...." (126)

"Listen, Jason ... Don't lie to me now, About her. I won't ask to see anything. If that isn't enough, I'll send more each month,. Just promise that she'll -- that she - - You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I can't, they won't let ...." (126)

And how much more subjectively self-aware does a woman need to be before she is heard than Caddy is about Dalton Ames with Quentin:

do you love him
her hand came out I didn't move it fumbled down my arm and she held my hand flat against her heart thudding

. . . .
Caddy you hate him dont you dont you she held my hand against her chest her heart thudding . . . Caddy you hate him dont you she moved my hand up against her throat her heart was hammering there

. . . .
yes I hate him I would die for him I've already died for him I die for him over and over again everytime this goes (91-92)

Gwin says that in Quentin's section "Caddy rises from the repressiveness of Quentin's discourse to speak her desire for Dalton Ames, for entry into a libidinal economy that allows her to give, to spend herself excessively . . . " (249). I would only add that I think she not only speaks her desire for entry into this libidinal economy but that she has entered into it and speaks its effects. In Jason's section Gwin writes that Caddy's is:

the voice of female subjectivity struggling within a cultural text that seeks its silencing. It speaks out of a tight place and it speaks panic and sorrow and loss. 'Oh God, oh God,' it cries out. To listen is painful and terrible for what we are hearing is the daughter of patriarchal culture speaking loss, speaking what it means to be denied subjectivity and access to one's own desire (250).

I would only change the last part of this sentence to read "what it means to be denied subjectivity and access to one's own desire from the outside" because until the subject interiorizes the outside denial she retains subjectivity and access to her own desires, she is just, as Gwin says, speaking "out of a very tight place" but she
is speaking. Once this denial has been completely interiorized she no longer has a voice to speak to us with, to recount her story. And Caddy does have a voice, she does recount her story. Caddy's brothers have denied her subjectivity, and readers have denied her subjectivity, but she does not deny herself.

IV.

Since no speaker in The Sound and the Fury can be seriously thought of as "reliable" -- Dilsey and Mr. Compson are as unreliable as the rest but at least they do not judge Caddy -- none of the criticisms, moral and otherwise, leveled at Caddy can be trusted as reasonably objective. It is left to the reader to attempt to understand what Caddy does by looking at what the brothers have unknowingly revealed about themselves and their family. Essentially it is not Caddy who is "doomed" but her brothers and her parents. Her situation inside the family is desperate. Her brothers follow her, surround her, coerce her with their voices and their bodies, they beat her up in a demand that she care about them and that she take care of them. They are the ones who are overwhelmingly interested in her sexuality, who would prefer to look at her muddy drawers than to find out what is going on, circle around her like dogs to scare away other men, watch as the rain flattens her shirt against her breasts, stare at her hard, turning body, smear the mud from themselves onto her. So she escapes from a crazy, incestuous family into the world and life outside the Compson mile. It seems to me that in spite of
how much she loves Benjy, Quentin and her father she refuses mental, emotional and physical incest, refuses to be mother, lover, wife for them. She leaves. This is sane. She refuses to act like Dilsey who tries to hold an insane family together out of some kind of unthinking belief in "family" when it is clear that they would all be better off as far away as possible from each other. It is very likely that because she is not and will not be a conveniently "blank," "empty signifier" for them that her brothers spend so much time and energy attention to, literally, mark her, imprint her with their physical and mental selves. And how can we as readers not see the abuse she is subjected to because of their desire, and not just see it, see it apart from the brothers and their bellowing voices?

Caddy's means of escape is through other men. One way of looking at it is that she symbolically but physically kills off her brothers and her father by giving to other men what she refuses to give to them, a reflection of themselves. I think it's important to notice that Caddy's attraction to Dalton Ames is at least partly based in his self-sufficient worldliness: "hes crossed all the oceans all around the world," "had been in the army had killed men" (so perhaps he could kill her brothers), and his shirts are made of silk not khaki (90, 91). It's important to notice too that Ames is a decent man. It is impossible to say whether he "loves" Caddy or not but he clearly cares about her, and for her sake as well as perhaps out of his own decency he treats Quentin with compassion and understanding. Quentin goes in search of Dalton apparently to tell him to either leave town and his sister, or die. Dalton, approached by Quentin thinks immediately of Caddy:
"She all right. . . she need me for anything now . . ." Even after Quentin has announced his intention he brushes it aside and goes back to Caddy: "listen save this for a while I want to know if shes all right have they been bothering her up there" (96-97). He understands that Quentin is suffering and tries to help him: "listen no good taking it so hard its not your fault kid it would have been some other fellow" (98). Dalton's estimation -- "it would have been some other fellow" and his practical judgement -- "theyre all bitches" betray an essential, male, alienation from women but does not interfere with his priority of emotional attachment. He cares about Caddy; Quentin is merely a brother.

Caddy has correctly estimated Ames: "I didn't think he would have I knew he wouldn't I knew he wouldn't" (99). And the startling difference between Ames and Herbert is a measure of Caddy's desperation. The price that Caddy pays for her escape, at the level of character and story, apart from the grief she clearly suffers over her daughter and the grief and guilt she feels for saving herself, is unavailable to us. All we have are the assumptions of the characters and the writer and these assumptions never escape an obsession with Caddy's sexuality which she herself, unlike Tess, has never shared. In other words, these assumptions, even Faulkner's, are not based on an objective view of what we see of Caddy, or who she is or what she does but on a morally questionable, even for then, view of her behavior, sexual and familial. The assumption, which uses a "moral" sleight of hand whereby the person obsessed buys himself moral innocence by imagining the object of his obsession as the guilty one, put simply, is this:
Caddy is "doomed" because of her sexuality. And sure enough she ends up, in the appendix, with a German staff general which for 1945 was as horrible a doom as could be imagined, a clear sign that Caddy’s soul had been sold to the devil.

The view we have of Caddy in the appendix is heavily interpreted for us. It appears in "a slick magazine" and it is

a picture filled with luxury and money and sunlight -- a Cannebiere backdrop of mountains and palms and cypresses and the sea, an open powerful expensive chromium trimmed sports car, the woman's face hatless between a rich scarf and a seal coat, ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned; beside her a handsome lean man of middleage in the ribbons and tabs of a German staff-general. (231)

Everything that Caddy has gained in this picture, including her lover who is handsome, lean and middleaged, not ugly, fat and old, including her ageless and serene beauty, is supposed to translate directly into an outward sign of just exactly how much she has really lost: "she knows Caddy doesn’t want to be saved hasn’t anything anymore worth saving nothing worth being lost that she can lose" (233). It could just as easily be translated into the straightforward signs of just exactly how much Caddy has won: wealth, power, France, ageless beauty that comes from serenity, a car that doesn’t give anyone headaches from the gasoline fumes, a general. (Of course all this would look like a pact with the devil to a little, mousey librarian in the deep and dusty South of 1945.) And again, the interpretation suggested in the appendix is not an objective or reliable one, it is based on the "doom" that Faulkner wrote into his image of a little girl's muddy
wet underwear, and so can only tell us, with any reliability, about him, the Other whose language, desire, fear wants to construct Caddy in this way.

This picture of Caddy appears 16 years after the novel was originally published. Given the Caddy present in the novel I do not think that the damned life that it describes would have been inevitable. It is Quentin and her mother who teach Caddy to see herself as "bad" and "sick" and "dead" so it seems possible to me that away from them she could relearn her own knowledge of self, and free of their "morality" could not be judged by it. More importantly, inside the actual story, even after she says that she has "died" Caddy is still Caddy. Her voice remains her own and very strong. Her body, her whole sense of herself remains intact. She has not "blurred" to herself, it is Quentin who perceives her as blurred, and again I think it is his image of himself in her that he sees as blurred. It is her subjective awareness of her state that tells her she is "sick" and "dying" and does not need to be taken necessarily as the final state. If Dalton Ames momentarily turns her into a child (and this is questionable as it is the way Quentin sees her) she is not a child with Herbert. He does divorce her which apparently makes her feel forced to give up her daughter but it would be hard to say which would be a higher price -- losing your daughter or a long life with Herbert. And if Caddy's pregnancy can be imagined as a way of escape neither Herbert not the child are ends, only means and so in some way calculated losses.

On the other hand, it is also possible that Caddy cannot escape or live outside Faulkner's vision of her. I mean to say that if he is totally, on all
conscious and unconscious levels, committed to the political/ideological conception of virginity (as opposed to the moral one) presented in *The Sound and the Fury* then I suppose that he could not create, could not write an existence for Caddy outside of this conception. Inside this structure Caddy, in her fearless journey from childhood to womanhood, is betrayed by the virginity which Mr. Compson says "men invented . . . not women" (48) and which Faulkner says had "no value whatever" for Caddy (229). As long as she refuses to provide men with the shelter of her body Caddy is free "to face change and loss," free to move forward. When she gives to other men the shelter she has refused her brothers she loses that freedom of forward motion. Stopped dead, Caddy is changed from "a giant" to a "child." The virginity which means nothing to her she gives away for the experience of "wild ecstasy" (Minter, *William Faulkner*, 37) only to find that ecstasy's real price is a complete loss of power, a form of death, and that she has paid this price with her virginity's male-invented value. I used to read the novel this way. I do not anymore. I think the appendix is an older man's betrayal of the fierce girl he created when he was younger and not frightened by her possibilities, but it's a possible reading.

Faulkner wrote about the appendix to Malcolm Cowley that "I should have done this when I wrote the book. . . . Then the whole thing would have fallen into pattern like a jigsaw puzzle when the magician's wand touched it." He wrote to Robert Linscott that it was "the key to the whole book" and recommended that it appear first in an edition that Random House was preparing at the time (*The*
Sound and the Fury, NCE, 224). But like James's and Hardy's prefaces Faulkner's appendix cuts off possibilities that his story leaves open, it freezes Caddy into a static and sterilized poise (I use "sterilized" because it is safe to see Caddy in this poise, she is unambiguously lost. This is what happens to young girls who don't do what their family wants them to do, who climb trees, who refuse to be nice, who refuse to contain and reflect), and it really does turn her into an "empty blank" coerced into signifying the Other. Caddy in the appendix is real absence which provides Faulkner with his best chance to write "doom" into her -- "doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it" (229) and Quentin's best chance to be reflected. According to the appendix, Quentin loves concepts and even concepts he loves romantically; Caddy loves to do it. It's here that Quentin finally gets the incestuous relationship that he always wanted, gets to "make" Caddy as himself because here he does not make/expose himself in his rage over what she denies him. It is Caddy who is made to reflect him literally, on the page, the temporal and physical space of each word spent to describe him through her, and Caddy who is made to reflect him in the figural space she gives him here: she loves him not in spite of him being horrible but because he is horrible:

... loved in him that bitter prophet and inflexible corruptless judge of what he considered the family's honor and its doom, as he ... hated in her what he considered the frail doomed vessel of its pride ... not only this, she loved him not only in spite of but because of the fact that he himself was incapable of
love . . . that he must value above all not her but the
virginity of which she was custodian. (229)

Caddy in the appendix is truly a "made" woman. The meanness of this
observation -- "still beautiful and probably still wealthy too since she did not look
within fifteen years of her actual forty-eight" -- is worthy of Jason but not of
Faulkner. He was never cynical about her in the original novel.

The description of Quentin, Caddy's daughter, provided in the appendix is
another over-inscription of male power that the novel itself does not bother with.
Quentin is "fatherless nine months before her birth, nameless at birth and already
doomed to be unwed from the instant the dividing egg determined its sex" (235).
A very dramatic way of presenting her, it's true, and considering that the rest of
the page long entry under her name is all about her uncle Jason and his various
obsessions, perhaps a necessary balance. Still, Quentin was not fatherless,
obviously she had a father, but on the narrative level of the text Quentin's father
was not important, and on the signifying level of the text Faulkner gives Caddy to
a number of men just so that, among other things, Quentin's father would be
unknown. "Nameless"? No. Her name is Quentin. The name she does not have
is her father's name -- which in any case would have been useless to her and one
more thing to carry as she climbed down the rainpipe and ran off into the world
with a lot of money which is better for buying survival than names. "Doomed to
be unwed from the instant the dividing egg determined its sex" -- a biological
impossibility; one's future marital state is not determined in this way. "Doomed to
be unwed" also makes an absolute value of the wedded state, again the man’s name, which the whole of *The Sound and the Fury* belies, on a subterranean level, not only in Caddy’s and her daughter’s actions, but also in her father’s. Remember it was Caddy’s mother, a Bascomb, and her brother who worried so much about the Compson name. Sixteen years after he wrote it Faulkner is much more aligned with Mrs. Compson and Quentin than he was in the novel.

V.

David Minter, in his 1980 biography of Faulkner, writes that "the immutability of the ‘cold pastoral’ which Faulkner associated with Keat’s urn and considered the epitome of form, becomes undesirable the moment its price, the foregoing of ‘wild ecstasy’ is named" (37). The image of Caddy climbing the tree while her brothers stare at her drawers is a specific version of this conflict between an urn (or vase) -- "the epitome of form" -- and "wild ecstasy." Caddy’s tendency to disobey and climb trees in order to "see" and satisfy her curiosity eventually leads her to Dalton Ames and "wild ecstasy": "my hand against her chest her heart thudding," "my hand up against her throat her heart was hammering there," "her blood pounded against my hand" (91-92). The "muddy drawers" may seem to be a particularly homely version of the Grecian urn but it is quite apt. Faulkner’s image of Caddy as a vase is passive, erotic form, something acted upon, something that receives but does not participate -- "Now I can make
myself a vase like that which the old Roman kept at his bedside and wore the rim away slowly with kissing it" (220), Minter calls it "a mouth he may freely kiss" (390) -- and here her muddy drawers, hiding a mouth that may not be freely kissed, transform the climbing ecstatic Caddy into a formal static and sexual image which receives but does not participate in the combined and incestuous stares of her brothers.

What Faulkner does with these muddy drawers repeats the brothers’ transference of something outside of and apart from Caddy into and onto her -- but at a much more intimate distance. She is not longer separated from her brothers’ desire by the length of half a tree, the drawers are on her body. Faulkner imagines then writes sexual shame and doom into Caddy’s pair of wet drawers, literally dressing her in shame and doom. He repeatedly assigns to them their symbolic, prophetic quality. Inside the text Dilsey determinedly scrubs Caddy’s bottom, not, it seems to me, to clean her as the narrative suggests, but to scrub the shame and doom into her in such a way as to make it finally appear as if all of Caddy’s dishonor comes from within. The stain moves from the underwear onto Caddy then into Caddy then somehow the process is reversed, the stain comes from Caddy. In the appendix she is still scrubbing away -- almost twenty years later: "Dilsey with the mudstained drawers scrubbing the naked backside of that doomed little girl -- trying to cleanse with the sorry byblow of its soiling that body, flesh, whose shame they symbolized and prophesied" (223, my emphasis; who is it after all who keeps dwelling on Caddy’s naked backside, her
body, her flesh?) Here because of the structure of the sentence "its" seems to 
refer to Caddy's body, not the underwear, as if it is her body which has soiled the 
drawers not the river, while "whose shame they symbolized" contracts time and 
suggests that her shame is already present, not just waiting in the future. So -- the 
stain is not only now on Caddy (having soaked through from outside) but comes 
from Caddy -- it is her body, her shame that has stained the drawers. As a 
technical device for projecting sexual guilt from the Other onto the subject it 
works brilliantly -- Olga Vickery writes that "as Dilsey's determined scouring of 
Caddy's bottom shows, the stains of one's experience are not that easily removed" 
(305). In other words, Caddy at seven is already permanently stained by 
experiences that are still a good eleven or twelve years ahead in the future. Like 
Quentin seeing his own hand coming up through Caddy's face Faulkner's 
projection of sexuality, shame and doom onto Caddy is so forcible and violent that 
he sees it coming up through her.

"So I, who had never had a sister, and was fated to lose my daughter in 
infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl" (220). I think that 
what Faulkner "made" was not the sister/daughter he never had, so could not 
know, but the absence of this sister/daughter, which he did know very well. 
Again, that the brothers cannot succeed in having Caddy -- which would have 
produced a vastly different story -- goes back to the original felt absence of a 
sister in Faulkner's life; they cannot have her because she is not there. "Did you
every have a sister" asks Quentin over and over again; but it is he who has no sister.

Though Benjy, Quentin and Jason may not be able to escape themselves and the representations of themselves that they would like to force Caddy’s body to carry, Faulkner himself is at least as committed to the ecstatic Caddy who is present to herself, who refuses to contain her brothers, as he is to Caddy as his own private Grecian urn.

Minrose Gwin poses the question:

How does man create 'character' coded as woman, the 'daughter' whose narrative desire and sheer force lead the father-author to relinquish the authority of the word, and thereby create a new kind of narrative process arising from the interplay of difference? In these cases woman created by man initiates the difference within that can make the male text speak against itself . . . (242)

The text thereby achieves "a power and tension that it would not have reached otherwise" (251). The question is more or less rhetorical as the answer lies in the intimate, mysterious workings of difference (251), a creative "process engendered by desire that always seeks more than it has, a force from in the feminine space rather than one postulated by patriarchal expectation" (245, my emphasis).

Nevertheless, though what allowed Faulkner to translate the feminine space within himself into the character of Caddy may be intimate and mysterious it is certain that he did because it is Caddy’s desire to seek more, a force from within herself that sends her climbing up that tree, escaping into the world.
Matthews puts it in a slightly different way: "Caught in Faulkner's mind as she climbs out of the book, Caddy is the figure that the novel is written to lose, and to whom the writer may lose himself" (396). Though I would say that the novel is written not to lose Caddy but to express her absence I do think that Faulkner loses himself to her sheer presence, his "heart's darling." She escapes his authoritative "making" because somehow he has made a woman so present to herself that she captures the writer and climbs up a tree and right out of the book.
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SARAH

Celebrations of woman or the identification of woman with some powerful force or idea -- truth as woman, liberty as woman, the muses as women -- identify actual women as marginal. Woman can be a symbol of truth only if she is denied an effective relation to truth, only if one 

presumes that those seeking truth are men.
(Culler, 166-67)

I.

In her article on Faulkner and Women, Minrose Gwin uses Michel Foucault's suggestion "that writing 'is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears into the spaces of the text and must be read out of these spaces'" as a basis for discovering the strong voiced "daughters" of Faulkner (243). It's interesting to compare a piece of Gwin's argument -- part of which I have used as the epigraph to Caddy's chapter --

As Faulkner the writing subject disappears into the rhetoric of the text, the created "daughter" emerges with her own language of desire and loss and subversion and, of course, creativity. Within this bisexual space, the daughter's creative voice is engendered by paternal absence, the father's vanishing -- that is, his repudiation of authority, and just as important, his willingness to vanish, to disappear into that opening as his text moves beyond its own

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boundaries and goes . . . somewhere else. (Gwin, 244, my emphasis)

-- to John Haegert's discussion of the manner in which he believes John Fowles to have resolved some problems inherent in Fowles's use of alluring, temptingly opaque women. In *Mantissa*, Haegert suggests, Fowles seeks "to *internalize* the authority of woman. *Only thus* could he *accord* her an integral and equally creative role in the (now) self-conscious task of removing all that stands between the artist and his 'total reality'" (161). Rather "than embody his 'female principle' in yet another mortal woman [Fowles] *resituated* it in the androgynous depths of his own imagination" (181).

For Gwin the daughter's voice is engendered, given birth to from inside the writer, exists because the father is absent, vanishes, repudiates authority. Haegert begins from the outside. When he says "his female principle" he does not mean "his" in the sense of what is already internal to Fowles but "his" in the sense of what Fowles has designated as being "female." Fowles then internalizes, resituates "the authority of woman," the authority designated by Fowles as belonging to woman, inside "his own imagination." Only in this way can he "accord" her, in other words, *give* to her (something that she does not have), an "integral and equally creative role" in his search for his "total reality."

Caddy has been described as nothing more than a "blank screen," an "empty signifier that speaks the desire of men." Sarah is the female character who first drew raves for Fowles as a staunch feminist. There is a great deal of
difference between the absent or vanished authority that has willingly repudiated itself which Gwin finds in Faulkner, and the very present, controlling, manipulating authority that Haegert, perhaps unintentionally, finds in Fowles. Granted, these are two different readers discussing two different writers but I find this juxtaposition provocative considering the blankness Caddy has been described as and the fullness that has been attributed to Sarah, considering also the claims made for Fowles, by himself and others, as a feminist, an existentialist, a writer who believes in relinquishing control for the sake of his characters’ freedoms.

When Faulkner vanishes into his writing Caddy and her story emerge. Fowles never vanishes in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, his authority is always in control and Sarah is always under his control. There is never any question of finding a story that belongs to her to tell. In this she resembles Daisy, there is not enough of her to come in any way into conflict with the surface narrative. The "suppressed" and "reinscribed" drama of The French Lieutenant’s Woman is a story about Fowles/narrator and the need to control, to author; what has been suppressed but leaves its disturbing trace everywhere, lying underneath the mythology that creates Sarah, forcefully shaping her "freedom," underpinning Charles’s rise from Victorian victim to modern existentialist, is Fowles’s/Narrator’s fear that it is woman who "makes" man, his "fat fears of a great feminine conspiracy . . ." (278).

Fowles has been described as a feminist because his fictional women, as Haegert describes them, are all "endowed with a unique impressionability: a
capacity for change and movement that enables them to 'burst through' the 'net' of custom and embrace reality in all its infinite variety" (166). I'm not sure what this actually means. The first part of it, at least, could as well be a rather idealized description of a chameleon. And woman's chameleon-like, or mirror-like, characteristics are not usually advanced these days as all that positive.

Haegert also quotes Daniel Martin from Daniel Martin describing Jane, one of those women "who like nature itself, are catalytic, inherently and unconsciously dissolvent of time ... " (161). In Fowles's brand of feminism what he attributes to woman he finds to be "inherent" and "unconscious" making it somehow "natural" to the sex and thus subtly diminishing any power or authority it might otherwise suggest. It is something that woman has no control over, an unconscious sign of her sex. Roland Barthes (Fowles says he has read him) writes that "from the point of view of ethics, what is disturbing in myth is precisely that its form is motivated. . . . What is sickening in myth is its resort to a false nature, its superabundance of forms, as these objects which decorate their usefulness with a natural appearance" (Mythologies, 126). And Jonathan Culler warns that "discussions of woman that appear to promote the feminine over the masculine . . . celebrate the woman as goddess . . . and invoke a metaphorical woman" place actual women in a position where they "will be found wanting" (Culler, 166).

Terry Lovell in his essay on Fowles, "Feminism and Form in the Literary Adaptation: The French Lieutenant's Woman," effectively demonstrates that the "narrative voice" in The French Lieutenant's Woman tells us that in his foreword to
Harold Pinter's screenplay Fowles "recalls the writer who turned down the project 'on the grounds that he could not help propagate a story so biased to the female side'" and quotes another critic who lauds Fowles as "a feminist 'before it was fashionable to be one'" (113). He then uses Fowles's "world view as expressed in The Aristos" to show exactly "how far Fowles's ideas are from feminism" (121):

'Eve societies are those in which the woman, the mother, female gods, encourage innovation and experiment, and fresh definitions, aims, modes of feeling.' This is precisely what we see the enigmatic Sarah stimulating in Charles, and why we only see her effect on him. We never see her, or him, or her story, from her point of view. Again this is directly related to Fowles's philosophy. For women achieve their evolutionary function through mystery and conflict. (120)

It seems to me that the key words here are "encourage" and "function." Women do not innovate, experiment and define in and for themselves, they only encourage these activities in men. Likewise, they do not evolve themselves (in which case they would surely at least evolve out of mystery and conflict into some other function), they "function" through their "mystery and conflict" to call men to evolve. In the extreme sense, then, it could be said that women function in much the same way as air pollution does which calls on man to evolve either a set of lungs equipped with better filters, or better filters for their machines, or to find a means to stop polluting.

Fowles as a champion of women is always revealing. In an interview published by Saturday Review (October, 1981) he says that "I think women do have
this quality, this one part of them which is the protectress ... and then there is
the other half, which I think is more biological and is really opposed to all that; it
lures you on, tempts you to danger and risk and seduction and conquest." He also
speaks of Charles making payment "for a far worse crime, the universal male
crime -- exploitation of women." Fowles's understanding of biology is a little
unusual, identifying as biological not the protective instincts that might justifiably
be seen as a biological and maternal urge, but what is opposed to these protective
instincts, "the other half," the luring, tempting, seducing, dangerous half of woman.
His concern for Charles making payment for "the universal male crime" of
exploiting women is peculiar given the use he makes of all that Charles finds
luring and tempting in Sarah.

David Leon Higdon's essay, "Endgames In John Fowles's The French
Lieutenant's Woman," quotes an interview with Fowles published in the Times
Literary Supplement: "But I do want an equality everywhere in life; until we get
that, I shall remain suspicious of all the gifts my sex has offered women these last
hundred years. I think they are the grudging interest payments of a born welsher on
his debts; the garish plaster beads that will distract the gullible natives' eyes from
the real and continuing exploitation" (360, my emphasis). "Interest payments" are
also called "gifts" (as in the gift of the right to vote, and the gift of the right to
own and hold property, etc., etc.). Women are identified as "gullible natives" and
their hard won victories, however far short they fall from justice, are equated with
"garish plaster beads."
More specifically, the presentation of Fowles as Feminist has come under suspicion in the last several years because readers have noticed that his amazing women are not as "free" as they seem to be. What they have is "a performative freedom arising out of perpetual enslavement to the author, the hero, and the text" (Haegert, 173). This is a description of the situation offered by Haegert and he is sympathetic to Fowles's literary endeavors. Haegert suggests that Fowles, becoming aware of "the gradual reification of the female principle in his fiction" sets out, in Mantissa, to revitalize, restore, and enlarge his heroine's "subversive influence" (170).

Haegert speaks of "authorial mastery and authorial subversion" and tells us that "Fowles was not only 're-writing' his heroine. In an important sense he was being rewritten by her" (170, my emphasis), and that the "value of Erato to Fowles . . . lies precisely in her challenge to his absolute authority as maker" (178, my emphasis). But he also writes "is it Miles's fiction, or Erato's? Who authorizes whom? Who embodies whom? The controlling artist or his uncontrollable imagination. All we can know for sure is that both were created by Fowles" (174, my emphasis). Haegert's certainty, that both Miles an Erato "were created by Fowles," is an apparently unintentional admission of Fowles's failure to do what Haegert says he wants to do in Mantissa and what Fowles very noisily declared he was doing in The French Lieutenant's Woman -- relinquishing the stance of the omniscient author, replacing it with an author whose first principle is "freedom," "not authority" (FLW, 82, my emphasis). In Haegert's reading Erato's subversive
relationship turns out to be only with Miles, not with Fowles. She is Miles's "uncontrollable imagination" but she is still Fowles's defined "female principle" "internalized" for a specific and technical purpose -- to prevent the reification of this same female principle. Real and effective subversion does not tend to come from a planned event. The "authority" that Gwin believes "vanishes" in Faulkner is a continual, directing presence for Haegert and I suggest that it is that way because Fowles literally never stops directing, never repudiates his authority, never ceases to control, never vanishes.

Fowles is also appreciated as an existentialist at the same time as he is noted for the intense degree of manipulation he subjects his characters and his readers to, the endless authorial direction I've just mentioned: "we have been manipulated by the magus-novelist . . . whose novels are themselves god-games of contrivance and myth for the purpose of teaching truths" (McDaniel, 41). It is hard for me to see how these two attitudes can really coincide together very healthily -- the existentialist doctrine, "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre, 15) with a doctrine of manipulation which supposes at the very least the directing pressure to go in a certain way. What you do with chance vs. what is done to you.

Fowles's specific manipulation of characters and readers in The French Lieutenant's Woman has been defended as ethically purposeful precisely on the basis of its supposed existential design: the narrator "has been manipulating his audience not out of any selfish need, but simply for the purpose of constructing a
meaningful world" (Rankin, 206); "Fowles's stance . . . is not a paradigm of
exhaustion but rather a paradigm of existential choice involving the character, the
narrator, the author, and the reader" (Higdon, 351); "this multiplicity of choice,
unsympathetic to the form of fiction is what he has labored so mightily . . . to
capture . . . " (Smith, 93); the novel "makes use of a highly self-conscious fiction in
order to force us during our reading to experience the tension between freedom
and necessity that is the novel's central concern" (Kellman, 159); and Fowles's
"structuralist interpreters argue that The French Lieutenant's Woman's modernism
forces the reader into an active relationship with the text . . . " (Lovell, 113).
Meanwhile, if we become irritated by the narrator's deceitfulness, his sloppy or
false logic, his pseudo machiavellian machinations then "we must assume that the
narrator who deceives and keeps secrets from the reader is not the same person
as the real John Fowles, who arranges things so that the reader can see through
him in the same way that Charles eventually sees through Sarah" (Hagopian, 201,
my emphasis). Why must we assume this?" (This insistence on Hagopian's part
makes me suspicious. What uneasiness is he trying to hide?) Because "the real
world is, of course, endlessly capable of being redescribed, but a specific
consciously created fictional world is not" (201). (This is a peculiar piece of
hopeful reasoning to come across in 1992; when was the last time Hagopian
looked at the endlessly proliferating MLA bibliographies?)

The uneasy relationship that Fowles has created between existentialism and
manipulation reveals itself if you poke around just a little bit into what these
readers say. Rankin, for instance, whose essay highlights just exactly how controlling and manipulative the narrator is -- of both characters and readers -- places herself, apparently unwittingly, in a rather large contradiction about the ethics of manipulation. In one paragraph she says that "one fact about Sarah is undeniable, however: she is a manipulator and, as such, is not to be trusted -- not as a human being, and certainly not as a representative of moral truth." In the next paragraph she writes "Whatever Sarah's motives were, they were basically selfish . . . . The narrator's motives are more apparent: he has been manipulating his audience not out of any selfish need, but simply for the purpose of constructing a meaningful world" (206, my emphasis). Manipulators are not to be trusted, unless of course they are John Fowles.

Smith's assumption, that "multiplicity of choice" is "unsympathetic to the form of fiction," is arguable. It seems to me, for instance, that good fiction is exactly that -- a multiplicity of choice -- and that what James's and Hardy's prefaces, Faulkner's appendix do is to interfere with the multiplicity of choice that their works offer by trying to insure that the works are read only in one way. Aside from this point though, Smith asserts that Fowles has "labored . . . mightily" to "capture" this "multiplicity of choice." "Capture" leaks out of this sentence, a small nick in the smooth promise held out by this "multiplicity of choice"; isn't there something a little odd in this juxtaposition -- labored mightily to capture/multiplicity of choice? Other critics supporting Fowles ethical and existential purposes have used the word "force": "in order to force us during our
reading," and "forces the reader into an active relationship." It's true that one can be forced to make a choice but even in such a case the power that lurks in "force" makes the "freedom" of the choice to be made rather questionable. Think of one of Sophie's choices: Choose which of your two children will go to the gas chamber or we will send both to die.) In any case, I find "force" to be a truer description of both our reader's relationship and his characters' relationship to Fowles than a "paradigm of existential choice." Fowles force feeds words and arguments into his readers' mouths. The questions we are to ask about the novel, and the responses we are to make come to us already formulated. Pretending to educate us, the effect he achieves is disorientation and intimidation -- who wants to be called "hypocrite lecteur" and suspected as an unworthy reader? As a result our real freedom to inquire, to look beyond surfaces is interfered with forcibly, while both Fowles's freedom to manipulate all his characters, not just Sarah, and his ability to obscure the design, the plan of his universe is greatly enhanced.

II.

Chapter 13 sets forth the rules by which Fowles says he governs himself as a writer in order to respect his characters freedom and autonomy and he is particularly concerned to respect Sarah's freedom and autonomy. In 1981 I wrote an essay on *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and said that I believed that Fowles was, for the most part, sincere when he wrote the famous, or infamous, chapter
13. I'm not sure why I was concerned about that, his sincerity or lack of it doesn't seem to me, now, to be a point. Almost everything underneath the surface of the novel so contradicts the surface rhetoric and Fowles's rhetoric outside the novel, that his sincerity, what he believes he believes, ceases to matter. But I have noticed that Fowles is adept at disclaimers: "'I suggest,' says the novelist 'that characters do [take over control]. But that's not really what I believe.' In reality, he admits, 'the writer has the final say'" (Shoshana Knapp, 68-69). Since these revelations of what Fowles really believes always follow someone else's revelation of yet another inconsistency between what he says he does and what he actually does I am a little skeptical about it all. In any case, since chapter 13 is the flag Fowles waves in Sarah's name it's worth looking at up close to see exactly how it works on us and on her:

Perhaps you suppose that a novelist has only to pull the right strings and his puppets will behave in a lifelike manner; and produce on request a thorough analysis of their motives and intentions . . . (81)

This "you" is inclusive, it reaches out and grabs all readers, those who think of novelists as puppet masters and those who don't. Remember, it is Fowles narrator who suggests the metaphor. Behaving in a "lifelike manner" and producing analyses of "motives and intentions" do not necessarily go hand in hand, nor are they mutually exclusive.
Certainly I intended at this stage (Chapter Thirteen -- unfolding of Sarah's true state of mind) to tell all -- or all that matters. (81).

In "Revision And the Style Of Revision In The French Lieutenant's Woman"

Frederik Smith points out that "in fact the two chapter outlines kept with the typescript at the University of Tulsa do not refer to 'Sarah's true state of mind'" rather the subject of Chapter Thirteen is in both cases listed as 'Novel Digression'" (footnote #6, 88).

I know in the context of my book's reality that Sarah would never have brushed away her tears and leaned down and delivered a chapter of revelation. (81)

Fowles suggests here that this absolutely graceless way of revealing "Sarah's true state of mind" is the only possible way, where in fact he constantly reveals Charles's, Ernestina's, and Sam's true state of mind without ever resorting to such an awkward lapse of style.

But I am a novelist, not a man in a garden -- I can follow her where I like? But possibility is not permissibility. (81)

Why is it permissible to spy on Sarah and the maid in bed (in order to titillate for a brief moment, with the suggestion of lesbianism), or on Sarah crying at the side of her bed, or in her room at Endicott's and yet not to follow her at this moment? Or for that matter why is it permissible to spy on Ernestina and Mary enjoying themselves, semi-clothed, in front of their mirrors, in their bedrooms? Why is it
permissible to follow Charles in every step he takes. Permissibility is not the issue here, nor is it what it is meant to suggest -- respect for Sarah's freedom -- in spite of what Fowles "a novelist, not a man in a garden" says; it is simply not at all in Fowles's best interest nor any part of his plan to reveal what Sarah thinks or feels.

I can only report -- and I am the most reliable witness -- that the idea seemed to me to come clearly from Charles, not myself. (81)

An only witness should not be confused with a reliable witness. They are neither mutually inclusive or exclusive.

There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to that definition. (81)

Actually, there are several intellectually satisfying definitions of god, whether you believe in a "god" or not. Why "must" Fowles "conform" to this definition? Who is making him conform? Another, necessarily higher God, a god of novelists who makes sure that they all obey "the freedom" who "allows other freedoms to exist?" By saying that he "must conform to that definition" Fowles/narrator insists that no other possibility exists for him, therefore we may, we must, with absolute confidence, accept and believe in his divinely ordained respect for his characters' individual freedoms.

The novelist is still a god, since he creates . . . what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the
new theological image, *with freedom our first principle, not authority.* (82, my emphasis)

As far as "decreeing," Charles's decision to drink a bowl of milk is Fowles's only and suspect example that he is not in fact the decreeing sort. "Decree" calls attention to itself as something that can be observed simply by its forceful presence -- I "decreed" you to behave in this way, but in fact only the very worst narrators, and Fowles does not belong in this group, allow their decrees to be visible, otherwise what is decreed is very simply what unfolds before the reader of the narrative as naturally happening. Fowles's obvious decree lies outside the novel: Knapp reports that preparing to turn the novel into film "Fowles told Reisz -- 'You and Harold go off and do what you like . . . but just don't explain *Sarah*" (69, my emphasis).

The one example a reader has of Fowles's characters' freedom is that he allows Charles to drink a bowl of milk before resuming his walk back to Lyme. Since this example is used as the occasion for Fowles to demonstrate his new theology I myself do not feel like giving it much credence. Fowles uses Charles, and one incident where his "freedom" of movement ought to be suspect anyway, to make us believe that what he gives Sarah is freedom -- the logic being what this generous god gives to one he will give to everyone. It would be perhaps too ludicrous for even Fowles to notify us each and every time he allows Charles or the others to move against his wishes but without these signposts I am at a loss to find anywhere where Charles -- and I have nothing against him as a character --
does anything significantly disobedient. (He probably did not want to throw up in front of all of us while with a prostitute, but he did.) The same is true of Ernestina -- and she I am drawn to. I believe she would have liked very much to disobey. As for Sarah's "freedom," exactly how and in what way is she free? Fowles's "decree" to Pinter and Reisz outside the novel makes visible the strong possibility that inside the novel Sarah's silence comes not from a freedom which chooses not to explain itself, but from a silencing order, and there is an inherent contradiction in a freedom that cannot speak or explain itself.

If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in... a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. (80)

But Fowles "pretends" throughout the novel, and not just previous to Chapter 13, to know Charles's mind and innermost thoughts, as well as the mind and innermost thoughts of several other characters, while insisting on the other hand, that he does not know Sarah's: "Out of what shadows does she come? I do not know. Modern women like Sarah exist, and I have never understood them" (80); "...what the protagonist wants is not so clear; and I am not at all sure where she is at the moment" (317).

Sarah's apparent "freedom" to be inexplicable extends to tiny details -- "whether it was because she had slipped or he held her arm, or the colder air, I do not know but her skin had a vigor, a pink bloom, that suited admirably the wild
shyness of her demeanor" (98, my emphasis). And this "freedom" remains intact even when in the same sentence another character is opened to Fowles's interpretation: "The minutest tightening of her lips -- into a determination or a resentment, it was hard to say which -- was her only reaction to this freezing majesty, [Mrs. Poultenay] who if the truth be known was slightly at a loss . . . " (194, my emphasis). It's worth noting that every time Fowles reminds us that he does not understand Sarah he does so in the context of presenting several possible interpretations of her behavior but these interpretations themselves either serve as descriptions of Sarah -- i.e. determined and/or resentful which limit the possibilities in exactly the way Fowles wants them limited, not from "fear" or "anger" or nervousness or any other number of reasons why her lips might tighten; or something else in the sentence marks Fowles's real choice, i.e. "wild shyness of her demeanor" not only describes her for us very specifically but also indicates that her pink cheeks are most likely the result of Charles holding her arm. Fowles denies that he is one of the Victorian gods, "omniscient and decreeing" but however much he calls attention to it as a fictional device he remains in an absolutely omniscient position to all of his characters, except Sarah.

But this is preposterous? A character is either 'real' or 'imaginary'? If you think that, hypocrite lecteur, I can only smile .... We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of Homo sapiens. So if you think all this unlucky . . . digression has nothing to do with your Time, Progress, Society, Evolution . . . I will not argue. But I shall suspect you. (82)
Fowles's sense of omniscience reaches outside his narrative and grabs at the reader. He insists that he knows us, "we are all in flight," "that is a basic definition," knows us well enough to choose our words and responses for us -- "preposterous," "real" or "imaginary," feels free to call us hypocrites, and to "suspect" us. If one manages to evade Fowles's dictatorial manner for a moment his contradictions stare you in the face: "I report, then, only the outward facts"/ "Charles's down-staring face had shocked her; she felt the speed of her fall accelerate . . ." (83). This latter sentence, which concludes chapter 13, is more than a report of the outward facts.

Fowles uses the two different endings he writes as another way of confronting his readers, and to demonstrate Sarah's freedom, the hazards of chance, the multiplicity of choice. Outside the novel the two endings have elicited as much attention as chapter 13. Again, what Fowles says he does is different than what he actually does:

I preached earlier of the freedom characters must be given. My problem is simple -- what Charles wants is clear?" It is indeed. But what the protagonist wants is not so clear . . . Of course if these two were two fragments of real life, instead of two figments of my imagination the issue of the dilemma is obvious: the one want combats the other want, and fails or succeeds, as the actuality may be. (317)

It's true that two years have passed since Sarah made it quite clear to Charles what she wanted: "You have given me the consolation of believing that in another world, another age, another life, I might have been your wife"; "I loved
you . . . I think from the moment I saw you. In that, you were never deceived” (278-79). Fowles tells us that he does not know what she wants but since he assumes that there will be a fight between two different "wants" he reveals that he does indeed "know" that Sarah does not want Charles. This revelation is also another of Fowles's betrayals of Sarah's much advertised "freedom" as it is decided without any contribution from her, that she does not want Charles.

. . . the chief argument for fight-fixing is to show one’s readers what one thinks of the world around one -- whether one is a pessimist, an optimist, what you will. I have pretended to slip back into 1867; but of course that year is in reality a century past. It is futile to show optimism or pessimism, or anything else about it, because we know what has happened since. (317-318)

The "fight" that is about to take place is not about the year 1867 or what has happened since then no matter how much time Fowles spends decorating his novel with historical importance. The "fight" is supposedly about two opposing "wants" and pessimism or optimism seems a rather limited spectrum of possibility.

The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. (318)

For all of his supposed reading of Barthes, Fowles still apparently believes that he can separate himself from what his writing reveals.

I take my purse from the pocket of my frock coat, I extract a florin, I rest it on my thumbnail, I flick it, spinning, two feet into the air and catch it in my left hand. (318)
But why, given the narrator’s penchant for manipulation, should we believe that even in "the context of the book’s reality," and in spite of the carefully specific, realistic description he gives us of his action, he actually flips a coin, or that if he does flip a coin he will be true in following the outcome?

Finally, probably most importantly, the two endings are not two versions of the same fight but two quite different fights each of which presents a different Sarah. Fowles wishes us to believe that the outcome of the "fight" is a matter of "chance" although "chance" as random as it seems to be to those who believe in it never yet set time back 15 minutes. He has told us on pages 317 and 318 that Sarah does not want Charles. In both endings Charles speaks the same words, has the same thoughts up until the moment that Sarah stops him from leaving the room. In the first ending Charles’s words or his eyes, or whatever, prompt Sarah to produce their child which produces the revelation in Charles which produces their re-union. Nothing he says after Sarah returns with Lalage attempts to bend her will to his own. In the second ending Charles achieves no such effect. "Chance" would suggest then that Sarah was simply in a softer, less militant mood in the first 15 minutes, in a much harder mood in the second.

The very last scene of the first ending implies something quite different than chance though, it implies that Sarah wanted Charles from the beginning and was only waiting for him to prove himself:

'But why? Why? What if I had never . . . .'
Her head sank even lower. He barely caught her answer. '... It had to be so.'

And he comprehended: it had been in God's hands, in his forgiveness of their sins...

'And all those cruel words you spoke... forced me to speak in answer?'

'Had to be spoken.'

'... Shall I ever understand your parables?' (360)

Charles wins Sarah here because he has traversed the "had to be so's," the "had to be spoken's," the "parables." He wins Sarah because he has made himself worthy of her, not because he has bested her in a fight over conflicting "wants," and not because of "chance."

The second ending presents a Sarah who does not want Charles and it's this ending that reveals the novel's allegiance to Charles. In the Saturday Review interview Fowles tells us that "it's a novel about him as much as her despite the title." (Did this piece of information come as a surprise to anyone?) "And, in a way, Charles has grown, I hope, by the end of the book... He'd become a much fuller human being." The interviewer asks "through Sarah's final rejection of him?" and Fowles answers "Yes, until then he'd been the victim, in a way; not only the victim of her... but a victim of his society..." (40). Fowles's implication that it is Sarah's final rejection of Charles that sets him free from her, and from his age, makes him come fully into himself, cannot be ignored.
In this ending Charles finally sees Sarah for what she "is":

... they remained staring at each other as if their clothes had suddenly dropped away and left them facing each other in nakedness; but to him far less a sexual nakedness than a clinical one, one in which the hidden cancer stood revealed in all its loathsome reality... He saw his own true superiority to her: which was not of birth or education, not of intelligence, not of sex, but of an ability to give that was also an inability to compromise. She could give only to possess, and to possess him... was not enough. (364)

Lovell's essay points out the ways in which "we are persuaded into sympathetic identification with Charles, as narrative voice merges with Charles's point of view" (118) and there is a sharp distinction between the times when this narrative voice is merged with Charles and those times when it is at a distance from him in order to comment ironically on his blind behavior. Narrative voice does not distance itself here from Charles, it "merges" completely with his point of view, authorizing it. Witnessing Sarah's "hidden cancer" and "loathsome reality" pushes Charles into full existential manhood:

... for he has at last found an atom of faith in himself... has already begun... to realize that life, however advantageously Sarah may, in some ways seem to fit the role of Sphinx, is not a symbol, is not one riddle and one failure to guess it... but is to be, forever inadequately, emptily, hopelessly, into the city's iron heart, endured. (366)
III.

Like Tess Durbeyfield who is not of herself but of the D'Urbervilles, Sarah is not her own but belongs to the French Lieutenant. The hidden irony of the title, that Sarah's claim to be the French Lieutenant's woman is actually not true, hides another irony: While the title suggests that the novel's focus will be Sarah, the only way that the narrative allows her "to break out" of what she is, to claim "to be truly not like other women," to be "beyond the pale" (142) is to make her not out of herself but out of a fictional relationship with a man. Woman, whose function is to serve as a catalyst for man, has nothing without that function to make of herself.

In this novel women are "sadists" (22), "shrews" (162), and "cats" (85). Men are "mice" trying to do the impossible -- escape from "between the claws" of the hungry cats (85). Impossible because, "though death may be delayed, as mothers with marriageable daughters have been known to foresee, it kindly always comes in the end" (20, my emphasis). Charles's uncle proves this maxim: unmarried at the beginning of the novel -- "heaven had punished this son, or blessed him, by seeing that he never married" (17, my emphasis) -- he has been nabbed by an upper middle class climber by the end of the novel. Charles does manage to escape but only through the extreme machinations of the "prophet bearded man" who sets time back to give him one more chance. If the prophet-bearded man is not likely to help you then there is one important consideration to make: it might
be better to marry a "shallow-minded" woman in order to profit from their "ageless attraction" -- "one may make of them what one wants" -- than to marry just any old woman like Sarah who might have a brain of her own (210).

In contrast to the enviable position of being a bachelor Sarah is described as appearing "inescapably doomed to the one fate nature had so clearly spent many millions of years in evolving her to avoid: spinsterhood" (49, my emphasis). A man's escape, bachelorthood, is a woman's doom, spinsterhood. This is particularly unfortunate for the so carefully evolved Sarah because unlike Ernestina who cannot seem to manage servants (does this ability come in a gene of its own or is it a part of the sex chromosome?) she immediately produces "a happier domestic atmosphere" upon arriving at Mrs. Poultenay's: "The astonishing fact was that not a single servant had been sent on his, or her (statistically it had in the past rather more often proved to be the latter) way" (49, my emphasis). Mrs. Poultenay, like Ernestina, and Mrs. Lyme, is troubled with jealousy of other women. (That answers my question: the "good domestic manager" gene and the "jealousy" gene compete for a dominant position on the Y chromosome.)

Women in The French Lieutenant's Woman are sexual and are made for sexual exhibition: Mary was "as nubile a little creature as Lyme could boast" (37, my emphasis). They take pleasure in their own exhibition as well as providing the reader with pleasure through exhibition:

In [Tina's] room that afternoon she unbuttoned her dress and stood before her mirror in her chemise and petticoats. For a few moments she became lost in a
highly narcissistic self-contemplation. Her neck and shoulders did her face justice; she was really very pretty. And as if to prove it she raised her arms and unloosed her hair..." (29, my emphasis)

Sarah exhibits and tempts, not only Charles but the reader, with her hair. (If you do not think we are involved with Sarah's hair just imagine how shocked you would have been to see Meryl Streep in her "A Cry in the Dark" wig instead of the Pre-Raphaelite one she used in the movie made from this novel.) Sarah's clothes intrigue Charles by what they refuse to reveal, Ernestina's tempt him by what they do reveal.

Men, on the other hand, are mental and made for contemplation of the soul. When Charles views himself in the mirror he apparently "sees" his thoughts which "were too vague to be described" (unlike Ernestina's neck and shoulders) "but they comprehended mysterious elements..." (15, my emphasis). At yet another viewing he notices his "wide forehead" (that ageless symbol of intelligence) and his "Doric nose, the cool grey eyes. Breeding and self-knowledge, he most legibly had" (38, my emphasis).

Fowles's surface arrangement of the contrast between Sarah and Ernestina is a not very subtle demonstration of Culler's point: "actual women will be found wanting" when compared to women who are used to represent "some powerful force or idea" (166). Ernestina has "exactly the right face for her age; that is, small-chinned, oval, delicate as a violet" (26); it is unremarkable because it is "right." Sarah's face must be something very different in order that it may shock
and arrest Charles in his headlong surrender to the Victorian age so she is given exactly the wrong kind of face: "It was not so much what was positively in that face which remained with him after that first meeting, but all that was not as he had expected; for theirs was an age when the favored feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy" (14, my emphasis). Ernestina's "gray, very pretty eyes" are "shortsighted" while Sarah's "stare" is "aimed life a rifle" and her sharp eyes "lance" Charles so many times during the course of the novel that it's hard for me to believe he could have any blood, real or figurative, left in him by the last page. Charles doesn't like it when Ernestina is "willful" because it contrasts "too strongly with her elaborate clothes, all designed to show a total inadequacy outside the domestic interior" (209). Sarah is a "wild animal" who is caged by the "barred surroundings" of any interior (86). Her clothes are without style, her ever-present coat is a man's coat, she has no place in a "domestic interior." For Charles what is perhaps most damaging in Ernestina but what fascinates him the most in Sarah is this: "Ernestina and her like behaved always as if habited in glass" infinitely fragile . . . . They encouraged the mask, the safe distance; and this girl, behind the facade of humility forbade it" (119).

Ernestina is the least free, the most imprisoned of Fowles's characters here because she was created so clearly as a representative of everything in the Victorian Age that Charles needs to escape from, as well as serving as the surface narrative's representative of Fowles's view of woman as the designing entrapper of man. As a representative she is not allowed a face of her own nor a voice of her
own but assigned the face and voice of her age. Even the tiny bit of difference she is allowed -- which Fowles must supply her with if Charles's attraction to her is to be at all believable -- is drawn in with a shallow and quick reference by Fowles to another earlier Victorian character -- Becky Sharpe. Fowles paints Ernestina as a product of her age and a victim of its circumstance: "I am not doing well by Ernestina, who was after all a victim of circumstances; of an illiberal environment. . . . She cannot be blamed . . . she had been hopelessly well trained to view society as so many rungs on a ladder; thus reducing her own to a mere step to something supposedly better" (201). But this representation simply blames history and class structure for what Fowles himself has actually done -- create Ernestina as a type, and disguises the fact that she is a victim of Fowles's narrative necessity by claiming that she is a victim of a particular age. (Fowles presents himself in the novel as a sort of marxist, Lovell punctures this representation as he does the feminist one.)

Fortunately for Ernestina (although the "fortune" is too small to make much difference) narrative necessity also forces Fowles, in the interest of dramatic conflict, to give Ernestina a speech to deliver to Charles when he breaks off their engagement which reveals Charles's and the narrator's estimation of her to be as shallow and selfish as they accuse her of being. Very early in the novel Charles wonders "whether Ernestina would ever really understand him as well as he understood her . . . " (15); becoming more and more disaffected with what he describes as a "monotonous . . . set paradox of demureness and dryness" he
decides that it is only the screen that covers "a vapid selfishness" (107). What Ernestina reveals in a stinging speech to Charles is the shallowness and lack of understanding in Charles's view of her: "I know to you I have never been anything more than a pretty little . . . article of drawing room furniture"; her own desire for growth: "I know I am not unusual . . . But under your love and protection . . . and your education . . . I believed I should become better . . ."; her perceptive intelligence: "I did not choose you because I was so innocent I could not make comparisons. But because you seemed more generous, wiser, more experienced"; and her own generous and clear understanding of Charles's nature: ". . . I wrote, soon after we became engaged, that you have little faith in yourself . . . but that is what I wished to make my real bridal present to you. Faith in yourself" (297).

But the cards are stacked against Ernestina. It is apparently more existentially real that Charles find faith in himself by discovering that he has been completely and utterly manipulated and rejected by a loathsome cancer than by having it planted and nurtured in him by a pretty little girl. The idea that he might actually do something himself, by himself, without woman as catalyst, as a means of achieving self-faith seems not to have occurred to Fowles as an interesting narrative possibility.

Fowles's elaborate and surface presentation of Sarah's inexplicable "mystery" stands in marked contrast to Ernestina's short-sighted, easily explained
shallowness. She is everything that Ernestina is not, pure intelligence and independence united with pure sex:

All in it [Sarah's face] had been sacrificed . . . to the eyes. They could not conceal an intelligence, an independence of spirit; there was also a silent contradiction of any sympathy; a determination to be what she was . . . the suppressed intensity of her eyes was matched by the suppressed sensuality of her mouth; which was wide . . . (99)

Significantly, Sarah's intelligence is not of the rational and so explicable kind but is "rare" and "uncanny"; she has an "ability to classify other people's worth: to understand them, in the fullest sense of that word" (47); "she saw them [people] as they were and not as they tried to seem" (47). "Understanding and emotion" is "that fused rare power that was her essence" (52).

Sarah is naturally animal, when she eats a meat pie it is "without any delicacy whatsoever" (222). Unguarded, "in the complete abandonment of deep sleep" she is a "girl" and most revealingly herself: "There was something intensely tender and yet sexual in the way she lay" (61), "curled up like a small girl under her old coat . . . . There was a wildness about her. Not the wildness of lunacy or hysteria -- but that same wildness Charles had sensed in the wren's singing . . . a wildness of innocence, almost an eagerness" (197).

Offsetting the girlish innocence of Sarah's sexuality and the ethical value of her intelligent understanding of human worth runs a strong current of danger with all of its stereotyped attraction -- again in contrast to Ernestina who never
manages to seem very dangerous. From the first description Sarah is associated with those mythically tempting and extremely dangerous Sirens: "the figure stood motionless, staring, staring out to sea, more like a living memorial to the drowned, a figure from myth, than any proper fragment of the petty provincial day" (11, my emphasis). Sarah is associated not only with the sirens' attractiveness but with their inevitable effect on the men who see and hear them: "Perhaps he had too fixed an idea of what a siren looked lie . . . There were no Doric temples in the Undercliff; but here was a Calypso" (117); Grogan tells Charles that "I think I know why that French sailor ran away. He knew she had eyes a man could drown in" (180, my emphasis); and again, in the first ending, "Charles stared at her, his masts crashing, the cries of the drowning in his mind's ears" (359).

Drowning is not the only kind of death to be met in Sarah's eyes, those "eyes without sun, bathed in an eternal moonlight" (117, just a little hint of vampirism here): "her stare" is "aimed like a rifle" out to sea, her eyes "lance" Charles at every meeting -- not only in the surface narrative sense of a wound being cleaned, but in another sense of being stabbed with a lance, a sword. "Her eyes were all flame" (198). Flame burns; the narrator tells us that Charles is the "fuel" -- what feeds the fire, he is what will be burned, consumed by Sarah's eyes. And Sarah's eyes "watch" her father, "watched him when he boasted, watching him with a quiet reserve that goaded him, goaded him like a piece of useless machinery . . . goaded him finally into madness" (48-49, my emphasis).
Sarah's dangerous, sunless eyes are only large expressions of her general nature. Charles "associated such faces" as Sarah's "with foreign women -- to be frank . . . with foreign beds. This marked a new stage of his awareness of Sarah. He had realized she was more intelligent and independent that she seemed; he now guessed darker qualities" (99, my emphasis). Sarah's sexuality is not merely another facet of her personality, like her independence and her intelligence; it is a "darker" quality.

The narrator aligns himself with Charles's description here in the next paragraph when he writes that "to most Englishmen of his age such an intuition of Sarah's real nature would have been repellent" (99, my emphasis). Sarah's "real nature" is sexual therefore "dark" and dangerous. In this same long moment of exchanged looks the narrator has Charles associate Sarah with Emma Bovary (whose sexuality destroyed her own life as well as others). And again the narrator authorizes Charles's interpretation: "as he looked down at the face beside him, it was suddenly, out of nowhere, that Emma Bovary's name sprang into his mind. Such allusions are comprehensions; and temptations. That is why, finally, he did not bow and withdraw" (100, my emphasis).

When Charles meets Sarah on the Undercliff in order to hear her "story," a real turning point for him in the level of his involvement with her, Fowles gives Sarah a piece of symbolic stagework which would be funny in its heavyhandedness if it wasn't so irritating in its implications: "She turned then, her eyes intense . . . Plucking a little spray of milkwort from the tank beside her, blue flowers like
microscopic cherub’s genitals . . . " Moments later she begins "to defoliate the milkwort" (138-139, my emphasis). Man’s darkest nightmare -- a castrating woman.

Later, the narrator, relating Charles’s horrified reaction to his discovery that Sarah had been a virgin, puts an ironic distance between himself and Charles’s nightmarish view of his situation -- the language is extremely melodramatic, question marks and exclamation marks proliferate:

Why? Why? Why?

To put him totally in her power!

And all those loathsome succubi of the male mind, their fat fears of a great feminine conspiracy to suck their virility from their veins, to prey upon their idealism, melt them into wax and mold them to their evil fancies . . . these, and a surging back to credibility of the hideous evidence adduced in the La Ronciere appeal, filled Charles mind with an apocalyptic horror" (278, my emphasis).

The narrator disowns Charles’s fears -- they are "the loathsome succubi of the male mind" -- but all of the other ways he has marked Sarah as dangerous, including Charles’s final understanding of her where narrative voice and Charles’s voice are indistinguishable -- "the hidden cancer stood revealed in all its loathsome reality," "she could give only to possess . . . whether because possession was so imperative in here that it had to be constantly renewed, could never be satisfied by one conquest only . . . " (364, my emphasis) -- make his disclaiming distance highly questionable.
"Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come? I do not know . . . . Modern women like Sarah exist, and I have never understood them" (80). Fowles is being disingenuous here, he knows very well who Sarah is, from out of what shadows he has dragged her, he understand her perfectly. Sarah’s silence, an apparent refusal on her part to reveal her motives, serves Fowles in a technical way. If Charles understood her he could not be affected by her in such a dramatic way (and neither would we), and in spite of the title it is Charles who Fowles wants to tell us about. This narrative reason for Sarah’s silence obscures another reason, the silence that Fowles presents as self-imposed by Sarah allows Fowles to keep her under his control; she can never disobey him, never say or do anything that might threaten the narrative development he has in mind for Charles. Whether Fowles uses this tactic consciously or not is impossible to say, its effect is the same.

Fowles reveals his knowledge and understanding of Sarah in two different ways: By countering on one level the confusion he cloaks her with on another, and more simply, by describing her. If we believe that we do not understand her, if our first reaction to her mysterious behavior is an unsettling confusion, then it is because we believe Fowles when he tells us that he is confused, because he makes such an issue of not telling us what she is thinking at the same time as he is painting her with all sorts of sinister and deceptive possibilities. Sarah’s silence
forces us to see everything she does as at least ambiguous. What are we to make of her faked sprained ankle? Why does she lie to Charles about Varguennes? Why does she disappear from the hotel in Exeter? I suppose an even more important question is one that concerns her sanity. Is Grogan right when he classes her with all those other bizarre and melancholic women?

The answers to most of these questions are there on the surface of the novel. Fowles may not wish us to suspect how very well he understands Sarah but he cannot help defining her as he sees her. What are we to make of the fake sprained ankle? No more and no less than we make of Ernestina’s faked faint. Both women want a specific reaction from Charles, the difference is only that Sarah has a longer time to plan her move. And Sarah lies to Charles for the same reason she lies to all of Lyme Regis, if they know her not to have slept with Varguennes she loses all distinction. She must also know that it will be easier for Charles to make love with her believing she is not a virgin. Why does she disappear from the hotel? Why should she stay? Remember she has never received Charles’s letter. She thinks he has left her forever for Ernestina.

Is Sarah one of Grogan’s melancholic women? No. Charles tells us this in one way: "... the doctors had failed him again. The distinguished young ladies who had gone in for house-burning and anonymous letter-writing had all, with a nice deference to black-and-white moral judgements, waited to be caught before confession" (199). In case we feel it safer not to trust Charles’s perception Fowles makes sure he himself has given us the same negative answer. When he first
describes her face he tells us that "there was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness" (14). And we should remember this description when we read the epigraph that Fowles gives to chapter 28, the chapter detailing the histories of these "mad" women:

Assumptions, hasty, crude, and vain,  
Full oft to use will Science deign;  
The corks the novice plies today  
The swimmer soon shall cast away.

A. G. Clough, Poem [1840] (183)

This strange mixture of ambiguity and clarity makes it easy to lost track of the ways in which Fowles straightforwardly identifies Sarah. "Out of what shadows does she come?" Out of those same shadows that produced "the booming new female clerical agencies" (329); from the same shadows that produced Bella Tompkins (173) and all those American faces -- with their traces of Sarah's face (339). Who is Sarah? She is that "fused rare power . . . understanding and emotion" (52). She is the woman described over and over again in those epigraphs taken from Hardy, from Tennyson, from Arnold. At first glance these snatches of poetry serve only to deepen Sarah's mystery: The women they describe are as cloaked in ambiguity as she is. If we stop here though, we miss the point. What we can understand is that there is a certain tradition of "mysterious," lost women which Fowles wishes Sarah to be identified with. In this tradition individual traits are much less important than an overall effect on men.
In the light of these epigraphs Fowles's first description of Sarah becomes very telling: "... the figure stood motionless ... more like a living memorial to the drowned, a figure from myth, than any proper fragment of this petty, provincial day" (11). Sarah was created a long, long time ago. She was, and is, "a living memorial," "a figure from myth." Her inscrutability is simply both the means and the end of the idealizing process that made her. The means because as Pearson and Pope say in The Female Hero, "it is the atmosphere of secrecy that makes women seem mysterious and Mythic," she "has power over men because she does not react to them," (53) the more silent she is, the more mysterious, the more powerful, the more Mythic. And the end because, as Auerbach suggests, women are mythologized because their power is seen, at least potentially, as so fearsome that it can only be held in check by the imposition of a rigid mythic code. Sarah's silence seems to make her powerful, but it insures the opposite, guarantees by mythologizing her that she never asks questions or disobeys Fowles, never cries out, never speaks for herself. Her silence lures Charles on and this same silence allows Fowles to create Charles by projecting and imposing his vision on the void made by Sarah's "refusal" to speak, to say who she is.

Pearson and Pope write that a woman may "focus not on what she sees but on how she is seen. To the degree that she does so, her cage is a mirror" (23). If we change the focus here, for awhile, from this woman who "focuses ... on how she is seen" we could focus instead on the viewer, the person who determines how this woman is to be "seen". And remember Kaja Silverman's description of the
"traumatic apprehension of the central role played in the constitution of the subject by the language and desire of the other" (28). According to this "apprehension" the decision by the viewer of how the woman is to be seen is based in "the language and desire" of this same viewer, not in the subject-woman viewed. I suggested at this point in Tess's chapter, that Silverman's "Other" can only hope with any degree of certainty to construct itself by its own language and desire and fear; it cannot simply and successfully construct a subject unless it encounters a weak or vacant "Other" which then collaborates in a mutual construction, or, constructs a subject that cannot argue with it, that pretends, according to its construction, to exist a-priori to its construction. Sarah is both vacant "Other" and the subject who cannot argue, the subject who pretends to exist a-priori.

Silverman says that Tess functions as a reflection of the male gaze, "as the surface upon which a pattern is imposed" (8) and ends by suggesting that "this mirror relay between male gaze, female exteriority, and female interiority renders the distinction between Tess's body and her soul largely irrelevant" (23). In Tess's case I disagreed with Silverman, but I find her description of how she sees Tess absolutely accurate as a description of Sarah. Fowles plays a very good trick on the reader because the creating, patterning "gaze" in The French Lieutenant's Woman always seems to originate in the mysterious, large eyed Sarah -- She Who Sees All The Human Heart -- and never with the almost blind Charles. Functioning as structure Sarah's eyes show Charles who he is and what he is to
become. But it is Fowles/narrator who stands behind Charles and "reads" the
inscrutable Sarah for Charles, creates him through this emptiness without a voice
by casting on to her his language, desire, fear, and then catching its reflection as it
bounces off of her, (Charles succeeds where Robert Cohn fails in insisting that a
woman make him and not the other way around) making Sarah into the
chameleon reflection of what Charles needs to see each step of his way into the
city's "iron heart."

"... again and again, afterwards, Charles thought of that look as a lance;
and to think so is of course not merely to describe an object but the effect it has"
(15, my emphasis). This, after Charles first sees Sarah. Each description of Sarah
produces an "effect" in Charles -- makes something happen. Charles must first be
made aware that he is sick and blinded. Sarah's piercing (lancing) looks catch his
attention, disorient him, make him examine himself more carefully because he
feels that someone else is scrutinizing him:

    ... once again that face had an extraordinary effect on
    him. It is as if after each sight of it, he could not
    believe its effect, and had to see it again. It seemed to
    both envelop him and reject him; as if he was a figure
    in a dream, both standing still and yet always receding.
    (74, my emphasis)

This passage manages to suggest the power and strangeness of Sarah's face,
apparently the cause, (at the same time as it hides the purely functional nature of
this face's power and strangeness) only by describing the effect it appears to have
on Charles. But all we really have is how Charles feels. The relationship between
Sarah's face and Charles's feeling, the apparent cause and its apparent effect, is all "as ifs" and "seems."

Once Charles's attention has been caught and he has become aware that something is wrong inside himself he must be made to look for its exact nature: Sarah must make him aware of "some hidden self he hardly knew existed..."; "It seemed clear to him that it was not Sarah in herself who attracted him -- how could she, he was betrothed -- but some emotion, some possibility she symbolized" (107, my emphasis). The narrative irony here -- "how could she, he was betrothed" -- works on a superficial level as a poke at Charles, a sign to the reader that Charles is fooling himself. On another level though it obscures -- by subtly negating the possibility -- what is really going on at a structural, technical level: it is the "possibility" and "emotion" that Sarah is made to symbolize which is working on Charles.

Sarah's eyes do not "accuse Charles of the outrage, but of not seeing that it had taken place" (114, my emphasis). He senses "something in her. A knowledge, an apprehension of nobler things . . ." (181, my emphasis) that makes him sense a lack in himself. She stops him from leaving

with an imperceptible yet searching movement of her eyes; as if there was something he must see, it was not too late: a truth beyond his truths, an emotion beyond his emotions, a history beyond all his conceptions of history. As if she could say worlds; yet at the same time knew that if he could not apprehend those words without her saying them . . . (206, my emphasis)
This last sentence is particularly wonderful because it not only continues to
disguise Sarah's functionality as powerful seer, but also permits the narrator to
again avoid giving anything concrete as to what exactly Sarah apprehends.

After the ninety second sexual encounter in Exeter takes place it is time for
Charles to begin to see and understand. To make this happen Fowles falls back
on Jesus Christ -- he cannot use Sarah here because that would be to reveal her in
a way that would make his final endings impossibly contradictory. "A dialogue
began to form between his better and his worse self -- or perhaps between him
and that spreadyagled figure in the shadows at the church's end" (282). Because
there is no narrative irony here, because the dialogue is either between his better
self and his worse self, or between Christ and his worse self, the reader can only
take what Charles begins to see and believe about himself and Sarah as "the
truth":

'If she had truly loved you, could she have continued
to deceive'.

Sarah does love Charles because she has revealed her deceptions.

'My friend, perhaps there is one thing she loves more
than you. And what you do not understand is that
because she truly loves you she must give you the thing
she loves more. I will tell you why she weeps:
because you lack the courage to give her back her gift.'
(284)

Sarah "truly loves" Charles. She loves him so much that she gives him what she
loves even more. Herself?? Her self-respect?? He is a coward because he cannot
return the sacrifice, or cannot return her to herself by giving freely of his love to her.

He began to understand Sarah's deceit . . . . The false version of her betrayal by Vargueness, her other devices, were but stratagems to unblind him . . . (288)

Narrative voice is still completely merged here with Charles's voice, with his perceptions; we take what he "began to understand" as the truth about Sarah. Later, in the endings, we are asked to exchange this "truth" for a different one:

And perhaps he did at last begin to grasp her mystery. Some terrible perversion of human sexual destiny had begun . . . and like all battles it was not about love but about possession and territory. He saw deeper: it was not that she hated men, not that she materially despised him more than other men, but that her maneuvers were simply a part of her armory, mere instruments to a greater end." (355)

We are also told that far from being able to sacrifice herself for love that she is "a spirit prepared to sacrifice everything but itself," that she gives, not out of love, but "only to possess. . . " (364, my emphasis). This is all very different from what Charles is made to "see" back in the church in Exeter. And again, the narrator authorizes Charles's understanding: "You may think that she was right: that her battle for territory was a legitimate uprising of the invaded against the perennial invader. But what you must not think is that this is a less plausible ending to their story" (365). (This is a peculiar juxtaposition of sentences here, revealing narrative uneasiness at some level, because a reader who thinks that Sarah's
"uprising" is "legitimate," is all the more likely to take this ending as the plausible one.) And here again, probably impelled by that same uneasiness Fowles/narrator is driven to tell us what we must or must not do, directing us, denying us our freedom to decide for ourselves.

What happens between the truth as revealed in Exeter and the truth as revealed in the endings, especially the final one? Rankin explains it by telling us that "for Sarah's behavior to have any consistency whatsoever it must be allowed that she has changed between the time of her sexual encounter with Charles in Exeter and her reunion with him at the home of the Rossettis" (206, my emphasis). I don't think so. What has changed is not Sarah but what Charles needs to see and needs to do. What Charles needs to see in Exeter, at that particular moment, is the unsuitability of his match with Ernestina, and he needs to leave her -- the strength to see and do this comes from the "truth" he "sees" in Sarah. What Charles needs to see two years later, in the Rossetti house, is quite different and what he sees here "causes" the final "effect" that I suspect Fowles has been aiming for all the way along. What Sarah's final rejection of Charles forces him to see is not that his life's journey has an end that he has just forever lost -- Sarah -- but rather that it has no end -- life "is to be forever inadequately, emptily, hopelessly, into the city's iron heart, endured" (366). And Fowles signs/authorizes this second ending as the ending, outside of his novel, in the interview quoted from TS by Higdon:
But this failure to connect is the only possible historical ending to their story. We know some such vital separation at the core of the human psyche took place about this time... (Higdon, 360, my emphasis)

He essentially repeats here what Charles begins to understand about Sarah's "mystery": "some terrible perversion of human sexual destiny had begun..."

At two different moments in the novel Sarah seems to have real power, on the afternoon in the Undercliff when she tells her story to Charles, and on the afternoon of the second ending, two years later. In this first moment her explanation is consistent with what we know of her but two things bother me. First, her words and her understanding of herself are so improbably sophisticated. She has not, after all, graduated from Oxford but from a second or third rate middelclass girls boarding school in Victorian Exeter.

'You were not born a woman with a natural respect, a love of intelligence, beauty, learning... my heart craves them and I cannot believe it is all vanity.'

'Perhaps I believed I owed it to myself to appear mistress of my destiny.'

'I did it so that I should never be the same again... It was a kind of suicide... but I knew no other way to break out of what I was... What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I am truly not like other women.' (138-142)

Isabel, Tess, and Caddy should be so lucky as to be this clear about themselves.

That Sarah feels this way is utterly believable, that she is able to express herself so clearly is not.
Second, Fowles uses Sarah's words the same way he uses her eyes -- to make Charles see what he is to become. Not 30 pages later Charles begins to spout what he has learned from Sarah: 'He is overcome by "a wild determination to make some gesture that would show he was more than an ammonite stranded in a drought, that he could strike out against the dark clouds that enveloped him" (167). After his encounter with Freeman the narrator describes him as "a man struggling to overcome history"; "he could not believe that all he had wanted was worthless..." (234). And after he gives in to himself and to Sarah he feels "a uniqueness, a having done something unparalleled" (291); "... he was an outcast, not like other men, the result of a decision few could have taken..." (335).

In the second moment Sarah is again very clear:

'I had abused your trust, your generosity, I yes, I had thrown myself at you. ... A madness was in me. ... I believe I was right to destroy what had begun between us. There was a falsehood in it...’ (351)

'The rival you both share is myself. I do not wish to marry because. ... I wish to be what I am, not what a husband, however kind, however indulgent, must expect me to become in marriage’ (353)

'You do not understand. It is not your fault. You are very kind. But I am not to be understood. ... I meant that I am not to be understood even by myself. And I can't tell you why, but I believe my happiness depends on my not understanding.' (354).

The trouble for me this time is, I hate to say it, her inexplicability. I mean to say that inexplicability is fine, even as Fowles uses it -- mystery to hide a purely
structural function -- as long as it is coherent. And Sarah's inexplicability is coherent, including her sudden and complete disappearance from Charles's life, up until their reunion at the Rossetti's.

Remember that Rankin says that "it must be allowed that she has changed" but why must it be allowed? After all, Sarah hasn't been living with George Eliot, but among the Rossetti's and the Pre-Raphaelites, none of whom are known for their radically feminist politics, nor for not marrying, while they are known for their stylized, idealized portraits of women. I think here Fowles is simply sloppy. He has written himself into a corner and in order to get out of it "we must allow that Sarah has changed." There is no other point in the novel where the reader "must allow" something in Sarah in order for the novel to make sense. So Sarah's words do not seem powerful here. They are, in a way, the most transparent words she speaks in that their awkwardness is the context of a lack of coherency, calls attention to their sheer usefulness: reject Charles so that his transformation into 20th Century existential man may be completed.

There is a revealing metaphor which the narrator gives us at the end of Sarah's confession to Charles in the Undercliff: Charles is "like a man who at last comes, at the end of a long high wall, to the sought-for door . . . but only to find it locked. For several moments they stood, the woman who was the door, the man without the key . . ." (150). A door is a passive thing, it cannot open or shut of its own will because it likes you or doesn't like you. If its key is available, fine; if
it is not it cannot provide it or unlock itself. In this particular moment Sarah is the door out of Charles's prison but she is not the freedom he is to pass into.

V.

According to the narrator Sarah's ability to see her fellow human beings clearly, what he calls her "instinctual profundity of insight" is exceptional (48); it is apparently what makes her so powerful. So it is interesting to me that Sarah's presentation of herself (presented to us through the narrator) to the world is based on how others see her. In the story the narrator tells us she not only invites the world's gaze, she directs it as well, telling the world how it is to see her: "I am the French Lieutenant's Whore" (142). And her goal in this self-representation is social obligation: "I am like this thorn tree... No one reproaches it for growing here in this solitude. It is when it walks down Broad Street that it offends society" (147).

This self-conscious presentation of herself puts Sarah in the same group as Ernestina and Bella Tomkins, both of whom are presented as taking great care to present themselves to the public in a certain way in order to achieve a certain goal -- a good husband. I've already mentioned Ernestina's clothes. She takes just as much care, in the manner typically assumed to be the working method of smart young women looking for husbands, in general, in order to attract Charles's attention; showing no signs of a particular interest in him she stocks her parties
with handsome young men guaranteed to flirt with her, she monitors her parents' conversations with him, and at just the right moment she makes it quite clear exactly what she wants from him. Mrs. Tompkins, for her part, has laid careful siege not only to Charles's uncle, but also to the uncle's whole household -- an older bachelor being much harder to catch than a younger one: She "had shrewdly gone out of her way to ingratiate herself with the housekeeper and the butler; and those two worthies had set their imprimateur -- or ducatur in matrimony -- upon the plump and effusive widow; who furthermore had . . . remarked to the housekeeper how excellent a nursery" a certain set of rooms would make. And she makes sure to tip well (170).

Grogan's presentation of Sarah's presentation takes it from the moral realm -- a thorn tree in society's side -- to a more practical/emotional level:

I am a young woman of superior intelligence and some education... I have fallen in love with being a victim of fate. I put out a very professional line in the way of looking melancholy. I have tragic eyes... enter a young god. Intelligent. Good-looking. A perfect specimen of that class my education has taught me to admire. I see he is interested in me. The sadder I seem, the more interested he appears to be... Now I am very poor. I can use none of the wiles the more fortunate of my sex employ to lure mankind into their power... I have but one weapon. The pity I inspire in this kindhearted man. (177-178)

Charles's and the reader's eventual denial of Grogan's interpretation results from this interpretation being immediately coupled with the extreme medical and legal cases which Grogan presents to Charles to read. Their extremity -- the women's
obvious neurosis held up against Sarah's complete lack of hysteria -- along with subtle directions from Fowles/narrator works to deny on the narrative surface what the Doctor has implied. If Grogan had instead offered Charles an account of Ernestina's or Bella's manoeuvrings the similarities would have been apparent.

Actually, if you look at what Sarah says and at what is said about her you can see that half of it is directed at presenting her in a certain type of attractive light guaranteed to draw the attention of someone like Charles while the other half makes it clear that the narrator assumes that she wants a husband and gives her the words to prove it. Like Ernestina, we are told that she not only wants to marry, she wants to marry up, (as do Bella and Mary): Her father has "forced her out of her own class, but could not raise her to the next. To the young men of the one she had left she had become too select to marry; to those of the one she aspired to, she remained too banal" (48, my emphasis). "Why am I born what I am? Why am I not born Miss Freeman?" (116). She is vulnerable to the French Lieutenant because he flatters her in a way that links marriage to her looks: "He was very handsome. No man had ever paid me the kind of attentions that he did. . . . He told me foolish things about myself. That he could not understand why I was not married. Such things. I foolishly believed him. . . ." (137). She wants a home and a family: "... to live each day in scenes of domestic happiness, the closest spectator of a happy marriage, home, adorable children. . . . It came to seem to me as if I were allowed to live in a paradise but forbidden to enjoy it" (138). And she is very clear about what she had hoped for with Charles: "You
have given me the consolation of believing that in another world, another age, another life, I might have been your wife" (278-279).

Ernestina and Sarah both launch well planned campaigns in order to win Charles. The difference is that the narrator presents one in exactly this way, and presents the other as something quite extraordinarily the opposite. But when Charles, finding blood on his shirt, thinks that he has "forced a virgin" there is a great deal of unseen irony in the fear "of a great feminine conspiracy" that is revealed by his and Fowles's attempt, with this clichéd phrase, to reassert his masculine control of the situation and to put him, so to speak, back on top.

What the narrative reveals is that Sarah not only wants Charles to make love to her but has plotted to put him into a situation which will make him vulnerable to doing just that. Once Charles is with her, alone, it is Sarah who makes the moves and signals which bring them together into the bed:

... he could not keep his eyes from hers. There was gratitude in them, and all the old sadness, and a strange concern,... but above all she was waiting. Infinitely timid, yet waiting... then, as if by an instinctive gesture, yet one she half dared to calculate, her hand reached shyly out and rested on his. (273, my emphasis)

When Charles pulls back from their passionate kiss "her arms came round him and pressed his head closer" (273). And this is not a description of someone forcing a virgin: "... he drew up her nightgown. Her legs parted... her arms
flung round as if she would bind him to her for that eternity he could not dream without her" (274, my emphasis).

Much, much earlier, back in the Undercliff, Sarah has already made everything quite clear: "She looked up then . . . with a declaration so unmistakable that words were needless; with a nakedness that made any evasion . . . impossible" (199). This look of Sarah's finds its twin in the look delivered by Ernestina at the specific moment she has decided on to reveal her intentions to Charles, and the true feelings of the writer/narrator lie in the parallel he chooses to suggest between what Ernestina does and what prostitutes do: "her eyes had for the briefest moment made it clear that she made an offer; as unmistakable, in its way, as those made by the women who in the London of the time haunted the doorways round the Haymarket" (169). Remember too that it is the apparently harmless little Ernestina who keeps Charles from leaving her side, several times, until he has bought his freedom with a kiss.

So, is Culler's "suppressed" and "reinscribed" drama here simply the story of how Sarah tried and failed to catch Charles as a husband instead of what most critics believe -- that Sarah uses "her stratagems of deceit and betrayal both in order to protect her freedom and as a way of unblinding her lover to the prudish inadequacy of Victorian judgement" (Haegert, 161), which just happens to be a tidy combination of the "truths" that Charles "sees" in Exeter and at the Rossetti's. I think the answer is yes, if we insert Fowles/narrator where he has already,
perhaps unwittingly, inserted himself, into the position of primary actor in this reinscribed drama.

The writer's/narrator's language, first and foremost, both constructs and reveals himself and what Fowles reveals here, in spite of all his talk of freedom, choices, existentialism, chance, hazard, is his fear that he is not free, that he has no choice, that it is not Chance and his creative ability to respond to it which makes him, but rather Woman, "those loathsome succubi." Thomas Hardy wrote a novel which effectively allowed him to control what he seemed to fear most controlled him -- Chance/Fate. Fowles has done the same. In both cases the thing that is most feared is acted out in the surface drama on another person -- Tess's life is ruled and destroyed by careless fate, Charles is manipulated, victimized by Sarah -- all the while it is really controlled by the author. More specifically, Fowles writes a novel where he makes a woman, and then makes her do what he wants her to do -- which is to make someone else -- Charles, the man who is finally immune to all of woman's tricks and traps and designs.
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