CHAPTER VII
THE SUMMING UP

Henry James had turned to the Feminist Consciousness theme because of a conjunction of several factors: his unique personal experience, his preference, at the beginning of his career for the novel of manners and the particular historical moment when he began writing fiction. But above all, however, was his impulse reaching far back in the history of the nation to define and express the identity of the American. From Washington Irving onwards, literary writers like James Fenimore Cooper had sought to identify the American by planting him in American wilderness. Mark Twain had recognized the American as Huckleberry Finn and dramatized, in his journey down the river of American society, his innocence, his maturing and his moral independence.

James took his American to Europe to discover their national uniqueness in juxtaposition with an old and established order. He chose his Americans from different walks of life; lawyers, journalists, businessmen and, above all, the American girl. His Americans were crude like Christopher Newan and elegant like Isabel Archer; they were morally stupid like George Flack and extremely orthodox like way marsh, but they were also morally sensitive and liberal in outlook like Lambert Stretcher. In sum, he created a vast and richly varied gallery of American characters and set them to reveal their essential characteristics in diverse situations in Europe.
His Feminist Consciousness theme yielded rich results and James came to be regarded as one of the greatest writers of Feminist Consciousness fiction. The treatment of the Feminist Consciousness theme in James’s fiction is wide ranging and multifaceted and includes both the comic and the tragic aspects of the contact of the old and the new world. For instance in ‘Daisy Miller’ the story of the passive American mother in search of a proper match for her daughter, Daisy, has comic undercurrent. On the other hand in The Portrait of a Lady’ and The Wings of the Dove, the agony of the American girls in pursuit of intellectual sophistication, elegance and experience assumes poignant and tragic proportions. In most of his Feminist Consciousness novels James repast the demand made by Kate Croy in ‘The Wings of the Dove’; “Why should a set of people have been put in motion, on such a scale and with such an air of being equipped for a profitable journey, only to break without an accident, to stretch themselves in the wayside dust without a reason?” (12). He thus attempts to combine the relevant qualities of tragedy and the novel in the most appropriate measures.

Isabel Archer’s tragedy is very well summarized by dying Ralph Touchett who says: “You wanted to look at life for yourself but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the convention” (145). Her tragedy lies in the conflict between form and freedom and we find her all the time trying to define herself in the world of Europe. In this world of appearances she has to find out that form which is the most appropriate for her.
Isabel's sense of freedom and her fondness for her liberty are the most important characteristics of which we become aware in the beginning of the novel. She is independent and the fact is revealed in her conversation with Caspar Goodwood when she says:

"I'm not in my first youth—I can do what I choose I belong quite to the independent class...... 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" (149).

She is determined to choose her own fate and hopes that she can thus avoid suffering. But when she chooses Gilbert Osmond, her freedom is quickly and dramatically proved to be an illusion. Isabel, unlike Henrietta Stackpole, lover Europe and in accepting Gilbert Osmond's proposal, she accepts a man who has rejected his native America for the older civilization of Italy. Goodwood has been rejected and it is only Osmond who can satisfy Isabel's requirements.

Isabel's freedom is, therefore, proved to be an illusion. She comes to know that Madame Merle, her husband's mistress, had planned Isabel's marriage to Osmond as a means to improving his fortunes. But she must come to realized that freedom in its purest form is not to be found at all. All that is possible in life is a limited kind of freedom. She returns to Osmond not in conformity to his idea of form; not because she needs to keep faith with him, but with herself. She had chosen her destiny for herself and therefore she must accept it.
The story of the novel comes to an end but it appears that Isabel's journey, is not over. James himself says in the preface that the novel has “an architectural competence” which makes it “the most proportioned” of all his “productions” apart from *The Ambassadors*. He is not suggesting that he has finished his story of Isabel Archer. In her return to Italy there is something of the traditional concept of spiritual triumph through death. Her renunciation of her physical freedom and her renouncing of her own desires, constitutes a kind of death of the flesh through which her soul triumphs. In aesthetic terms this is both the climax and the end. At the end for the novel, thus, Isabel is much changed; she has retained her pride, determination and natural nobility of character but she has lost a good many of her naïve illusions about life.

*The wings of the Dove* is a novel which is focused on Milly Theale’s death and as such James is aware of following the dominant tragic tradition, “as if to be menaced with death or danger hadn’t been from immemorial, for heroine or how, the very shortest of all cute to the interesting state.” (56) Milly’s possible death is increasingly the most important fact about her. James himself is not clear as to when the idea of the novel came to him but it must have been with him ever since the death in 1870 of his beloved cousin, Minny Temple. He recalls in the preface that “the idea, reduced to its essence, is that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamored of the world; aware moreover of the condemnation and passionately desiring to ‘put in’ before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as
possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived.” Milly Theale, like Isabel, is once again the young American heroine of whom James was so fond. She is typically innocent and has a desire to live. She is independent and her wealth makes her “the potential heiress of all the ages” (72). This combination of features, and especially her gentleness, her wealth and her lack of family makes her a vulnerable prey to the schemers with whom she comes into contact in Europe. Kate Croy and Densher decide to make use of her for their own happiness. They are all after her and her tragedy is that with all her vulnerable virtues she is unprepared to cope with London and the world. She not only dies but also suffers in her love. Her death is not dramatized, but reported and while using Kate and Densher to present Milly’s tragedy, James suggests the nature of their own, which is bound up with their meeting with a life which could not be assimilated by theirs. In this ending James combines the traditional tragic note with a concept of tragedy which is more characteristically his own. The wings of the Dove’ thus closely resembles ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ in theme. Milly’s nobility and Isabel’s loyalty help both in their triumph over the dubious morality and unscrupulous intrigue of the world of Europe.

The Feminist Consciousness theme, implying confrontation between the two worlds, ends, in his later novels on a note of reconciliation and harmony. Some of his earlier novels like The American (1877) and The Portrait of a Lady (1881) seem to depict the two words as irreconcilable opposites. In no novel is the Feminist Consciousness issue more fully presented than in the story of Christopher Newan, a
self made wealthy American, whose experiences in France are used to define the contrast between the two civilizations. We are always aware of the contrast between the two worlds. And again ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ carries the theme about as far as it will go on the level of cultural contrasts. This was James’s first major novel which had a theme that had occupied him increasingly during his long apprenticeship: the American innocent involved in the Feminist Consciousness situation. In Isabel herself and in the men whom she meets on her journey to self realization, James has presented almost every degree and kind of cultural differences from the rashness of the American Casper Goodwood to the subtlety and corruption of the Europeanized Gilbert Osmond, including the blunt British honesty of Lord Warburton and the sensibility of Ralph Touchett who plays the role of an observer. We are reminded of similar sentiments expressed in ‘Traveling Companions’ a short story which was composed after his return from Europe in the year 1870. It is the story of a typical American aboard and James himself says:

‘He (Mr. Evans) was in many ways in excellent representative American. Without taste, without culture or polish, he nevertheless produced an impression of substance in character, keenness in perception, and intensity in will, which effectually redeemed him from vulgarity. It often seemed to me in fact, that his good-humoured tolerance and …. Fearlessness of either gods or men combined in proportions of which the union might have been very fairly termed aristocratic.” (243)

We know more about the contrast when the American couple looks out from a top the roof of the Milan cathedral at the snow capped peak of monte Rosa: “She
represents the genius of the North. There she stands, frozen and fixed, resting her head upon that mountain wall, looking over at this lovely southern world and yearning towards it forever in vain.” (256)

But, on the contrary, in the later novels we find James with a completely changed outlook. ‘The Ambassadors’ (1903), ‘The Wings of the Dove’ (1902), and ‘The Golden Bowl’ (1904) are regarded as the summit of his achievement. He had once again returned to his early theme of the American in Europe but this time with an enlarged vision. This vision of James had helped him to analyze the situation objectively and them with which he was so concerned comes to end on a note of harmony and reconciliation.

The Ambassadors is the story of Lambert Stretcher, a middle aged American who goes to Paris to bring back to Massachusetts a wealthy young man who, in his view of his family has stayed too long abroad. Stretcher in the end is captivated by civilized Parisian life. He ‘had absolutely become, himself, with his perceptions and his mistakes, his concessions and his reserves, the ridiculous mixture ....of his braveries and his fears, the general spectacle of his art and his innocence, almost an added link, and certainly a common, priceless ground for them to meet upon”(347). This gradual conversion in Stretcher suggests a possible synthesis of Woollett ethics with Parisian aesthetics. The novel, thus, becomes a study in the growth of perception and awareness in stretcher. James, perhaps, wants to suggest the possibility of enjoying the fruits of culture without abandoning one’s moral values. ‘The Golden Bowl’ similarly suggests reconciliation and distinctly holds out to us the
promise of a happy and successful union of the American and the European. It is a novel that achieves a compromise towards which all of James's stories on the Feminist Consciousness theme seem to have been striving.

*The Golden Bowl* was James' last Feminist Consciousness novel and he had realized that the feminist consciousness theme was a limited subject. He also realized that underneath the surface of national differences lie the universals of human nature which offer profounder and more durable material for fiction than cultural contrast. ‘Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie’ (1900) was his last Feminist Consciousness tale and reminds us of the situations in Daisy Miller' and An Feminist Consciousness Episode' which shows that the theme of cultural contrast had been exhausted. And yet the theme had acquired such a success with James that at least one more novelist was to turn off it.

Edith Wharton had turned to the Feminist Consciousness theme because like James, her own experience made the subject easily available to her, and like early James her predilections were for the novel of manners. Like James, however, she began with American themes and her first volume of stories ‘The Greater Inclination’ (1899), treated mainly American subjects. After a number of non Feminist Consciousness stories she wrote *The House of Mirth* (1905), a novel dealing with the Franco American theme to which she was to return repeatedly. James had demonstrated convincingly the interest and possibilities of the Feminist Consciousness subject; but there was a basic difference between James' choice of the subject and Mrs. Wharton's. James was exploring an almost fresh field but Mrs.
Wharton, with her publication of Madame de Treymes' (1907), was taking up a subject that James had thoroughly exhausted. The difference is evident throughout Mrs. Wharton’s story which is full of echoes from *The American*.

*The Reef* (1912) is not an Feminist Consciousness novel because its functional character are all Americans and Europe in the book serves only as a stage, without any significance to the action of the story. Similarly in *Marne* (1908) she turned to the same theme, but it was now a subject that had been completely exhausted. F. Scott Fitzgerald also locates the action of some of his stories and one major novel *Tender is the Night* (1934) in Europe. But Europe in the novel affects neither the characters nor the action in any significant way. There is no contrast of national manners in the novel and the story is interesting only as an event in the history of the Feminist Consciousness theme after James.

Unlike Mrs. Wharton, whose best work is not set in Europe, and Fitzgerald, whose major novels, except *Tender is the Night*, are set in America, Ernest Hemingway’s three major novels *The sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and a number of his stories are placed in Europe. One or more of the major characters in these novels, moreover, is European. Europe, however, plays no significant part in the revelation and shaping of characters. The European setting in these novels, whether on the battlefields in Italy and Spain, or in the cafes of Paris, has on essential relevance either to the story or to the fundamental crises in the characters’ lives. Italy and Switzerland in ‘A Farewell to Arms’, for example only function as landscapes of war and peace. The
European characters in these novels, similarly, are significant not as Europeans but as exemplars of the same emotional and psychological predicament as the American characters. The reason, then, for Hemingway’s choice of European settings seems to be that once he had decided on war and the lost generation as his objective correlatives, Europe seemed to him to be the most appropriate stage for his novels. Christ of Weglin cites the famous words of a character in *Death in the Afternoon*:

> “Madame, there is not remedy for anything in life”. He further concludes from this remark that ‘in such knowledge, national differences of any kind were submerged and the fiction which grew from it had to all intents and purposes ceased to be Feminist Consciousness.” (226)

In the fiction of James however, the Feminist Consciousness theme has a supreme importance and he in his later novels pleads for mellowness, tolerance, harmony, cosmopolitanism and charity. He is also aware of the complexity of values in both the old and the New World which alike present a mixed web of merits and demerits and sympathetic understanding of each other’s cultural standards. His Feminist Consciousness theme had acquired a great interest and success at his hands and its treatment in the novels is marked by James's insight, realism, breadth of vision and subtlety. The theme is singularly free from partisanship and parochialism. James began his career as a representation list whose ‘cosmopolitan self had found fulfillment” in Europe. Leon Edel very rightly sums up James’s achievements in the world of fiction:
“For half a century, Henry James had created a singular literary monument of novels, tales, plays, criticism.... And..... was the one major writer who...managed to safeguard a large reputation and live by his pen....James, more esoteric' than any of the others by prodigious literary energy and unflagging artistry, made an independent' go' of his writing....James was the complete artist ...since 1950 the world has accepted him as a classic. Washington square is read in Moscow, the Italians, the Germans, and the French have...translated his difficult prose. Like T.S. Eliot, who followed his example and became the poetic counterpart of what James was in fiction, he continues to speak to the late 20th Century of man as a creature capable of the finer grain".....His novels are everywhere ...he belongs now to the permanence of American literature." (245)

He is, indeed, the greatest artist who ever became a novelist and will remain the prototype of the American writer who devoted his entire life to his art. Henry James had turned to the Feminist Consciousness theme because of a conjunction of several factors: his unique personal experience, his preference, at the beginning of his career for the novel of manners and the particular historical moment when he began writing fiction. But above all, however, was his impulse reaching far back in the history of the nation to define and express the identity of the American. From Washington Irving onwards, literary writers like James Fenimore Cooper had sought to identify the American by planting him in American wilderness. Mark Twin had recognized the American as Huckleberry finn and dramatized, in his journey down the river of American society, his innocence, his maturing and his moral independence.
James took his American to Europe to discover their national uniqueness in juxtaposition with an old and established order. He chose his Americans from different walks of life; lawyers, journalists, businessmen and, above all, the American girl. His Americans were crude like Christopher Newan and elegant like Isabel Archer; they were morally stupid like George Flack and extremely orthodox like way marsh, but they were also morally sensitive and liberal in outlook like Lambert Stretcher. In sum, he created a vast and richly varied gallery of American characters and set them to reveal their essential characteristics in diverse situations in Europe. His Feminist Consciousness theme yielded rich results and James came to be regarded as one of the greatest writers of Feminist Consciousness fiction.

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death in 1870 of his beloved cousin, Minny Temple.

He recalls in the preface that “the idea, reduced to its essence, is that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamored of the world; aware moreover of the condemnation and passionately desiring to ‘put in’ before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived.”(218) Milly Theale, like Isabel, is once again the young American heroine of whom James was so fond. She is typically innocent and has a desire to live. She is independent and her wealth makes her “the potential heiress of all the ages” (72). This combination of features, and especially her gentleness, her wealth and her lack family makes her a vulnerable prey to the schemers with whom she comes into contact in Europe. Kate Croy and Densher decide to make use of her for their own happiness. They are all after her and her tragedy is that with all her vulnerable virtues she is unprepared to cope with London and the world. She not only dies but also suffers in her love. Her death is not dramatized, but reported and while using Kate and Densher to present Milly’s tragedy, James suggests the nature of their own, which is bound up with their meeting with a life which could not be assimilated by theirs. In this ending James combines the traditional tragic note with a concept of tragedy which is more characteristically his own. The Wings of the Dove’ thus closely resembles ‘The
Portrait of a Lady’ in theme. Milly’s nobility and Isabel's loyalty help both in their triumph over the dubious morality and unscrupulous intrigue of the world of Europe.

The Feminist Consciousness theme, implying confrontation between the two worlds, ends, in his later novels on a note of reconciliation and harmony. Some of his earlier novels like *The American* (1877) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) seem to depict the two words as irreconcilable opposites. In no novel is the Feminist Consciousness issue more fully presented than in the story of Christopher Newan, a self made wealthy American, whose experiences in France are used to define the contrast between the two civilizations. We are always aware of the contrast between the two worlds. And again *The Portrait of a Lady* carries the theme about as far as it will go on the level of cultural contrasts. This was James's first major novel which had a theme that had occupied him increasingly during his long apprenticeship: the American innocent involved in the Feminist Consciousness situation. In Isabel herself and in the men whom she meets on her journey to self realization, James has presented almost every degree and kind of cultural differences from the rashness of the American Casper Goodwood to the subtlety and corruption of the Europeanized Gilbert Osmond, including the blunt British honesty of Lord Warburton and the sensibility of Ralph Touchett who plays the role of an observer. We are reminded of similar sentiments expressed in *Traveling Companions* a short story which was composed after his return from Europe in the year 1870. It is the story of a typical American aboard and James himself says:

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We know more about the contrast when the American couple looks out from a top the roof of the Milan cathedral at the snow capped peak of monte Rosa: “She represents the genius of the North. There she stands, frozen and fixed, resting her head upon that mountain wall, looking over at this lovely southern world and yearning towards it forever in vain.” (215) But, on the contrary, in the later novels we find James with a completely changed outlook. ‘The Ambassadors’ (1903), ‘The Wings of the Dove’ (1902), and ‘The Golden Bowl’ (1904) are regarded as the summit of his achievement. He had once again returned to his early theme of the American in Europe but this time with an enlarged vision. This vision of James had helped him to analyze the situation objectively and them with which he was so concerned comes to end on a note of harmony and reconciliation.

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*The Golden Bowl* was James’ last Feminist Consciousness novel and he had realized that the Feminist Consciousness theme was a limited subject. He also realized that underneath the surface of national differences lie the universals of human nature which offer profounder and more durable material for fiction than cultural contrast. ‘Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie’ (1900) was his last Feminist Consciousness tale and reminds us of the situations in *Daisy Miller*’ and *An Feminist Consciousness Episode*’ which shows that the theme of cultural contrast had been exhausted.

And yet the theme had acquired such a success with James that at least one more novelist was to turn off it. Edith Wharton had turned to the Feminist Consciousness theme because like James, her own experience made the subject easily available to her, and like early James her predilections were for the novel of manners. Like James, however, she began with American themes and her first volume of stories ‘*The Greater Inclination*’ (1899), treated mainly American subjects. After a number of non Feminist Consciousness stories she wrote ‘*The House of
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The difference is evident throughout Mrs. Wharton's story which is full of echoes from The American. The Reef (1912) is not a Feminist Consciousness novel because its functional character are all Americans and Europe in the book serves only as a stage, without any significance to the action of the story. Similarly in Marne (1908) she turned to the same theme, but it was now a subject that had been completely exhausted.

F. Scott Fitzgerald also locates the action of some of his stories and one major novel Tender is the Night (1934) in Europe. But Europe in the novel affects neither the characters nor the action in any significant way. There is no contrast of national manners in the novel and the story is interesting only as an event in the history of the Feminist Consciousness theme after James.

Unlike Mrs. Wharton, whose best work is not set in Europe, and Fitzgerald, whose major novels, except Tender is the Night, are set in America, Ernest Hemingway's three major novels The sun Also Rises (1926), A Farewell to Arms (1929) and For Whom The Bell Tolls (1940) and a number of his stories are placed in Europe. One or more of the major characters in these novels, moreover, is
European. Europe, however, plays no significant part in the revelation and shaping of characters. The European setting in these novels, whether on the battlefields in Italy and Spain, or in the cafes of Paris, has on essential relevance either to the story or to the fundamental crises in the characters’ lives.

Italy and Switzerland in *A Farewell to Arms*, for example only function as landscapes of war and peace. The European characters in these novels, similarly, are significant not as Europeans but as exemplars of the same emotional and psychological predicament as the American characters. The reason, then, for Hemingway’s choice of European settings seems to be that once he had decided on war and the lost generation as his objective correlatives, Europe seemed to him to be the most appropriate stage for his novels.

Christ of Weglin cites the famous words of a character in *Death in the Afternoon*: “Madame, there is not remedy for anything in life”. He further concludes from this remark that ‘in such knowledge, national differences of any kind were submerged and the fiction which grew from it had to all intents and purposes ceased to be Feminist Consciousness.’ (256)

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hands and its treatment in the novels is marked by James's insight, realism, breadth of vision and subtlety. The theme is singularly free from partisanship and parochialism. So we can say that Henry James presented the feminist consciousness in his novels with the American panorama of his age.
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