THE MAKING OF A HEROINE:

A Study of The Madonna of the Future (1875),
Daisy Miller (1879) and Mme. De Mauves (1875)

Throughout his career, Henry James had an over-riding sense that the fact of his being an American was a distinctive quality, sometimes a negative one but always a challenge to be unique. Most of his memorable protagonists are Americans or at least of American origins. The sense of this distinctiveness or separateness was always vis-à-vis the old civilization of Europe. Commenting on the new vigour of the emerging nation he wrote,

It is a complex fate being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitions valuation of Europe.... We are American born, I look upon it as a great blessing, and I think that to be an American is an excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to be that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them, we can deal with forms of civilization not our own. We must of course have something distinctive and homogenous and I take it that we shall find it in our unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigour.¹

This then will be the intellectual background against which the tales *The Madonna of the Future, Daisy Miller* and *Madame de Maupes* will be discussed in this chapter. These can be taken as the blueprint for James's concept of a heroine and in the formulation of his "intentions" in them one can see the author's initial statements about the aesthetic-moral code of life which he explores through the careers of his heroines. The transcendent idealization of *The Madonna of the Future*, the naivete of the American princess-type heiress in *Daisy Miller* and the narrow conventionality of her own kind abroad in the same story and the victimization of the innocent American heiress by her corrupt French husband in *Madame de Maupes* are the seeds which blossomed into James's mature works later about similar heroines. The study of James's heroines can best be conducted in the light of the following statement by Philip Rahv.

Henry James is not fully represented in his novels by any one single character, but of his principal heroine it can be said that she makes the most of his vision and dominates his drama of transatlantic relations. This young woman is his favorite American type, appearing in his work time and again under various names and in various situations that can be taken as so many stages in her career. Hence it is in the line of her development that we must
study her. Her case involves a principle of growth which is not to be completely grasped until she has assumed her final shape.  

In analysing the "principle of growth" in the heroines of Henry James, one has to bear in mind two important points. First, the implications of this principle are that there are higher values than mere social accomplishments and acquirements, and that in life these are the most important moral values. Second, that James's internationalism has always been 'secondary' to dramatizing moral distinctions because he felt that only in a cosmopolitan setting the moral values of two distinct outlooks on life could be portrayed. Therefore the internationalism of his novels can be said to be a means to an end.

Almost all of James's memorable heroines have been American girls exuding both elements of naivete and innocence as well as a keen sense of moral consciousness. A remark by Frederick J. Hoffman seems to point to an essential truth about the Jamesian heroine. "The best of James's Americans are metaphorical figures, seeking

the finest opportunities for actualizing their insights". (p.275) The study and exploration of these 'insights' constitutes an important aspect of the development of the Jamesian heroine. Hoffman continues in the same article, "This is why the American consciousness, which is in itself really more naive than "free", needs to experience the fixed and established European world, but above all needs desperately an occasion that will challenge its spirit without merely indulging it". (p.278).

However, the 'freedom' that these heroines possess is initially presented as their being heiresses in the literal sense. The material well-being thus affords them the 'opportunities for actualizing their insights' or 'dreams' or whatever one chooses to call them.

The inclusion of The Madonna of the Future in a study of the heroine's 'development' may at first glance seem incongruous but this tale may be taken as a metaphor for James's life-long pre-occupation with the creation of an ideal heroine. And this ideal heroine would be an American heiress - princess type who would finally prove the "superiority" of the American "moral consciousness" and would be able to deal with a civilization which is not hers but nevertheless over which she has established her own mastery.
The 'heroine' of *The Madonna of the Future* is as yet only a concept and an ideal in the mind and imagination of "poor Theobald" an expatriate American painter living in Florence, nursing a fantastic dream of creating on canvas a perfect madonna "breathing truth and beauty and mastery" which his friend playfully designates as The Madonna of the Future. The narrator in the story describes Theobald thus,

It amused me vastly at times to think that he was of our shrewd yankee race; but after all, there would be no better token of his American origin than this same fantastic fever. The very heat of his devotion was a sign of conversion; those born to European opportunity manages better to reconcile enthusiasm with comfort. He had moreover, all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion and our native relish for sonorous superlatives. (MF p.212)

Long before he wrote this tale, he wrote to his mother in 1869 comparing Americans with Englishmen.

On the other hand, we seem a people of character, we seem to have energy, capacity and intellectual stuff in ample measure. What I have pointed out as our vices are the elements of the modern man with 'culture' quite left out. It's the absolute and incredible lack of culture that strikes you in common travelling Americans.5

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Theobald here then is the archetypal 'travelling American' whose naive enthusiasm about his project borders on the ridiculous. However, the main point of the story is the "dream" of Theobald the artist and the irony inherent in the apparent incongruity between his ideal woman and the real one on whom he has based his dreams. The woman of this artist's dream is no ordinary woman - she is to be the madonna, the eternal virgin, symbol of innocence and purity. The realization of this dream would not only create the ultimate symbol of womanhood, embodying perfection of form, attractiveness and even seductiveness, it would also mean the ultimate in artistic achievement for Theobald. He would, in fact, in drawing the madonna, create his masterpiece.

Theobald's "sonorous superlatives' regarding his madonna only highlight the fact that he has idealized the model for his masterpiece beyond recognition. He claims that this woman is "a beauty with a soul" - "the most beautiful woman in Italy." In reality, "the most beautiful woman in Italy" is "broad and ample, low-browed and large-eyed, dark and pale" yet certainly one, whose beauty the passage of time has not been able to
stamp out completely. This woman so blindly and
naively idealized by Theobald is a shrewd and practical
woman of the world. When confronted by the narrator
one time in her true surroundings, she states her
philosophy of life in a very matter of fact way.

In this hard world, one mustn't ask too
many questions; one must take what comes
and keep what one gets. I've kept my
good friend [meaning Theobald] for
twenty years and I do hope that at this
time of day signore, you've not come to
turn him against me. (MF p.225).

In her own way she has helped keep Theobald's dream alive
in order to extract what material gains she can out of
the whole situation.

This model for the Blessed Virgin is more than
a friend of the man with whom she is seen by Theobald
and the pair of them are engaged in the mass production
of cheap statuettes for sale to the hordes of tourists
visiting Florence, the home of Michael Angelo. The sheer
incongruity and futility of Theobald's artistic zeal
and idealism is made obvious by the popularity of the
statuettes of cats and monkeys peddled by Serafina and
her gentleman friend.

Everyone who knows Theobald, thinks him a
slightly mad artist who lives a fantastic dream. And
it is inevitable that he too should one day face the naked truth of his dismal failure as an artist. When that day comes, he is unable to take in the hard facts of reality and his death is only a logical exit for so much naivete' and idealism.

The Madonna of the Future exists purely on the plane of the ideal, with few incidents of actual life. Theobald's idealism and artistic dream is a hypothesis and his death a mere academic conclusion to it. Yet, there is enough force in the argument to activate the reader's imagination to the awareness that it is not Theobald's lack of artistic talent which defeats and destroys him in the end but that it is his complete lack of comprehension of the realities of life which eventually kills him. Perfection of any sort is an impossibility in the "felt" and "lived" life of flesh and blood and any unrealistic pursuit of it is bound to end in disaster - like the disaster for Theobald's "transcendent illusions."

In his exuberance, enthusiasm and artistic pronouncements, there is a hint of the superficiality which is the hallmark of any imitator. Theobald, the expatriate American in search of art, culture and civilization in Europe is an imitator of the old masters
of Europe, by which he acknowledges the superiority of the old civilization. He is so consumed by his idealization that he fails to understand the ways of the practical life of the people among whom he has lived so long.

In Theobald's idealization of the model for his madonna and the glaring disparity between this and the actual facts about her, one can sense the author's ironical comment on the European civilization that Americans so fervently, so devotedly and often blindly pursue. The decadence of this older civilization so subtly hinted at through the life of Serafina, would victimize American naivete and innocence time and again in James's later fiction.

As a study of such a sensibility combining naivete and innocence, Daisy Miller (1878) stands out as a timeless index of James's concept of the American heroine as the heiress-princess type. In this brief but brilliant study we see the blueprint as it were, for all the heroines that were to follow and who were of course to be more fully rounded characters. Perhaps sensing a certain lack of full expansion in Daisy Miller, James makes a justificatory remark, after a lapse of 31 years since the story was first published, that "my supposedly
typical little figure was of course pure poetry and had never been anything else.\(^6\)

No matter what the author intended her to be, it is an undeniable fact that Daisy Miller is an unsophisticated, uncultured girl who on the strength of her father's riches is holidaying in the continent in order to imbibe what culture and education she can, through actual contact with the older civilization. The world into which Daisy has been transported can best be described in Cargill's words as "one in which a character usually guided in his actions by the mores of one environment, is set down in another, where he must employ all his individual resources to meet successive situations where he must intelligently accommodate himself to the new mores, or in one way or another, be destroyed."\(^7\) The "individual resources" which may mean a cultural background or even family tradition seem to be consciously absent from Daisy's life. The deportment of her brother, and her mother's passive helplessness are indication enough of their lack of tradition and breeding. She herself is a very ignorant, very innocent girl. Her

\(^6\)Henry James, Preface to *Daisy Miller*, from The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), XVIII, V-VIII.

concept of society therefore is very superficial -
going to parties, wearing smart dresses, being given
dinners and having "gentlemen" friends is her idea of
high society, the absence of which in the small Swiss
town she deplores. In the "nouveau rich" society of
Schenectady and occasionally of New York, Daisy has
very little chance of learning about 'society', that
class-ridden conglomerate of the old titled and often
monied families of Europe whose cardinal rule of living
is the proper manner of doing things.

Through an ironic twist, a representative of
such a sensibility is Mrs Costello, an expatriate
American herself, who thoroughly disapproves of Daisy's
free and easy way of mixing with people, her complete
lack of inhibition in her association with men and her
failure to insist upon the class distinction of the
paid servant Eugenio. In her eyes, whatever is coarse,
vulgar, loud and unmannerly can be equated to being
"bad". But on this point, her nephew, Frederick
Winterbourne, takes up for the Millers and says, "They
are very ignorant, very innocent only. Depend upon it
they are not bad."8

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8 Henry James, Daisy Miller, from Great Short Works
of Henry James, Introduction by Dean Flower, (A Perennial
subsequent references are to this edition, cited as D.M.
This remark perhaps sums up Daisy Miller's situation. Her fate, as Henry James takes care to underline, is the result, not only of her innocence, but also of her ignorance, lack of awareness and self-knowledge. Her ignorance of correct social behavior is understandable because her mother, who otherwise would have groomed her daughter in this, is herself a very ignorant, unsophisticated person, insensitive to the subtle undercurrents and innuendoes of social intercourse. This becomes apparent when she is seen talking at cross-purposes with Mrs. Walker during the latter's party. Mrs. Miller tells the hostess that Daisy will be coming in only later as she was busy at the piano with Mr. Giovanelli. Mrs. Walker replies, "I'm sorry that she should come in that way". Mrs. Miller completely fails to take in the innuendo in the remark and instead replies, "Well, I told her that there was no use in her getting dressed before dinner if she was going to wait three hours. I didn't see the use of her putting on such a dress as that to sit around with Mr. Giovanelli" (D.M., p.40). She displays the same insensibility at the end of the party too. Daisy's seemingly unpardonable behavior at the party makes Mrs. Walker vow that she will never invite her again to her house and she snubs Daisy publicly.
Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker are typical of the expatriate Americans who bring on their harshest indictment against Daisy. These pseudo-sophisticates disown her, disparage her and publicly disgrace her as Mrs. Walker did. "They ceased to invite her; and they intimated that they desired to express to observant Europeans the great truth that though Miss Daisy Miller was a young American lady, her behavior was not representative - was regarded by her compatriots as abnormal" (D.M. p.47). Even Winterbourne, who is a sort of a champion for the Millers, begins to grow quite critical about her behavior and resents the fact that he tries to 'chop logic' about this young, irresponsible and reckless girl. Yet he wonders whether she is not "too light and childish, too uncultivated and unreasoning, too provincial to have reflected upon her ostracism or even to have perceived it" (D.M, p.47). He goes on to think that holding one-self to a belief in Daisy's "innocence" was "more and more a matter of fine-spun gallantry".(ibid).

Winterbourne's mixed reaction to Daisy is partly due to her own "reckless" behavior as well as to the fact that he is not an impartial observer. He entertains a secret admiration for her which he cannot
articulate because of his self-righteous and superior estimate of himself. He takes on the supercilious attitude of the initiate towards a novice - he thinks that because of his long exposure to the older civilization of Europe, he can deign to look down on Daisy and her kind as some country bumpkins come to a metropolis to gawk at the alien culture. His view of Daisy's personality is myopic because he tries to reduce a phenomenon as complex as a human being to a string of certitudes and decide that her "eccentricities" as he calls them may be taken for something "generic" or "national". In taking such an attitude towards Daisy, however personal his observations are, Winterbourne identifies himself with all the others like Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker who tend to think that "good manners" may be an index to a person's moral integrity.

Daisy Miller is both a symbol as well as a product of the emerging awareness of a new culture, a new way of life that was the America of the nineteenth century. The shaping of an ingenue personality like Daisy's among the uncertainties and paradoxes of the alien culture of Europe is only hinted at. Daisy Miller is finally killed as much by the cold unrelenting self-righteous puritanism of Winterbourne and his kind as by the Roman fever.
Daisy Miller is condemned on account of her behavior in an alien society. She is at once an ingenue and a coquette embodying all the innocence, naivete' and inexperience of youth - yet one who is so headily drunk with the new licence that money can buy. All these contradictory qualities in her are sharply projected because she is in an unfamiliar setting where "appearances" seem to matter much more than the real facts. The fallacy on which her condemnation rests is exposed by Giovanelli's remark, "She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable. And she was the most innocent." (D.M., p.54). It is extremely ironical that an actual European has to vouch for the "innocence" of Daisy's character which has been so heartlessly maligned by her Europeanized compatriots.

Daisy's effect and impact on her circumstances may be tentative, but the author's ultimate comment seems to be the exposure of the emptiness behind an assumed cultural superiority and what such an attitude can do to any potential human relationship. Winterbourne is perforce bound to recognize his own share in Daisy's tragedy and makes this remark to his aunt, "You were right in the remark that you made last summer. I was
booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in
foreign parts" (D.M., p.54). The keynote is struck by
the word "foreign" - the implication being that having
been under the influence of a "foreign" culture, his
natural impulses have been deadened to such an extent
as to make him impervious to the needs of a very innocent
and inexperienced compatriot. The 'mistake' he commits
regarding Daisy is due to this insensitivity. A year
ago when he saw Daisy with Giovanelli at the Colosseum
at night he had immediately jumped to the conclusion
that "She was a young lady whom a gentleman need no
longer be at pains to respect". (D.M. p.51). When he
recollects Giovanelli's remark about Daisy and her
message to him before she dies, Winterbourne is forced
to revise his opinion about her. He tells his aunt,
"She would have appreciated one's esteem". (D.M. p.54).

Though Winterbourne is the central intelligence
through whom we perceive Daisy, a certain dubiousness
relating to his own personal life makes him an unfit
judge of her. After the Daisy episode of his life he
goes back to Geneva, the metropolis of Calvinism, the
stronghold of Puritanism, in order to pursue his interest
"in a very clever foreign lady" who is also reported
be "older than himself". This probably could mean that
she was one of those ladies who, 'for respectability's sake were provided with husbands'". (D. M., p.11). He changes his mind several times regarding Daisy. He seems to be truly puzzled by her odd behaviour which he views solely from the Europeanized angle. The subtle debunking of Winterbourne as the commentator on Daisy seems to point to a sort of vindication for her. But if there is any vindication, it is in the sense that though there is no assertion about the "rightness" of Daisy's actions, there is certainly a strong emphasis on the "wrongness" of the premise on which she has been so cruelly condemned.

Daisy Miller is rich with suggestions of the way in which the writer viewed innocence and personal integrity vis-a-vis the correct social behaviour, bringing out the truth that these two are not always synonymous. In terms of James's concept of the heroine, Daisy Miller anticipates the predicament of young girls who want to "affront destiny", or who just want "to live—oh so to live" in a society whose paradoxes stifle and stunt them and more often than not victimize them.

Daisy Miller is etched in bold, striking poses as if in keeping with the ingénue quality of the heroine. Though she is the archetype of the young American girls
who in the later and maturer fiction of James emerge
as heroines of more significant stature, Daisy Miller
does not attain such a fulness because James does not
equip her with any background at all. In his own words,
"The Francie Dossons, and the Daisy Millers and the
Bessie Aldens and the Pandora Days", the American branch
of his inter-nation department, are "unprecedented
characters" "with the same "characteristic blankness".
Commenting on the "blankness" or "flatness" of character
in Daisy, James, in his reply to Mrs. Lynn Linton about
his "intentions" in Daisy Miller, says that notwith-
standing the fact of her "blankness" - "a sufficiently
brooding tenderness might eventually extract a shy
incongruous charm". He calls the story (in the same
letter), "the tragedy of a thin, natural, unsuspecting
creature being sacrificed as it were to a social rumpus
that went on quite over her head and to which she stood
in no measurable relation". In the same letter he points
out that "the keynote of her character is her innocence". 9

In his preface to Daisy Miller (1909), James
staunchly defends his portraiture of Daisy and says
"that my supposedly typical little figure was of course

9 Henry James to Lynn Linton (in 1880), in George
Somes Layland, Mrs. Lynn Linton (London : Methuen & Co.,
1901), pp.233-234.
pure poetry, and had never been anything else; since this is what helpful imagination, in however slight a dose, ever directly makes for."

If in 1878, Daisy was only a "poetic" formulation of his concept of a heroine, he however establishes her as the predecessor of all his memorable heroines by giving them similar characteristics and developing them into fully rounded characters - in particular like Milly Theale of *The Wings of the Dove*. She too, like Daisy, dies before she can fulfill her dream "to live - oh so to live". But in her, whatever James left unfinished in Daisy, is made vivid in superb masterful strokes.

Daisy's abrupt death in the story is seen by Richard A. Hocks as her "liberation, even by death, from the darker interpretations of life." Drawing the inevitable parallel between the death of James's beloved cousin Minny Temple in 1870 and that of Daisy's in the story, he points out that "James seems always to have believed that Minny's death, terrible as it was, at least precluded her discovery of the full extent of the world's evil." (p.173). This is an interesting observation

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10 Preface to *Daisy Miller*.

because in the later novel *The Wings of the Dove*, the heroine Milly Theale too dies young – but her death is not a "liberation" in the sense that Daisy's is. Daisy dies before her consciousness is awakened and assaulted by the experience of life, therefore she escapes any knowledge of "the full extent of the world's evil".

Daisy is seen entirely from without, there are only two instances in the story where we glimpse something deeper in her nature than the personality of a precocious flirt. The first is when she perceives inspite of Winterbourne's denial, the fact that Mrs. Costello does not care to know her. The second instance is when she "turns pale" at Mrs. Walker's snub at the end of the party. In the life of such a young girl then, who has not yet known any deeper emotion than the sensations of new places and new people only, death is seen somewhat as a senseless, meaningless thing.

But in the later novel, death for Milly Theale is full of the poignance of a life which held so much promise but one which is doomed to an early demise. It is not only this that attaches more meaning to her death – she dies because she cannot bear the reality of the "full extent of the world's evil". For her then death is a "liberation" in the literal sense of the word.
It is inevitable that an early work like *Daisy Miller* should seem somewhat amateurish when compared to James's maturer fiction. But this tale occupies an important place in the James canon because here we see James's model for all subsequent heroines who were to dominate his artistic canvas. Though the reading public as well as some critics were outraged at what they termed as an "affront to American girlhood", *Daisy Miller* nevertheless was a tremendous success. Among the more favourable reviews of that time, one by John Hay¹² seems to grasp the essential truths about the story very precisely.

The fact that he has done so with a touch of marvellous delicacy and truth, that he has produced not so much a picture as a photograph, is held by many to be an aggravating circumstance. Only the most shiveringingly sensitive of our shoddy population are bold enough to deny the truth of this wonderful little sketch. To those best acquainted with Mr. James's manner (and I believe I have read every word he has printed) *Daisy Miller* was positively startling in its straightforward simplicity and what I can only call authenticity. It could not have been written - I am almost ready to say it cannot be appreciated - except by one who has lived so long abroad as to be able to look at his own people with the eyes of a foreigner. (12)

"The eyes of a foreigner" of the foregoing paragraph may be interpreted as a sort of objectivity that

James has in depicting the career of Daisy. Such objectivity is necessary because her situation is the transatlantic relations and the heroine’s career is to assimilate the European experience without really surrendering the moral vigour of her provincial background. However, themes which were to be explored in greater detail in the later works are merely hinted at in *Daisy Miller*. For example, Daisy’s affluence is never emphasized except through some precocious remarks of her brother Randolph. Also the question of her marriage too is discussed by the others only as some hypothetical argument. An interesting point in this context is the discussion between Winterbourne and his aunt.

He *Giovanelli* is evidently immensely charmed with Miss Miller. If she thinks him the finest gentleman in the world, he, on his side, has never found himself in personal contact with such splendour, such opulence, such expensiveness, as this young lady’s. And then she must seem to him wonderfully pretty and interesting. I rather doubt that he dreams of marrying her. That must appear to him too impossible a piece of luck. He has nothing but his handsome face to offer, and there is a substantial Mr. Miller in that mysterious land of dollars. Giovanelli knows that he hasn’t a title to offer. If he were only a count or marchese! He must wonder at his luck, at the way they have taken him up. (*DM*, p.45).

And again, "It is very true", Winterbourne pursued, "that Daisy and her mamma have not yet risen
to that stage of - what shall I call it? - of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a marchese begins, I believe that they are intellectually incapable of that conception." (DM, p.46).

In James's fiction, the 'drama of transatlantic relations' begins at the point where American affluence, in an attempt to assimilate the old-world culture and civilization of Europe, tries to buy a 'title' and in which transaction it is the American heiress who is the bait for the barter. In *Daisy Miller*, this is merely hinted at and left as a remote possibility because Daisy is too much the provincial belle rather than an idealist like Isabel Archer to take such a step. Hence, the 'incompleteness' of *Daisy Miller*. If there is any explicit moral element in the story it is still in the realm of social and cultural context rather than of individual psychology. This element dramatizes the special conflict and mutual misunderstanding between the free American spontaneity as represented by Daisy and the complex reaction to it by the Europeanized Americans.

In terms of chronology, *Mme de Mauves* (1874) is an earlier tale than *Daisy Miller*, but in terms of
thematic treatment, it analyses more fully the tragedy of a young, uninitiated and rich American girl exposed to the history and glamour of an older civilization. The decadence of the European sensibility which was only obliquely hinted at in *Daisy Miller* is now fully exposed through the decadence and cynicism of the de Mauves. The social and cultural conflict between two different outlooks on life as we see in *Daisy Miller* is now transformed into the personal, psychological conflict between the rich American heroine Euphemia Cleve and her profligate and impoverished French husband Baron de Mauves.

Unlike the sketchy portraiture in *Daisy Miller*, characters in *Mme de Mauves* are more fully developed and the tension among them made more dramatic. As in *Daisy Miller*, in this tale also there is a central character through whose consciousness the heroine is presented. But unlike Frederick Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller*, Bernard Longmore is not a mere observer. He is assigned a role of much more intimacy with the heroine thereby drawing out her characteristics more fully. In fact, the relationship between Longmore and Mme de Mauves provides the framework for the story's central idea,

In presenting Euphemia Cleve, Henry James
emphasizes most her romantic nature. In a letter to Longmore from a friend, Mrs. Draper, this point is stressed. Commenting on Euphemia's unhappiness in marriage, Mrs. Draper goes on to say, "She was romantic and wilful, and thought Americans were vulgar."(p.288).

This sentence reveals at a stroke both her romanticism and naivety - the following description of her girlhood again emphasizes this romantic streak in her character.

Here, in the Parisian Convent besides various elegant accomplishments - the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea - she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which she might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a title - not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Mme. la vicomtesse (for which it seemed to her that she should never greatly care), but because she had a romantic belief that the best birth is the guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. Romances are rarely shaped in such perfect good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was in the radical purity of her imagination. She was utterly incorruptible, and she cherished this pernicious conceit as if it has been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints, she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than in well arrested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and that the consciousness of a picturesque family tradition imparts an exquisite tone to the character.(Mm 11, p.289)

Such a person, however, existed purely in the imagination of this romantic girl and when she enters into a personal relationship with such a preconceived notion, there is bound to be a moment of disillusionment at close contact with reality. Though the Baron de Mauves, whom she eventually marries, is a "gentleman with a long pedigree", he is far from being the "fine fellow" of her "transcendent theory."

When Longmore makes the acquaintance of Mme de Mauves in the little French town of Saint-Germain, she has been married long enough to the Baron to have discovered what kind of a man he is. She is no longer the bright-eyed innocent girl who had such romantic notions about being married into the aristocracy. Though she is unhappy, she is however determined to hide her unhappiness behind a calm exterior. Her disillusionment, in other words has been complete and into such a volatile situation in the de Mauves household, Longmore is introduced.

When a frustrated and disillusioned but young girl makes the acquaintance of a fellow American, young, personable and unattached, and who does not conceal his growing admiration of her, two courses are open to her - either to plunge headlong into an affair with the
admirer or to bear her sorrow in secret and maintain only a formal relationship with him. Given her temperament and upbringing she chooses the latter option.

On the other hand, her husband, far from being wary of Longmore's presence in his household and his attentions to his wife, encourages him to continue doing so. The Baron's sister Mme. Clairin goes so far as to say that both she and her brother count upon him to 'make love' to Mme de Mauves. In the eyes of these representatives of French aristocracy, it is more than justifiable for a young, beautiful and wronged wife to take a lover as a form of revenge upon the husband. Not only that, by doing so, she would be accepting that particular way of life, which for the de Mauves is merely the history of their family. They therefore want that Euphemia should 'conform' and not create any unnecessary unpleasantness by being jealous.

Euphemia, however, refuses to "conform" and this refusal sorely irritates the de Mauves who consider her attitude tantamount to an affront from the little puritanical foreigner come into their fold to disrupt their centuries-old way of life.
If Euphemia refuses to indulge the de Mauves, she also refuses to make a public spectacle of her marital problems by assuming the role of a tragic figure. In other words she simply refuses to show any outward signs of reaction to her husband's infidelity. She tells Longmore,

'I hate tragedy', she once said to him; 'I have a really pusillanimous dread of moral suffering. I believe that - without base concessions - there is always some way of escaping from it. I had almost rather never smile all my life than have a single violent explosion of grief'. (MM, III, pp. 306-307).

What she is actually expressing there is that having been so brutally proven wrong in her romantic idealization of marriage and partnership, she has moved from one extreme of poetic imagination to one of cold prosaic conclusion about the futility of all human interaction. She reveals the process of her disillusionment to Longmore after he forces her to discuss her unhappy marriage.

I like my "world" no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what particular group of people is worth pinning one's faith upon? I confess it sometimes seems to me that men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I'm romantic. I have a most unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life is hard prose, which one must learn to read contentedly. I believe I once thought that all
the prose was in America, which was very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl, fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin to tell you now. Sometimes when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days, they take away my breath, and I wonder my bedazzled visions didn't lead me into troubles greater than any I have now to lament. I had a conviction which you would probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form of passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardour of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now in the distance like a shadow melting slowly in the light of experience. It has faded, but it has not vanished. Some feelings, I am sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the conditions of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion — that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece, then, and there is no shame in being miserably human. As for my "isolation", it doesn't greatly matter; it's the fault, in part, of my obstinacy. (MM II, pp.317-318).

In this long discourse, she displays a mind far more mature and composed than one would have given her credit for. Already, the tone of resignation about her fate is quite pronounced. The only note of regret in this passage is sounded when she says, "There have been moments when I have wished I was the daughter of a poor New England minister, living in a little white house under a couple of elms, and doing all the housework." (MM p.318).

When Euphemia refuses to "conform" according to
the de Mauves' code of conduct she not only defeats their purpose, she also thwarts Longmore's amorous advances. His visits have been the only moments of relaxation in a life otherwise fraught with the tensions of an unhappy marriage, but so far she had been able to maintain a discreet distance with him in spite of the regularity of his visits and his attempts at soliciting any direct allusion to her personal life. So long as the state of her marriage was secret, Mme de Mauves could maintain this distance, but after her long confessional statements, such a stance becomes impossible because the hitherto passive Longmore becomes more bold in his avowals of affection for her. Having been compelled to shed her reservations with him, she decides to put an end to their relationship. Her decision is more or less precipitated by an encounter that takes place between her and the Baron where he literally tells her to go ahead and have an affair with Longmore.

Take your revenge, console yourself; you're too pretty a woman to have anything to complain of. Here's a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to the poor fellow, and you'll find that virtue is none the less becoming for being good natured. You'll see that
it's not after all such a doleful world, and that there is even an advantage in having the most impudent of husbands. (MM. VI, p.326)

Euphemia, however decides that the time has come for her to remove any possibility whereby her integrity may be compromised. Therefore in a coolly calculating way, she puts forward her decision in the form of an appeal to Longmore's refined sensibility and also reminding him of her "high opinion" of him.

'Don't disappoint me. If you don't understand me now, you will tomorrow, or very soon. When I said just now that I had a very high opinion of you, I meant it very seriously. It was not a vain compliment. I believe that there is no appeal one may make to your generosity which can remain long unanswered. If this were to happen - if I were to find you selfish where I thought you generous, narrow where I thought you large - and she spoke slowly, with her voice lingering with emphasis on each of these words - vulgar where I thought you rare - I should think worse of human nature. I should suffer - I should suffer keenly. I should say to myself in the dull days of the future, "There was one man who might have done so and so; and he too failed." But this shall not be. You have made too good an impression on me not to make the very best. If you wish to please me for ever, there's a way. (MM, VIII, pp. 336-337)

And the way to please her is for him to make this visit his last and she makes it sound like the best possible way - "not that I had dismissed you,
but that you had gone away out of the fullness of your own wisdom". (p.337). A very cleverly manipulated stratagem - and an appeal to which she knew Longmore would respond in the way she expected him to - that he would accept the challenge of the appeal and leave her to her fate. Thus the only source from which any hint of compromise upon her integrity was possible, has been effectively removed.

Had the story ended at this stage Euphemia's vindication might have been a plausible fact. But the author gives it an O'Henryesque twist by making the Baron shoot himself. It is reported that the Baron eventually repents of his follies and falls in love with his wife - but Euphemia refuses to admit him to her favours again. In the words of this third person narrator, "She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. (MM. IX, p.347)

In such a person's concept of morality, intransigence rather than the accommodating Christian principle of forgiveness seems to be the motivating force. Emotions in such a person, once arrested at the vulnerable point, have no hope of being revived. Quite early in their association, Longmore had intuitively grasped this quality of Euphemia's personality,
when he thinks that she had effectively concealed her sorrows and had assumed "the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek Statues. ...." (MM III, p.300)

However, as his attachment to her grows apace with his association, he tends to idealize her more and more. He regards her passive submissiveness as the sign of a generous nature.

She seemed to him to have been long resisting the force of cruel evidence, and though she had succumbed to it at last, to have denied herself the right to complain, because if faith was gone her heroic generosity remained. (MM,III, p.306). And again after his dismissal he thinks, "She has loved once", he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his windows; that's for ever & Yes, yes - if she loved again she would be common. (MM, IX, pp.339-340).

It is only at the end when he hears of her husband's suicide that he finally understands the true nature of her personality. It is perhaps because of this perception that he shows no inclination towards her even though he learns that she is free. "The truth is, that in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Mme. de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling, for which awe would be hardly too strong a name". (MM, IX, p.347).
There is Mme de Mauves' insistence to uphold the responsibility of a commitment even after the sentiments and feelings which prompted it are no longer there, an unfeeling, unreflecting obstinacy of clinging to a meaningless formality. If there is evil in the decadent and cynical way of life among the debauched Europeans, there is an equally chilling dehumanizing effect in the rigid and unrelenting puritanical attitude to human foibles as displayed by Mme de Mauves. The spiritual and cultural alienation between the Baron and his puritanical wife is the essential character of the international conflict in Mme de Mauves. But it is in the context of Euphemia's relationship with Longmore that this conflict becomes clear and the rigidity of her worldview is exposed. Her relationship with Longmore rather than that with her husband, provides both the main interest and the critical point of view in this tale.

James Kraft makes this remark about Euphemia Cleve:

Perhaps in Euphemia the element of romance is so strong that, properly approached, she could have an affair with Longmore. He must, however, attempt this affair in a way that fulfills her romantic ideal. Once her husband and his sister have entered, it is too late for this proud woman. The idea is only suggested in the tale but if this suggestion seems substantial, it shows James dealing with the subtle innuendoes of a mind that wants merely to appear pure in order to imagine itself so; and the criticism of Euphemia and her American morality must then become, in the light of her later actions, even more devastating. She is not just injured and self-righteous; she is then deliberately and hypocritically playing the role of the martyr. (p.152)

Granting that Euphemia is a romantic person, it is however illogical even to suggest that she could have had an affair with Longmore. Idealist that she is, there is a great deal of selfishness in her idealism. If she is disappointed and disillusioned with her husband it is simply because she thinks that she deserved better consideration from him. The same analogy applies to her attitude to Longmore too. This is apparent in the way she begins her appeal to him - "Don't disappoint me". And then she proceeds to order his emotions according to her expectations. The initial effect of her appeal on Longmore is to arouse in him a "perverse imagination".
Longmore was confused, dazzled, almost bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal; but her presence there, so close, so urgent, so personal, seemed a distracting mockery of it. She had never been so lovely. (MM VIII, p.337)

Her words leave him wondering, "Were her words, in their soft severity, a mere delusive spell, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and was this the only truth, the only reality, the only law?" (p.337).

But Longmore does not remain perplexed long and understanding of her words and actions dawns on him with the revelation of her estimate of him.

She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly. She liked him, she must have liked him greatly, to wish to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her friendship - her strong friendship she had just called it - Longmore's soul rose with a new flight, and suddenly felt itself breathing a cleaner air. The words ceased to seem a mere bribe to his ardour; they were changed with warmth themselves; they were a present happiness. (MM VIII, p.338).

Longmore's reflections and subsequent actions too are then logical because he too, like Euphemia Cleve, is a member of the "transatlantic democracy" whose sensibilities are in direct opposition to those of the
de Mauves and all they stand for. The irony of the situation is that though Longmore does not perceive it, he has been 'used' by Euphemia as a foil to her prim puritanical moralism just as much as she has been taken advantage of by the de Mauves because of her romantic idealism.

In *Eme de Mauves*, one sees the transformation of a romantic idealist into a cold unfeeling moralist who would not admit of any human consideration in a relationship. Her reaction to the intense personal deception that she has suffered seems to be purely cerebral — there is no overt grief, no outward change in her relationship with her husband. Though her progression from an innocent, idealistic girl into an austere, puritanical matron is too abruptly etched, the conflict between two opposing codes of moral conduct is clearly brought out. This theme was to recur in all of James's later works too. But in his mature fiction, he restores the human equation to the heroine's moral stance by investing in her the mellow humanity which is often acquired through a heart rending personal tragedy. Heroines like Isabel Archer, and Maggie Verver, though they too suffer similar deceptions do achieve a compromise without totally surrendering their principles.
Apart from the mature style and compactness of the nine short, dramatic units, Mme de Mauves marks an important step in the development of James's narrative technique. Unlike Winterbourne in Daisy Miller, Longmore is made the story's central consciousness and through his mind we see the unfolding of the dramatic conflict in the story. Because of this he becomes a more important fictional character than merely an observant narrator like Winterbourne.

Mme de Mauves is important from another consideration — it seems to be the kernel of James's most important work of his early phase, The Portrait of a Lady.

In Euphemia Cleve one can virtually see an Isabel Archer in the making. Both are romantic idealists and rich. Euphemia is a girl, who, according to her own confessions, is in love with her theories. (p.318). Isabel too is described as one who had many theories. Both marry much older men, suavely decadent in their own ways. And these men marry the girls solely for their money. The egotism and politeness of the Baron de Mauves vividly anticipate Gilbert Osmond's. In Longmore one sees a combination of Ralph Touchett and Caspar Godwood. In playing the role of the
outsider, observing the drama of the de Mauves marriage, he resembles Ralph Touchett, the "interested observer" of the fortunes of Isabel in The Portrait. But as a contender for the affections of Euphemia, he is like Caspar Goodwood, who, like him is rejected when the heroine decides to stick to her despicable husband. Madame Clairin with all her sense of history and family pride resembles Countess Gemini of The Portrait. However though both Euphemia and Isabel are betrayed by their husbands and both take similar moral stands regarding their obligations to their marriage contracts, Isabel's portraiture is more detailed and analytical and because her sense of disillusionment is so sympathetically presented, she emerges as a more plausibly human individual than Euphemia.

What James is able to achieve in Mme de Mauves is perhaps best stated by J. A. Ward. 15

In its total effect, Madame de Mauves is a remarkably complex and carefully organized work of fiction. The relationships among the characters, the narrative development, and the setting work together to explore the delicate relationship between class and character, between cultural persuasion and private perception.(p.94).

In the exploration of such a 'relationship' the boundaries of countries and nationalities are immaterial. The tension is purely in the "nameless country" of the mind, and imagination. Euphemia tells Longmore exactly this during a conversation in the early days of their association.

As matters stand, one may be very American and yet arrange it with one's conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps — I had a little when I was younger — helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This is not America, perhaps, about me, but it's quite as little France. France is out there, beyond the garden, in the town, in the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and — she paused a moment — 'in my mind, it's a nameless country of my own. It's not her country' she added, that makes a woman happy or unhappy. (MM, III, p.301).

Here then we see how James was to use the conflict between America and Europe rather as the backdrop to study 'private perception' and how in his later fiction he placed the drama in the "nameless country" of his characters' mind rather than in any international conflict between nations and cultures.

Madame de Mauves was not one of those pieces which produced rave reviews for James and was less known than Daisy Miller. But in the James canon, the heroines
of these two tales occupy an important position as the predecessors of all his other memorable and more famous heroines like Isabel Archer, Milly Theale and Maggie Verver. These tales, therefore, far from being mere items in a prolific writer's repertoire provide the initial insights into the "many stages" in the development of the Jamesian heroine.