

Victoria Rosenberg

**Washington Square: "The Only Good Thing . . . Is The Girl"**

Henry James's own assessment of his novel, *Washington Square*, is expressed in a letter to his brother William: "The only good thing in the story is the girl."<sup>1</sup> Not many critics concur. They do not deny James's craftsmanship, but rather they take from that girl, Catherine Sloper, any sign of development, seemingly agreeing with her father's and her lover's opinion that she is as limited in intellect as in beauty. Most perceive her as a pathetic, if not tragic, figure. Typical are Brian Lee's comment that Catherine's father "condemns her to a life barren of meaning or happiness"<sup>2</sup> and Mina Pendo's conclusion "Catherine is never a challenging woman. She is patient and wealthy and we are pleased to see her manage her spinsterhood with dignity, but this is not enough in a heroine. She initiates nothing; she is merely a victim."<sup>3</sup> And although Donald Hall confirms that Catherine's "magnificence is in the honesty and integrity of her emotions", nonetheless even he describes her at the novel's close as having withdrawn into a "relentless calm", a turning away from relationships that renders her "nobility" a "negative" state.<sup>4</sup>

It is Catherine's aunt, Mrs. Almond, however—the one woman aside from his dead wife, whose intellect Dr. Sloper respects and the one person whose counsel he seeks—who pinpoints the girl's distinctive characteristic: "She doesn't take many impressions; but when she takes one, she keeps it. She is like a copper kettle that receives a dent: You may polish up the kettle, but you can't efface the mark."<sup>5</sup> The simile is simply meant to warn the doctor of Catherine's steadfastness. However, its accuracy ultimately lies in its implication of the depth and constancy of Catherine's emotions.

Just as the kettle passively receives its dent, so is Catherine at first acted upon. Filled with love for her father and Morris Townsend and belief in their superiority, she has no capacity for self-definition. Nor is she even aware of the wealth, "the prospect of thirty thousand a year", as Mrs. Almond reminds the doctor (35), that is, to society, her out-

standing attribute. When her father rebukes her at Marian Almond's engagement party for dressing as though she had "eighty thousand a year", her reply, "Well, so long as I haven't—", reveals the vagueness of "her conception of her prospective wealth" (23). And to Morris's warning that the doctor will tell her that his interest is stirred by her money alone, she responds with naive honesty, "But I am glad we shall be rich" (55). Her inheritance from her mother seems to be sufficient; it is her father's approbation that she desires, not the material instance of it.

Nonetheless, the fundamental difference between the impressions Catherine receives and those which others have of her is what gives the novel's title its appropriateness, explaining why a location rather than Catherine herself should lend the book its name. For the dominant viewpoint in the novel, that which forms the doctor's, Townsend's and Mrs. Penniman's impressions of Catherine, is that exteriors are of more importance than is human substance. And though Mrs. Almond's shrewdness is guided always by her sympathy for Catherine, still her impression too of Catherine is limited. Her metaphor of the copper kettle, despite its accuracy, asserts the simplicity of Catherine's nature: "Nothing could be simpler than Catherine" (106). Yet ultimately it is not Catherine but, on the contrary, her manipulators who are, despite the worldliness of their knowledge, without the appreciative vision which is the characteristic, in James's fiction, of the complex, the intelligent, consciousness.

Dr. Sloper confides to Mrs. Almond that he is waiting for a "third element" to appear in his daughter as the result of the conflict between her devotion for himself and for the lover of whom he disapproves. Analyzing for his sister the surprising stubbornness with which Catherine clings to Townsend, the doctor declares, "The two things [Catherine's "adoration" of her father and of her lover] are extremely mixed up, and the mixture is extremely odd. It will produce some third element, and that's what I'm waiting to see" (106).

The plot itself would seem to give dominance to the two opposing and apparently opposite characters, Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend, rather than to Catherine who must choose between them, and indeed it is to these two that most critical attention has been paid. Ultimately, however, the two are merely the servers, not the possessors, of what James in the Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* terms "the intelligent consciousness".<sup>6</sup> Their victimization of Catherine creates within her precisely this consciousness, one whose action, the absolute rejection of them both, defeats their every intent. Moreover, tempering

that rejection is her compassionate understanding which exposes the inadequacy of their manipulative knowledge.

Deemed simple-minded by the three individuals dominant in her life (father, lover and, in her aunt Penniman, counsellor-companion), Catherine's development is gradual and solitary.

In her struggle with her father she is totally alone; even when she presumably has the support of Morris and Mrs. Penniman it is only her money, her potential inheritance, they are backing. Catherine herself, unaware of the power her wealth accords her, becomes its pawn. For Morris, her prospective fortune determines her value. Once he is convinced that her father will disinherit her should she marry him, he rejects her. Simply enough, his insensitivity is the product of his greed. Dr. Sloper's hardness of feeling toward his daughter is more complex; it is the obverse side of intellectual pride. In Catherine's summation of her life—that "Morris Townsend had trifled with her affection, and that her father had broken its spring" (165)—she rebukes Townsend but it is her father she damns.

But though Catherine judges her father's treatment of her to be the most culpable, it is nonetheless that very abuse which provokes her development. The doctor's shrewd eye penetrates Morris's shallowness and mercenary motive immediately, but is consistently blind to Catherine's worth. His perception of her is flawed by his disappointed vanity; he sees only the imperfection of the reflection she casts of himself. Even at her birth she fails him, her female sex no substitute for the son of "extraordinary promise" who had died two years previously (7). Nor does she duplicate, as she grows to maturity, the beauty, grace or elegance of her mother who had died of childbirth complications in bearing her. Her plain face, matched, he believes, by a dull intellect, neither solaces his grief nor satisfies his pride. His assessment of her he considers to be the judgement of an impartial logic; in actuality, it reveals only the absence of love. His knowledge of her is no less superficial than that of her acquaintances who deem her "quiet and irresponsive" (13). Without tenderness, he can perceive neither the shyness behind the stolidity he finds so irksome, nor the romanticism behind her inappropriately flamboyant dress. Chagrined that "a child of his should be both ugly and overdressed" (15), he is not amused at her naiveté. Instead his sharp wit is provoked to a condescending sarcasm. His first direct statement to her in the novel—"Is it possible that this magnificent person is my child?"—draws the narrator's comment, "it is a literal fact that he almost never addressed his daughter save in the ironical form" (23).

To his credit, the doctor does recognize that Catherine is "a faithful and affectionate child" and out of "fear of being unjust to her, he [does]

his duty with exemplary zeal" (13). Nonetheless, he counsels himself to "expect nothing, so that, if she gives [him] a surprise, it will be all clear again" (13). That surprise is indeed forthcoming, though the gain is only in the "prospect of entertainment" she unexpectedly offers him (96). Her responsiveness to Morris Townsend's attentions belies the prediction the doctor had made in her girlhood that she would be unsusceptible to romantic fancies. However, he had decided when she was but twelve years old that "No young man . . . will ever be in love with Catherine" (11), and he finds Townsend no threat to that judgment. The novelty of Catherine's being sought after at first amuses rather than alarms him; in fact "he went so far as to promise himself some entertainment from the little drama" (37). His disapproval of her engagement adds spice to his amusement, rousing his curiosity as to how she will resolve her conflicting loyalties. Thus he turns Catherine's predicament into his own private spectacle, and, accordingly, distances himself from her distress. He is even disappointed at her patience toward his displeasure, interpreting her silence as the submission of a weak spirit; the narrator, however, wonders whether resistance might have amused him better (77).

But it is when Catherine comes to his study to tell him of her decision to continue meeting Morris that the doctor's humour shows its cruel edge. Playing upon her filial conscience he declares that, should she see Townsend, she "will have given [her] old father [he is forty-nine at the time] the greatest pain of his life" (96). After she leaves, in tears, the narrator observes "a thin sparkle . . . of something like humor in his eye"; her stubborn adherence to Morris, though surprising and irritating, has for Dr. Sloper the merit of "a comical side" (96). Determining to counter her obstinacy with his own, he spurns her, not with contempt but with indifference, while making clear by his formal manner the inflexibility of his opposition; again the narrator comments, "You would have had to know him well to discover that, on the whole, he rather enjoyed having to be so disagreeable" (111).

Nevertheless, Dr. Sloper is no sadist. He is prompted instead by a sense of his own rightness which dispels any compassion he might otherwise have felt for his daughter. In the narrator's words, "He was sorry for her . . . but he was so sure he was right" (96). Moreover, his disapproval of Morris is not, he believes, inconsiderate. Initially he had even been "very curious to see whether Catherine might really be loved for her moral worth" (38), but Morris's arrogance cannot support a supposition of moral vision. Furthermore, his close questioning of Morris's sister, Mrs. Montgomery, proves his suspicions of the young man's selfishness, giving weight to his immediate dislike of him.

However, though he is convinced of Catherine's unhappiness as Townsend's wife, he never considers that his own harshness might be as detrimental to her happiness as Morris's avarice. His sureness of his own judgment directs both his wit and his will. He exults to Mrs. Penniman, after surmising that Catherine has indeed been jilted, "It's a great pleasure to be in the right" (152). And, without scruple, he turns Catherine's love for him against herself, using it as his weapon of manipulation: playing upon her desire to please him, he offers to take her to Europe and away, thereby, from Morris Townsend.

The doctor's "cold, quiet, reasonable eye" (59) is deceptive. His control is edged by a brutality that shows itself during their European trip, in an Alpine setting that reflects his characteristics: the mountains are "hard-featured", the air "cold and sharp", the "cold red light" of the setting sun traces his movements as he climbs (120). Confronting Catherine "with eyes that had kept the light of the flushing snow-summits on which they had just been fixed" (120), he asks whether she has renounced Townsend (it is the first time in their six months of travel that Morris's name has been mentioned between them). She senses that he is deliberately using the desolateness of their environment to intimidate her:

She wondered what he meant—whether he wished to frighten her. If he did, the place was well chosen: This hard, melancholy dell, abandoned by the summer light, made her feel her loneliness. She looked around her, and her heart grew cold; for a moment her fear was great. (121)

Her fright is vindicated, moments later, by his explanation that he had been "raging inwardly" throughout their trip and had taken advantage of their isolation "to flare out" (121). The anger he declares in his low tone and by the swinging of his walking stick is apparently contained only by disciplined effort and his confession to her warns of its power should he allow it control: "You try my patience . . . and you ought to know what I am. I am not a good man. Though I am very smooth externally, at bottom I am very passionate; and I assure you I can be very hard" (121). His description is accurate; it is his passion that makes him hard, both in the sense of unyielding and of cruelty, a passion which demands not simply Catherine's submission (though early in her relationship with Morris that probably would have sufficed) but rather her recognition of the authority of his judgment. The violence implicit in his demand is exposed by her instinctive fear:

There was a kind of still intensity about her father which made him dangerous, but Catherine hardly went so far as to say to herself that it might be part of his plan to fasten his hand—the neat, fine, supple hand of a distinguished physician—in her throat. Nevertheless, she receded a step. (121)

Upon their return from Europe, the doctor's passion grows to an obsession that characterizes his attitude to her until his death. Not believing Catherine's account of Morris's absence (that it is she who has sent him away) and failing to glean any information from Mrs. Montgomery, he determines that she and Morris are merely waiting until he dies to marry. (The idea is not new to him. During his conversation with Catherine the evening she approached him in his study, he had answered her attempts at conciliation with the declaration, "You can wait till I die, if you like," adding "for it is beyond a question that by engaging yourself to Morris Townsend you simply wait for my death" [94]). His suspicion is made certainty, however, by the evidence of what he describes to Mrs. Almond as Catherine's "blooming repose" (163). Her obvious contentment dismisses, to his mind, his sister's contention that Catherine, on the contrary, is grieving. Hence he reasons that his daughter has no need of his sympathy; moreover, "to pretend to condole with her would have been to make concessions to the idea that she had ever had a right to think of Morris" (162). In actuality, however, his justification of his hardness is superfluous; he gives no sympathy to Catherine, for his very nature disallows it. Indeed when she tells him she has broken her engagement, he is disappointed, for her acceptance of blame costs him the "chance for a little triumph he had rather counted on" (160). He quickly recoups his loss, however. Taunting her about her heartlessness he eases his frustration and "ha[s] his revenge, after all" (160).

His conviction of "the arrangement" between Catherine and Townsend strengthens with the years, her rejection of two suitable marriage proposals corroborating his suspicion. When, seventeen years after Morris's retreat, she refuses to promise that she will not marry Townsend upon his death, the doctor exerts his power through a codicil to his will. He leaves her but a fraction of his estate and censures her judgment under the guise of protecting her from "those unscrupulous adventurers she persists in regarding as an interesting class" (169). It is a tactic he had used years before—damning Catherine while supposedly acting as her protector—when, in discussing her with Mrs. Montgomery, he had analyzed her with a combination of discernment and abuse. Thus, he had acknowledged, "She is the best creature in the world, and she would never do him a grain of injury" (70), yet he had also declared her to be "simpleminded" (71). He had interpreted her gentleness detrimentally—"she would have neither the intelligence nor the resolution to get the better of [a bad husband]"—yet at the same time he had predicted insightfully that "she would have an exaggerated power of suffering" (71). In short, the doctor's coldness has consistently, and more surely than his one violent outburst, robbed his

judgment of its validity. Finally, in his last testament, his wit is turned to abuse. Devoid of compassion, his intelligence is insufficient.

In contrast to her father, Catherine develops, in her conflict with him, the moral and compassionate awareness that is the attribute, for James, of intelligent consciousness. Early in her engagement to Morris, she hopes "to effect some gentle, gradual change in his [the doctor's] intellectual perception of poor Morris's character" (95). Instead, a change, painful and gradual, occurs within her own self, altering her perception not only of Morris but of her father and of herself as well. Until meeting Morris Townsend, to gratify her father is Catherine's sole ambition:

Her deepest desire was to please him, and her conception of happiness was to know that she had succeeded in pleasing him. She had never succeeded beyond a certain point . . . and to go beyond the point in question seemed to her really something to live for. (12)

He has her constant admiration ("Whenever he addressed her he gave her pleasure" [23]); her devotion perceives him only in superlatives: "She thought him the cleverest and handsomest and most celebrated of men" (12). Her adoration has the qualities of worship—it is sustained by faith, not fact, and commingled with a "little tremor of fear" (12); his words have "such an authority for her that her very thoughts were capable of obeying him" (94). Those characteristics of his discrepant with her idealization she excuses as flaws in her own understanding: "her father's great faculties seemed, as they stretched away, to lose themselves in a sort of luminous vagueness, which indicated, not that they stopped, but that Catherine's own mind ceased to follow" (13).

Catherine offers Morris the same submissive adoration, and it is this willingness to yield and to please that desires to placate, not defy, her father's suspicions of him. Accordingly, she interprets these suspicions in such a way as to retain her loyalty to both, ascribing to Morris "the purest love and truth" (79), yet excusing her father's distrust as the "natural and proper" reaction of "conscientious parents" (78), indicative of his desire to protect her. She thereby places upon herself the onus of opening the doctor's eyes to her lover's honorableness. She feels herself incapable of any reasoned argument to bring about a change in his perception for "She could not imagine herself imparting any kind of knowledge to her father; there was something superior even in his injustice, and absolute in his mistakes" (79). She must, she decides, rely instead on the efficacy of her own goodness.

She only had an idea that if she should be very good, the situation would in some mysterious manner improve. To be good she must be patient,

outwardly submissive, abstain from judging her father too harshly, and from committing any act of open defiance. (78)

Her very goodness, however, separates Catherine morally (though not emotionally) from Morris Townsend and ultimately leads to her emotional estrangement from Dr. Sloper—goodness not as she defines it, but rather in the sense of her strict honesty. It is this honesty that fails to comprehend the role of coquette Morris expects of her (she is so incapable of flirtation that she deprecates herself to him, telling him without expectation of being refuted, “You know how little there is in me to be proud of. I am ugly and stupid” [51]) and that refuses the subterfuge of secret meetings. She will not criticize her father to him—in fact, she insists upon the doctor’s kindness—nor will she allow Morris to do so (at Mrs. Almond’s “at home”, she reacts “with energy” to his imputation of her father’s insolence toward him [50]), neither will she deny the importance to her that her parent approve of her fiancé. Evasion is foreign to her character. To Morris’s urging that they settle upon a line of action, she decides upon the direct, not the circuitous: “We must do our duty” (54). Her letters to him are similarly concise and forthright, the sincerity of her feelings needing no ornamentation.

However, for Morris, Catherine’s lack of artifice is not testimony to her honesty but only to her dullness. His letters to her are not merely the contrasts to hers. Rather, they are models of the artificial style he finds exasperatingly absent in her. The letter he writes during their engagement, for example, reflects the pose of his courtship—its tone is both passionate and melodramatic, while his letter of farewell is hollow of tone and graceful in expression, a summation, in short, of his character. That Catherine cannot adopt such a manner—one her younger cousin Marian so easily assumes and her aunt Penniman tries so pathetically to master—incapacitates Morris. Her honesty allows him none of the gestures appropriate to an aggrieved lover, no assuagement to his pride and no easy retreat. Thus it is not from Catherine but from Mrs. Penniman that he receives the assurance, early in his courtship, that Dr. Sloper’s approval is inconsequential, and not Catherine but her aunt who approves of his idea that he and Catherine meet clandestinely. And though Mrs. Penniman reaps the benefits—Morris’s constant company during the Sloper’s year-long stay in Europe—nevertheless she must eventually pay for her usurpation of Catherine’s role. It is from her that Morris demands restitution for his disappointed expectations, she who must prepare Catherine for his desertion of her and, years later, for his return.



But if for Lavinia and Morris honesty is inimical to romance, for Catherine it is an obligation due her love, both for her father and for Morris, the proof she offers her father of her dutifulness and, more important, of Morris's worth. Thus honesty becomes for her the gauge of the lovers' honour. She refuses to meet Morris in the Square after he insists to her, early in his courtship, that the doctor's dislike of him is intense and insulting. Her reason is not as Morris understands it, for convention's sake ("I don't care who sees us", she answers him [51]), but rather consideration of the moral impropriety of going behind her father's back.

Though she irritates both the doctor and Morris by her lack of coquetry, it is merely the correlative to her ignorance of manipulation. She has no understanding of the concept Morris and Mrs. Penniman so willingly accept—that relationships are essentially a matter of barter, of making ample material profit out of one's personal advantages. Indeed, she must ask her suitor to explain the word "mercenary". In her desire to protect Morris from the insult of that particular label, however, she begins consciously to define for herself moral virtue. She tells her father that by defying his will she feels herself to have forfeited the right to live in his house: "But if I don't obey you, I ought not to live with—to enjoy your kindness and protection" (113). The assertion is her response to his comment (one in which she senses no sarcasm) that he hoped Morris would give her permission to accompany him to Europe. Her father's is "the most calculated, the most dramatic speech . . . he had ever uttered" (113), the prompting of a cold self-righteousness. Catherine's argument is, in contrast, probably her first deliberation in moral logic. The distance between it and her father's calculation is not so much the measure of his insensitivity as it is of her awakened moral sense.

That Catherine's father not only fails to appreciate her logic, but rebukes her for it, causes the first significant change in her perception of him: "for the first time . . . there was a spark of anger in her grief. She had felt is contempt; it had scorched her" (115). Her anger liberates her from the constraints her honesty had imposed: "at last, completely and unreservedly, her passion possessed her" (115). And though she replies with consternation to Mrs. Penniman's warning that the doctor's idea in taking her to Europe is to lessen her desire for Morris, she does not satisfy her scruple by telling her father his hope is ill-founded. Her principle, not to deceive him, has lost its validity. She meets Morris without her father's knowledge and corresponds with him throughout her stay in Europe. Her guilt at loving him without her parent's sanction is absolved by the doctor's scorn of her scrupulousness: "There was a sore spot in her heart that his own words had made when

once she spoke to him as she thought honor prompted; she would try and please him as far as she could, but she would never speak that way again" (120). Taking her lover's counsel rather than her father's, she disregards her qualm that by accompanying the doctor to Europe while cleaving in love to Morris, she violates her filial duty. And though her anger against Dr. Sloper is not sustained throughout their year's travel—indeed it dissipates into humiliation soon after its initial spark—nevertheless, it has broken the grip of her idolization of him and, in this way, has prepared her independence.

Catherine's anger thus acts as a catalyst to her development. It alters not only her relationship with her father but that with her aunt as well, exposing her growing distrust of Mrs. Penniman which is to become permanent and overriding. For although, as Catherine's playmates in her childhood discover, "Aunt Penniman was but an accident in Catherine's existence, and not a part of its essence" (18), nonetheless Catherine esteems her enough to consider her aunt's admiration of Morris Townsend, upon their first meeting of him, "a personal gain" and to accept her standard of judgment as "extremely high" (22). It is when Mrs. Penniman tells her that she has met Townsend, during that time when she herself has, in order to placate her father, refrained from seeing him, that Catherine first judges her aunt. Her anger allows her to see Mrs. Penniman as "meddlesome" and to apprehend her aunt's potential of "spoil[ing] something" (87). And though Catherine's indignation is only momentary, the sternness that replaces it announces her withdrawal of trust. Her defence against Mrs. Penniman's accusation of her heartlessness towards Morris, "I don't think you understand or that you know me" (89), articulates a judgment against her that does not alter from this point on. (The night she spends sobbing into her aunt's lap at her father's implacability does not change her opinion that she is "aggressive and foolish" [91]; Mrs. Penniman merely provides her with company, not with solace.) On her return from Europe, "her sense of Mrs. Penniman's innocent falsity" strengthens (125) until, after her scene with Morris in which he takes leave of her, it bursts forth to accuse her aunt of causing his change of heart. In her vehemence she "judge[s] her aunt finally and without appeal" (153).

Soon after she had announced her engagement to her father, Catherine had sensed she was changing, not only in her feelings towards her father and aunt, but radically, within her own self. She could not foresee either the nature of the change or its effect upon her actions, nonetheless, "[it] was as if this other person, who was both herself and not herself, had suddenly sprung into being" (77). Upon her return from Europe she is able to articulate her alteration, declaring to Mrs.

Penniman, "Nothing is changed—nothing but my feeling about Father" (128-29). She repeats to Morris her charge to her aunt, that she will no longer try to appease her father. But to her fiancé she adds the explanation, "He is not very fond of me" (131), a confidence which voices the one impression she has received, the whole of the fullness of knowledge her father wished her to acquire from a trip abroad. As the force of her emotion overcomes the hesitancy her pride dictates, she is able to strengthen her expression and admit that her father "despise[s]" her (132). She pinpoints her moment of insight—it followed upon his sarcasm the night before their sailing for home and matured to conviction during the voyage. At the time her responses to his taunts of her increased "value" ("We have fattened the sheep for him before he kills it") had been one of physical action alone: "Catherine turned away and stood staring at the blank door" (123). Her averted body is the preliminary sign of the emotional withdrawal she puts into words for Morris—"I feel separated from my father" (132).

Dr. Sloper had told Mrs. Almond that he would provide his daughter with "a pair of spectacles" (41). The clarity of vision Catherine achieves, however, is not the product of his coercion of her. Rather it is a moral perception which arises out of the intensity of her love: out of her refusal to repudiate either her passion for Morris Townsend or her obligation to her father. And it is out of that love that the transformation is effected within Catherine's own character. Spurred by love, the honesty that is the virtue of her naiveté matures to integrity and her shyness to a reserve that does not consider the self-pity her father expects nor understand the self-dramatization her aunt counsels. When her belief in her love is destroyed by her recognition of its betrayal, that new being who is "both herself and not herself" survives. The injury of her father's accusation that she is "an ungrateful, cruel child" (96) hardens her will; she travels to Europe as his "associate", not his "victim": "She was always [their months abroad] her father's docile and reasonable associate . . . she had completely divested herself of the characteristics of a victim . . ." (119). She returns with the assurance of "great moral comfort" (131), knowing that by his failure to love her he has violated his responsibilities to her and thereby severed those which she had felt towards him.

Catherine trusts that Morris's devotion to her will be the balm to her father's contempt. Certainly her conviction of his love had given her the strength to surmount her fear of her parent; however, it had not freed her from subservience to Morris himself, a subservience she renders willingly but which he too enjoys and expects. (The one time in their relationship that she genuinely pleases him is when she stands before him "submissively, the image, in advance, of a dutiful and

responsive wife" [103].) His failure to fix their marriage date even though her father's disapproval has, for her, become inconsequential to their love provokes not her anger, only her anxiety and embarrassment; she "wait[s] on [Morris's] good pleasure, and would wait modestly and patiently" (143) without demand of a reckoning. Only when she senses his unmistakable withdrawal from her does the force of her emotions overcome her meekness, and, for the first time, she claims those rights lovers deem inherent; as he presses to extricate himself from her, she counters his every argument about the necessity of separation with reasons invented by devotion, finally urging him for a promise of faithfulness with the reminder of her sacrifice ("Think of what I have done! . . . Morris, I have given up everthing" [147]).

Catherine's aggressiveness is the unconscious assertion of her own self-worth, a radical departure from the self-deprecation which contended that her own unhappiness did not matter, that the alteration they must seek in her father's viewpoint is in his recognition of Morris's worth alone. A quiet assertiveness characterizes her actions from this time on, directing her lie to her father that she has terminated her engagement and her concealment of how "deeply and incurably" she had been wounded by Morris's desertion (161). Upon the doctor's death, she checks his own intended revenge; she is pleased by his changed will.

Mrs. Almond had explained to her brother that the insensibility he complained of in Catherine, upon her broken engagement, was the "comparative repose" that follows an "amputation" (163). This repose fills Catherine's years: she "went generally, with an even and noiseless step, upon the rigid business of her life" (165). This rigidity, however, is not that of either aridity or hardness. Rather it is the rigidity of a strict self-restraint, without the mitigation of a confidant or the allowance of another love ("she averted herself rigidly from the idea of marrying other people" [164]), a rigidity that supports her "amputation" with the firm framework of a regulated existence. Neither her father's unexpected demands of her promise never to marry Townsend nor his final illness shatter that framework. Only Mrs. Penniman's re-introduction of Morris threatens its safeguard ("There were some things she believed she had got over, some feelings that she had thought of as dead, but apparently there was a certain vitality in them still" [173-74]). But with Morris's actual appearance, any vestige of revitalization in her dead passion proves illusory. After his quarrel with her years before, it had seemed to her "that a mask had suddenly fallen from his face" (148). That face, exposed by time, is "strange and hard"; "If she had first seen him this way she would not have liked him" (172). That she had indeed first seen him this way she cannot realize, no

more than she did then. He had, to her first sight, "looked like a statue", with the features of "young men in pictures . . . so chiseled and finished" (20). It is a description, though she does not recognize it as such, of stone. Morris's insensitivity hardens his features only with age; no sign of it blemishes his youth's appearance. Nonetheless Catherine's choice of metaphors to describe his beauty had unwittingly forewarned of the hardness that will destroy it. The man she sees, one year after her father's death, is "mature and complete" (177); complete, to her judgment, in the sense of cessation of growth. Catherine too is complete, but in the opposing sense of wholeness, and it is in this sense that her reaction to Morris can be understood and his question, why she had never married, answered. What is to Morris "her confounded little dry manner" (179) is not the absence of feeling but rather the constraint learnt by fortitude.

F. W. Dupee affirms of Catherine, "A small but real triumph has been hers: she has survived and become a person without recourse to the selfishness of her tormentors."<sup>7</sup> Catherine's recourse, however, in surviving is to use the technique of her tormentors: despite the honesty that is both natural to her and her deliberate (and only) policy in persuading her father of Morris's sincerity, Catherine begins and ends her relationship with Morris with a lie. Her first is due simply to shyness—she pretends to Marian Almond that Morris has not impressed her and tells Aunt Penniman that she does not know the name of the attentive gentleman—but her last, to her father, that it is she who has refused Townsend, is the assertion of pride, her declaration of self-worth. Within the framework of those lies is her development plotted. Her dissimulation to her father does not violate her integrity, but rather declares it. Her honesty had abhorred deception; her lies are retribution for Dr. Sloper's life-long deception of her. Quite simply, she withholds the truthfulness which previously had been her declaration of love for him: "He . . . would have given a great deal to discover the exact truth; but it was his punishment that he never knew—his punishment, I mean, for the abuse of sarcasm in his relations with his daughter" (161).

Catherine's development occurs in utter solitariness; her growth in awareness is both unappreciated and unshared. For although even the doctor confides in his younger sister, Catherine takes no confidant. Whether out of instinctive privacy or the desire to protect her father from unfavourable interpretation, she tells no one of the doctor's attitude toward Morris or of her own anguish on its account. Having refused to announce to her father her suffering at his disapprobation of her engagement, she refuses, upon Morris's desertion, either to expose her pain or to give the doctor cause to celebrate the rightness of his

judgment. In her middle years the sole indication of her own history she allows to be known is in the sympathy she extends young lovers.

Catherine's inward growth has, all along however, its one visible metaphor: "strong and solid and dense" (100), her body portrays not her lack of intellect, as the doctor and Morris had supposed, but testifies, rather, to her state of moral health. Indeed even the vow her father demands of her, that upon his death she will not marry Townsend, she had already made him of her own choosing when he had not thought to ask her for it. To his first accusation that she anticipates his death by holding to her engagement, she had replied, "If I don't marry before your death, I will not after" (94). What had been to her an "inspiration", is to him an "epigram" formed by the "wanton play of a fixed idea" in an "unaccomplished" mind (94). In refusing to give to coercion what she had previously offered willingly, Catherine refuses humiliation. To her father, she will grant no leeway to injure her once more.

With the loss of her naiveté, Catherine sheds her capacity for passion. In its stead comes not the coldness of her father but rather a dignity that is warmed by understanding. In the years before the doctor's death, her days are "regulated . . . upon a system of her own" and if she dispenses philanthropy's gifts of purse (interesting herself in "asylums, hospitals and aid societies"), she is nonetheless capable of charity of the heart: "She was greatly liked, and as time went on she grew to be a sort of kindly maiden aunt to the younger portion of society. Young girls were apt to confide to her their love affairs . . . and young men to be fond of her without knowing why" (165).

In short, though the calmness created out of her endurance of pain cannot admit desire—she refuses John Ludlow who genuinely loves her—it does not preclude compassion. When she had perceived only her father's disappointment in her, she had been able to pity him "for the sorrow she had brought upon him" (111); when she had understood his contempt, she had not reproached him. She had explained to Morris, "I don't accuse him; I just tell you that that's how it is. He can't help it; we can't govern our affections . . . It's because he is so fond of my mother whom we lost so long ago. She was beautiful, and very, very brilliant, he is always thinking of her. I am not at all like her . . ." (132). When she had achieved distance enough from Morris to judge him, she had been able to forgive him ("I forgave you years ago" [179]). But to neither of them is she willing to offer her love again. Upon Morris's final departure, she takes up her needlepoint, "for life, as it were" (180). The "for," however, does not condemn the limitations of her existence. Her life has the qualities of tapestry, its ordered containment and lack of passion, but it is not static.

Catherine remains at Washington Square. However, the house, whose marble entrance-way had been the reflection of her father's superficial and inflexible judgment of her, does not simply pass, with her ownership, into an emblem of her endurance. Sharing her own physical attributes—"strong and solid and dense"—the house is finally the metaphor of her full and moral consciousness.

## NOTES

1. "To William James", 27 November 1880, in *Henry James, Letters: 1875-1883*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), II, 316. James's only other comment about *Washington Square* in his letter immediately precedes the one already quoted and is about Morris: "The young man in *Washington Square* is not a portrait—he is sketched from the outside merely, not fouillé".
2. Brian Lee, *The Novels of Henry James: A Study of Culture and Consciousness* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 18.
3. Mina Pendo, "Reason under the Atlanthus", in *Washington Square*, ed. Gerald Willen. p. 251.
4. Donald Hall, "Afterword" to *Washington Square* (Signet Classic), p. 190.
5. James, *Washington Square*, from 1st English ed. (Harper, 1881; rpt. New York: Signet Classic, New American Library, 1964), p. 106. James did not include *Washington Square* in the New York edition of his works. Accordingly, all page references incorporated into the text of this chapter are to the Signet edition.
6. James, Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, X, xiii-xiv.
7. F. W. Dupee, *Henry James* (Toronto: William Sloane Associates, The American Men of Letters Series, 1951), p. 65. Dupee precedes this assertion, however, with the statement that Catherine "is not even intelligent" (Dupee, p. 64).