

ISABEL'S SYMPATHETIC RECONCILIATION IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* from the perspective of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which allows us to rethink the imagination and its relationship to literary aesthetic experiences. In this paper, I argue that it is through Isabel's sympathetic development, a concatenation of admitting her faults, rethinking her past and imagining her future, that allows her to reconcile with others, and then herself. As a voracious reader who derives her philosophies from the literature that she reads, Isabel Archer, is at first unconsciously entrapped in her theoretic idealisms. With her romantic and unrealistic imagination, Isabel projects her idealisms onto Gilbert Osmond, which leads to their miserable marriage. To remove her suffering and pain, Isabel retreats into alienation and self-abnegation. During this time of great difficulty, Isabel develops a sense of sympathy. It is through rethinking her past that Isabel reconciles with others and herself. Thus, Isabel's cultivation of Smithian "fellow-thinking" shows her transformations from a theoretical reader of literature in her early years to a more mature person through the development of her capacity for sympathy.

KEY WORDS: Henry James, sympathy, fellow-thinking, imagination, *The Portrait of a Lady*

Introduction

Like a Romantic reader, fusing occurrences in life with the experiences in reading novels, Isabel Archer is "devoted to the romantic effects" (James 2008: 87) with a lively imagination. Sure enough, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel is first introduced as a reader, reading in her childhood home at Albany. The readers are told that Isabel's "mind was a good deal of vagabond" and she has to make an effort to train it since her imagination "was by habit ridiculously active; when the door was not open it jumped out the window" (James 2008: 41). In Sarah Daugherty's words, Isabel is "'floated' by her own romantic spirit and by the 'current of... rapid curiosity'" (Daugherty 2009: 67). Perceiving Isabel as a novel that cannot be simply understood, Isabel's cousin-in-law observes Isabel is "written in a foreign tongue" (James 2008: 47). Charles Caramello remarks that "James might have intended first to compare Isabel Archer... as a romancer and then as a novelist" (Caramello 2000: 7). Isabel exclaims with enthusiasm when Ralph in-

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troduces Lord Warburton to her: “I hoped there would be a lord; it’s just like a novel” (James 2008: 31). With her romantic and unrealistic imagination, however, Isabel is entrapped in her idealism as she struggles to prove her liberty in the choice of her romantic relationship. After this failed attempt, Isabel retreats into self-alienation. In this paper, I will argue that it is only through Isabel’s sympathetic development, a concatenation of admitting her faults, rethinking her past and imagining her future, that she reconciles with others, and then herself.

Sympathy and Fellow-thinking

Sympathy, an intentional and ethical cognitive exercise, requires imagination in forming connections with others, with aesthetic experiences. Along with critics like Thomas Laquer, Kristen Pond points out that the shared understanding of sympathy in nineteenth century Victorian England is a continuation of the eighteenth century’s understanding of sympathy, which is closely connected with “notions of virtue and even national identity” (Pond 2010: 21). Sympathy, as Pond argues, requires a distance of space and a period of time for the digestion of aesthetic experiences and recreation in tranquility. Rachel Ablow observes that eighteenth century moral philosophers, such as Lord Shaftesbury, David Hume, Adam Smith, consider sympathy a way to “entering into another’s feeling” (Ablow 2014: 2) and to “counter selfishness and consolidate community” (Ablow 2014: 2). Similarly, Steintrager indicates that those philosophers “emphasize pity, compassion, fellow feeling, and sympathy, broadly construed, as the steering mechanism of individual interaction” (Steintrager 2004: xiii). The origin and definition of sympathy have been widely debated by scholars for long. Hammond and Kim points out that the idea of fellow-thinking appears back in the Ancient Greeks, “who gave us the names of “suffering together” (Hammond and Kim 2014: 2). This definition of “suffering together” resonates with Smith’s notion of fellow-thinking, that is “changing places in fancy with the sufferer” (Smith 1982: 4). This enriches sympathy with the meaning of interrelationships, mutual dependencies to connect with each other.

Offering a distinct comparison between Hume and Smith, Narayan shows that compared with Smith’s intact spectator, for Hume, the sympathizer’s identification to the object he/she sympathizes with is crucial—“the operation of sympathy is closely allied with a strong and undivided self-identity” (Narayan 2010: 33). In Narayan’s words, Humean “sympathy is strongest when resemblance is greatest” (Narayan 2010: 33), as Hume suggests that

the nature has preserv’d a greater resemblance that preserves itself amidst all their variety; and this resemblance must very much contribute to make us en-

ter into the sentiments of others, and embrace them with facility and pleasure. (Narayan 2010: 33)

However, grounded on physiology, Humean sympathy, as Greiner indicates, is “contagious”, yet impossible and undesirable, for “feeling can transfer directly from one person to another” without bypassing cognition (Greiner 2012: 17). Based on “similarity rather than difference” (Narayan 2010: 33), a Humean sympathizer ultimately leads to a pathological disaster. I perceive Isabel, on the other hand, as more of a disengaged Smithian spectator, who coolly analyzes her situation in James' s narration. In this paper, I will argue that it is only through Isabel's sympathetic development, a concatenation of admitting her faults, rethinking her past and imagining her future, does she reconcile with others, and then herself.

Isabel's Idealism

Without real life experiences but a wild imagination directed by her own theoretic idealisms, Isabel's naivety generates egoism and leads to chaotic exaggerations. Isabel's imaginative character that directs her idealistic projections, which can be traced back to her childhood, when she is both “spoiled and neglected” by her remarkably handsome, yet somewhat irresponsible father, who wishes his “daughters... to see as much the world as possible” (James 2008: 50). Deprived of parental supervision and formal education after their mother dies, Isabel and her sisters are left to a nursemaid while her father travels around the world alone. As the daughter of a literary father, Isabel is surrounded by “the London *Spectator*, the latest publications, the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot” (James 2008: 51) since her youth. Significantly influenced by her unconventional childhood, Isabel, claiming herself to be a person who “like[s] [her] liberty too much” (James 2008: 182), places great value on her independence. Weisbuch describes young Isabel as “an overly theoretic, though wonderfully fresh and earnest self-realizer” (Weisbuch 1998: 112), and a follower of Emerson, who reads philosophies of German Idealism in her enclosed room in her grandmother's house at Albany. The readers are told that in the room there is a door that was bolted, but Isabel “had no wish to look out, for this interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side” (James 2008: 41). In this well-sheltered mind, yet with a vivid imagination, Isabel develops a strong opinion to perceive the world without knowing her own arbitrariness. Although she came to Europe with a wish to learn from experience in society rather than the literary world, Isabel carries a great amount of presumptions into her life experiment. Elizabeth Sabiston clearly illustrates Isabel's self-contradiction, for she is in an incessant conflict both externally and internally:

[Isabel] is the victim not only of the conflict between herself and the external world, but also of a tension between opposites in her own character: an idealism uninformed by knowledge of reality... a thirst for experience coupled with fastidiousness and a tendency to surrender to outside forces. (Sabiston 1973: 336)

Always ready to subdue outside forces with her “immense curiosity about life” that makes her “constantly staring and wondering” (James 2008: 51), Isabel is tricked by her immense reading of literature that leaves out the true experience of real life. Sure enough, as a voracious reader, having a “great desire for knowledge”, Isabel “prefer[s] almost any source of information to the printed page” (James 2008: 51). Shaping the theories that later turn into her philosophies with her metaphysical learning of literature, “a source of interest and even of instruction”, that fused with her fantasies, Isabel is trapped in a romanticized world that she is vulnerable, yet unaware of. The fatal decision where Isabel turns her theory into practice is to marry Gilbert Osmond.

Although Isabel seems to inhabit a normal social framework through entering a conventional marriage like the other Victorian women, her different marital decision reveals her unconventionality. Unlike most Victorian women, Isabel is struggling to constrain her tendency to go against the social norms. With her unusual mannerisms, Isabel decides to enter a matrimonial system with a reckless that has long been a curiosity to scholars. Along with Sarah Daugherty, who complains about Isabel’s “banality of her thoughts on marriage” (Daugherty 2009: 68), Sandra Fischer contends that Isabel is “a repressed and rather mundane person” (Fischer 1986: 48), who chooses enclosure rather than liberty in her life. A possible explanation is that Isabel is in a dilemma in pursuing her own individuality and to make sacrifices to obey social conventions. Mary Schriber points out that Isabel is actually conservative in heart; the uncontrollable Isabel is a mere projection of fantasy: “the rebellious Isabel who protests she will perhaps never marry represents a pose drawn from novels, and that the conventional Isabel is the real one”, since Isabel clings to the belief that “marriage is the framework of her destiny” (Schriber 1976: 449). Still, Schriber indicates Isabel contains a more dynamic disposition for she inclines to fill in a conventional role of “a Victorian lady”, who holds “the power of the social proprieties” (Schriber 1976: 442), under the disguise of her seemingly nonconformity:

Isabel toys with the norm of “lady”, dramatizing herself by now conforming to it, now departing from it heightening her own and others’ sense of her mystery and individuality—much as James draws attention throughout *The Portrait* to the conventional woman in order to dramatize Isabel’s situation. (Schriber 1976: 442)

Self-consciously, Isabel distinguishes herself from the conventional Victorian woman, whom she thinks to be “horribly ignorant” (James 2008: 62). In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the narrator comments that “Isabel’s originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own”, while “[m]ost women did nothing with themselves at all; they waited in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come their way and furnish them with a destiny” (James 2008: 87). The narrator reflects that when suitors of Isabel’s sister came to the household, they “were afraid of her [Isabel]” since “they had a belief that some special preparation was required for talking with her” (James 2008: 51). Schriber goes on to insist that Isabel should be held responsible for her own fate, for the gratification in turning the external forces of the outside world into her own and resides with them (Schriber 1976: 444). In this light, taking a step forward from Schriber’s criticisms, I contend that marriage is a compromise that Isabel undertakes to “play a part” in the conventional framework of Victorian society, where her potentials and self-fulfillments are constricted. That is, Isabel actually takes marriage as an expediency to work out her limited power.

Lord Warburton’s and Caspar Goodwood impede Isabel from actualizing her self-fulfillment and result in the failures of their proposals. Commenting that she likes Lord Warburton “well enough” (James 2008: 133), Isabel refuses his proposal for the reason that he is “too perfect” and that “irritates” her (James 2008: 169). Under this statement is Isabel’s refusal, as Millicent Bell explains, to sacrifice “her personal ideal of a selfhood unbounded by cultural categories” by entering the sphere of Lord Warburton’s “conventional” personage (James 2008: 771). Lord Warburton, “a territorial, [a] political, [and] social magnet” threatens to “[draw] her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved” (James 2008: 122). Isabel proudly remarks her refusal to Lord Warburton’s proposal that “many girls would have accepted” (James 2008: 179), as a sign of her own independence by turning away from his “big bribe” (James 2008: 135). Compared with Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood’s unyielding persistence, a “disagreeably strong push, a kind of hardness of presence” (James 2008: 134) also intimidates Isabel’s liberty, for Goodwood’s expressive energy has its power on her and the fact “deprive[s] her of the sense of freedom” (James 2008: 135). Isabel shows her discontent by declaring to Goodwood that she can find a way to live by herself without being taught by a clever man (James 2008: 179). On the other hand, Gilbert Osmond’s expressive weakness, being “poor and lonely” (James 2008: 459) has its charm on her and lures Isabel to “invest” not only her money, but herself on him: “[s]he would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence; it would be a good thing to love him” (James 2008: 458). Having the power of becoming a contributor who “[comes] with charged hands” to assist a noble, yet “helpless

and ineffectual” (James 2008: 458) widower, Isabel is driven by the strong desire that excited her to exercise her independence.

By projecting her idealisms on Osmond, “[t]he finest... manly organism she had ever know had become her property” (James 2008: 459), Isabel contents herself to fulfill her self-actualization through participating in Osmond’s idiosyncrasy: “besides herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble” (James 2008: 331). Isabel’s “ideal of intimacy”, Southward points out, is “that of the thinker and metaphysician”, an unrealistic idealism that contributed to her disastrous marital decision:

Isabel holds herself aloof from a reality more happily by her own imagination, cherishing her freedom to think what she likes even as she considers herself morally responsible for thinking what is true. It is an attitude willing to create the interest it does not find. (Southward 1997: 101)

When Ralph questions Isabel’s marital decision, as though defending for herself, Isabel retorts that what pleases lies in the fact that Osmond’s virtue is a list of nothings—“No property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It’s the total absence of these things that pleases me” (James 2008: 375). Placing her expectation on Osmond, as Bell perceives, in fact, Isabel projects herself on Osmond as an instrument to fulfill her ideal self (James 2008: 768). Osmond’s mysterious character, in which Isabel’s “mind contains no class offering a natural place” (James 2008: 285), and a philosophy of “willful renunciation” of all kinds of actions, has its charm for her. Bell observes that Osmond’s “pretended indifference to all commitments to convention makes him seem to her what she herself aspires to be” (James 2008: 772). Considering Osmond as her idealistic alter ego, Isabel is blinded in a way that she only sees her desired qualities that she projected on Osmond as she claims that Osmond’s independence and individuality “is what *I* most see in him” (James 2008: 370). Along with the others, Ralph’s disapproval only adds to Isabel’s pride, for the thought that she “married to please herself” (James 2008: 377) confirms her liberty and independence.

Isabel’s imagined feeling that misguides her fellow-thinking results in her insistence in marrying Osmond, for she imposes her idealization on Osmond. Since it is impossible to contact directly with the thoughts and feelings of another person, as Rae Greiner argues, by seeking a general conception of how others would think or feel in a given set of circumstances or situations, “sympathy [becomes] productive, not just mimetic” (Greiner 2012: 21). Rather than to reproduce a person’s feelings in oneself, a Smithian sympathizer imagines what a person in his situation is likely to feel:

It is “the impressions of our own senses only, not those of [the other], which our imaginations copy.” No original feeling need even be present. When we “put our selves in his case”, we can conjure feelings “from the imagination” that do not derive from the sufferer’s “reality”. The burden of proof falls away. I need not worry whether I feel what the other feels. (Greiner 2012: 17)

This emotion is what Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, terms “fellow-feeling”, which is cultivated by imaginative reflection. However, in this way, sympathy does not promise to provide a foundation for ethical social life for a person’s thought and imagination can be misdirected. With her wild imagination, during the months of her acquaintance with Osmond, Isabel “had imagined a world of things that had no substance” (James 2008: 458). It is only after her marriage that Isabel finds out that she had “invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honors” (James 2008: 375). A fancy that is “fed through charmed senses” and leads to misreading—“she has not read him right” (James 2008: 458).

Transforming from a romantic to a realistic narrator, Isabel is stuck in her self-alienation, which prevents her from achieving sympathy with herself. As a turning point, Chapter Forty-Two is famous for the soliloquy of Isabel’s overnight meditation on the first three years of her marriage with Osmond. During those three years of Isabel’s life, which remains a gap in the text due to the absence of narration, the readers are only indirectly and partially informed about Isabel’s marriage and the death of her first child by the conversations between other characters, before she reappears as a leading character in the story-line. Departing from her past romantic illusion, at this crucial self-reflecting night, Caramello writes, Isabel “critically examine her past and realistically assess her present situation” (Caramello 2000: 7). Not long after their marriage, Isabel and Osmond, whom she thought to be her idealistic self, are depicted as “two disillusioned lovers”, who are “perfectly apart in feeling”, “but they had never yet separated in act” (James 2008: 572). Isabel and Osmond’s mutual attractions are based on a sense of mutual possession. It turns out that, ironically, while Isabel projects her idealism on Osmond, similarly, Osmond tries to make Isabel an extension of his own self. Isabel having too many ideas of her own offends Osmond. His desire to draw Isabel into his own system is what Isabel dreaded most, and what earlier made her refuse the other suitors’ proposals. Along with critics like Freedman and Poirier, Southward argues that Isabel and Osmond’s aestheticism is to resolve to think as they desire and to see the world that suits them (James 2008: 102). What Osmond wants is “her [Isabel] character, the way she felt, the way she judged” (James 2008: 460); “[h]er mind was to be his” (James 2008: 463). However, at first Isabel is reluctant to recognize her suffering; passionately, Isabel feels that she needs to

know “her unhappiness should not have come to her through her own fault” (James 2008: 519). For admitting pain leads to an acknowledgment of her misjudgment, which contradicts to her theory that she alone keeps her “spiritual affairs in order” (James 2008: 519). The most important theory that directs her throughout her life is the belief of her own righteousness and judgment of her conduct—“a consideration which had often held her in check” (James 2008: 575). Even at Ralph’s death bed, Isabel replies to Ralph that she will stay in England “as long as seems right”, while he answers “Yes, you think a great deal about that” (James 2008: 613). Disillusioned after her marriage, Isabel is alienated from herself in her unhappy marriage, for she is not willing to confront her misjudgments.

For an idealist like Isabel, pain and suffering mean failure. To eliminate them from her idealistic theory, Isabel, trying to escape from the despair of her disillusion, alienates herself by making an effort to “play the part of a good wife” (James 2008: 445). Isabel considers that “if she could really amuse herself she perhaps might be saved” (James 2008: 446)—to be saved from the “house of suffocation” (James 2008: 461), where Osmond forces his rigid system on her. It is not until close to the end of the novel when Isabel is “weary of [her] secret” (James 2008: 521) that she finally acknowledges her unhappy marriage to Henrietta, which she has long been keeping to herself. Isabel reluctantly admits to Henrietta that she is “wretched” to be pitied and sympathized, although “she hated to hear herself say it” (James 2008: 521). Yet Isabel refuses to take the advice of departing from Osmond, for it suggests an admission of her fault as she asserts that it is “not of him that I’m considerate—it’s of myself!” (James 2008: 522) Having “an unquenchable desire to think well of herself”, Isabel “[has] an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong” (James 2008: 68). This hope, however, produces self-abnegation that results in the failure of fellow-thinking, for at the same time, Isabel alienates herself from what also remain as parts of her self.

Rather than imposing her own idealism on the others, Isabel develops a sense of sympathy with others that unconsciously contributes to her own self, for it is her relation to others that defines who she is. Contending that no one can be exclusive and isolated from the living network of human beings, Southward poses that *The Portrait of a Lady* is “not so much of the lady, but of the relations that make the lady who she is” (Southward 1997: 82). As the novel progresses to the end, the narration of Isabel’s inner reflection has become less; instead, Isabel’s thought is more interpreted through the interactions with other characters. Greiner perceived that in Smith’s sympathetic procedure, feelings must be abstracted first and “turned into the stuff of story—to be imaginatively passed on and shared”:

sympathy with others arises not from direct contact with their feelings but from the imagination, and in particular from thoughtful consideration of the expressive situations in which those feelings arise, Smith shifted the focus away from what persons should be doing to what they might *do*, where they *are*. (Greiner 2012: 53)

Discovering the scandal between her husband and Madame Merle adds to a deeper pain of Isabel's already gloomy marriage; however, this discovery makes Isabel determined to travel to England despite Osmond's opposition, which evokes an involuntary communion with her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, whose husband is dead and only son, Ralph dying. Thinking of her aunt, Isabel's pain turns into an imaginative narration as she

wondered if she were not even missing those enrichments of consciousness and privately trying—reaching out for some aftertaste of life, dregs of the banquet; the testimony of pain or the cold recreation of remorse. On the other hand, perhaps she was afraid; if she should begin to know remorse at all it might take it too far. (James 2008: 606)

Rather than directly referring to Isabel or Mrs. Touchett, the narrator technically uses a personal pronoun, “she”, creating a fusion of feeling, abstracted in narration and shared between Isabel and Mrs. Touchett. In this light, by entering a communal thought through fellow-thinking, Isabel leaves her self-alienation, and individual isolation.

We contend that a period of time is requisite to re-create Isabel's thoughts in memory. Isabel's sympathetic thinking is intensified in memories since thinking about others is forming a relation of thinking between self and others. The theme of thinking as relating recurrently shows up in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Noting that Isabel's past contains relations with others, Southward argues that Isabel's fate, as well as her past, are intertwined with the men who desire her, for it is impossible for her to disconnect their plea for her from the involvement in every year and hour of her living, “which she labors to keep in mind and cherishes than any suitor's hand” (James 2008: 94). Indeed, Isabel does not refuse when Lord Warburton asks Isabel to “[t]hink of me sometimes” when he bids farewell to Pansy and Isabel in Rome.

Likewise, Isabel replies to Goodwood that he may “[g]ive a thought to it every now and then” (James 2008: 546) when he asks her whether he should give the thought of pitying her after the discovery of her unhappy marriage. Isabel's step daughter, Pansy, succinctly expresses how mutual thinking bonds one and the other together. When Isabel tells Pansy not to disobey Osmond's wish to think about her unsuccessful lover, Mr. Rosier, Pansy replies, “[y]ou think of those who think of you” (James 2008: 502).

Goodwood requests Isabel to think of him—“I want you to think of *me*” (James 2008: 625) in their final meeting. The time in the past and relationship with others are mingled together in the trajectory of Isabel’s life; repetitively, the past overwhelms her. In the beginning, by “leav[ing] the past behind her” (James 2008: 48), Isabel wants to start her life afresh. But from the outset Isabel does not really want to experience, only to imagine; correspondingly, in her relationships with others, she does not want to judge herself. As Ralph points out, Isabel wants “to see... not to feel” (James 2008: 775). Nonetheless, the harder she tries to abandon the past, the more this strategy backfires. In her childhood house in Albany, before being interrupted by Mrs. Touchett’s unexpected visit, Isabel ponders on “[t]he years and hours of her life came back to her, and for a long time, in a stillness broken only by the tickling of the big bronze clock, she passes them in review” (James 2008: 49). Later, during her trip to Rome, Isabel was “moved... all inwardly” by [t]he sense of the terrible human past” the moment she enters St. Peter’s Cathedral (James 2008: 312). For Isabel, it is not until undergoing her bruising experience with Osmond that she develops a sympathetic character.

It is through acknowledging her past Isabel reconciles with others, as well as herself. As Greiner points out, sympathy prepares a person for thinking about others, “including the other in myself as others see me” (Greiner 2012: 1). That is, thinking along with others as a way to think with oneself is also the cultivation of one’s own sense of self (Greiner 2012: 22). It is only by sympathizing with others can a person sympathize with their own self, for one’s very self can be perceived as an other. Sympathy breeds sympathy. In a similar way, it is not until a person is reconciled with others can that person be reconciled with him/herself. Greiner poses that thinking the past brings about the feelings that is “felt and imagined” and further the probability to reconsider and make possible of (Greiner 2012: 73). To be reconciled with oneself, thus, is through harmonizing with one’s past, a past that is interwoven by one and the other as Greiner points out that

Far from corrupting fellow-feeling, then, sympathy with oneself proves to be constitutive of it, begetting a migrant conception of self at once continuous with the past and not utterly determined by it...the self-fragmentation that makes it possible to sympathize with others also generates the conditions through which one harmonizes self with self—one’s former lives with the life one is living, one’s past with one’s present, the possible lives one isn’t living but might have, might yet. (Greiner 2012:78)

Isabel, in fact, carries a heavy weight on her for all her bitter-sweet experiences, including the mistakes that she tries to repress, which have merged

into her past. Her past keeps reminding her through memories, and eventually become a part of the self that she cannot discard.

In the novel's opening scene, where Isabel is first presented to the reader, Isabel reviews her life in deep meditation, imagining the possibilities of the roads that were not taken: "It suddenly struck her that if her Aunt Lydia had not come that day in just that way and found her alone, everything might have been different. She might have had another life and she might have been a woman more blest" (James 2008: 604). For Isabel, "she was wondering whether if her aunt had not come that day in Albany she would have married Caspar Goodwood" (James 2008: 604), whom "she believed that he had invested all in her happiness, while the others had invested only a part" (James 2008: 519), through the abstracted feeling of reimagining her own past. Through rethinking her past and the people in relation to her, Isabel rediscovers herself gradually. It is through her reconciliation with others that she is, in turn, reconciled with herself.

I propose that Goodwood is the most important person that affects Isabel in reconciling with her past, for Isabel once renounces him for her idealistic persuasion, yet this decision remains as a regret to her. What is in Isabel's mind that compels her to return to Rome is never revealed even at the very end of the novel, but one incident that is closely related to it is Isabel's last unexpected meeting with Goodwood. Before their meeting, Isabel is undecided to her future. After Goodwood's impulsive kiss, all of a sudden, Isabel has an epiphany, knowing "where to turn", as she metaphysically sees "a very straight path" (James 2008: 628), that later turns out to be the way back to Rome. It should be stated that, rather than passively or forcibly being kissed by Goodwood, it is a kiss that Isabel "took" from Goodwood and significantly, the kiss justifies his "intense identity" that makes "each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her" (James 2008: 627). This statement sheds some light in Isabel's inexplicable care for Goodwood, that she has always kept him in her mind. Goodwood, "the only person with an unsatisfied claim on her" (James 2008: 518), continues to haunt Isabel's thoughts. Goodwood even makes a larger preoccupation in Isabel's mind after her marriage, when she realizes she made a wrong choice: "on finding herself in trouble he had become a member of that circle of things with which she wished to set herself right" (James 2008: 519). Therefore, rejecting Goodwood is to cast off her true desire—a rejection of her very self. In the sensation of the kiss, Isabel is released from her own suppression. I consider the reason Isabel returns to Rome is that she finally faces the reality as becoming true to herself. On the contrary, if Isabel is still blinded by her idealism, she would believe eloping with Goodwood could be a possible redemption for her, which, I believe, will turn out to be another disaster by moving her idealization from Osmond to Goodwood. The only reasonable

way for Isabel is to return to her gloomy marriage in Rome, yet she returns with a different character.

During her development, pain and suffering are indispensable in activating her imagined fellow-feeling in thinking along with others. Admirably, Isabel takes the initiative in responding to the pain and suffering that serves as important themes in her life. I deem that sympathy works less as a solution to Isabel's travail than as a platform to relate her and others together. Her suffering, nevertheless, in her marriage makes a turning point for Isabel to leave her imaginary world and face reality with a mellow character. Although pain and sorrow do not always generate fellow thinking, suffering, a comparatively more prolonged feeling compared with other affects, stimulates a greater imagination in abstract thinking. For Isabel, suffering has become "an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure" (James 2008: 456). If not encountering difficulties that bring distress, Isabel would still indulge in her theoretic idealisms as she once believed: "It's not absolutely necessary to suffer; we were not made for that" and declares that she has come to Europe "to be as happy as possible" (James 2008: 775). Before her miserable marriage, Isabel is absorbed in her idealistic theory of proving her liberty. After the disillusion in her marriage, Isabel at first tries to cover it up by pretending to be happy, but later she becomes more mature in reconciling with others and herself by admitting her misjudgment. Isabel's transformation is drastic as she silently reflects on her journey back to England to visit the dying Ralph: "she wondered if it were vain and stupid to think so well of herself" (James 2008: 597) to believe "she was too valuable" for "to live only to suffer" (James 2008: 596). Indeed, Isabel achieves self-reconciliation through developing a sympathetic thinking when she rethinks her past relationships and imagines the possible future.

Conclusions

This paper pointed out that Isabel reconciles with herself through Greiner's reading of the Smithian sympathetic fellow-thinking that is shared in imagination. Isabel's mellowness is revealed in her transformation: moving from a romanticist who lives only to please herself to a matured woman who is willing to accept her misjudgments and take them as part of her life. Compared with her experience of literature in her early years, when Isabel absorbs everything without reservation, Isabel's cultivation of fellow-thinking shows her effort in resisting literature's effects becomes part and parcel of her later maturity. With her earlier egoistic romantic imagination, Isabel falls into exaggeration of Osmond's virtues. Her projected idealism leads her to a false self-identification with Osmond due to her romantic the-

ories and inexperienced naivety. It is, nevertheless, after the disillusion, her fellow-thinking relates Isabel with her past and later leads to the reconciliation with others. Throughout this paper, I have pointed out that Isabel reconciles with herself through a sympathetic fellow thinking that is shared in imagination. Isabel's new composure is revealed in her final transformation: moving from a romantic who lives only to please herself to a mature woman who is willing to accept her misjudgments and take them as part of her life.

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