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COLLECTING AS ETHOS AND TECHNIQUE IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

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> Collections are the artistic creation of self out of self, part of the connection of past and present and the hope of a future.
> —Susan M. Pearce

While critics have paid much attention to the importance of the fine arts in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, the cultural and psychological phenomenon of collecting remains overlooked in the novel. In *The Museum World of Henry James*, Adeline R. Tintner painstakingly catalogues, and assesses the effects of, particular works of art as they appear in James's novels and stories. Tintner tends primarily to be concerned with the "symbolic insertion of significant works of art to dramatize a crisis" in James's fiction.[1] Yet Henry James was as much intrigued by the gesture of collecting as he was by the objects collected. James's emphasis on collecting in *The Portrait of a Lady* focuses the cultural and psychological significance of the act on the novel's characters. But it also contributes much to the special form of realism James developed in the early stage of his career as marked by *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Although the phenomenon of collecting in *Portrait* has received no critical attention, except for condemnations of Gilbert Osmond as a collector of people and objects alike, such has not been the case for James's later novel, *The Spoils of Poynton*. It is as if the ideas on collecting that James was developing implicitly in *Portrait* reached their most explicit expression in *Spoils*. In both novels what is at stake is not mere possession of objects, but rather the self as it attempts to possess. Paul B. Armstrong points out that for Mrs. Gereth in *Spoils*, "the process of objectifying herself through her possessions is all-important to her own sense of who she is."[2] Such self-objectification is also part of what Isabel attempts through her marriage to Osmond in *Portrait*. In his Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, James acknowledges that the "real centre" of the novel, "the citadel of the interest," is "the Things, always the splendid Things."[3] James conceives of Fleda Vetch, says Armstrong, only because the things, the spoils of Poynton, "could not function as the work's central consciousness although they deserve

[202.120.237.38] Project MUSE (2025-08-05 03:05 GMT)

that role."[4] Similarly, in *Portrait*, Isabel becomes the thing, the spoils, that functions as the novel's central consciousness. Collecting itself serves both as the characters' central motivation and as James's *modus operandi* in creating the novel.

Some of the post-Civil War historical and cultural contexts for collecting as it plays out in *The Portrait of a Lady*, as well as in James's developing realism, are familiar. The Civil War had left the United States struggling for a sense of national self-definition. For many leisure-class Americans—whose postbellum role was not imposed upon them by the land and industries to be worked in war-ravaged America—there was perhaps an even greater sense of the need to define themselves as Americans heading toward the *fin de siècle*. Given secure financial means, one way to acquire a sense of self was the conspicuous acquisition and collection of things, securing for wealthy Americans the kind of status previously associated with aristocratic Europeans.

According to Susan M. Pearce, collecting—especially since Darwin—has been used as a means to gather evidence of one's advanced place on the evolutionary scale.[5] It was not until the nineteenth century, with the advent of large national museums in conjunction with a burgeoning middle class, that collecting as a means of national identity formation began to reach cult status. John Berger points out that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the aristocracy typically commissioned works of arts depicting themselves (and their possessions) as the central subject for the purpose of self-reflexively affirming their own aristocratic status.[6] Addressing this same tendency, the cultural anthropologist James Clifford cites C. B. MacPherson's analysis of Western "possessive individualism," tracing the "emergence of an ideal self as owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods."[7] These goods tended predominantly to be objects generated from, and referring to, the owner's own cultural (European, aristocratic) milieu.

In the nineteenth century wealthy Europeans, often in the name of science, undertook what Clifford calls a "journey into otherness," penetrating distant continents to lay claim to cultural artifacts (most famously the Elgin Marbles) and meticulously collecting and curating these artifacts in private collections and national museums.[8] The collector uses the objects collected to posit an identity—or, as in *Portrait*, a self capable of maneuvering in the world. While wealthy Americans,

like the Touchetts in *Portrait*, shared in the Western notion of "possessive individualism," American nineteenth-century possessiveness differed from the European version. Werner Muensterberger argues that the need to collect "derives from a not immediately discernible sense memory of deprivation or loss or vulnerability."[9] Lacking a unified national history, and hence a distinctive national identity, many American had reasons to feel such deprivation, loss, and vulnerability following the Civil War. So while Europeans looked to the Middle East, Far East, and Africa to collect their "otherness," Americans tended to look toward Europe—toward a culture they could recognize and emulate, but also, in their acquisition of it, surpass.

The characters in *The Portrait of a Lady*, all Americans abroad with the exception of Lord Warburton and Mr. Bantling, play out, in Clifford's phrase, "the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience)."[10] Not only is collecting a metaphor for how the characters live their lives; beyond that collecting becomes for them "a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity."[11] Nowhere is the notion that objects create the person better articulated than in the oft-quoted passage involving Madame Merle, who functions as a kind of free-floating curator claiming all of Europe for her own. In attempting to disabuse Isabel of her romantic idealism, Madame Merle tells her:

> "There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for *things*! One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive."[12]

Madame Merle, admired by all for her knowledge and refinement, is the master-curator among both the novel's expert collectors, Gilbert Osmond and Ralph Touchett, and its novice collectors, Isabel and Edward Rosier—despite the fact that in the end she forsakes this role, rejecting its overdetermination of her, and flees back to America to *un*define herself. Through Madame Merle, Henry James anticipates the observation by William James, eight years later, that "*a man's Self*

[202.120.237.38] Project MUSE (2025-08-05 03:05 GMT)

is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friend, his reputation and works, his lands and yacht and bank account."[13] William James pushes the connection between identity and things further than Madame Merle by asserting that possessions, more than mere expressions of the self, actually comprise the self. Yet it is Madame Merle who suggests the nature of ownership as a process that "overflows" in creating the self.

The compulsion to collect drives Madame Merle and all the Americans in *Portrait* to live very itinerant lives. Isabel is compelled to collect experiences by seeing all of Europe, and Henrietta Stackpole is determined to collect tidbits of gossip from Europe's best houses to advance her career as a journalist. The three self-professed collectors—Gilbert Osmond, Edward Rosier, and Ralph Touchett (Ralph being the most discreet of the three)—live permanently abroad, as if in continual uprootedness, and travel about England and the continent at their leisure. Yet the characters' itinerant lives are not just the result of their urge to collect. Their itineration actually leads them into collecting. According to Muensterberger, "Obtaining one or another object is a prerequisite of finding relief from what one [informant] described as 'unbearable restlessness.'"[14] Such restlessness is particularly strong among the uprooted and anxious Americans in *Portrait*. The character in whom these characteristics are most evident is Gilbert Osmond, not only the most inveterate expatriate in the novel but also its preeminent collector.

Osmond represents the extreme in the collecting ethos as it is depicted in *Portrait*. Having virtually no history, he compensates for the overwhelming void in his life through collecting. This makes him, in turn, someone with "the collector's obsessional infatuation with the objects" he collects.[15] Madame Merle, who knows him better than does any other character, tells Isabel that Osmond "lives *tout bêtement* in Italy. No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" (p. 249). Osmond is a detached signifier, signifying only to the extent that he accumulates things. He resides in Italy but does not belong there. Rome and Florence serve as a fertile base from which he can pursue his collecting. His villa is a veritable museum,

> telling of arrangements subtly studied and refinements frankly proclaimed, and containing a variety of those faded hangings of damask and tapestry, those chests and cabinets of carved and time-polished oak, those angular specimens

> of pictorial art in frames as pedantically primitive, those perverse looking relics of mediaeval brass and pottery, of which Italy has long been the not quite exhausted storehouse. (p. 279)

When Isabel first enters the villa, she remarks how "Everything seems to me beautiful and precious" (p. 306). In reply, Osmond attempts a modest acknowledgement of her compliment, but reveals his conceit in his possessions: "I've a few good things . . . indeed I've nothing very bad" (p. 306). In the same breath, he adds, "But I've not what I should have liked" (p. 306), betraying what Muensterberger calls the collector's "repetitive states of neediness,"[16] the result of deep-seated insecurity—an insecurity that Osmond later exhibits in his determination to place Pansy with the best possible suitor and to preserve his hold on Isabel. In the same scene, Osmond's sister, Countess Gemini, bemoans her brother's rather sad obsession when she says to Isabel, "Poor Osmond, with his old curtains and crucifixes!" (p. 306).

His curtains, crucifixes, and other collectibles seem indeed to be all that Osmond has in life. Like Muensterberger's collectors, in his obsession he has "abandoned [his] lasting trust in people, thus giving preference to objects and possessions."[17] Very much the isolate in Rome, surrounded by his precious objects, Osmond reveals his weariness toward people when Madame Merle first mentions Isabel to him. His initial response to the proposed introduction is to say, "I know plenty of dingy people; I don't want to know any more" (p. 291). In order to cajole Osmond into agreeing to meet Isabel, Madame Merle must reassure him. She does so by flattering his great pride in his collections:

> She looked about the room—at the old cabinets, pictures, tapestries, surfaces of faded silk. "Your rooms at least are perfect. I'm struck with that afresh whenever I come back; I know none better anywhere. You understand this sort of thing as nobody anywhere does. You've such adorable taste."
>
> "I'm sick of adorable taste," said Gilbert Osmond.
>
> "You must nevertheless let Miss Archer come and see it. I've told her about it."
>
> "I don't object to showing my things—when people are not idiots."
>
> "You do it delightfully. As cicerone of your museum you appear to particular advantage." (p. 293)

With this final sally, Osmond relents. Madame Merle successfully plays

[202.120.237.38] Project MUSE (2025-08-05 03:05 GMT)

on the unconscious notion among collectors that by having their collections admired, they themselves receive admiration. Osmond agrees to an introduction, but only after asking Madame Merle to reaffirm Isabel's monetary worth. Now that he has been worked up by Madame Merle's praise for his "museum," he begins to calculate the potential advantage to his collection that Isabel might bring—not only though her income but through her own collectibility.

In "The Commodity World of *The Portrait of a Lady*," Michael T. Gilmore observes that "no one in *The Portrait* is free from the habit of metaphorizing others as expensive and beautiful objects."[18] Gilmore places particular emphasis on Osmond's objectification of Isabel, condemning this process as dehumanizing to her. Yet the issue is more complicated than one character's objectification of another. Osmond certainly assesses Isabel as a collectable, noting early in their courtship that "this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one" (p. 401). Indeed, he becomes quite attracted to "the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects" (p. 354).

Isabel, though, is not without a degree of volition in this process. Without condoning it, she participates in her own objectification, negotiating it to her own best possible advantage. As Paul B. Armstrong reasons, "in marrying Osmond, she seeks the value of culture, the power of self-sufficiency, the satisfaction of putting the wealth she possesses to meaningful use."[19] Isabel marries "to please herself," and, in a sense, thereby knowingly augments her exchange-value by joining herself to Osmond's esteemed collection, a collection she makes more valuable through her inclusion in it (p. 400). Furthermore, in marrying Osmond, she also objectifies him. She understands that "The finest . . . manly organism she had ever known had become her property" (p. 477). Of course, ultimately, she is objectified far more than she bargains for, to the point that she loses virtually all independence. She eventually realizes that Osmond is the final and ultimate proprietor of his collection and that "The real offense . . . was her having a mind of her own at all" (p. 481). Her own worth is subsumed by the more extensive worth of Osmond's "museum" in much the same way as a valuable painting's worth is relative to the collection to which it belongs.

For Osmond, Isabel certainly becomes, above and beyond her annual income, an important addition to his "world of intimate encounters with inexplicably fascinating objects"—"personal fetishes," to borrow James Clifford's terms.[20] Isabel had already been fetishized by

Ralph, the novel's other important collector, who at one point declares to her, "It was for you that I wanted—that I wanted to live" (p. 551). But Osmond co-opts Ralph's creation, Isabel, to put her to the service of his "own project of creating an identity," as Armstrong says of Mrs. Gereth's collecting practices in *The Spoils of Poynton*.[21] Toward the end of the novel, when Osmond explains to Casper Goodwood, as if to a hostile bidder, that Isabel and he are "as united, you know, as the candlestick and the snuffers," his simile is particularly apt: he would not dare break up the set (p. 552). He and Isabel objectify one another to garner mutual value, mutual recognition. Their marriage heightens the value of that by which they are who they are: their collections—his of objects, hers of experience. By no mere coincidence, it is in the museum-like St. Peter's Cathedral that Isabel encounters Osmond for the first time in Rome.

Nowhere is Osmond's objectification of another person more apparent than in his treatment of his daughter, Pansy. Gilmore says that "To her father, Pansy is another piece of property, an income-producing human being."[22] Yet this is to reduce Osmond's obsession with collecting to a merely venal project, which it is not. Osmond does not auction off Pansy simply for personal gain. Like Isabel, Pansy, among the items in Osmond's collection, has the status of a fetish. Pansy—who her father notes is "as pure as a pearl" (p. 294)—provides Osmond with great gratification through her perceived exquisiteness. He refuses to allow Rosier to marry her not because he does not have the means to afford her, but because he is such a novice collector, especially compared to himself. Warburton, on the other hand, represents the European aristocracy of old—the embodiment of the eighteenth-century private museum. Less interested in the income Pansy can demand, Osmond is more concerned with how he, as the donor, can best place Pansy and thereby receive glory through his benefaction of such a valued item. As Susan M. Pearce observes, collectors, in striving for immortality through their collections, must also plan for the security of their collections after their death; thus museums contract with collectors on the promise of preserving the integrity of the private collections bequeathed to them.[23] We see another version of this gesture in Ralph's careful bequeathal of his belongings at his death. While "The most valuable of the collection goes to Lord Warburton" (p. 627), he consigns Isabel—Warburton having married—to the care of Warburton's American counterpart, Goodwood. Likewise, Osmond wants to secure Pansy in the hands of Warburton, the stable museum

[202.120.237.38] Project MUSE (2025-08-05 03:05 GMT)

director in Osmond's eyes, to guarantee that his legacy will survive him. To Osmond's thinking, Edward Rosier, as a novice collector and also as an American, fails to offer the kind of status and security that Warburton can.

Edward Rosier, who is approximately Isabel's age and who was her childhood acquaintance, resembles Isabel in his deliberate efforts at self-definition through self-refinement. Whereas Isabel accumulates experiences, Rosier collects objects that will best redound to his "cultivated tastes" (p. 265). Rosier has "an acquaintance with old china, with good wine, with the bindings of books, with the *Almanach de Gotha*, with the best shops, the best hotels, the hours of railway trains" (p. 265). He knows "things" above all else; and furthermore, he is known by his "things"—although his knowledge of "things" remains on the level of "an acquaintance."

For Rosier, as for all collectors, collecting, as a means of identity formation, is a process, not simply an end. The act of acquiring things generally provides more stimulation than the passive act of simply owning. For the ardent collector such as Rosier, one of the most important relationships is the one with the seller of the objects the collector covets—a relationship he tries to foster with Osmond through Isabel and Madame Merle. Rosier, as a younger, more eager version of Osmond, exemplifies the nearly addictive nature of the buying aspect of collecting when, in response to a question from Isabel, he exclaims, "Do I spend my life at the auctioneer's? . . . Oh no; I haven't the means. I wish I had . . . When I think how clever they must be, the people who make *me* buy!" (pp. 266–67). He almost seems to recognize his desperately dependent relation to the people who can satisfy his collecting impulse. In comparison with Osmond, this side of Rosier shows him to be a fairly inexperienced, even petty, collector. He collects *bibelots*, or knick-knacks—a word never used in reference to Osmond's collections. For a man, the fact that he collects *bibelots* could be taken pejoratively, suggesting effeminacy. R. G. Saiselin points out that at the end of the nineteenth century "women were perceived as mere buyers of bibelots," whereas "Men, of course, collected too, but their collecting was perceived as serious and creative."[24] In his desire for Pansy, though, Rosier aspires toward far more serious collecting.

Rosier is torn between the kind of immaterial idealism entertained by Isabel and his passion for collecting objects. To himself, his love for Pansy seems authentic, even noble. Yet it is significant that he should happen to fall in love with the daughter of Gilbert Osmond,

whose collection he is forced to concede is superior to his own, who is a man who lives in Italy and owns even "better 'French' than he in Paris" (p. 416). Rosier arguably frequents Isabel's Rome house as much to appraise Osmond's collection as to pursue Pansy, perhaps even pursues Pansy as a strategy to obtain her father's collection. The rivalry between Rosier and Osmond is subtle but apparent. On first entering the Osmonds' house, Rosier, reluctantly yet graciously, "was obliged on the spot to admit that they had [better French objects], very much, and vanquished his envy, as a gentleman should, to the point of expressing to his hostess his pure admiration of her treasures" (p. 416). In pursuing Pansy, Rosier challenges Osmond as a pupil might his master. While he resents Osmond for his superior collection, he also admires his skill as a collector. Rosier recognizes "the fact that Gilbert Osmond had landed his highest prizes [including Isabel] during his impecunious season" (p. 416). This detail, in fact, lends Rosier hope; it confirms his and Osmond's "most cherished doctrine—the doctrine that a collector may freely be poor if he be only patient" (p. 416). Rosier takes this doctrine to refer equally to his pursuit of Pansy, the acquisition of whom would guarantee that he possessed the superior collection.

Rosier routinely assesses his chances of gaining Pansy's hand in marriage against the worth of his current collection. When he first goes to Madame Merle to elicit her help, he concerns himself not with how he will approach her, but with her possessions. He observes that her drawing-room is "furnished with specimens of every style, was especially rich in articles of the last two centuries" (p. 409). Forgetting the ostensible purpose of his mission, he "immediately put a glass into one eye and looked round; and then 'By Jove, she has some jolly good things!' he had yearningly murmured" (p. 409). When Madame Merle enters the room, she catches him "with his nose very close to the great lace flounce attached to the damask cover of the mantel" (p. 409). Before making known his purpose, he virtually offers to buy her things from her, and several moments later, after declaring his intentions toward Pansy, he frets that if Madame Merle did offer her assistance, "she was really only thinking of his *bibelots*. Had it come into her head that he might offer her two or three of the gems of his collection?" (p. 415). Despite his announcement that "I care more for Miss Osmond than for all the *bibelots* in Europe!" (p. 410), and despite his thought a few moments later that "If [Madame Merle] would only help him to marry Miss Osmond he would present her with his whole

[202.120.237.38] Project MUSE (2025-08-05 03:05 GMT)

museum" (p. 415), his motives are far from pure. He well knows, as does Osmond, that Pansy is a collectible worth far more than his museum of knick-knacks.

Even when frequenting Isabel's Rome house under the pretense of encountering Pansy, Rosier immediately "acknowledged that these people were very strong in 'good things'" (p. 416). Indeed, he is more preoccupied with Osmond's collection than his self-proclaimed intent: "In general, when Rosier presented himself on a Thursday evening, his first recognition was for the walls of the saloon; there were three or four objects his eyes really yearned for" (pp. 416)—"yearning" being particularly apt here in light of his love-lorn attitude toward Pansy. Gilmore points out that even though Rosier appears to value humans over objects, he nevertheless "elides the distinction between human beings and material possessions."[25]

Of course, Rosier does sell his collection in what at first appears to be a self-sacrificing gesture, although in actuality he is only attempting to better his bid for Pansy. It is at the Coliseum, in its own way a collector's icon of Western civilization, that he declares to Isabel that "I've sold all my *bibelots*!" (p. 573). Isabel responds in horror, recognizing the desperateness of the gesture. He explains to her that the sale was so devastating to him that he stayed clear of the auction, admitting that "I couldn't have seen them [his objects] going off; I think it would have killed me" (p. 574). The hyperbole of being killed by the sale is not so extraordinary, since his collection so thoroughly defines who Edward Rosier is. Rosier himself guesses as much when Isabel, understanding quite well Osmond's motive of placing Pansy in the finest possible collection, tells Rosier that Osmond will "say now that you're not wise" (p. 574). Rosier, who has an affinity with Osmond, instantly recognizes the full implications of the sale of his collection. He comes to understand, almost explicitly, "the notion of collection as the extended self," as the ultimate in self-definition.[26] He responds to Isabel's remark by saying, "Do you mean that without my bibelots I'm nothing? Do you mean they were the best thing about me? That's what they told me in Paris; oh they were very frank about it. But they hadn't seen *her*!" (p. 574). His final comment here only suggests further his objectifying of Pansy as an extremely fine collectible, one whose worth even the Paris auctioneers would necessarily appreciate given the chance. Isabel tries to comfort and reassure him by commenting that she is glad that he has at least kept his enamels, implying that all is not lost. The plain fact that he has withheld something from the sale, his

enamels, emphasizes the inauthenticity of his gesture as one made on behalf of an ideal love. Ironically, though, if the Osmond/Rosier doctrine of patience as the collector's greatest virtue holds true, by retaining his enamels Rosier may restore his collection and even, as the novel's inconclusive ending allows, eventually win Pansy.

Osmond and Rosier are not the only ones who desire to take possession of others in order to elevate their own status. James's title, *The Portrait of a Lady* (aside from the Titian allusion that Tintner notes in it) suggests an objectification of its subject.[27] In his Preface to *Portrait*, James speaks of "my grasp of a single character—an acquisition I had made."[28] His meaning here seems quite deliberately two-fold. He refers not only to understanding Isabel as a character which he has finally grasped, but also to the strategy with which he will write the novel, using Isabel as the impetus behind the entire narrative. In the same passage from the Preface, he also speaks of being "in complete possession of it," again referring to his central character as well as his narrative strategy.[29] This manner of expression in regard to both his subject and method in *Portrait* indicates how the cultural function of collecting and the psychology underlying the practice extend beyond the author's characters to the novelist himself. While much has been made of the blurring of theme and technique in *Portrait* as connecting the focus on Isabel's consciousness with the author's development of the limited point-of-view narrative, an important crossover between theme and technique also occurs in respect to the concept of collecting.

William W. Stowe argues that through the inspiration of Balzac James developed a form of "systematic realism."[30] According to Stowe, systematic realism, rather than striving to imitate the phenomenal world as commonplace notions of realism would have it, aims instead toward an interpretation of that world by means of a careful selection process. This systemization omits certain phenomena in order to make more intelligible other selected phenomena. In the process of selecting items and carefully placing those items in relation to one another, realism as practiced by Balzac and James closely resembles the practice of collecting.

"The process of selection," as Susan Pearce observes, lies at the heart of collecting."[31] In James Clifford's account, "the self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify"; thus "An excessive, sometimes even rapacious need to *have* is transformed into rule-governed, meaningful desire."[32] Henry James, who urged himself always to write more instead of less, to expand rather than condense,

[202.120.237.38] Project MUSE (2025-08-05 03:05 GMT)

nevertheless wrote extremely rule-governed fiction, as famously evidenced by his discussions of craft in the Prefaces and elsewhere. In "The Art of Fiction," James asserts that fiction is one of the "exact arts," and as such it "is essentially selection."[33] Just as the stamp collector chooses stamps that will compliment individual stamps as well as the collection as a whole, James in his fiction selects details for their specific and collective effects. Although he strongly favors inclusiveness, this tendency remains subordinate to his selectiveness—always part of his systematic realism. This selectiveness is integral to James's interpretative take on life in the same way that a collection, as an extended self of the collector, represents the collector's interests and values.

It is no coincidence that the Victorian age not only saw an increase in the accumulation of cultural artifacts in private collections and national museums, but also produced prodigiously prolific writers. Novels such as Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Balzac's *Cousin Pons*, both of which have collections at the heart of their subject, reinforce Dillon Ripley's observation that "Culture, then, creates collections; collections create culture."[34] In the Victorian novel as in the public museums that gained popularity during this period, collecting and collections are means toward defining society. As William Stowe points out, Balzac and James acted as cataloguers of society.[35] As with all cataloguers, curators, and collectors, the two novelists were more concerned with displaying the collection of details they accumulated from society—their version of society, just as Osmond's collection is his version of himself—than in a mimetic representation of society. Unlike Osmond, who collects as a means of self-aggrandizement, James sees his fiction as a service to, rather than an exploitation of, society: the role of a public curator as opposed to the private collector.

Werner Muensterberger links Balzac's own personal collecting fanaticism to the thematics of collecting within his fiction.[36] Similarly, Adeline Tintner recognizes that, when naming particular art works in his novels and stories, James saw "rich and suggestive analogues for what he was trying to do in his prose," although for Tintner these analogues remain primarily thematic.[37] Neither Tintner nor Muensterberger makes the connection between collecting as an active behavior and the rhetorical strategies of fiction—in particular, realism. Yet the connection exists quite overtly in James, who, as Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley says, wished to become the "American Balzac."[38]

Jay Bochner's discussion of the role of objects in *The Portrait of a*

Lady indirectly touches upon the connection between collecting and realism. He argues that in contrast to Hawthorne's concern with the symbolic value of things, such as the scarlet letter "A," James cares far more for objects for their own sake; things are what they appear to be in *Portrait*.[39] Rather than signifying transcendent ideals, objects are simply objects, and as such—as with objects in a collection—they define the people they surround. Objects come to posit the otherness by which characters know themselves and are known by others. Objects may certainly accrue to themselves incidental symbolic importance—but this symbolism is more a function of the reader's interpretive overlay on the objects than of the objects themselves.[40] Bochner's stress on James's use of objects for their own sake points toward what Pearce asserts about the function of objects a collector includes in his or her collection: "collected objects are both the signifier, that is the medium that carries the message, and the signified, the message itself."[41] As James's discussion of Isabel in his Preface suggests, objects serve as both theme and technique in *Portrait*.

The systemic realism of James's use of details in *Portrait* is a way of selectively collecting, cataloguing, and thereby creating a world complete unto itself. Whether it is Rosier selecting *bibelot*s, Osmond selecting Isabel, or James himself selecting any given detail he includes in *Portrait*, the selection of the item transforms it, not into something symbolic (though this may follow), but into an actual part of material culture. As material culture, the details become, as Pearce says of any object deliberately collected and displayed, "part of the world of human values."[42] These human values are not universal truths, aesthetic or moral, toward which the objects simply signal readers, as literary symbols typically do. They are in the first instance the particular values that Henry James wishes to foster through his own highly deliberate selection and presentation of objects—whether a piece of porcelain or a character such as Isabel—within his fiction. With such an approach, of course, James risks dehumanizing his characters, risks being guilty of the same objectification of Isabel that Osmond is. He avoids this, though. By recognizing the actual materiality of his characters, by refusing to reify some abstraction through Isabel, he makes them more authentically human. He makes them *real* in the same sense that objects in the novel are real for the characters.

In entering the Egyptian Pavilion at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we do not enter Egypt, but rather the curator's version of it. Likewise, in entering *The Portrait of a Lady*, we do not enter nineteenth-

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century Europe or a young woman's consciousness, but rather James's version of each. Tintner claims that in James's later novel *The Golden Bowl* the museum "becomes, in the [novel's] metaphorical language . . . a meta-museum."[43] Beyond James's museum-based metaphors, though, all of his novels may be considered museums in the sense that they formulate a "reality" through their collected and displayed details. Through collecting details—the objects, characters, and events that comprise his fiction—James consciously creates *his* realism, the Jamesian collection. He neither condones nor condemns the act of collecting as moral or immoral. Rather, as in *The Portrait of a Lady*, he recognizes that collecting can serve various ends. Thematically, in Osmond and others, James depicts the dangers to which an obsessive collecting impulse can lead, while artistically he demonstrates how collecting is crucial to any significant representation of the world.

Notes

I wish to thank Dr. Linda Leavell for her invaluable advice and encouragement throughout the revision of this essay.

[1] Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1986), p. 3.

[2] Paul B. Armstrong, *The Phenomenology of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 194.

[3] Henry James, "Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*," *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. 126.

[4] Armstrong, pp. 191–92.

[5] Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1992), p. 8.

[6] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corp. and Penguin, 1972), pp. 83–112.

[7] James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), p. 217.

[8] Clifford, p. 217.

[9] Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), p. 3.

[10] Clifford, p. 218.

[11] Clifford, p. 218.

[12] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 253. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

[13] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt, 1908), p. 291.

[14] Muensterberger, pp. 251–52.

[15] Muensterberger, p. 7.

[16] Muensterberger, p. 254.

[17] Muensterberger, p. 255.

[18] Michael T. Gilmore, "The Commodity World of *The Portrait of a Lady*," *NEQ* 59 (1986), 55.

[19] Armstrong, p. 117.

[20] Clifford, p. 216.

[21] Armstrong, p. 196.

[22] Gilmore, p. 60.

[23] Pearce, pp. 63–66.

[24] R. G. Saiselin, *Bricobracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot*, quoted in Pearce, p. 60.

[25] Gilmore, p. 55.

[26] Pearce, p. 37.

[27] Tintner, p. 60.

[28] Henry James, "Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*," in *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 46.

[29] James, "Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*," p. 46.

[30] William W. Stowe, *Balzac, James, and the Realistic Novel* (Princeton: Princeton

Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 3–20.

[31] Pearce, p. 7.

[32] Clifford, p. 218.

[33] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Future of the Novel: Essays on the Art of Fiction*, ed. by Leon Edel (New York: Vintage, 1956), pp. 10, 23.

[34] Dillon Ripley, *The Sacred Grove* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 23.

[35] Stowe, p. 7.

[36] Muensterberger, pp. 101–34.

[37] Tintner, p. 1.

[38] Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, *The Early Development of Henry James* (Urbana: Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), p. 76.

[39] Jay Bochner. "Life in a Picture Gallery: Things in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Marble Faun*," *TSLL* 11 (1969), 761.

[40] See, for example, J. T. Laird's reading of the cracked porcelain in the falling-out scene between Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, in "Cracks in Precious Objects: Aestheticism and Humanity in *The Portrait of a Lady*," *AL* 52 (1981), 643–48.

[41] Pearce, p. 38.

[42] Pearce, p. 5.

[43] Tintner, p. 4.