

The Blooming Narrative of Henry James:
The Portrait of a Lady (1881) and *The Bostonians* (1886)

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Henry James and Garden

It is well known that Henry James (1843–1916) had a strong attachment to the garden. When he settled in Lamb House in 1897, he employed his friend, former artist and garden designer Alfred Parsons to create a broad lawn fringed with colorful flowers and paths through the garden. Although James writes “I am *densely* ignorant—only just barely know dahlias from mignonette¹ (*The Letter of Henry James* 283) in 1898, his last secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, mentions that “he left gardens entirely to professional hands—he never attempted to cultivate intimate acquaintance with his plants” (Reavell 225). He enjoyed eating the vegetables and fruits and took pleasure in the flowers. The recollections of her predecessor Mary Weld and James’s own correspondence show that he enjoyed to cut roses and sweet peas for indoor enjoyment, once he learned it was for the good of the plants. One year, he won no fewer than thirteen prizes on the exhibits—mostly firsts on the exhibits, even though Gammon, the gardener, had done all the work. He took pleasure in the close view of the garden from the delightful Garden Room in which he worked on his last three major novels, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

The nineteenth century was the high time when the modern flower garden flourished widely. It was the period of horticultural societies, flower exhibitions and flower competitions, of professional gardener and literary garden. Flower garden, which fills garden with many flowers as possible, became popular not only in France but also in America and England. People from various classes began to enjoy flowers both in their gardens and homes. The concept of “gardenesque” treats gardens as a work of art, not merely as an imitation of nature popularized.

Including Parson, there arise some artists-turned-gardeners such as William Andrews Nesfield, Gertrude Jekyll. However, Alfrey (2004) points out that among those artists, Parson is the only one who represents the consistency between his paintings and gardens. While

¹The letters of James to Miss Muir Mackenzie in 1898

Nesfield and Jekyll assumed painting as a prelude to their gardens, Parson held exhibitions throughout his life. The idea that painting should be a model for gardening is firstly advocated by British horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll and her mentor, William Robinson at the end of the nineteenth century. Countering the former belief that garden design should be more similar to architecture, Jekyll states that gardens have pictorial values. The affinities between paintings and gardens are their consciousness for its composition, shading, proportion and color.

This trend is stabilized in the Broadway circle made up of American artist expatriates in 1880s England. Moving to Broadway in the mid-1880s, Parson associated with Anglo-American artists such as Edwin Austin Abbey and Frank Millet who had rented Farnham House in 1885 and invited John Singer Sargent to join, forming a Broadway circle. They were joined by James, Edmund Gosse and the Shakespearian actress Mary Anderson and others, shared their interests in painting, music, literature and gardening. Sargent painted *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885-6) which shows his method of open-air painting in the garden. The next year, they moved to Russel House which was almost next door and Parson made a garden for themselves.

The direct exchange between the fields of art and gardening is also mentioned by James. Before the introductory essay 'Gardens and Orchards' for Parson's exhibition at the Fine Art Society in 1891, James had already portrayed Parsons as an artist who proposed the idea of the garden holding the essence of Englishness in the exact way that Americans would expect England to appear². He felt that Parsons captures "that peculiarly English look of the open air room," that "nook quality, the air of a land and a life so infinitely sub-divided that they produce a thousand pleasant privacies" (Alfrey 49).

Moreover, artists in the nineteenth century often represented the garden associated with femininity, love and sexual desire. This concept completely changed the prospect tradition of garden portraiture in the early eighteenth century in British art which included a social world such as fields, forests, roads, rivers and even towns and cities. The garden has been personified by Flora, the goddess of the spring as Albert Moore's *A Garden* (1869) and also embodied womanhood in Christianity to connote the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. The paintings are often attributed to the biblical story of Garden of Eden, confirming the seductive aspects of the paradise. For artists, those private and secret gardens imply a

²Henry James, "Our Artist in Europe," *Harper's Magazine*, vol. 79, 1889, pp.55-65.

retreat into a private world, which also alludes to the women situation of being confined by force.

As James appreciated those garden culture and enjoyed seeing flowers grow in his garden, he also treated a literary work as a garden which is made by literary gardener, the author. In his literary criticism, James wrote about writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, employing natural and horticultural language to describe their works. In his critical essay on Balzac "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905), he addresses Balzac's writing style: "the light he produces is, beyond that of any other corner of the great planted garden of romance, thick and rich and heavy" ("The Lesson of Balzac" 125). He also praises him for living with "the restless energy" in "his garden." As this rhetoric shows, James regarded the novel as a garden of its writer, in which the readers "walk with him in the great glazed gallery of his thought."

In those "garden of romance," heroine is often likened to flowers by James. In his literary criticisms on Anthony Trollope and George Eliot, he criticizes their heroines in the botanical language. James also depicted heroines in the name of flowers in his literary garden. As Daisy in *Daisy Miller* (1878), Pansy in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Verena (which is derived from Veronica) in *The Bostonians* (1886), he often attached floral names to his protagonists and represented them as flowers, describing their growth by horticultural language such as "bloom", "spring" and "flower."

Then, what does James intend to by using the analogy between novels and gardens and what kind of femininity is implied by depicting maidens as flowers? This paper explores James's concept of the blooming girl in *The Bostonians* (1886) in comparison with the maidens in *The Portrait of the Lady* (1881) and examines how he applies and converts the blooming tradition to his two novels.

James's adaptation of horticultural language in the literary criticisms on Anthony Trollope and George Eliot

Originally, there had been a long tradition of associating the flower with femininity in the literary culture. Although the horticultural language can be found in the classic myths, medieval novels, pastoral poems and English novels in the eighteenth century, the cultural identification to see women as domestic figures began in the nineteenth century. In America, it became a major cultural phenomenon as the category of sentimental flower books gains its popularity. Sentimental flower books introduced the language of flowers which was imported

from France to America around the 1830s, as well as religious prose works using flowers, collections of flower poems, study of flowers, and sentimental botanies. The illustration of plants and flowers served as an archive and also conceived as an ideal formal gift.

This associative exercise originated in early in the eighteenth-century France, reaching its popularity from a popular book, *Le Langage des Fleurs* (1819), published under the pseudonym Charlotte de Latour. The book is imported to America and attracts mostly famous women writers and editors. Although the first book on the language of flowers in America was not the work of a woman writer, it is followed by many books on the language of flowers written by women authors such as Elizabeth Gamble Wirt's *Flora's Dictionary* (1829), Dorothea Dix's *The Garland of Flora* (1829), Sarah Josepha Hale's *Flora's Interpreter* (1832) and Catharine Waterman Esling's *Flora's Lexicon* (1839).

Under the name of the language of flowers, floral symbolism was systematized. The concept of the book of language of flowers is a dictionary to show a list of flower names with their associated meanings which connote the conduct of a love affair. Mostly, the meaning ascribed to each flower often derived from prose and poetry included together in the book. Not only the meaning is based on the flowers reference in classical mythology and also the connotation in the Bible, it also reflected some physical characteristic of the flowers: their color, shape, or scent.

In those trends, the language of flowers in America was often identified with women to represent their natural traits. The meaning of flowers was identified with the interests of women, who were required to be religious and domestic. Besides, Beverly Seaton (1995) suggests that "flowers, in fact, were seen as the most suitable aspect of nature to represent women, or to interact with them, reflecting as they do certain stereotypical qualities of the female being: smallness of stature, frailty of mind and body, and impermanence of beauty" (17).

King (2003) points out the huge impact the scientific achievement of French botanist Carl Linnaeus had on the literary use of flower connotation. He is the prominent botanist of the eighteenth century who proposed a "sexual system" of plant classification in the encyclopedic *Species Plantarum* (1753), which brought about a scientific achievement and attracted the great public. The interest became popular among lay individuals all over Europe, England and America. This led to a growing awareness that the bloom or inflorescence of the plant was key to sexual reproduction. His *Systema Sexuale* became dominant, especially in England, by the 1770s, when his taxonomical system was adopted by Philip Miller for the

eighth edition of *The Gardener's Dictionary* (1768). The flower thus came to be recognized as the sexual organ of the plant. It was also reflected in the metaphorical use of flowers in literary contexts. Linnaean classification actually refers to the sexual reproduction of a flower as "marriage," conflating the "natural" act of blooming with the human act of marriage. In fact, according to Seaton, the sentimental books associate flowers with love and death—marriage and children. They consider flowers representing women's typical fate as well as their most cherished goals, alluding to childbirth which too often brought death both to children and the mothers.

This concept of woman sympathizing with flowers is adopted by many writers to describe their heroines. King calls those novels of the nineteenth century which depict a girl of marrying age "bloom narratives" and investigates the figure of the heroine, marriageable girl, who she calls "blooming girl" (13). In those stories which contain the "botanical vernacular," these blooming heroines are symbols which conflate the bodily fact of being "in bloom" with a particular social position. For instance, in *Persuasion* (1818) Jane Austen uses "bloom" not simply for its corporeal or sexualized implications but rather as an index of age. A girl "in bloom" is thus a female who is socially/sexually matured and ready for marriage. In the nineteenth century, female maturation and courtship became particularly focused in fiction.

In the context of literary culture, James seems to be fully aware of the implications of bloom. This is reflected in his literary criticisms of Anglo-American novels, especially in his essay on Anthony Trollope; these were dedicated to Trollope a few months after his death, appearing in *Century Magazine* in 1883. In this essay, he writes that all Trollope's novels center upon "a simple maiden in her flower" except for *Barchester Towers* (1857), in which the widow heroine, Eleanor Bold, is described as "not in her flower." In contrast, he describes disagreeable young women who "had ceased to belong to the blooming season" such as Lady Alexandrina de Courcy and Amelia Roper in *The Small House at Allington* (1864), and Griselda Grantley in *Framely Personage* (1861). Clearly, he distinguishes women of marriageable age and women who are not.

According to James, Trollope's flowery girls look as follows:

She is always definite and natural. She plays her part most properly. She has always health in her cheek and gratitude in her eye. She has not a touch of the morbid, and is delightfully tender, modest and fresh (1350).

Moreover, James comments on how Trollope treats the heroine as an author with some erotic words:

[H]e took possession of her, and turned her inside out. He never made her a subject of heartless satire, as cynical fabulists of other lands have been known to make the shining daughters of those climes; he bestowed upon her the most serious, the most patient, the most tender, the most copious consideration. He is evidently always more or less in love with her, and it is a wonder how under these circumstances he should make her so objective, plant her so well on her feet (1350).

The rhetoric sounds erotic to some extent, however, James states that “if he was a lover, he was a paternal lover” (1350), which correlates with James’s way of seeing his heroines. James noticed that there are “the British maiden under innumerable names, in every station and in every emergency in life” in Trollope’s works, and praised him that “he discriminates between them” in a fine way and “even in the groups there are subtle differences” despite the fact that generally people might be inclined at first “to lump each group together.” However, Trollope’s girls are generally similar to the prototypical girls. They neither indicate the sexual potential of marriage nor belong to the marriage plot.

It was in the works of George Eliot that James found the precedent for the blooming heroine. In a book review of *Middlemarch* (1871), he praises the heroine Dorothea for being the “perfect flower”:

[H]er heroines have always been of an exquisite beauty, and Dorothea is only that perfect flower of conception of which her predecessors were the less unfolded blossoms. An indefinable moral elevation is the sign of these admirable creatures . . . She exhales a sort of aroma of spiritual sweetness, and we believe in her as in a woman we might providentially meet some fine day when we should find ourselves doubting of the immortality of the soul (959).

On one hand, her “bloom” is clear from her “exquisite beauty” and “indefinable moral elevation.” She is a flower which exhales “a sort of aroma of spiritual sweetness.” On the other hand, James’s comment on Rosamond Vincy further emphasizes James’s botanical analogy: “The author’s rare psychological penetration is much lavished upon this veritably mulish domestic flower” which as a flower, cannot reproduce. Eliot identifies the birth of the bloom narrative in *Middlemarch*, which goes beyond the confines of the traditional marriage

plot by discussing the sexual potential of marriage. Examining his literary criticism, it is clear that James understands the nineteenth-century literary history of bloom.

Woman as a gardener in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881)

His appreciation of the bloom narrative is clearly depicted, and his indebtedness to Eliot is suggested in the preface of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Referring to Eliot's maritime metaphor— "In these frail vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affection"—James insists on centering the young woman and weighting her consciousness. Thus, though continuing the tradition of the bloom narrative, James modifies it by exploring further the blooming girl. In his novels, women are concerned not only with marriage, but also with life. The dominant narrative question is how a girl should be in her adventure and how she faces destiny, as "millions of presumptuous girls, intelligent or not intelligent, daily affront their destiny." He goes on to state that "without her sense of them (her adventures), her sense FOR them, as one may say, they are next to nothing at all" (14).

In considering the blooming "type" in James's fiction, James's blooming plot focuses on the heroine's psychological maturity. James reinterprets blooming in *The Portrait* as an interior exercise which pursues and heightens the individual's intellect and pleasure, rather than just acceptmen's proposal and become a housewife. Isabel Archer attempts to live differently and twice refuses the proposals of men which are conventionally ideal, resulting in a tragic marriage by choosing the wrong man. In a way, Isabel can be regarded as "a post blooming girl."

The heroine, Isabel Archer has a conception of marriage that the conventional blooming girl does not share. She believes that thinking about marriage too much is "a conviction of the vulgarity (55)" Her insistence on her own conception of marriage is established in the following passage:

From lapsing into eagerness on this point she earnestly prayed she might be delivered; she held that a woman ought to be able to live to herself, in the absence of exceptional flimsiness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex. (55)

For Isabel, a woman can be happy on her own. Marriage does not necessarily lead to happiness, although she also feels "deep in her soul" that "if a certain light should dawn she

could give herself completely.” Her belief is that “a young woman whom after all everyone thought clever should begin by getting a general impression of life.” It is clearly stated that it is her first priority to plan her inner “development” to attain “perfection”:

She was always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress. Her nature had, in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one’s spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses. (56)

As James referred to Balzac romance “garden,” Isabel is also compared to “a garden” with her “garden-like quality” which hints her complexity. Isabel’s introspection is likened to taking a walk in the garden, reminding one of James’s metaphorical statements with regards to reading Balzac. Therefore, the blooming girl in the *Portrait* is no longer a flower—“a frail vessel” as Eliot writes, but a garden, revealing an evolved personality of an increased complexity.

As she struggles with her miserable marriage, however, Isabel as a garden is threatened by her despotic, patriarchal husband Osmond:

The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his – attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching (362).

On one hand, this description of Isabel’s introspection employs the garden rhetoric. Isabel as a garden is diminished to the role of a “small garden-plot to a deer-park,” which Osmond would control. Male control in the bloom plot is now not only limited to the social sphere, but also extended to the domination of her private life. In the age when plant collecting was popular among the upper classes, Osmond wanted to collect Isabel to his art collection as an art critic. He calls her “a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects” (258), connoting a darker aspect of James’s bloom narrative.

On the other hand, Pansy, the daughter of Osmond, represents a conventional blooming girl who only displays the exterior signature. Raised in a convent, she is faithful to her father and “in the bloom of her juvenility had a hint of the rococo.” Just as Dorothea and Rosamond

are presented as opposite characters in *Middlemarch*, Isabel and Pansy function as opposites in *The Portrait*. However, the ending of *The Portrait* is different from the *Middlemarch* in that *The Portrait* doesn't show "fairy-tale endings" as what James called of Eliot's novel.

Osmond names Pansy after a flower, which means "I share your sentiments" in Delachénaye's version in *Abécédaire de Flore, ou Language des Fleurs* (1810), which is an early list of the language of flowers. As this meaning shows, Pansy is depicted as conventional passive girl who doesn't have her own opinion. As opposed to Isabel, she sympathizes easily with anyone and she doesn't belong to either side in the middle of the battle between Isabel and Osmond, maintaining peace with both of them. Here, James clearly distinguishes the traditional flowery girl and garden-like girl on describing female figures in *The Portrait*.

In the last part, the battle between Isabel and Osmond increases in intensity when Pansy's marriage is put at stake. She has been raised in the convent apart from her real mother, Madame Merle, who had concealed the truth about her past and played a heavy role in orchestrating Isabel and Osmond's marriage, pretending to be her close friend. It was Osmond's idea to keep her in a convent, intending to make her a domestic flower who is valued in the marriage market. Then, when she becomes available, knowing that she is in love with Edward Rosier, a young art collector, Osmond urges Pansy to get married to Lord Warburton, who previously proposed to Isabel and declined. Isabel, in contrast, prevents their marriage attempting to rescue her beloved daughter in law from a devilish plot to confine her in a perfect flower.

Osmond, noticed that the marriage broke off because of Isabel, gets mad and again make his daughter go back to the convent. He tells Isabel his decision in the drawing room, looking at "the basket of flowers" (441) in the middle of the table that "I like to think of her there, in the old garden, under the arcade, among those tranquil virtuous women" (442). Obviously, Pansy is alluded to a flower motionlessly stays in a basket. Although he adds that "I've made the most liberal arrangement" (442), Isabel knows that Pansy "had taken fright" and thinks that "poor little Pansy became the heroine of a tragedy", looking at the basket of flowers similarly. This image of Pansy imprisoned in a basket hovers in the scene, illuminating the heated antagonism between Osmond and Isabel on Pansy's situation.

However, even after Isabel's marriage irreparably broken when Isabel noticed the hidden history between Osmond and Madame Merle, she never loses affection towards Pansy and "couldn't turn away" from her (456). As she prepares to leave Italy to see her dying cousin in

England, she also thinks of Pansy and visits the convent to see her. By Visiting the convent after a long time, Isabel perceived the place as frightening, giving her “the impression of a well-appointed prison; for it was not possible to pretend Pansy was free to leave it” (456). There, she made up her mind to “make her reach out a hand” (456). Pansy also notices her situation. When she sees Isabel, hearing that she leaves England tonight, utters that “don’t leave me here” (461). Isabel, “now saw she had guessed everything” when Pansy again implores that “Mrs. Osmond, you won’t leave me! (462)”, says at last “I won’t desert you (462)” after considered for a while.

Therefore, Isabel determines not to make Pansy another victim of Osmond’s egoism. Having learned from her experience, Isabel confronts Osmond’s evil desire to get a hold of women under his “liberal” garden which is totally a creation of his selfish illusion. Rather, Isabel as a gardener intends to raise Pansy in a much broader garden. The garden for Isabel is not a closed convent garden but the one which “exercise in the open air (56)” and “a world as a place of brightness” (54). In other words, the concept of the garden is perceived differently by Isabel. While Osmond conceived the garden as a secret and private garden which was often connected with femininity in the nineteenth century, Isabel’s idea of the garden of so-called bird’s-eye views established in British art in the early eighteenth century which shows elevated views of landscape. James thus establishes a new blooming narrative by rendering the traditional flowery girl into a psychologically blooming girl, adding complexity to the narrative. Not only it subverts the original blooming narrative by putting ambiguous conclusion to allude the unhappy ending of heroine’s marriage, he gave a chance for his heroine to take revenge for her fallen fate.

The empowering nosegay in *The Bostonians* (1886)

Then how can *The Bostonians* (1886) be read as James’s bloom narrative? The story centers on the subject of the women’s rights movement in 1870s Boston. It is James’s first realism novel surrounding the controversial political issue in the era withfull of botanical vocabulary. First of all, James bestows the female protagonists flowery names — Verena and Olive — who starts what is called Boston marriage for the sake of women’s right movement. The male hero, Olive’s cousin Basil, is also bears a herbal name, representing a patriarchal southerner and tries to take Verena away from Olive out of the reform.

In fact, the language of flowers of the main characters' names provide a hint to trace the plot. According to Delachénaye's version and Latour's version, *La Langage des Fleurs* (1819), Verena, from whose name "Verena" is derived, infers "saintliness" and "fidelity" which matches her personality. Verena's unique power of speech is often described as "divine" and also referred to as the French saint "Joan of arc" by Olive. She keeps her "fidelity" which is thought as one of the virtues conventional passive girl has to have. This personality resonates with her description of being in bloom:

Verena's genius was a mystery, and it might remain a mystery; it was impossible to see how this charming, blooming, simple creature, all youth and grace and innocence, got her extraordinary powers of reflection. (65)

Similarly, Verena is repeatedly depicted "the sweetest flower of character that had ever bloomed on earth"; she "bloomed like the flower that attains such perfection in Boston." Thus, Verena shows herself as a conventional blooming girl at first.

However, with her mentor Olive, who has a great passion for the reform, her original character starts to change. As she moved in Olive's place and studies the history of the women's rights movement, she no longer remains a passive character: "her own spring" works on her and "the fire with which she glowed came from within" (131). Verena, who becomes a public figure of the women's movement, matures as she becomes more enlightened. On this stage, the "bloom" takes on another meaning.

Verena develops her intelligence by her mentor Olive, who is in contrast, not in bloom. With her inherited wealth, an upper-class Olive pays off Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant to bring Verena to live with her. Since she is economically independent and has a misandry spirit, she stays as a spinster. The meaning of Olive is distinguished according to the figure, flower and tree by Delachénaye's vocabulary. Considering Olive's nature, it turns out that "charity," the tree, is more suitable than "peace," the flower, for Olive takes care of Verena for nothing in return. Having a great passion for the emancipation of women, she is absorbed in the reform and trains Verena to be an icon. She wants Verena to devote all herself in the agitation and share her hatred for men. She repeatedly admonishes Verena to dislike men generically. Rather than preferring peace, Olive is a revolutionist to fight against patriarchy. As it is written that "it was her [Olive's] theory that Verena was a flower of the great Democracy," she wants Verena to be a flower not for a particular manas conventional blooming girl is

expected but for the all human being in society. Therefore, Olive supports Verena to “bloom” not for the sake of the personal goal but for the public aim.

Thanks to Olive, passive Verena starts to speak with her own words in her speech. The flower connotation is not only attached to her figure but also included in her discourse. When Verena makes her touching speech in front of a crowd, her eloquence depends on a botanical vocabulary:

Good gentleman all, if I could make you believe how much brighter and fairer and sweeter the garden of life would be for you, if you would only let us help you to keep it in order! You would like so much better to walk there, and you would find grass and trees and flowers that would make you think you were in Eden. (208)

If men are gardeners of the world, she implores them to share their work to women. She persuades the audience, using the garden metaphor that women’s participation in the society would be also beneficial for men.

There is a historical evidence of applying horticultural language to the discourse of women’s suffrage movement. Writers of opposing cultural and political positions concerned with the social issue of human sexuality explicitly and implicitly invoked botanical language to state their political views. Despite the fact that the language of flower books shaped the widespread correspondence between different flowers and sentiments, the interpretation of the flower code is varied depends on the book and the symbols were flexible. After the polemic debate of the 1790s concerning the nature and rights of women, both radical and conservative writers borrowed from botany to support their cause.

Steele (2001) points out that it enabled nineteenth century women writers to infer feelings that were difficult to be conveyed through the ordinary language, referring to Margaret Fuller. She states that Fuller mingled such flower symbolism with spiritual language from mythology, elevated it “far beyond the confines of the domestic garden” (72) and composed “The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain” (1841). Botany’s rational and healthy appearance made it possible for them to preserve their political and cultural positions. Around the issue of female education in particular, conservatives maintained that the study of botany is beneficial to traditional female sensibility, while radical writers emphasized that botany could express a sort of sexual legibility associated with a liberated position for women. Thus, as flowery connotations emphasize the prototypical female image, so flowery references were used to veil their explicit political opinion.

At last, Basil stands for “hatred” in Latour’s vocabulary and “courage” in Delachénaye’s version. Those meaning fits to his agitation towards feminization of the society which leads to the last bold attempt to kidnap Verena:

From the most damnable feminisation! . . . The whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solitudes and coddled sensibilities. (260)

Basil considers the movement to be a menace to men, which leads the world to “feminization,” turning men into women. In the end, Ransom broke into the Boston Music Hall when Verena is about to have her speech, and take her away from the Hall in front of her parents and Olive. Thus, although Verena seems to be enlightened after her studying and delivering many speeches at the women’s conference, she after all couldn’t break out of the conventional female mold. James presents the reader with the problematic condition that the girls in bloom is situated. Despite the struggles in the women’s rights movement to change social norms, she still remains in the “frail vessel.”

Thus, in *The Bostonians*, James draws a clear line between the flowery girl and the unconventional girl who is not in the frail vessel, alluding the difficulty the flowery girl has to convert herself. This contrast is well depicted in the characterization of Verena and Olive as he did in Pansy and Isabel in *The Portrait*. Both Olive and Isabel who are not in frail vessel take a place of gardener, to take care of flowers, Verena and Pansy. Moreover, they try to protect their flowers from an “ideal” marriage in Victorian patriarchal perspective. In that sense, *The Bostonians* is nearly a sequel to *The Portrait*, for the Isabel’s endeavor to liberate Pansy out of Osmond’s basket seems to be succeeded by Olive, exercising prolonged mentorship over Verena against Ransom in *The Bostonians*.

However, the motivation of making the flower bloom is elevated in *The Bostonians* compared to *The Portrait*. While Isabel’s incentive is personal, reflecting herself to Pansy, reminding her wrong marriage when she was in bloom, Olive’s one is public, for she is only interested in the social reform. All she teaches Verena is to be an ideal public person in pursuit of improving women’s position. As the saying “The Personal is Political” goes, the story of women’s revolt over men is enhanced from personal to political between those novels.

Besides, the women's bond is more foregrounded in *The Bostonians*. James seems to adopt an image of nosegay consists of flowers embodied by women. As well as the flowery names of protagonists, this connotation of flowers as a symbol of female friendship and solidarity can also be seen when the community or the society Olive belongs is described:

This little society was rather suburban and miscellaneous; it was prolific in ladies who trotted about, early and late, with books from the Athenaeum nursed behind their muff, or little nosegays of exquisite flowers that they were carrying as presents to each other. (137)

Here, James refers to "little nosegays" which women exchanges between them as a sign of sisterhood.

In conclusion, making use of bloom narratives from the eighteenth century which George Eliot and Trollope established, James created the new archetype of the blooming girl in *The Portrait*. Compared to the traditional blooming girl, who has a stereotypic characteristic of the Victorian era, Isabel is a psychologically blooming woman; she is no longer a flower in a frail vessel as Pansy represents, but a garden which shows her independence and intellectual maturity. Furthermore, *The Bostonians* elevated Isabel's revenge plot over Osmond ironically but also sympathetically by depicting the tragic end which Bostonian marriage between Olive and Verena leads to. Despite the fact that Olive's attempt ends up in vain, she presents the new definition of "flower in bloom" in the genealogy of blooming narrative, which bloom in public and bare a fruit for society. By alluding to Verena's tragic future, suggesting Verena "in tears" which "were not the last she was destined to shed" (350) when Verena is being kidnapped by Basil, James also emphasize the social obstacles which women has to surpass. In these novels, James tries to improve the blooming plot he recognized in the Victorian literary culture, subverting them by reinterpreting the bloom and adopting it in his heroines' lives in *The Portrait* and *The Bostonians*.

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