

MARRIAGE AND FREEDOM: ISABEL ARCHER'S CHOICE IN *THE PORTRAIT
OF A LADY*

ANDREINNA DELGADO RICCI
PAOLA ANDREA FAJARDO PÉREZ

LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS INGLÉS — FRANCÉS
ESCUELA DE CIENCIAS DEL LENGUAJE
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES
CALI – COLOMBIA
2016

MARRIAGE AND FREEDOM: ISABEL ARCHER'S CHOICE IN *THE PORTRAIT
OF A LADY*

ANDREINNA DELGADO RICCI
PAOLA ANDREA FAJARDO PÉREZ

Literary essay as partial fulfillment of the degree Licenciada en Lenguas
Extranjeras Inglés-Francés

Directed by: TIMOTHY ANDERSON KEPPEL

LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS INGLÉS — FRANCÉS
ESCUELA DE CIENCIAS DEL LENGUAJE
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES
CALI – COLOMBIA
2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Biography of Henry James	7
3. Antecedents	10
4. Theoretical Framework	13
5. Marriage and Freedom: Isabel Archer's Choice in <i>The Portrait Of A Lady</i>	16
6. Conclusions	49
7. Bibliography	52

1. Introduction

Henry James (1880-81) narrates the story of a fictional American lady called Isabel Archer who decides to move to England to live with her aunt and later inherits a great fortune. The novel's story is set during the late nineteenth century, which is an epoch that has a broad historical context with transitions and revolutions in different academic fields. These changes ranged from the scientific with Darwin who was interested in biological questions regarding evolution, to the psychological with Sigmund Freud and the literary with Honoré de Balzac. The aforementioned men were some of the most relevant nineteenth century authors who significantly inspired James' work.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the literary world was impacted by many social events that caused aesthetic taste to move from the Romantic to the Realist Movement. Writers shifted their focus from the spiritual, the abstract, and the ideals of life in society, to the faithful and harsh reality of society. James' literary works are a perfect example of this.

Realism was a literary movement born in France that spread internationally. It was modified by James who added a new realistic component: the interior psychological life of his characters and their internal monologues. James claims to change the perception of psychological realism within his novels, particularly in *The Portrait of Lady* by showing a different perception of courtship and the different kind of roles male suitors interpreted.

James discusses the perception of marriage and freedom during a period of transition in the ideals and perceptions of these aspects of social life. Although

some critics have tagged *The Portrait of a Lady* as an unfortunate chauvinistic book, James created it to offer a new perspective of life in terms of freedom, equality and marriage for the nineteenth century women. Through Isabel, James demonstrates his revolutionary thoughts about the new role women were acquiring.

Accordingly, this analysis treats the issues developed in the book that explore, on the one hand, the possibility of a woman to be free in a nineteenth century Victorian society that demands adherence to traditional beliefs in order to belong to the high, intellectual and respectful elite. On the other hand, the book presents the possibility of marriage in which women have autonomy over their decisions and lives in general.

The present analysis will explore how the social political changes in the nineteenth century affected women, who make a transition from the allegiance to an old, conservative and radical society to the adoption of ideals and desires of a more modern woman. It will examine the idea of freedom during James' time period while at the same time attempting to demonstrate the real transition that the New and Old Worlds are experiencing at the time.

This text is developed following the main themes of the novel such as the role of women in society, which will be developed throughout the analysis of the main character and the way she has to face the different conceptions and expectations for a woman of the day; for instance her independence and her willingness to be free as well as the later decisions she takes in order to show how she has control of her life even if she is mistaken. The role of women will be also analyzed through the perspectives of the life of two other women in the novel: Mrs. Touchett who is a very modern woman for her time and who vicariously lives the

life Isabel would dream of and Henrietta Stackpole the young American woman who rigidly adheres to her principles and who fails to influence Isabel in her decision to marry. The role of men in society will be presented through the characters of Casper Goodwood as the young American man with a strong determination; Lord Warburton, a fine specimen of a liberal English peer; and Gilbert Osmond an American living in retirement in Europe. These three show how the role of men in the society of the time was also influenced by the Victorian society, which granted them a certain privileged position in society.

Also the effect of money in society will be shown while the different behaviors, beliefs and ideals are featured throughout the description of each character and individual impressions, expectations and ideas towards the new heritage. It will also show how becoming rich places Isabel in a different position in society, giving her new challenges to face and decisions to make.

One of the main subjects presented in this analysis will be manipulation. According to all the opening dialogues, Isabel seems to have a clear idea about her life, her future, and how much she wants to conform to the role of a mature woman. Even though she declares many times her willingness to be free, she becomes highly influenced by Madam Merle because for Isabel her speech and life experience are worthy of trust, as a result, she succumbs to a life of lies.

The exploration of the main themes is done with the purpose of giving the reader the general idea of the most relevant events while analyzing the way freedom and marriage shape the society of the nineteenth century.

2. Biography of Henry James

Henry James was an American-born author who is considered to be the father of the realistic psychological genre created in the nineteenth century. He was born in New York in 1843 and was raised in Manhattan. He was the second of five children of Mary and Henry James Sr. He spent many years of his childhood and adolescence traveling back and forth between America and Europe with his family, attending schools in different European cities such as Paris, Newport and Geneva.

James' constant journeys and life experiences in both the New and the Old World, awakened in him the writers' ability for describing real daily encounters between people from both worlds, as well as social and political trends of his time. In his work the central theme is the innocence of the New World in contrast with the corruption and wisdom of the Old World.

There is a great growth of Victorian society behavior in the upper classes. All of the configurations of this society are influenced by Victorian morals, which are very radical and presuppose high expectations from the elite in many different aspects of life. This behavior has its origins in the way the society is ruled:

The politician who resorts to law and morality to disguise his power-position is suffering from a bad political conscience, and the politician or the state with a bad conscience is decadent. Ascendant politics is not afraid of being politics. Decadent politics passes itself off as religion, law, morality, science-in short.... (Yockey, 1981, p. 8).

Here, Yockey is showing how the morality of the country starts being ruined little by little from the monarchy and the upper classes, which are the social strata that society follows in many different aspects of life. If the politics start to be affected by human decadence, all the other aspects of life are submitted to the same decline.

In James's novels, he contrasts the naiveté and innocence of American society to the social English decadence which he explores throughout the descriptions and interpretations illustrated in novels such as *Daisy Miller* (1879), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Bostonians* (1886), and *The Ambassadors* (1903).

James concentrated on his writing soon after attending Harvard Law School for a short time. By his mid-twenties James was already considered one of the most skilled writers in America. It was William Dean Howells who first looked after and supported him, taking him to the earliest success. Howells is considered the father of Realism in The United States, which is why James is greatly influenced by him. Howells was James's mentor; he not only introduced James into the literary world of America but also dedicated his efforts to revise his works.

James moved to England early on in his professional career and was naturalized as an English citizen in 1915, one year before his death. As mentioned before, James elaborated an original perspective of philological realism and is therefore considered to be the father of this literary movement which is characterized by the description of the different character's points of views, in this way exploring the psyches of characters and dealing with complex social and ethical situations typical of the time.

In general, after having undergone the significant transition from Romantic to Realistic literature, nineteenth century writers began to approach literature from a psychological perspective through the description of their characters' personalities and internal issues. Like other novelists such as Dostoevsky and Proust, James was highly inspired and influenced by Balzac's realistic novels and

writing style. It is also worth mentioning that the naturalistic/realistic contributions of Eliot, Hawthorne, and Howells influenced and helped shape and define the Jamesian realistic style.

In 1896, James established himself in England, moving into Lamb House at Rye, which was his residence during the last and most productive period of his career. He died on February 28, 1916 in Chelsea, London. James never married and some critics have debated his repressed (probable) homosexuality. In conclusion, James left behind a great legacy in the literary world. In his work, James included many details from his personal life, reflecting his own emotions, experiences and points of view through his various characters.

3. Antecedents

James' father, the eccentric Swedenborgian philosopher after whom he was named, was one of the great intellectuals of the time. His son was also highly influenced by some of the other great minds of the time due to their connection with his father: noted characters as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Carlyle and Henry Wadsworth. In 1869, James went to London, he met some artistic and intellectual figures of the time such as George Eliot, William Morris, Gabriel Rossetti and Leslie Stephen. He started to write letters for the New York around 1881 before moving to England when he was still in Paris. All these characters influenced his works, in which he shows some of the thoughts, ideas social and politic thinking of the time.

James shows in his novel the great influence that Victorian society has on his ideals and beliefs. Although he was raised in a culture which provided the possibility to see the world by himself, his great ideas and broadmindedness came from the journeys he made between America and Europe, which is later shown in his literary work. He also had the opportunity to learn from his professors in Geneva, London, Paris, Bologna, and Bonn where he studied as well as in Harvard.

Henry James showed the influence of the European culture in his early works like *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). This last one, considered to be his masterpiece, is an analysis of the North Americans expatriate in Europe as well as an analysis of Victorian society in its many different aspects. James provides detailed dialogues

and descriptions of his characters in order to smoothly show the truth and make it more real, all this with his distinctive prose. James is considered one of the precursors of the interior monologue, in which he allows the reader to create their own individual interpretation.

According to Leon Edel (1996), James's foremost biographer, he wrote the novel in the year 1878. All his work was highly influenced by European history and culture. Many of his works include romances and narratives with very well-developed characters that belong to high society and have certain position in terms of politics, class, and status. James creates his characters thanks to the relationships he has among the privileged class. He also explores the perceptions and beliefs about personal freedom, feminism, morality and marriage. He frequently compares the Old World with the new one. The fame and the respect he gained in North America and Europe were developed thanks to the influence of Honoré de Balzac, Henrik Ibsen, Charles Dickens and Nathaniel Hawthorn. James was well known as one of the notable figures of the time, along with Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert and Ivan S. Turgenev. His work has served as inspiration for other author's works and also for adaptations on the screen.

William Dean Howells, James's friend, was the first to believe in James's work and stated that James had done better than anyone before. He came to influence other American writers such as Willa Cather, who took James as her example and imitates him. James attempted to show realism from his point of view, enriched by the world abroad he experienced, shaping a new American literature. The tradition of American expatriation is a subject well analyzed in the novel and in other publications James produced in *Atlantic Monthly*. During World War I, James

renounced his U.S. citizenship and while for some Americans it was seen like treason, James shows his disagreement through his novel *The American*. Howells helped James review his work and he finally presented him as the leader of the new American fiction, greatly influenced by the French realism of Alphonse Daudet.

4. Theoretical Framework

A literary analysis is a critical view of a literary text presented as a critical essay that focuses on how plot, structure, characters, setting, and many other elements are used in the story to create meaning. In the field of literary analysis there are different kinds of approaches that focus on the different writing techniques used by the author. These approaches include the following perspectives: formalist perspectives, biographical perspectives, historical perspectives, psychological perspectives, sociological perspectives, reader-response perspectives, mythological perspectives, structuralist perspectives, deconstructive perspectives, and cultural studies perspectives (Diyanni, 2008). This critical analysis of *The Portrait of a Lady* was developed with the combination of two literary analysis perspectives: sociological and psychological criticism.

This literary analysis centers its attention on the main character of the novel, Isabel Archer. It follows her psychological transformation throughout the story, her interaction within American and English societies and the analysis of the role of women in it, among other sociological aspects of the nineteenth century. The following is a general outlook of the two approaches in literary criticism applied to this essay.

Sociological criticism examines literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which the novel is written. It focuses on philosophies and experiences of people who lived in that time and culture, in this case, the nineteenth century. It also looks at how society in several political ideologies distinguishes between members of various races, social classes, sexes or culture.

Subjectivity is probably sociological criticism's weakness. This perception is frequently influenced by the sociopolitical convictions of the critic. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, there is a clear contradiction and constant struggle between characters from English and American society of the time. Isabel Archer faces a crossroads in her life. She needs to adapt to the stereotype of the European women's role in nineteenth century society. She abandons her apparent New World liberal ideologies and becomes a true "lady". The value placed on money as well as men's roles in society is sociological elements analyzed in the novel through this approach.

Psychological criticism is the use of modern psychology applied to literature and literary criticism. In the 1920s, a psychoanalytic approach was established by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) for the analysis of literature and other arts. Freud's psychoanalytic theories focus on the author's and characters' psyche and unconscious. They explore new and controversial areas of human behavior such as wish-fulfillment, sexuality and repression. Abrams (2011) explains that the Freudian approach analyzes "residual traces of prior stages of psychosexual development" within the unconscious of every individual. Repressed wishes from childhood that are revived in a later event and motivate fantasies in adult life.

Psychological criticism focuses on the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author as well. According to Abrams (2011) there are three kinds of critical procedures "that are based on the assumption that a work of literature is correlated with its author's distinctive mental and emotional traits" (p.48) The first one refers to the author's personality in order to explain and interpret a literary work; the second one refers to literary works in order to

establish, biographically, the personality of the author; and finally the third one explores the way of reading a literary work specifically in order to experience the distinctive subjectivity of its author. In this sense, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the protagonist's subconscious and her psychological transformation throughout the novel will be analyzed.

As derived from Freud's psychoanalytical theory, Horney (1939) and Sullivan (1953) agree that society, environment and culture have a great influence on the development of personality and ideals. Horney also suggests that experiences in childhood are the major reflection of character and decisions in adult life. In this sense, analyzed through these social and interpersonal theories will be the different changes Isabel Archer undergoes and how these influence her final decision of choosing married life over freedom.

5. Marriage and Freedom: Isabel Archer's Choice in *The Portrait Of A Lady*

Isabel Archer comes from a genteel family from Albany, New York. Her mother died when she was a little girl and her father encouraged her to educate herself and develop her independent nature. As a result, as an adult, Isabel is widely read, confident, and full of dreams. One of her first suitors in Albany is Caspar Goodwood, the charismatic and influential son of a wealthy Boston mill owner. Isabel's strong commitment to her independence makes her refuse his marriage proposal because she sees marriage as renouncing to her freedom: "I'm very fond of my liberty", Isabel warns her cousin Ralph in the novel's opening pages (30). Isabel knows from the beginning that her goal in life is to be an intelligent and independent worldly woman who is shown in her speech: (Malka, 2012). "Oh, no; she [Mrs. Touchett] has not adopted me. I'm not a candidate for adoption" (30). When she speaks to Ralph about her aunt's help, she reaffirms how free she is to be free and independent in general; that is, not in regards to the idea of a possible husband but also in regards to any form of Chaperone.

Freedom for Isabel represents autonomy and the capacity to make choices, which is something women did not have at that time. Women were discouraged from obtaining an economic income, resulting in their financial dependency on a male figure, usually either their fathers or husbands. Even if they were single, a male relative had to provide financial support for them. Gordon & Nair (2000) state in their article that: "The conventional image of the Victorian middle-class woman as economically dependent is to some extent borne out by the evidence from the census ... The percentages of married women with any source of income recorded

in the census are tiny, between 3 and 4% until 1891 ..." (5). In this sense, in Victorian society it was very unusual to see an independent wealthy woman such as Isabel was after her unexpected inheritance. These unusual circumstances aroused interest in malicious characters from the novel such as Madam Merle and Mr. Osmond.

The Victorian era (1837-1901), the main representative of which was Queen Victoria, is considered to be the domestic age guided by strict moral values. This monarch came to represent a kind of feminine role model which was devoted to family, motherhood and respectability. Dedicated to her beloved husband Albert and her children in the surrounding area of Balmoral Castle, Victoria became a nineteenth century icon of middle-class femininity, moral and domesticity.

The first main topic to be analyzed will be the women's role in nineteenth century society. European women belonging to Victorian society and American women during this time were both faced with gender inequality. During this age a woman's social place was in the household with domestic and motherly duties. Women were completely responsible for raising their children with the proper moral values of the time. Consequently, they were blamed and singled out by society if something went wrong in the household; for example, if the children didn't show proper manners or behaved improperly in public. On the contrary, men were placed in a higher position in the social hierarchy. They provided financial stability and were the figure of strength, wisdom and above all, authority to Victorian families.

As mentioned by Hughes, women and men were settled in different and separated 'spheres': "The two sexes now inhabited what Victorians thought of as

‘separate spheres,’ only coming together at breakfast and again at dinner” (Hughes). What caused this clear distinction between men and women was the beginning of industrialization, urbanization, as well as the growth of the economy, which were factors that transformed European and American societies and family life. This was a big change in the household at the time; it turned into a strictly family dwelling. While men had a significant role in the public sphere of the new workplace, which was now located outside the home, women were left behind to be the caretakers and spiritual guides for the Victorian family.

In Victorian culture, many representations of the ideal woman as a patient, tender, gentle, fragile and sacrificing wife were elaborated by different authors. In addition to this new domestic role of women in society, single women started to require a new kind of education or coaching which allowed them to attract a husband by displaying characteristics such as being feminine, patient, gentle and skilled in house chores. Jane Austen (1813) is an author that through her novels creates a sketch of what the proper Victorian woman should be like. In *Pride & Prejudice* she lists the skills required by any young lady who considers herself accomplished: “A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages....; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions ...” (Austen, 1813). Patmore (1854) also depicts the ideal Victorian woman in her celebrated poem *The Angel in the House*:

“Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities

She casts her best, she flings her breast [...]" (Patmore, 1854, p. prelude I)

Consequently, those who could fulfill these roles established by the nineteenth century society for men and women were considered to be respectable model citizens. Though education was important for a woman of this period, it was inappropriate for her to abandon her domestic nature to pursue a higher education because her homely duties were considered to be a woman's main priority. Women who were more interested in their intellectual development were called 'blue-stockings'. As Hughes expresses in her article, "Blue-stockings were considered unfeminine and off-putting in the way that they attempted to usurp men's 'natural' intellectual superiority" (p. 6). 'Appropriate' behaviors and social conduct were dictated by society's moral and cultural standards of the time. Even some doctors stated that "too much study actually had a damaging effect on the ovaries, turning attractive young women into dried-up prunes" (p. 8). This demonstrates how societal authorities contributed to the idea of women as inferior to men, reinforcing the idea that women were meant to stay at home while men had a wider social life.

If one were to read *The Portrait of a Lady* without fully appreciating its social-political context, one would fail to comprehend the revolutionary importance of Isabel's discourse on freedom. Nowadays it would be a cliché having a female protagonist say she does not want to get married because she wants to travel and live on her own in this world full of opportunities. However, taking into consideration how Victorian society functioned, virtually none of these desires could have been achieved by a "respectable" unmarried woman. Isabel's options were few and there was no place for adventure or for imagination.

Isabel is presented as an independent and free woman who makes her own decisions. However, Isabel's independence and freedom can be called into question. This is due to the fact that throughout the novel one notices how her concept of freedom seems to be highly influenced, if not determined, by others. This is shown by the way Madame Merle, for example, convinces her to marry Osmond as a form of charity. If Isabel had true independency and control of her decisions, she would never have accepted involvement with this man (Lupu, 2013). Isabel also demonstrates her lack of autonomy in many of her decisions, which she makes only after consulting others like her ill cousin or her aunt, Mrs. Touchett. The latter convinces her to take an unexpected trip to London after her father's death. This is demonstrated in the next quote: "...You should go to Florence if you like houses in which things have happened – especially deaths ... "I should like very much to go to Florence." "Well, if you will be very good, and do everything I tell you, I will take you there." Isabel responds, "I would promise almost anything!" (pp. 35-36). The way Isabel succumbs to the proposal of a trip by promising to do "almost anything" demonstrates how she allows other people to have a major influence in her decisions. However, not everybody has this privilege in Isabel's life, only the people who become her role models: Mrs. Touchett and Madam Merle. These two women represent for her ideals such as independency, freedom of choice and expression, beauty, culture and artistic knowledge.

These women with opposite characteristics, though both dazzling for her, represent Isabel's main role models in separated parts of the novel. On the one hand, Isabel's aunt was a modern woman at her time; she is her role model due to her strong character and position in her marriage. Unlike other women, she is a

free woman whose behavior and thoughts are not limited neither by her husband, nor by society. In spite of her freewill to do what she pleases, she also shows her kind heart and commitment when she decides to stay with her husband during his last days of life, with the great integrity a wise, mature woman has.

On the other hand, there is Madame Merle as Isabel's second role model. She is a mature woman with great experience in life. Her certainty and conviction of her words involve Isabel in a world she does not know, and that is presented very attracted to her. Madame Merle seems to have a word and an answer for everything, she knows more about the world than any other woman Isabel has ever met in her life. Madame Merle shows her appreciation of the world without hesitation and strong convictions. At the same time, she shows her sensibility towards humanities and arts: she knows how to paint and how to play the piano; her speech convinces Isabel that the old world is a must to be discovered.

At the beginning of the story, Isabel finds Mrs. Touchett as interesting as a book of literature; she finds in her character the woman she wants to emulate, a woman who stands up for her own opinions and beliefs. Isabel relates to her aunt in the sense that she considers herself a free and independent woman: "For Isabel the world is a free expansion of irresistible actions" (Malka, 2012, p. 80). She knows she has the choice to be free and she wants to make decisions about her own life. That is why, when Mrs. Touchett offers to take Isabel on a trip to Europe, she eagerly accepts. Isabel's youth and her desire to triumph awaken in her a need to gain experience, which will enable her to state her opinions freely like her aunt without being scorned by people around her.

Isabel's identity as a woman is strongly influenced by Mrs. Touchett's character. The latter is an intelligent, well-organized and non-traditional woman, which "means for her the rejection of all that is 'stupidly conventional,' in particular of conventional views about what a woman ought to do with her life" (Malka, 2012, p. 80). For Isabel, her aunt is the kind of independent and secure woman who has the courage to express herself, giving her opinions about life in general, even though they are unconventional, and speaking without the social restrictions women had at the time: "My point of view, thank God, is personal! Isabel thought this a better answer than she admitted; it was a tolerable description of her own manner of judging, but it would not have sounded well for her to say so" (p. 61). Mrs. Touchett is an experienced and respectable woman of the time. Isabel, on the other hand, is just a young lady starting to live, who is learning many aspects of social, cultural and political aspects of nineteenth century society. Her lack of experience and naivety do not allow her to express those ideas in the same way her wise aunt does.

For Isabel, the choice between being independent and conforming with society was the real liberty. At the beginning of the novel she speaks about her feelings for Warburton: 'I like him extremely; I'm very free to admit that. But I don't wish to marry any one just now.' (James, 1995, p. 103). She recognizes how free she is even to go against her natural attraction towards a man. Here, Isabel shows how unsatisfactory marriage is to her as it implies the sacrifice of her freedom.

Nevertheless, an expectation linked with the idea of having a good marriage implied that women were limited to the domestic sphere. Isabel's crucial decision at the end of the story is the turning point in which Isabel Archer has to decide

between her freedom and a “good marriage”. When marrying Gilbert Osmond, Isabel makes a conscious decision in which she gives up her freedom and dedicates her life to pleasing her new family.

As Middup (2013) expresses:

A ‘good’ reputation however, was usually based on nothing more than a woman being able to conform to ‘ladylike’ notions of femininity. These were based primarily on patriarchal expectations and societal limitations and if a woman’s femininity was compromised in any way by behavior that did not conform to an accepted norm, then her good name would be besmirched and her identity forever tarnished (p. 1).

The author states in her essay how a good reputation was essential in nineteenth century society, thus, for Isabel it was hard not to follow those standards even if she claims to have different ideals. She finally achieves a good reputation by behaving like a lady, by becoming a wife.

Isabel and Mrs. Touchett leave for England, where Mr. Touchett works as a powerful banker. At Mr. Touchett’s stunning residence in Gardencourt, Isabel meets her cousin Ralph, who is slowly dying of a lung disease, and who rapidly develops a deep admiration and affection for her. However, Isabel does not see him as an honorable man, but rather she perceives him as an immature cousin: “She accused him of an odious want of sinuousness, of laughing at all things, beginning with himself” (p. 61). Isabel considers Ralph to be a friend whose point of view is only relevant when it’s convenient for her. Part of the reason why Ralph is considered to be undesirable as a man and an unworthy suitor is due to the fact that he cannot offer Isabel security in the form of social and political protection because of his lung disease that was inevitably going to end in his premature death. According to Mrtva (2005), Isabel was looking for a man who could provide her with security and who could give her a sense of support:

She was probably looking for someone who would secure her and protect her from the rest of the world, as in her childhood her father had. Such a person should be settled, able to provide a secure place for her and also be able to show her the position she should take in life and in society. None of her present suitors offered her such a position (p. 80).

In this novel, Ralph is a character that represents the opposite of what men were expected to be during the late eighteen hundreds. He was physically weak and thus dependent on others, he lacked seriousness and was therefore perceived as immature and incapable of handling certain affairs such as being in charge of a home and family. This is exactly why Isabel does not think of him as a proper man: "People in an advanced stage of pulmonary disorder had better not marry at all" (p. 159). Nevertheless, Ralph is not that interested in the role of suitor, also his eccentric behavior, according to Maria Blood, might be the result of his illness. "I wish to make the argument that Ralph is just as much of a suitor in the novel's action as any of the aforementioned men, but is purposely limited; and moreover that this enables James to redefine what constitutes a male suitor" (p. 47). Ralph does not seem to have a purpose when talking to her; it is clear that he is avoiding marriage even though that is the last thing his father asks him to do; his illness limits him.

Touchett's aristocratic neighbor, Lord Warburton, on the other hand, is the representation of the ideal man in James' literary work. Warburton is an honorable man with respectable values and the best qualities of a good husband. Apparently, he is the most appropriate suitor for her. According to the standardized social ideal of a man, this character represents this ideal of what is expected of the male gender in this time period. He is a wealthy English man with a great reputation who is ideal for occupying the role of a protector and the head of a family. Nevertheless,

contrary to Isabel's relatives' advice to consider Lord Warburton as a possible husband, she refuses the idea of losing her freedom by becoming a typical respected wife of the time, turning him down more than once throughout the novel.

Henrietta Stackpole is a feminist who, having no parents can cultivate herself and reach her goals as an independent woman with well-founded principles which she builds herself by entering the literary world. She and Isabel had become great friends particularly due to the fact that they shared the same views on life. Henrietta travels to England to visit Isabel and to help Caspar Goodwood finally reach Isabel's heart. She also wants to introduce herself into the high class society as she is interested in knowing and understanding how the Victorian society operates. She feels that this knowledge and new friends will help her with her journalistic work in New York.

Later in the novel, Isabel compromises her sense of agency with those new principles that bloom in her mind. She wants to continue growing in knowledge and she finds herself immersed in a new society that she finds amazing and where she wishes to fit in. According to Isabel, it would not be beneficial to marry someone before going deep inside this fantastic new world. This is why she again rejects the proposal of Caspar Goodwood in London. For Isabel Archer, the world represents limitless opportunities to learn from and contribute to society. This is something she mentions many times when conversing with her cousin and other suitors. Through her speech she tries to let others know she is not in the comfortable position of waiting for someone to come and change her life through marriage. She wants to show others her different point of view towards the oppressiveness of this institution that, according to her, causes women to lose their liberty. In this way,

Isabel has “a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action...” (p. 54). The protagonist is very fond of her liberty and wants to be responsible for her own actions.

Isabel shows pride and loftiness during the first half of the novel. She is true to her ideas and seems to be a radical defender of them even though some people around her do not approve of them at all. Her ideas reflect her true character, her liberty and her dreams, which are then forgotten after she marries Osmond: “Although Isabel had modern and great ideas about her future life, she was stuck in the traditional marriage, where the husband took all decisions and she was subordinate to him. She also seems to have lost all her ideas” (Mrtvá, 2005, p. 32).

Before her marriage, Isabel does not give any explanations about her actions. After marrying Osmond she modifies her ideas in order to conform to those of her husband. It is at this moment in which the nineteenth century readers are astonished; they were expecting to have the traditional happy-ending narrative that they were accustomed to reading. Indeed, a good wife limits her thoughts and decisions by accepting what her husband has decreed and a higher education or professional work for women of the time was out of the question. In the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (1847), strong feelings about women’s limited role are expressed:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags (p. 81)

Once again, this emphasizes the implications of Isabel's choice to become an ideal wife and submit to the expected woman's role, which means the loss of her freedom.

Henrietta tries to convince her to reconsider Caspar Goodwood's proposal and give him an opportunity. She wants Isabel to go back to being who she was: "Well, I don't care; you have changed. You are not the girl you were a few short weeks ago and Mr. Goodwood will see it. I expect him here any day" (p. 92). This is Henrietta's response to Isabel after a conversation in which she tries to praise the qualities of Goodwood and Isabel does not show interest about him. At this point, Isabel had already gone through the transformation of a free and independent American girl to a proper Victorian lady.

Henrietta Stackpole thinks that Isabel needs to be saved from the new life that is embracing her with different beliefs about the world in general. Henrietta speaks with Caspar Goodwood in order to have him meet Isabel in London. As part of nineteenth century beliefs and the concept of women as dependent, fragile and meek, Henrietta seeks a strong protector for her friend Isabel, someone who can redirect her to the 'right path'. This protector and savior might be Goodwood, a respectable man with positive characteristics for a man of the time. Isabel's necessity to find a rescuer in her life, combined with her naïveté, led her to choose the less well-intentioned of the two suitors, Gilbert Osmond.

When contrasting American and European society of the time, an important fact is that American society was influenced by many other immigrant subcultures from all over the world. This is stated by Zimmermann (2015):

... Because of this, the United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. ... it is a country of immigrants, most notably the English who colonized the country beginning in the early 1600s. U.S. culture has also been shaped by the cultures of; Native Americans, Latin Americans, Africans and Asians (p. 1)

These influences were probably the reason for a more liberal mentality and lifestyle present in American women. In contrast, European society was more traditional. Because of James' own life history, he could feel this cultural dissimilarity between the two settings.

Henrietta exerts her influence to prevent Isabel from being further influenced by British culture: "She is not the bright American girl she was. She is taking a different view, and turning away from her old ideals. I want to save those ideals" (p. 109). She thinks Isabel is changing her values and Isabel herself knows how patriotic and fond of liberty Henrietta is: "She knows a great deal, and I know enough to feel that she is a kind of emanation of the great democracy---of the continent, the country, the nation. I don't say that she sums it all up, that would be too much to ask for her. But she suggests it. She vividly figures it" (p. 87). Henrietta represents Isabel's old self, which serves to highlight how much Isabel has changed. Isabel has lost her liberty by adopting Victorian English cultural ideals of a respectable lady and her friend is truly aware of that. Even Isabel's speech has changed, which demonstrates her transformation.

While apparently Isabel is determined to maintain her independence. Mr. Touchett's health declines and her thoughtful cousin Ralph convinces him to leave half of his wealth to Isabel. This is done with the intention of protecting her independence and ensuring that she will never have to marry for money. Ralph Touchett plays the role of a loving, close relative who really cares about Isabel no

matter what her convictions are or what choices she makes. Thanks to his intervention, Isabel receives a large fortune.

Mr. Touchett's and Ralph's legacy attracts the attention of Madame Merle, Mrs. Touchett's refined, sophisticated and beautiful woman, whom Isabel admires. She becomes Isabel's main role model. Later, the two women become close friends, giving Madame Merle the opportunity to gain Isabel's trust and starts planning how to profit from this interesting friendship.

Contrary to Merle, Isabel is full of innocence and expectations. She finds in the sophisticated Madame Merle a woman to admire and respect. Her beauty, artistic knowledge and cultured speech are characteristics Isabel longs to achieve for herself. Nonetheless, these characteristics that Isabel admires are only a cover she uses to impress and gain people's trust, which works on Isabel. Her affair with Osmond is hinted throughout the story. It is suggested by the author that Osmond supports her financially as she is having a liaison with him. She also has Pansy, an illegitimate child with him, whom he also supports financially. Merle weaves a web of lies and her deliberate betrayal is motivated by the inheritance of the young lady.

In 19th century society, the female role was again violated by the standards of society and women lost all legal rights on property ownership once married. Madame Merle and Osmond take advantage of this inequality and deceive Isabel in order to keep her heritage and take advantage of the situation.

Isabel's transformation is greatly aided by Madame Merle, who is a controversial character, as she does not conform to the ideals of Victorian society. She is Gilbert Osmond's lover and is the mother of Pansy, who was born out of wedlock. Osmond's wife died shortly after the girls' birth, so Merle and Osmond

spread the story that she died in childbirth. Pansy is placed in a convent to be raised, and she does not know that Merle is actually her real mother. Madame Merle is the antithesis of James' heroine. She is not a standard respectable woman of the time as she breaks polite society's rules in many ways, even by having a lover, which was scandalous and inconceivable for a Victorian lady. It is remarkable how James uses this technique to accentuate Isabel's characteristics in contrast with this opposite character. Madame Merle contradicts the standard Victorian image of a lady and mother. This is demonstrated in the following quote: "Madame Merle is a mass of contradictions, all hidden underneath a preternaturally smooth, too-flawless shell of composure. She herself is the first to admit that she's shockingly chipped and damaged underneath this impression of perfection, and that she's just very good at hiding it" (Team, 2008, pág. 137). However, as a result of Madame Merle's perfect techniques of manipulation, Isabel is astonished by all her characteristics as a woman and chooses her as one of her role models. Isabel doesn't see through her falseness until the end of the novel.

Isabel is enchanted by Madam Merle's knowledge of Victorian society. During the illness of her uncle, Madam Merle and Isabel spend a great deal of time together. Due to Madam Merle's engaging conversation and appreciation of life, Isabel comes to admire her point of view much more than her aunt's. As part of the Victorian era's main characteristics regarding women's role, and also as part of a whole ritual of engagement and marriage, older women in the family played the role of chaperone for the young ingénues of society, as they were experienced and could help the young lady navigate the potentially dangerous situations that could arise. Hoppe (1998) mentions in her text that:

A girl was under her mother's wing for the first few years of her social life. She used her mother's visiting cards, or that of another female relative if her mother was dead. This same person usually served as her chaperone, as a single girl was never allowed out of the house by herself, especially in mixed company (p. 1)

Though Merle is neither Isabel's mother nor a close relative, Isabel sees in her someone admirable who can occupy this role in her life. However, Merle does not conform to this role as she merely pretends to be her protector, when really she is plotting how to gain control of Isabel's wealth. Once again, James is subverting the expectations of the readers by depicting her as a greedy thief. Victorian women were expected to be pure and selfless.

Considering the social and political context of the time, James exposes a truth that was not commonly spoken in his time; that women are flawed, that they make mistakes but are also strong enough to confront them. James is able to depict this truth by creating and portraying the heroine of this novel as a young woman with real strengths and flaws.

Isabel demonstrates a new perspective of women's role in society. In Victorian society, where marriage was understood as a woman's duty and a sacrifice of her freedom, Isabel interprets it not as an obligation but rather as a choice between freedom and settling down. James portrays a new type of woman in terms of her sense of agency and speech.

Of course, among her theories, this young lady was not without a collection of opinions on the question of marriage. The first on the list was a conviction that it was very vulgar to think too much about it. From lapsing into a state of eagerness on this point she earnestly prayed that she might be delivered; she held that a woman ought to be able to make up her life in singleness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex. (p. 55)

Here, James depicts a free-spirited woman who is not willing to be tied down to a man or family. Isabel's first source of admiration, Mrs. Touchett, is exactly what Isabel expects to be as a grown and mature woman: independent, wise and admirable.

Throughout the novel, Isabel demonstrates her ability to make decisions based not only on her will, but also based on the way she perceives life, marriage and her identity as a woman. Isabel thus decides to remain unmarried because she cherishes her liberty and believes that women have more to look forward to than just marriage. She believes that women should have the opportunity to pursue other goals in life. In other words, although Isabel has a wide range of suitors with a variety of profiles to select from, she chooses to decline them all in order to remain true to herself and her ideals. In the end her decision brings her trouble, grief and regret when she chooses to marry a man for the sole purpose of being charitable to him. This is precisely what captivated the nineteenth century readers of this novel. This narrative gave its audience a new kind of novel that provided them with a realistic and noble truth, distinct from the perfect worlds with happy endings they were used to getting.

According to Katerina Mrtva (2005), James' depiction of women, through the character of Isabel, is not that of a new female archetype that is immoral, slovenly, careless and irresponsible. The author is presenting women from a fresh new perspective; he is showing women as role models with convictions shown in values such as liberty and autonomy, which were new to his nineteenth century audience. "James did not see Isabel's independence in working outside of the home, but in having great ideas, her own opinions, and meeting friends she liked. Many men,

but also women were worried that women's changing role would lead to a weakening of the family" (p. 29)

For Victorian society, women were the focal point of the family. Their role in the home was completely irreplaceable; that is why they were prepared and educated to be devoted housewives from childhood. Spending time outside the family unit was seen as potentially damaging and it was not considered proper for a respectable lady of the time. "Cultural ideology dictated that the feminine woman ... was meek, subservient, domesticated and dependent and the idea that she could be both strong-minded as well as feminine was anathema to the smooth-working of a patriarchal society" (Middup, 2013, p. 4). As the author states, everything that did not follow the strict female role built by society was simultaneously misinterpreted and rejected by society itself.

The Portrait of a Lady can thus be interpreted as a portrayal of the changes which occurred in the nineteenth century in regards to gender roles, marriages and other aspects of social life. Gulbicki (2013) states that: "Although the image of the vulnerable lady was a powerful one, the nineteenth century was also a period of redefining womanhood" (p. 6). The role of women in nineteenth century society was going through a transformation due to many social factors and changes that led to this female 'evolution'.

Manipulation is one of the main topics in James' novel. As the *Online Cambridge Dictionary* defines, this notion means: "controlling someone or something to your own advantage, often unfairly or dishonestly". In *The Portrait of a Lady* there are several moments in which manipulation is used as a tool to

acquire what some characters desire. In fact, the author uses it as a tool to move the novel along, mainly concerning Isabel's decisions made throughout the story.

The choices that Isabel has made during the novel have been influenced, by good or bad intentions, by other characters. Her weak and innocent character allows others to mold her thoughts and ideals. Even her last and most significant decision is highly influenced by Madame Merle, the antagonistic character of the story. However, Isabel is not the only one manipulated and influenced by others. Characters like Ralph Touchett and his mother take advantage of some circumstances to obtain benefits through other people. On the one hand, perhaps Mrs. Touchett seeks to recover with Isabel the lost relationship with her late sister and get some company which is lacking in her solitary life, and that is why she influences Isabel to travel to England with her. On the other hand, in his persistent attempts to please and protect his cousin, Ralph Touchett uses his illness and death sentence to convince his father to leave part of his fortune to his beloved cousin.

When Isabel travels to Florence with Mrs. Touchett and Madame Merle, she introduces Isabel to a man named Gilbert Osmond, who has no social standing or wealth. Madame Merle insists on describing him as one of the finest gentlemen in Europe who is supposedly devoted to art and aesthetics. Isabel gets mixed up in a twisted plan elaborated by Osmond and Merle to manipulate her into marrying this man so that they can have control over her wealth.

The first strategy implemented by Madam Merle is to persuade Isabel is to start speaking ill of Ralph: "If he weren't ill, you say, he'd do something?—he'd take his father's place in the house. My poor child, I doubt it; I don't think he's at all

fond of the house” (p. 171). Madame Merle attempts to create a negative image of Ralph for Isabel. She tries to mold the admiration and affection Isabel has for her cousin so he does not influence her more than Merle wants to over Isabel’s life and decisions. Merle speaks about Ralph as someone who, due to his illness and lack of character, should above all be treated with pity. In that sense, because all his features, Ralph must be conceived, according to Merle, as the least appropriate suitor for Isabel Archer.

Madam Merle portrays Osmond as a spiritual and delightful man. She describes him as such because she knows it’s a characteristic Isabel would be interested in, since she wants to reach a spiritual life. In this way, Madam Merle depicts Osmond as a grateful man who, despite the fact that he has no position in society, is a good, clever and wise man who is dedicated to being a perfect father for his daughter. Madam Merle deceives Isabel into thinking how beneficial it would be to get close to this “great man”. She is quick to take advantage of every opportunity she has to speak well of him and soon Isabel becomes highly influenced by him.

To illustrate this point, the following quote is quite clear:

Madame Merle spoke to Isabel afresh about Gilbert Osmond In Italy, as in England, the lady had a multitude of friends She had mentioned to Isabel most of the people the girl would find it well to know ... and she had placed Mr. Osmond near the top of the list. He was an old friend of hers; she had known him these ten years; he was one of the cleverest and most agreeable men it was possible to meet. He was altogether above the respectable average; quite another affair. He was not perfect – far from it; the effect he produced depended a good deal on the state of his nerves ... like most people, after all; but when he chose to exert himself no man could do it to better purpose. ... At any rate, he was a person to know. One should not attempt to live in Italy without making a friend of Gilbert Osmond ... (p. 210)

Through the character of Madame Merle, James depicts a woman who wants to have a great influence on Isabel's life and decisions for the sole purpose of obtaining personal gain, as a result of a deliberate betrayal. In a very clever way, Merle speaks favorably of Osmond, also showing him like any other human being with flaws and virtues, but especially highlighting the benefits he would have first as a friend and later as a husband.

"I don't pretend to know what people are meant for," Madame Merle says. "I only know what I can do with them" (p. 207). Merle knows how influential she can be. She decides to use this ability to convince Isabel to think and act the way she wants her to. Madam Merle is influential in such a way that Isabel simply can't resist following the path her role model smoothly draws out for her and thus, she ends up marrying him. "Madam Merle tells her, "You were charming my dear; you were just as one would have wished you. You're never disappointing." Isabel responds, "I did, but I don't see what that matters either..." (p. 213). As this quote demonstrates, at the beginning, Isabel has no desire to charm Osmond, but after being worked by Merle, she ends up taking an interest in his favorite subjects, to the point that she pesters Merle to tell her about him. In other words, Isabel becomes interested in pleasing Osmond in such a way that he would find her delightful.

The fact that Madam Merle continues living with the Osmond family shows what a big influence she has on Isabel's life. Even when Isabel is already married to Osmond, she continues believing and trusting Madam Merle: "I asked her for an opinion—for nothing more. I did so because she had seemed to me to know you

very well” (p. 318). Isabel is talking to Osmond and she shows how important Madam Merle’s appreciation of life and people in general is to her.

In these examples it is clear that, manipulation is a key theme in *The Portrait of a Lady*. The story moves by this type of actions in which some characters in the novel take advantage of key circumstances for profiting relationships or redirecting some people’s decisions like Isabel’s. The character of Madame Merle is an enormous influence on Isabel from the moment they meet for the first time to the final choice Isabel makes of giving up her desired freedom by marrying Gilbert Osmond.

Throughout the novel, Isabel goes through a clear transformation. The original psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud and two other psychodynamic theories that followed the first one might influenced Isabel’s behavior. She starts off being a young independent woman who rejects marriage, believing it to require a sacrifice of her freedom but later turns into a proper Victorian lady who not only marries, but who gives up her happiness and sense of liberty when deciding to stay in a loveless and abusive relationship.

Different suitors try to win Isabel’s affections without success. Her fear of losing her autonomy and freedom prevents her from accepting any marriage proposals. However, after she inherits a fortune, she finally decides to marry Osmond as a form of charity to him, thinking this to be a good cause to dedicate the rest of her life to; while at the same time conforming to the conventional ideal of a woman of the time.

Throughout the novel, it is clear that Isabel’s decisions are highly influenced, if not determined by, first, Mrs. Touchett and later, Madame Merle. During the first

half of the novel, Isabel identifies her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, as her role model, while under her influence she adopts the point of view of a modern woman; such as prioritizing her freedom over marriage. Later, after meeting the fashionable Madame Merle, Isabel innocently succumbs to her manipulation and social pressure, changing her ideals about life to the point that she decides that marriage is a worthy cause to dedicate her life to.

James draws the image of an innocent and well-educated young American woman who, following her unconventional aunt, decides to move to England. While abroad she receives a great fortune that elevates her position in society. Nevertheless, at the beginning she maintains her initial attitude towards life, marriage and freedom. With this new wealth, Isabel follows her desire to explore the world. However during this travel she makes new acquaintances who become quite influential over her, to the point that she ends up adopting the Victorian's ideals of the kind of life style a lady should have and thus ends up marrying.

There are elements in James' work that could indicate how Isabel's actions and ideals derive from a state of unconsciousness in which memories from her childhood and adolescence show her that she can be an independent woman without any ties. Her self-education, motivated by her father, makes her think, as an adult, that she does not need anyone, specifically a man, to be happy and fulfill her ideals. By contrast, according to the parameters dictated by society of the time, she strongly believes that to unite her life with another man will make her completely lose her freedom and she will not be able to achieve her dreams of adventure. Horney in her *Psychoanalytic Social Theory* argues that childhood experiences have a great importance on any person's life: ... in normal individuals,

childhood experiences are primarily responsible for personality development” (Horney, 1939). Thus, Isabel’s independent nature of her early years living made her grow up with a ‘strong’ belief of autonomy in her adult life.

Isabel relishes liberty because she believes that when one is free, one can help and serve others better, she thinks that when a woman is independent, free and unmarried she is able to offer her life to charity, education which enriches humanity. Instead, as Ralph concludes after a conversation with Ms. Stackpole, a woman who seeks marriage thinks differently: “When a marriageable young woman urges matrimony upon an unencumbered young man, the most obvious explanation of her conduct is not the altruistic impulse” (p. 86). In this way, Isabel wishes to be a free woman in order to dedicate her life to humanity. She appeals to compassion, mercy and altruism not only in her speech but also in her actions. This is why Madame Merle is able to convince Isabel to marry Osmond. She convinces her that she would be doing an act of charity towards him by doing so.

Isabel’s first official suitor, Caspar Goodwood, whom she rejects throughout the novel, appears in two significant moments of Isabel’s life. The first moment is when she wants to live as freely and independently as possible; she does not hesitate to make this clear when she speaks to Goodwood, rejecting his proposal of marriage, “Goodwood, who had arrived hopeful as well as resolute, took his way back to his lodging with the feeling of a man defeated” (p. 34). The second significant encounter with Goodwood reveals the hidden fragility beneath the self-assurance that Isabel shows at first. This time she sees Caspar Goodwood as a possible way of escape from her confining marriage. Goodwood witnesses Isabel’s

unfortunate transition from a rebellious young woman to a real “lady” with responsibilities to fulfill as an unhappy but honorable married woman.

Through Isabel, James depicts a woman who goes through this transformation. Isabel leaves America, she leaves behind the place that has shaped most of her conceptions about life. She also leaves behind her friend Henrietta Stackpole, an American journalist, who sees Isabel’s point of view changing from what it had been during their delightful and vivid conversations in America.

Isabel is not educated in economics and sexual life. She does not receive instruction in how to develop herself as a mother, a wife and a complete Victorian woman: that is why she does not know how to act; she does not even know what she wants from her suitors: “One would think you were going to commit some atrocity!” said Caspar Goodwood. “Perhaps I am. I wish to be free even to do that if the fancy takes me” (p. 143). Isabel shows how well she knows about her human state of imperfection. Even though she promises Caspar Goodwood nothing, she hides her face in her arms alone in her hotel room after he leaves. This scene shows how vulnerable she is to the world, how real she is; it even shows that she has feelings for him. She decides to conform to the ideals she expresses in her speech. Also, her speech is much more influenced throughout the novel.

In the first half of the novel, Isabel emanates confidence and trust in her ideals. People around her admire her firm thoughts so different from the current society of the time. Gradually, not only her speech but their actions change throughout the story. Under the influence of Merle, Isabel begins to consider marriage with a man who only seeks to swindle her. This not only demonstrates how malleable and innocent is the protagonist of the novel, but it shows as well

how culture and society also have an important influence on Isabel's decisions. Sullivan (1953) in his *Interpersonal Theory* points out that people develop their personality within a social context and that it would be impossible to have one without other people. He expresses that: "A personality can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being" (pág. 10).

Towards the end of the novel Caspar Goodwood, the persistent suitor whose love for Isabel remains constant, reaffirms his love to her in an attempt to convince her to divorce her husband and run away with him. Isabel has defied her abusive husband by disobeying his order to remain with him in Italy, to visit her dying cousin Ralph. Caspar Goodwood, who sees this as a sign of her desire to leave her husband and her unhappy marriage, tells her,

You took the great step in coming away; the next is nothing; it's the natural one. I swear, as I stand here, that a woman deliberately made to suffer is justified in anything in life--in going down into the streets if that will help her! I know how you suffer, and that's why I'm here. We can do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything? What is it that holds us, what is it that has the smallest right to interfere in such a question as this? (p. 543)

However, Isabel turns away from his persistence precisely because she feels that the bond of marriage means she cannot do absolutely as she pleases, because she now has responsibilities to own up to. Thus, she passes up this opportunity for happiness and returns to a loveless marriage in Rome, in this way becoming an actual Victorian Lady: "Isabel is a single modern American who tries to break the conventional rules of the Victorian society; she tries to educate herself, reads widely and attempts to gain experience from travelling to Europe. Victorian morality was a "set of social ideas widely influential among the privileged classes of

England and America”; however, in America they started to free themselves of its influence at the end of the 19th century, and “by 1900 the Victorian social and moral ethos was crumbling on every front” (Mrtvá, 2005, p. 10).

Horney, as well as Sullivan, claims that culture has also a great importance on people’s lives. She believes that cultural forces are major determinants of human behavior and that modern culture is based on competition: “Everyone is the real or potential competitor of everyone else” (Horney, 1939, p. 7). In other words, societies demand for success, and success conceived by Victorian society was to practice the gender roles already established in which man and woman were located in different areas and had a different hierarchical position between them. Male gender as the provider and protector member of the family and the woman as the ‘Angel in the house’. Thus, culture, society and people around Isabel Archer plays also a significant role in James’ novel.

In contrast, other critics like Jötkandt (2005) have claimed that Isabel’s controversial final decision is no more than the transition from a negative freedom to a positive one, the first one being a state of life without any kind of constraints and the second one a more mature freedom that someone chooses to have, even in a decision to get married. Isabel begins the novel believing that freedom consists of avoiding all obligations and barriers or impediments to choose freely, a state that Jötkandt describes as “the state of possibility”; this, however, is “a negative rather than positive concept of freedom, understood as an absence of limitation” (p. 15). Isabel becomes dissatisfied with this state and looks for a different kind of freedom by marrying Osmond: “freedom without boundaries . . . is no freedom at all but rather a wearisome slavery to her immediate whims. By marrying Osmond, Isabel

imagines she will expand rather than contract her freedom—duty will give her a vehicle through which to articulate her freedom” (p. 16).

Even her cousin Ralph, who admires her, can see how innocent she is about real life and nastiness in people “Ralph shook his head sadly. “I might show it [the ghost] to you, but you would never see it. The privilege isn’t given to every one; it’s not enviable. It has never been seen by a young, happy innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it. I saw it long ago,” said Ralph, smiling. “I told you just now I was very fond of knowledge, the girl answered. -Yes, of happy knowledge—of pleasant knowledge. But you haven’t suffered, and you are not made to suffer. I hope you will never see the ghost!” (pp. 51-52). Ralph is making a metaphor for the wickedness of humanity, telling Isabel she has not seen bad intentions in others yet, as Ralph says she does not have experience in real life matters. Thus, the warnings of his cousin Ralph finally come true once Isabel discovers the betrayal of Merle and Osmond. In this sense, Isabel undergoes a clear transformation throughout the story, from a single woman full of hopes and dreams to fulfill, to a married woman with an ephemeral happiness, which ends in a big disillusion of a woman who simply conforms to reality, which was very common for women in Victorian society. That is why James depicts a portrait of a real lady, who does not appear until the end of the story.

It is not until this betrayal is revealed to Isabel that she begins waking up from a state of ignorance and great innocence. However, Instead of feeling sorry for herself and giving up, she bravely accepts the challenge and struggles to re-establish her identity in the chaos of her life. She thus gains knowledge and

maturity and grows into a graceful lady as intended by James. Due to her tendency to confine herself to a narrow area secluded from the reality of life, she never has the idea about how dark the real world is and how malicious some people can be. Merle and Osmond's manipulation combined with the social pressure of the time and Isabel's naïve state of life are the factors that finally force Isabel to make her unfortunate final decision.

In opposition to this theory, authors like Fessenbecker (2011) claim that the end of the novel was predictable and Isabel Archer did not lose her freedom by marrying Gilbert Osmond but instead she chooses to give another sense to her life and have a positive one, in the same way. At the end of the novel, "her decision to return to Osmond is not in any straightforward sense a "mistake". "Isabel has become a different person compared to the one that she was at the beginning of the novel; she has come to care deeply about something. Temporarily, of course, her desire to be happy has risen, and she has briefly considered life with Goodwood" (p. 86). Isabel is a new woman now; she changes a lot due to different circumstances around her which make her modify little by little her ideals.

Even her controversial decision to stay with Osmond at the end of the story is easily predictable after scrutinizing nineteenth century society context. Once Isabel takes the bait, it is very difficult for her to refuse to keep her word of honor. His reputation is at stake and in Victorian society it was not seemly for a woman to give up her marital duties. Once married, even after discovering a betrayal, it is a must to take care of her and her husband's reputation and respectably.

The mores of Victorian society influence Isabel to change her convictions. Likewise, her innocence and naïveté in the real world make her succumb to

manipulation. Her unconscious makes her grow as an independent woman with liberal ideals, but environment, cultural factors, her innocence and society itself significantly influence her final transformation to a true lady of the time: respectable, meek and with stifled emotions.

James was one of the first writers to innovate in the Realism narrative of the time. Realism is an approach that endeavors to portray settings and people as they really are without the archetypal subjectivity that Romanticism uses. This new school, adopted by writers in America and England, focused attention on highlighting the subject matter as well as the character. James embarked upon a complex exploration of the mind throughout psychological realism. James' Realism has a noticeable influence of his brother's conceived narrative of stream of consciousness or interior monologue in his work: the principles of psychology.

Stream of consciousness seeks to seamlessly show the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of characters as they occur in their minds; the principal idea is to make the reader feel he is in the character's mind in such a way that the reader will see motivation in the plot of the novel. Isabel's attitude and charisma can be as vivid as everything she attempts to do.

He allows the reader to know her from a very close perspective in which one can see how she changes her attitude, beliefs and ideas throughout the novel.

As James writes in his critical preface, Isabel was a real character of the time, she struggles and falls. That is what this novel is all about: reality and true people. The way James develops Isabel's character throughout the novel, presenting not only a description of what he can perceive of the character but of the internal psychological movements of great complexity that happens in the

character's mind that gives much more to the reader in order to make an interpretation of how real the characters are.

Henry James is considered the father of the realistic psychological novel. "His characters are defined by the world in which they live and the social requirements of their society" (Red, p. 1). James claims to change the perception of psychological realism in his novels, particularly in *The Portrait of a Lady*. He does this by drawing a different picture of courtship for the time through the description of all the different suitors for the heroine; he shows the reality of life in his descriptions, portraying real profiles of male archetypes who display strengths and weaknesses that demand serious considerations from Isabel. Also, those social traits that were influenced by the Victorian society are well developed in the novel in an indirect way, due to the different descriptions and dialogues that shape the political thoughts about the individual and his social interests. Directly opposed to Romanticism as a literary movement, "James believes characters should be created without idealization and that settings and situations must be portrayed as faithfully to real life as possible" (p. 1).

James describes in his book, *The Art of the Novel*, the construction he makes in each character: the reality and the truth about people. "I seem to myself to have as much as I need - to show my people, to exhibit their relations with each other; for that is all my measure ... But I would rather, I think, have too little architecture than too much -When there is danger of its interfering with my measure of the truth "(p. 43). In this critical preface, James answers the French critics who marked him as a writer with too little architecture because of the

description of his characters. In response to those critics, James appeals to the reality of the time: he would rather have the truth of life than standard ideas.

In this way James pioneers a new kind of realism in his narrative, a new perspective of it, which is different from the one Dickens shows in his novels; Dickens' narratives are especially well known in Europe and the English world for their critique of the Victorian society. As realism comes in response to the traditional romanticism in which life is perfect and there is peace, realism is instead viewed through the observations of social issues in society and its abrupt changes during the Industrial revolution which brings about the rapid transformations in society and within it in the average citizen.

James goes beyond what Dickens did. Considered the father of the psychological realism, James depicts ordinary people in everyday situations creating this plot that explores the psychology of their characters.

James manipulates the silence in such a way that he reaches more complete expressions and meaning, as he does when he describes Isabel's feelings after rejecting Mr. Goodwood "...As Isabel became conscious of this feeling she bowed her head a little lower; the feeling was there... it was a part of her emotion; but it was a thing to be ashamed of..." (p. 144). James attempts to describe how Isabel becomes aware of her strong position when talking to Mr. Goodwood and feelings generate from this; she apparently was excited and sad at once. James writes more than ten lines for this description without dialogue, and he does not tell but only shows the inner dialogue from a psychological perspective. Isabel's monologue can be open to multiple interpretations; is a great example of James' work and influence on American literature.

James characters are “defined by the world in which they live and the social requirements of their society.” His characters are real people, the average American or European involved in real situations of everyday life. James explores the psyches of characters facing complex, ethical and intricate situations. James thinks that the portrait of his characters and situations should be as faithfully to reality as possible. He did not write about poverty as Dickens did; he instead focuses his attention on his environment, which was full of the complex manners and demands of the elite.

6. Conclusions

The Portrait of a Lady is a revolutionary vision of the time. It is modern enough to make the nineteenth century reader concerned about the reality, the society and culture of the day. It also includes all of the cultural background of this author highlighting the positive aspects of life and proposing a general new view of society. For Henry James, art and morality were intertwined; he did not want to change the view of his time: the collective, religious, social, political customs of his time, his individual and collective history. James shows his appreciation towards his background culture when he underlines the respect he feels about his own experiences of life. He wants to show a life image of that reality and he wants to set it free.

His description of Isabel throughout the novel and her beliefs about life is the best representation of his willingness to set free his own cultural legacy; in this way, despite Isabel's declarations of absolute independence, Isabel is not entirely autonomous. She heavily relies on the influence of others like her aunt as it is seen at the beginning of the novel but later she strives to emulate her. Once in Europe, she chooses Madame Merle as her mentor and is highly influenced by her in her decisions that finally lead her to the greatest personal influence she ever had, Osmond.

All of these events show how vulnerable Isabel is to the world and the people around her. In the opening pages of the novel, Isabel is shown as such an independent and strong lady that the reader cannot even foresee how her behavior is going to change. The manipulation of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond show

how cruel real life can be. This was a different kind of narrative and proposal for the time. All of the contemporary stories show well-defined characters with radical thoughts about life. James shows a more realistic perspective of life; he draws broad descriptions of his characters with good and bad human characteristics that shape them in such a way that they are closer to the real American and European reader of the time. For the traditional Victorian society this was indeed a revolutionary novel that went against the principles that configure the role of women in life; it also contrasted with the general structure and behavior of the high class within the subject of money and position, and how they conceived it.

As Horney writes, Isabel is the real character that portrays the adult that keeps alive in her subconscious all the experiences she lived with her father in which she learns how to think by herself and be independent. But as a regular member of her community, she also develops her personality within her social context and culture which forces are major determinant of human behavior. (pp. 133-168)

Isabel is not strong from the beginning. However, she transforms shapes and configures her thoughts and behaviors in life within certain areas that enrich her, that are painful and even abrupt like Osmond's betrayal. Isabel could have been different. She could have been a stronger woman with a more radical and critical view of people; in this way, she would have never permitted others to manipulate her. Instead, she is influenced and that is why she is forced to transform herself, to rise and fight or to be still and do nothing. Essentially, it all depends on the point of view of the reader; nevertheless, she does change.

People do not maintain the same position on something forever. People change their minds and undergo transformations. Isabel's transformation has a lot to do with the new people she meets who change her perception of life in different ways.

Another great influence in James' novel was Freud's psychological perspective. James attempts to create a broad description of his main characters by going deep inside the mind of the characters, their feelings, thoughts and reactions towards different situations in life.

Isabel's reactions and thoughts after she succumbs to manipulation and a life of restriction are well shown within her new view of life and misfortune. She knows she was mistaken and she feels she puts herself into a space of restriction and depression; she sees happiness as far away. Here, James chooses to show how Isabel examines her path to have such a life; at first she was confident about her decisions and now she knows how wrong she was and feels like a prisoner. Finally she accepts that she was mistaken and that she is not happy at all.

7. Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. (2011). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Appell, F. (n.d.). *Victorian Ideals: The Influence of Society's Ideals on Victorian Relationships*. Retrieved from <http://www.mckendree.edu/academics/scholars/issue18/appell.htm>
- Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Thomas Egerton.
- Boros, D. C.-J. (2010). *A psychological analysis of Henry James' The Portrait of a Lady*. United States of America: Xlibris Corporation.
- Brontë, C. (1847). *Jane Eyre*. London : Smith, Elder & Company.
- Cambridge Dictionaries Online. (n.d.). Retrieved December 05, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/manipulation>
- Carroll, D. (n.d.). *George Eliot: the critical heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Chattopadhyay, A. (2011). Women in Victorian Society as Depicted in Thomas. *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration Volume 1, Number 1 (2011)*, 23-28.
- Diyanni, R. (2008). *Literature: approaches to fiction, poetry and drama*. New York: Mc Graw Hill.
- Edel, L. (1996). *Henry James, The Contemporary Reviews*. Whitefish : Kessinger.
- Fessenbecker, P. (2011). Freedom, Self-Obligation, and Selfhood in Henry James. *Nineteenth - Century Literature Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (June 2011) , 69-95.
- Freud, S. (1949). *An outline of psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Gulbicki, S. (2013). *Style and Substance: Isabel Archer as a New Type* (Thesis). Seton Hall University, New Jersey .
- Hoppe, M. (1998). *Literary Liaisons*. [Blog] Literary Liaisons. Available at: <http://www.literary-liaisons.com/article009.html> [Accessed 27 Mar. 2016].
- Horney, K. (1939). *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*. London: Publisher Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner And Company, Limited.
- Hughes, K. (n.d.). *Gender roles in the 19th century*. Retrieved from <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>
- James, H. (1995). *The Portrait of a Lady*. New York: Norton Critical Edition.
- Jöttkandt, S. (2005). *Acting Beautifully: Henry James and the Ethical Aesthetic*. Buffalo: State Univ. of New York Press.

- Lupu, D. G. (2013). The innocent American Girl in Henry James's International Novel. *Gender Studies*, 258–269.
- Malka, J. (2012). *A life of one's own. freedom and obligation in the novels of Henry James* (Thesis). University of Toronto, Toronto.
- Middup, L. C. (2013). "Dear! How tiresome it must be to be so religious! [...] and where's the use of it?". *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies Issue 9.3 (winter 2013)*.
- Mrtvá, K. (2005). *Marriage and the Position of Women in Wharton's Age of Innocence and James's Portrait of a Lady*. (Thesis). University of Pardubice
- Nair, E. G. (2000). The economic role of middle-class women in. *Women's History Review Volume 9, Issue 4, 2000*.
- Patmore, C. (1854). *The Angel in the House*. London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand.
- Porte, J. (1990). *New Essays on James' The Portrait of a Lady*. New York: Cambridge University Press .
- Red, T. B. (n.d.). *Realism and Henry James*. Retrieved from http://www.neabigread.org/teachers_guides/handouts/washingtonsquare/washingtonsquare-handout3.pdf
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*. New York: Norton.
- Team, S. E. (2008). *Madame Merle in The Portrait of a Lady*. Retrieved from <http://www.shmoop.com/portrait-of-a-lady/madame-merle.html>
- Women, T. D. (1886). *Documents - Society*. Retrieved from http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=545
- Yockey, F. P. (1981). *The enemy of Europe*. 8.
- Zimmermann, K. A. (2015, January 15). *live science*. Retrieved from <http://www.livescience.com/28945-american-culture.html>