

Henry James: Ethnographer of American Women in Victorian Patriarchy

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Humanities Department in the Graduate School of
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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the social question: is 19th century women's identity socially determined or do 19th century women have the liberty to forge their own identities as they see fit? In order to answer this question, this paper treats Henry James as ethnographer and "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady as ethnographies of American women in Victorian Europe. The primary focus of this paper is Isabel Archer and how she is constructed from Henry James's Daisy Miller and George Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth, in order to demonstrate that while 19th century women were victimized by the tyranny of Victorian patriarchy, 19th century women were also capable of resisting and subverting normative Victorian social expectations for women.

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Section I: Introduction

Henry James's secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, details in the biography Henry James At Work that James "realized how constantly the tenderness of growing life is at the mercy of personal tyranny and he hated the tyranny of persons over each other. His novels are a repeated exposure of this wickedness, a reiteration and passionate plea for the fullest freedom of development, unimperilled by reckless and barbarous stupidity."¹ In this paper, I argue that James's "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady function as ethnographies of American women in Victorian Europe. It is my contention that these texts ethnographically detail how Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer struggle to assert their "fullest freedom" within the "wickedness" and "reckless and barbarous stupidity" of Victorian social relationships. I argue that James creates "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady, as social experiments, to examine whether 19th century women's identity is socially determined or if 19th century women have the liberty to forge their own identities, as they see fit.

In order to answer these questions about the construction of women's identity in the 19th century, it is crucial to anthropologically examine culture and how culture manifests itself in social structures and social interactions. As culture works to inform someone's social positioning in a society, as well

¹Theodora Bosanquet, *James At Work*, ed. Lyall H. Powers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 57.

as how people should interact with one another, culture also creates people's individual desires and freedom. For the purpose of ethnographically tracing the development of and conflict within "culture," it is necessary to provide a concrete definition of "culture." I will use Victorian anthropologist E. B. Tylor's definition of culture: "taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."² My choice to use Tylor's definition is because his interpretation of culture historically coincides with James's writings, and because his rhetoric suggests that culture can be ethnographically described. In addition, as Nancy Bentley historically traces in The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton, in 1958, Raymond Williams successfully argued that Tylor's understanding of culture had its roots in literary tradition.³ Since Tylor's definition of culture is premised in the "culture" produced by Victorian poets and critics, Tylor's definition is appropriate for my project: to demonstrate how Henry James is an ethnographer of American women in Victorian Europe. The primary focus of this paper is Isabel Archer, and how she develops from James's *Daisy Miller* and George Eliot's

² Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871), 1.

³ Nancy Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James and Wharton (Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3-4.

Gwendolen Harleth in order to demonstrate that while 19th century women were victimized by the tyranny of Victorian patriarchy, 19th century women were also capable of resisting and subverting normative Victorian social expectations for women.

Since 1990, two literary movements have generated a majority of Henry James scholarship: psychoanalytic literary criticism and New Historicism. While both movements have produced important and interesting scholarship, I believe that, in Jamesian criticism, both have become limited in their insights.

Lois Tyson writes in her textbook Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide that “[f]rom the perspective of classical psychoanalytic theory, [...] we might attend mainly [...] to what the work can tell us about human beings’ psychological relationship to death or to sexuality; to the way the narrator’s unconscious problems keep asserting themselves over the course of the story.”⁴ Therefore, if psychoanalytic scholars want to analyze how a work reveals an author’s psychological relationship to death or sexuality, through the author’s narrator, psychoanalytic scholars research a writer’s personal experiences on these issues, so that they can track how an author’s unconscious desires and anxieties fuel the narrative plot in a literary work. The psychoanalytic literary approach has been very successful for Jamesian

⁴ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 35.

scholarship, because of the extensive historical and biographical documents we have from and about Henry James.

Leon Edel's comprehensive five-volume biography⁵ of Henry James argues that James's texts were a sublimation of James' personal, sexual conflicts. Moreover, in James's autobiography, Notes from a Son and Brother, James elliptically refers to the "obscure hurt" he suffered in 1861, (1862 in other historical documentation), that allowed him not to fight in the American Civil War.⁶ As with James's elliptical narrations in The Portrait of a Lady, James's pithy account of the event and subsequent injury he incurred as a teenager has spurred a lot of critical debate.⁷

John Halperin argues in his article, "Henry James's Civil War" that

⁵ Edel's five-volume biography was updated and rewritten in his abridged edition; Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

⁶ Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 298.

⁷ In the article, Paul John Eakin, "Henry James's "Obscure Hurt": Can Autobiography Serve Biography?" *New Literary History* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1988), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/469095> (accessed March 29, 2011). Eakin gives a historiography of the biographical scholarship on James's "obscure hurt:" beginning in 1916, Rebecca West's biography glosses over James's hurt, accepting it as a physical injury that disqualified him from service in the Civil War. In the 1930s, James's hurt is speculated to be castration, which is originally suggested in Glenway Wescott's biography. In 1943, Saul Rosenzweig argues that the physical injury of James's hurt is only of secondary concern and that the primary concern is the psychological implication of the hurt. Following Rosenzweig's suggestion, Leon Edel's biographies suggest that the "obscure hurt" is extremely important from a psychological perspective, because it offers insight into James's characters and narrators.

In retrospect it would seem to be no accident after all that, in the spring of 1861, James, faced with these momentous choices of life and death, of roles to be played out, allegedly suffered what he was later to call "an obscure hurt" [...] an event which has spawned more speculation about him than any other event in his life. What exactly was this "obscure hurt"-which, according to the novelist, disqualified him not only from participation in the Civil War but also, forever, from the normal physical exertions of life, including sexual exertions, and rendered him a sort of invalid, a permanent spectator of life, passive and celibate?⁸

Halperin writes that James's "obscure hurt" occurred at the same time as the beginning of the Civil War and should not be viewed as coincidental.

Halperin concludes, "[a]s long as the dates are not confused we should be able to see James's "obscure hurt" as what in fact it was; an excruciating mental convulsion-"a huge and comprehensive ache"- rather than a physical mishap."⁹ Similar to Halperin, in "Henry James' Sexuality and His Obscure Hurt," Ruth Perry examines James's "obscure hurt" as a physical and psychological injury:

He suffered an "obscure hurt" when he was eighteen—an injury to which he refers with great secrecy, understatement, and embarrassment. Whether this injury stunted James' sexual growth at a crucial time, whether it was psychologically or practically castrating, it has often been used to explain his perennial bachelorhood. Moreover, it is invoked to explain the peculiar "brinksmanship" of James' fictional sexual entanglements. Again and again, he sets up heavily charged

⁸ John Halperin, "Henry James's Civil War," *The Henry James Review* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1996), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/774561637?accountid=10598> (accessed March 29, 2011).

⁹ *Ibid.*

situations and then simply lets the intensity drain away without any proper climax. The recurrence of this unsettling momentum in his work is occasionally connected by some to the injury he suffered in his early manhood.¹⁰

As Halperin and Perry establish, critics and scholars question why James was not explicit in the details surrounding the “obscure hurt,” and what were the physical and psychological implications of the “obscure hurt.” Tyson continues in her chapter on psychoanalytic criticism that two of the main questions psychoanalytic scholars ask are: “How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work? [...] What does the work suggest about the psychological being of the author?”¹¹ In consequence, the questions, and the subsequent answers surrounding James’s “obscure hurt” are of paramount importance for psychoanalytic scholars; they reveal James’s psychological relationship to sexuality, as well as suggest why James treats sexuality the way he does in his novels.

Edel’s argument that James’s stories were a form of sublimation, in conjunction with the ambiguity surrounding James’s “obscure hurt,” created the opportunity for powerful and successful Jamesian psychoanalytic scholarship; for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s queer reading of James’s

¹⁰ Ruth Perry, “Henry James’ Sexuality and His Obscure Hurt,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 24, no. 33 (April 1978): 34, <http://isp.sagepub.com/content/24/1/33.citation> (accessed March 29, 2011).

¹¹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 38.

“The Beast in the Jungle.”¹² Sedgwick’s piece spurred an important trajectory in Jamesian psychoanalytic criticism: gender theory.¹³

Shockingly absent from the Sedgwick-inspired gender readings are James’s heroines, specifically Isabel Archer. The successful psychoanalytic readings of Jamesian women try to pinpoint real-life models for James’s heroines. Using Edel’s argument and James’s “obscure hurt,” this scholarship examines James’s personal relationships with women, which always reveals that James had no arousal or sexual passion for women; for example, Perry writes:

[I]t is certainly clear that he had a peculiar attitude towards women as sexual beings—the women in his works are generally

¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The Beast in the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic," in *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 182-212.

¹³ I acknowledge that some people do believe that a feminist reading is a sort of gender reading. However, the debate on the sex versus gender distinction in women’s studies has had an impact on literary critical lenses. Since the late 1990s, there has been a splintering between feminist readings and gender readings: while all gender readings could have a feminist agenda and a feminist approach, not all feminist readings are concerned with gender. This is an important distinction for my analysis; while I take a feminist approach, I am concerned with the question of (biologically sexed) women in society, not with issues of sexual orientation or gender construction. For my discussion of James’s texts, I am not concerned with the idea of “masculine” versus “feminine” women, nor heterosexual, homosexual, asexual, etc women. My goal is not to analyze comparatively Isabel, Henrietta, Mrs. Touchett, Pansy nor Daisy, Mrs. Walker, and Mrs. Costello, and subsequently label them according to my own understanding of the gender spectrum. Instead I will treat James’s texts as ethnographies, which forces a reading of James’s female characters, as biologically sexed women, who construct themselves within Victorian social and cultural paradigms.

either unattainably pure or else husband-chasing predators to be feared. He rarely allows them full-blooded passion. But it is also true that such a woman was not within his personal experience. Henry James lived a celibate life: the only women with whom he was at all intimate were those in his immediate family. And whether this was the case because he was psychologically incapable of such sexual feeling, or because of the “obscure hurt” he suffered at eighteen, no one will ever know.¹⁴

Because James does not allow Isabel to have “full-blooded” passion in The Portrait of a Lady, psychoanalytic readings of Isabel argue that her qualm with Goodwood’s sexual passion for her is actually a manifestation of James’s own psychosexual problem: a fear of sexual desire.¹⁵ While psychoanalytic gender readings have produced interesting scholarship, in the context of The Portrait of a Lady, this sort of criticism only offers one insight into Isabel Archer, that she’s sexually repressed, which, over the course of 20 years, has been exhausted.

James treats Isabel’s female sexuality in accordance with 19th century social norms.¹⁶ Moreover, using James’s lack of sexual passion, as the

¹⁴ Ruth Perry, “Henry James’ Sexuality and His Obscure Hurt,” 37.

¹⁵ Two pieces of well-known scholarship that argue that Isabel fears her sexual desire with Goodwood are: Annette Niemtow, “Marriage and the New Woman in ‘The Portrait of a Lady,’” *American Literature* 47 (1975): 377-395. C. Vopat, “Becoming a Lady: The Origins and Development of Isabel Archer’s Ideal Self,” *Literature and Psychology* 38 (1992): 38-56.

¹⁶ In fact, James responded to suggestions that Isabel Archer was not a full psychological portrait in her sexual desires for her male suitors. For its American publication in 1908, The Portrait of a Lady was revised and Isabel’s consciousness has increased sexual awareness. A good critical essay that traces James’s revisions of Isabel Archer from The Portrait of a Lady’s initial

psychology for his heroine, is to misrepresent Isabel: Isabel's desire is *to choose* her fate. Throughout The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel makes choices based on her own considerations of what she wants in life, which are illustrated through James's well-constructed and detailed psychological portrait of Isabel. Her rejection of Goodwood is not because of sexual repression, but because she does not want her fate to be a life with Goodwood. (This is a point I will argue in-depth later.) Critics only can justify that Isabel is sexually repressed through James's narrations, not through the dialogue, and thus individual psyche, of Isabel.¹⁷ To argue that James's characters are psychological manifestations of himself is the same as arguing that because Vladimir Nabakov had synesthesia, Humbert Humbert from Lolita must also be a synesthete. Isabel Archer is not a repressed sexual being in the way that scholars and critics argue James was; she does not lack sexual arousal and

publication to its 1908 publication is Bonnie L. Herron, "Substantive Sexuality: Henry James constructs Isabel Archer as a Complete Woman in His Revised Version of *The Portrait of a Lady*," *The Henry James Review* 16, no. 2 (1995): 131-141.

¹⁷ While the narrations in James's text serve as scaffolding for the ethnographies in "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady, I will argue in a later section that the dialogue in James's texts are of paramount importance. The dialogue amongst the characters in James's texts ethnographically detail the discourse on competing ideologies between the American heroines and Victorian societies they visit. As aforementioned by Tyson, classical psychoanalytic theory examines how the narrator's unconscious problems, with issues such as sexuality or death, continue to assert themselves throughout the text. However, the narrators in The Portrait of a Lady and "Daisy Miller" are not Isabel Archer and Daisy Miller, nor are the narrators James. In fact, in "Daisy Miller," the narrator is Winterbourne.

sexual passion, she questions sexuality because she wants to retain her liberty.

In addition, these psychoanalytic readings of Isabel Archer fail to recognize her larger social significance. As Kurt Hochenauer notes in his article “Sexual Realism in *The Portrait of a Lady*: The Divided Sexuality of Isabel Archer,” “[b]y dismissing historical approaches in favor of the never-ending ambiguity offered by psychological or spiritual interpretations, Isabel’s detractors or worshippers give us half-empty insights.”¹⁸ Hochenauer’s observation argues for the importance of the other pole of current Jamesian scholarship: a historical approach.

One of the better pieces of recent historical scholarship on The Portrait of a Lady exemplifies my problem with some historical Jamesian scholarship: James’s literature is not the primary object of study. MacComb’s essay is a well-evidenced historical account of individual liberty and divorce for women in the 19th century, with intermittent references to The Portrait of a Lady. Debra MacComb’s “Divorce of a Nation: or, Can Isabel Archer Resist

¹⁸ Kurt Hochenauer, “Sexual Realism in “The Portrait of A Lady”: The Divided Sexuality of Isabel Archer,” *Studies in the Novel* 22, no. 1 (1990): 21, <http://content.ebscohost.com/pdf9/pdf/1990/SNV/01Mar90/9601231540.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=9601231540&EbscoContent=dGJyMNxb4kSep644zOX00LCmr0ieprJSsKm4S7GWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGsr0y0r7dMuePfgeyx%2BEu3q64A&D=aph> (accessed November 7, 2010).

History?"¹⁹ historically situates Isabel's story in the context of American Studies, arguing that James, through Isabel, is critiquing America's valuing of individual liberty over tradition and obligation, in the 19th century. I completely disagree with MacComb's argument that James privileges tyranny over freedom in The Portrait of a Lady. As aforementioned, James's project was a social experiment to examine how personal freedom was always at the mercy of tyranny. Moreover, if James did privilege tyranny over freedom, his endings, Daisy's death and Isabel's suffering, would be authorial punishment, rather than social criticism. (This is a point I will continue to develop throughout the paper.)

MacComb, citing Adeline Tinter²⁰, notes that only one date is mentioned in the novel, 1876, which marks the centennial of America's independence from Great Britain. After a brief discussion of why Tinter's argument is persuasive, MacComb argues against Tinter's move, suggesting that "to attribute James's interest in and foregrounding of the Centennial year merely for the ironic accent it adds to our appreciation of Isabel's plight overlooks the extent to which the rhetoric and ideals of the 1776 Revolution

¹⁹ Debra MacComb, "Divorce of a Nation; or, Can Isabel Archer Resist History?," *The Henry James Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 129-148, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/750480136/12E3E19B6DB2B599B02/3?accountid=10598> (accessed March 18, 2011).

²⁰ Adeline Tinter, "The Centennial of 1876 and *The Portrait of a Lady*." *Markam Review* 10 (1980-81): 27-29.

shaped marital expectations and informed, well into the nineteenth century, America's divorce debate."²¹ After this point, MacComb gives a three-page very detailed historiography of American marriage and divorce after the American Revolution, but never once mentions The Portrait of a Lady. On the fifth page, of her eleven-page article, MacComb finally discusses The Portrait of a Lady, but by page six, is broadly discussing James and his connection with the American debate on marriage and divorce. MacComb's essay, while well written and well evidenced, does not treat the text of The Portrait of a Lady as the object of study. In literary analysis, James's texts should be the central object of study, which is why I will not take a purely historical approach to reading The Portrait of a Lady and "Daisy Miller."

There are important, overlooked insights between these two poles of Jamesian literary criticism. First, with psychoanalytic criticism: instead of using a psychoanalytic approach to focus on repression as a structure for James's narrative or what James's works suggests about his psychology, I will use psychoanalysis solely to read Isabel's and Daisy's individual motives and desires. Tyson writes, "when we psychoanalyze literary characters, we are not suggesting that they are real people but that they represent the psychological experience of human beings in general."²² While the

²¹ Debra MacComb, "Divorce of a Nation; or, Can Isabel Archer Resist History?," 2.

²² Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 35.

psychological experiences of James's heroines are realistic representations, Daisy's and Isabel's psychological experiences are not the psychological experiences of "human beings in general;" James's heroines are historically and culturally situated in a specific time and place. Which means Isabel's and Daisy's psychological experiences are realistic representations of the psychological experiences of 19th century women. James, as ethnographer, uses Daisy and Isabel to represent the struggle 19th century women faced in trying to assert their "fullest freedom" within the "wickedness" and "reckless and barbarous stupidity" of Victorian social relationships.

Second, with historical criticism: instead of simply situating James's texts with contemporaneous ideological debates in American studies, James's texts should be read with both a historical and a cultural lens, so that we can ask questions like: what does Winterbourne's sexual categorization of Daisy Miller say about the social relationships of Victorian Europe? And, what does Isabel Archer's insistence to do as she chooses illuminate about the conflict between American and Victorian social ideologies? James's texts are stories about American women negotiating their power and agency in Victorian Europe. By treating James's texts as ethnographies, I will trace how Victorian culture functions to suppress Daisy's and Isabel's individual thoughts and actions. In this sense, Victorian culture tyrannizes over Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer through social expectations—Daisy and Isabel must be acculturated and appropriated according to Victorian social standards.

Additionally, I will trace how James's ethnographies detail Victorian culture enabling Daisy and Isabel to think and act in the way that they do. In this sense, Daisy and Isabel have agency and the power to choose their actions and social identities, as they see fit.

Section II: Henry James as Ethnographer

The goal of ethnography is to provide an in-depth and detailed description of everyday life and practices of a particular group of people. Ethnographies vary in scope, but always study a representative sample of a society, in order to detail and understand that society's culture.¹ Taking an ethnographic approach allows one to understand how meanings and categories emerge from within culture.

Using history and anthropology together to interpret literature, we can treat a text as both a historical product and as ethnography of the culture in which it was created. Ethnographies aim to give a holistic picture of the people they study through details of habitat, kinship, worldview, social structure, language, acculturation, values, rituals, and religion. In James's texts, the ethnographic details about worldview, social structure, language,

¹ The original ethnographic approach, by anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, treated "culture" as having various components that people participate in, i.e. social structure, language, acculturation, etc., all of which are separate and do not impact one another. As ethnographic approaches developed, anthropologists became interested in more theoretical components of culture, such as values and worldviews. Clifford Geertz's ethnographies trace people in the various "components" of culture, similar to earlier ethnographers, but he also traces how culture manifests itself in society, through people's values and worldviews. Geertz's ethnographies demonstrate how "culture" is not simply an outline with various components, but instead "culture" is an intricate set of webs, in which all "components" are influencing and impacting one another.

acculturation, and values appear in dialogue and character interactions.² In the context of James's work, a close reading of the dialogue and character interactions in "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady shows how Daisy's and Isabel's social identities are cultural constructions in a specific historical time. Therefore, I will read James's texts with a historical understanding of Victorian patriarchy and treat James's texts as ethnographies, in order to evaluate power and agency in 19th century social relationships.

Nancy Bentley writes in her book The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton, "James [...] casts fiction as an activity or process, something one can do to aesthetically 'appropriate' a social scene. In its phrasing, James's injunction to 'do' [...] anticipates Clifford Geertz's emphasis on anthropology as the work of 'doing ethnography.'" ³ Bentley's project, like mine, argues that James's texts are historical products, as well as ethnographies. However, Bentley's argument is different from mine in that

² In The Portrait of a Lady, the narrator is omniscient, detailing events as they happen. The moments in the novel that elucidate values, social structure, and acculturation are when Isabel is in conversation with other characters, i.e. Henrietta, Mrs. Touchett, Osmond, Lord Warburton, etc. In "Daisy Miller," the conflict regarding worldview, social structure, and acculturation occur in Daisy's conversations with Winterbourne and Mrs. Walker. In addition, in Winterbourne's internal monologues, which also function as the primary narrative plotline, Winterbourne evaluates the conflict between Daisy's and Victorian society as he observes and judges her interactions with Victorian society.

³ Nancy Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James and Wharton*, 2.

she argues Hawthorne, James, and Wharton are like Malinowski, because they write about cultural primitivism in a way that validates their own Western social institutions. Bentley conflates James and Malinowski as having the same goals and methodological approaches. Moreover, briefly referencing both Geertz and Malinowski, Bentley never explores the nuances between these anthropologist's ethnographic approaches, nor how James is acting in conversation with various ethnographic approaches. It is my contention that as James moves from developing "Daisy Miller" to The Portrait of a Lady, James's ethnographies parallel the historical development in ethnographic writing; from Malinowski's interpretation of culture as individual, non-related components, to Geertz's interpretation of culture as a complex web of institutions.

In James creating his texts, he is performing the same operation as an ethnographer analyzing a culture. James writes in his preface to The Portrait of a Lady:

I'm often accused of not having 'story' enough. I seem to myself to have as much as I need—to show my people, to exhibit their relationships with each other; for that is all my measure. If I watched them long enough I see them come together, I see them *placed*, I see them engaged in this or that act and in this or that difficulty. How they look and move and speak and behave, always in the setting I have found for them, is my account of them—of which I dare say, alas, *que cela manqué souvent d'architecture*. But I would rather, I think, have too little architecture than too much—when there's danger of its interfering with my measure of the truth.⁴

⁴ Henry James, preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, by Henry James (Boston:

James's decision "to show [his] people, to exhibit their relationships with each other" corresponds with the purpose of ethnography: to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday practices of a particular group of people. The critical meanings of the events in James's ethnographies are his "measure of truth" about Victorian society. Martin Kreiswirth writes in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* that "[t]he critical act, for James, must [...] be a [...] search for 'truth,' for 'life.' Like Matthew Arnold, [...] James saw criticism as a means of making 'truth generally accessible;' it does not busy itself with consequences."⁵ James's goal in "Daisy Miller" and *The Portrait of a Lady* is to reveal the "truth" about "life" in Victorian social relationships.

Traditionally, ethnographies are done on primitive societies with the assumption that these societies are not as civilized and not as advanced as the ethnographer's own Western society. Tyson writes, "the traditional view that history is progressive is based on the belief, held in the past by many Anglo-European historians, that the 'primitive' cultures of native peoples are less evolved than, and therefore inferior to, the 'civilized' Anglo-European

Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 5.

⁵ Martin Kreiswirth, "James, Henry," in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Second Edition, 2005, <http://litguide.press.jhu.edu.proxy.lib.duke.edu/cgi-bin/view.cgi?eid=152> (accessed March 30, 2011).

cultures.”⁶ However, James’s ethnographies are of the Western society in which he lives. In consequence, James is doing something different than traditional ethnographies, and is not doing what Bentley: he pushes against the traditional historical assumption that history is a linear progression of events. In consequence, James treats his Victorian society as a sort of primitive society. Unlike Bentley’s contention, James’s texts do not attempt to validate his own Western society; rather, James’s ethnographies critique his Western society. By eliminating the idea that his Western society is the most advanced form of civilization, James is creating the space necessary to reveal his “measure of truth:” a critique of Victorian social relationships. In consequence, James’s ethnographies treat Victorian culture the same way any ethnography would interpret a primitive culture: through “the web of institutions and lived relations that structure any human community.”⁷

Cultural anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski outlines in his book, Argonauts of the Western Pacific that the goal of any anthropologist is “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world.”⁸ Bronislaw Malinowski not only developed and popularized the

⁶ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 283.

⁷ Nancy Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James and Wharton*, 3.

⁸ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1961), 25.

ethnographic method, he also developed the concept of “participant observation;” an approach in ethnographic research in which the ethnographer is a participant in the social setting they are examining, while remaining an observer who can describe the events and experiences without personal attachment.

James uses a similar approach to Malinowski’s “participant observation” when he constructs his texts. First, James is a participant in the social setting of his ethnographies, because he is the author of the fictive societies in his texts. While James is constructing the social settings in his novels, he is participating in the social setting of his ethnographies. Moreover, James’s social settings in “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady represent the real Victorian society in which James participated. Tyson writes, “all events—including everything from the creation of an art work, to a televised murder trial, to the persistence of or change in the condition of the poor—are *shaped by and shape* the culture in which they emerge.”⁹ The Victorian culture, in which James lived, shaped how he, as author, constructed the social scenes in his “art work[s],” “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady. In addition, James’s novels had an impact on his own Victorian culture. Once “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady were published and read in his society, James’s art works were “shap[ing] the culture in which they emerged.” In consequence, James is a “participant” in

⁹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 284.

two different realms: the social settings of his novels and the social setting of Victorian Europe.

James is also an observer, as ethnographer. He writes in his preface to The Portrait of a Lady:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. [...] They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbors are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. [...] The spreading field, the human scene, is the “choice of the subject”; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the “literary form” [...] Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has *been* conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his “moral” reference.¹⁰

James, as an ethnographic writer, is an observer; he has a pair of eyes “with a field-glass” that serves as “a unique instrument” “for observation” of events and experiences in Victorian society. “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady demonstrate James’s participant observation; he is aesthetically appropriating a social scene, in accordance with the Victorian society in

¹⁰ Henry James, preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, 7.

which he lives, while he is observing how his characters think and act within the Victorian society he creates.

Within “the spreading field” of “the human scene,” just as Malinowski could choose the Trobrianders to be the subject of his ethnography, so too is “the choice of the subject” up to James in his ethnographies. An anthropologist always gets to choose what information he privileges in his ethnography. For example, Malinowski’s ethnographic trilogy on the Trobrianders focuses on different issues, as evidenced in their titles: Argonauts of the Western Pacific, The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia, and Coral Gardens and their Magic. Similarly, James chooses the focus of his ethnographies of Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer in Victorian Europe. In “Daisy Miller,” James privileges information on Daisy’s flirtatious personality and does not provide a lot of information on Daisy’s psychology.¹¹ In contrast, in The Portrait of a Lady, James privileges Isabel’s psychology.

As aforementioned, ethnographers traditionally interpret their cultures of study as primitive, passing judgment on them in relation to their own Western standards. Because James’s ethnographies are of his own Western society, James’s judgment of Victorian society in “Daisy Miller” and

¹¹ By psychology, I mean why a character chooses to act and think the way that they do. For example, we never know *why* Daisy is flirtatious, the text simply asserts that she is a flirt. By contrast, in The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel continually asserts that she has the liberty to choose how she wants to act, in order to control her fate.

The Portrait of a Lady is “achieved [through] detached discrimination, analysis, and appreciation.”¹² In accordance with his “moral reference,” James does pass judgment on Victorian society’s treatment of women, but he does not judge nor condemn Daisy and Isabel for their actions and behavior. As Kreiswirth wrote about James’s critical act, “it does not busy itself with consequences.”¹³ Therefore, the endings of “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady cannot be read as authorial punishment. Instead, James’s ethnographic description of Daisy’s death and Isabel’s suffering elucidate James’s “measure of truth” about Victorian society: the wicked and reckless and barbarous stupidity of Victorian patriarchy.

In the 1870s, after the Civil War, America had an industrial boom, which allowed individuals to come into sudden wealth. Many of these people chose to travel abroad, to Europe, for the first time. However, these Americans came from a society that had different manners and traditions from the Victorian society they visited. The clash between American and European social codes forced questions about manners, morals, and culture. In James’s texts the ideological and social conflict between Americans and Europe is known as the “international theme.” Marcus Münch details in “The International Theme: The Conflict of National Types in the Tales of Henry James” that James’s international theme:

¹² Martin Kreiswirth, “James, Henry,” in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*.

¹³ Ibid.

reflects the mutual misunderstandings of Americans and Europeans, often by following the same basic pattern, i.e. the innocent and naive American girl who journeys to the Old Country and encounters a corrupt, mostly rigid set of values which its advocates attempt to subjugate her to. Usually the heroine struggles to protect her integrity, her individualism and personal freedom against a society that strikes her as oppressive, anti-democratic or, as is the case with *Madame de Mauves*, as immoral, and undergoes a changing process in which she abandons her romantic vision and nostalgic longing for a quaint and picturesque Europe.¹⁴

Both “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady contrast the values of American freedom and innocence against European sophistication and social convention. Anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard argues in Social Anthropology and Other Essays, “[s]ocial and cultural developments are brought about by contacts of people and borrowing of ideas, techniques, and institutions.”¹⁵ James is consistently concerned with the sort of social and cultural evolution that develops from the clash between American and European social paradigms. Leon Edel writes in the forward to the 1961 Houghton Mifflin Company edition of The Portrait of a Lady, that James had “extraordinary sensitivity to the silver cords that bound America to Europe, and his abiding interest in the figure that Americans cut abroad, not on the

¹⁴ Marcus Münch, "The International Theme: The Conflict of National Types in the Tales of Henry James" (Scholarly Paper, University of Dusseldorf "Heinrich Heine," 1999), 2.

¹⁵ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays: An Investigation of the Aims and Methods of Modern Anthropology by one of Its Major Figures* (New York: Free Press, 1962), 173.

mere plane of “manner” –although these interested him as emblems of civilization—but on the level of the moral being and the cultural heritage.”¹⁶

In “Daisy Miller”, Daisy’s body creates tension between the traditional European, patriarchal, aesthetic understanding of women and the new American, liberal understanding of women, which emphasized independent agency. Winterbourne interprets Daisy as the subversive American woman; she is suggestively licentious and only acts to make herself happy, instead of conforming to Victorian social conventions. Moreover, in The Portrait of a Lady, the American Isabel Archer also assumes her life does not depend on marriage, which is why she has the ability to choose to marry Osmond, instead of marrying Lord Warburton or giving into her sexual desires with Goodwood.

Cultural anthropologist, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown expanded on Malinowski’s ethnographic approach to anthropology. Inspired by the French sociologist, Émile Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown argues that social concepts should frame ethnography, so that an ethnographic study can reveal generalizations about a society’s social structure. I acknowledge that, *prima facie*, the use of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown together is paradoxical; Malinowski, a functional anthropologist, believed that anthropology should study people and their motives in order to understand how society functions,

¹⁶ Leon Edel, introduction to *The Portrait of a Lady*, by Henry James (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), x.

whereas Radcliffe-Brown, a structural functionalist anthropologist, believed that anthropology should study how culture/institutions function to meet society's needs as a whole. However, we need to use the lenses together in order to examine if 19th century women's identity is socially determined or if 19th century women have the ability to forge their own identities, as they see fit. Similar to Geertz's belief that culture functions as an intricate web of institutions, James's ethnographies illustrate how values and worldviews impact and influence social expectations, as well as how Daisy and Isabel choose to act and behave.

Tyson writes, "individual identity is not merely a product of society. Neither is it merely a product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect, and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive [...] and dynamically unstable."¹⁷ Given that "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady depict the struggle of a 19th century woman to actualize her "fullest freedom" within Victorian patriarchy, we must know what Daisy's and Isabel's motives and desires are, their "fullest freedom," as well as how the institutional structure of Victorian patriarchy is influencing their actions.

In the traditional ethnographic sense, both "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady are ethnographies of manners that illustrate the tyranny

¹⁷ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 284.

of Victorian patriarchy. Like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's ethnographies, James's "Daisy Miller" describes Daisy's actions and Victorian social expectations as independent components. Daisy's actions do not influence Victorian society, nor does the Victorian social paradigm influence how Daisy chooses to act. However, The Portrait of a Lady adopts a more Geertzian approach: as Isabel negotiates her power and agency, her actions are influenced by Victorian social expectations. In addition, as Isabel chooses to act, members of the Victorian society conform in their interactions with her; for example, Osmond chooses to frame his argument for why Isabel should stay in their marriage, in accordance with Isabel's own value system.

James titles Isabel's story as being about a "lady," a title that, in James's society, is ascribed to someone because of their manners. The Portrait of a Lady is told from Isabel's point of view. Kreiswirth continues in his article that "point of view for James was simply the most effective method for keeping the narrative focus squarely upon the character's consciousness, where, of course, he felt the "*leading* interest" of the novel must lie."¹⁸ Since, Isabel's consciousness is "the leading interest of the novel," it is crucial to understand what Isabel is culturally conscious of, and how her cultural consciousness impacts her social choices.

¹⁸ Martin Kreiswirth, "James, Henry," in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*.

In the chapter “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” Clifford Geertz explores the idea of cultural consciousness through ethnographically examining winking. Geertz asserts that a wink can function as a communicative gesture, “in a quite precise and special way: (1) deliberately, (2) to someone in particular, (3) to impart a particular message, (4) according to a socially established code, and (5) without cognizance of the rest of the company.”¹⁹ Geertz concludes that in order for a wink to be a communicative gesture, the winker and the person being winked at must be culturally conscious of the various meanings of a wink. Geertz’s conclusion about winks can be applied to any cultural knowledge: in order for an action, belief, value, etc to have meaning, a person must be culturally conscious of how these aspects of culture function. Reading The Portrait of a Lady from the perspective of Isabel’s cultural consciousness, allows us to understand the social implications of Isabel’s actions and beliefs, and therefore what it means to be “a lady.”

In Structure and Function in Primitive Society, cultural anthropologist

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown argues:

Social relations are only observed, and can only be described, by reference to the reciprocal behaviour of the persons related. The form of a social structure has therefore to be described by the patterns of behaviour to which individuals and groups conform in their dealings with one another. These patterns are partially formulated in rules which, in our own society, we distinguish as

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3.

rules of etiquette, or morals and of law. Rules, of course, only exist in their recognition by the members of society; either in their verbal recognition, when they are stated as rules, or in their observance in behaviour.²⁰

As aforementioned, what is important about Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer is that they are American women unaware of the social rules of the European society they are entering. The clash between American and European social paradigms is important in James's ethnographies, because it forces Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer to become culturally conscious of their social choices. Subsequently, the individual choices Daisy and Isabel make to either abide by or reject European social etiquettes allows us to ask if social institutions or individual choice construct the social identities of 19th century women.

²⁰ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure And Function In Primitive Society Essays And Addresses* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 198.

Section III: Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

“Daisy Miller” examines the young, innocent, and American Daisy Miller, who finds her American behavior in conflict with Victorian etiquette and morals of *proper* women. Daisy Miller socializes as she chooses, unaware of Victorian society’s perception of her behavior.

David Lodge writes in the introduction to the 2007 Penguin edition of “Daisy Miller,” that “Daisy Miller” is:

a story which dramatizes profound differences of manners between America and Europe, and more importantly between different classes of Americans who meet in Europe. For the principle opposition in the action of ‘Daisy Miller’ is not between Americans and Europeans [...] but between two kinds of Americans in Europe: the upper-class, regular visitors and residents like Mrs Costello and Mrs Walker, who scrupulously observe the proprieties of ‘good’ society in the Old World (which also serves as their model in the New), and the less cultivated, more provincial *nouveaux riches* American tourists, like the Millers, who behave exactly as they do at home.¹

There are three different types of Americans in the text: (1) the “*nouveaux riches*” Americans, i.e. Daisy Miller, who comes to Europe with her American social paradigm. (2) “Upper-class, regular visitors and residents,” i.e. Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello, whose social paradigms retain “the properties” of the etiquettes and manners of “the Old World,” which, as Lodge continues, means that “‘manners’ in the sense of ‘external social behavior’ still retained

¹ David Lodge, introduction to *Daisy Miller: a Study*, by Henry James (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), xvi.

some of the older meaning of ‘morals’.”² Lynda Nead writes in “Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain,” “[In Victorian Britain,] [w]omen were also seen as moral and spiritual guardians – as Samuel Smiles declared in *Self Help*, ‘The nation comes from the nursery.’ In other words, the moral health of the nation and its empire depends on the moral purity of women.”³

(3) Winterbourne: who was born in America, but has lived most of his life in Europe. Winterbourne does not have the same rigid social paradigm as Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello, and he does not know much about American customs and behaviors.

James’s dialogue and character interactions in “Daisy Miller” are ethnographically described, which allows us to objectively trace how Daisy’s behavior comes into conflict with Victorian social norms, as well as how Daisy responds to people’s observations that she is not behaving appropriately. As aforementioned, for James, point of view is extremely important. Although the text is titled, “Daisy Miller,” the narrative is told from Winterbourne’s point of view. The information we are given about Daisy is provided through Winterbourne’s observations of Daisy’s interactions with other characters in the text,

² Ibid., xvii.

³ BBC, Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain, 4 November 2001, available from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/women_out/urban_life_01.shtml; Internet; accessed 2 November 2010.

as well as his own conversations with the young American girl. Throughout “Daisy Miller,” Winterbourne observes and studies Daisy like an ethnographer, trying to categorically define Daisy within bounded notions of Victorian social propriety. For Winterbourne, social expectations do not change, they are absolute. In this sense, Winterbourne, like Malinowski, only examines how Daisy participates in different component of culture, i.e. social interactions, without regard to ideological components of culture, like value systems and worldview.

Initially, Daisy Miller is completely ignorant of Victorian social structure and society’s social expectations of her. David Lodge continues in his introduction:

The conduct of Daisy and her family violates the code of manners to which Mrs Costello and Mrs Walker subscribe in several ways, some of which are explicitly noted, others merely implied in the narrative. The Millers are, for instance, much too familiar with their courier, transgressing the order of the European class-system. [...] They are largely ignorant of European culture and history, and their speech lacks elegance and polish. The main issue, however, on which the whole story turns, is the proper conduct of a young unmarried woman in relation to the opposite sex.⁴

While Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello are troubled by Daisy’s lack of “proper conduct” in her interactions with men throughout the novella,

⁴ David Lodge, introduction to *Daisy Miller: a Study*, xvii-xviii.

Winterbourne's primary concern with Daisy is how he can categorically define her within a culturally constructed social paradigm.

"Daisy Miller" details how Daisy's behaviors come into conflict with the Victorian social codes advanced by Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello, and how Winterbourne struggles ideologically to categorize Daisy according to his understanding of acceptable social identities for 19th century women. Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Costello, and Winterbourne are not in the wrong for assuming that Daisy should conform to Victorian social etiquettes. Radcliffe-Brown asserts, "in any relationship within a social structure a person knows that he is expected to behave according to [...] norms and is justified in expecting that other persons should do the same."⁵

When Winterbourne first discusses Miss Daisy Miller with Mrs. Costello, he is preoccupied with determining what Daisy's intentions are with men:

Her nephew was silent for some moments. 'You really think, then' he began, earnestly, and with a desire for trustworthy information—'you really think that—' But he paused again. 'Think what, sir?' said his aunt. 'That she is the sort of young lady who expects a man—sooner or later—to carry her off?'⁶

Winterbourne concludes that if Daisy is not simply nice, or perhaps a flirt, her expectations must be that "a man" will "carry her off." Winterbourne does

⁵ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure And Function*, 10.

⁶ Henry James, *Daisy Miller: a Study*, ed. David Lodge (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), 18.

not base this conclusion on anything that Daisy has done or said, nor does his conclusion directly stem from Mrs. Costello's assertions. Rather, Winterbourne categorizes Daisy based on his own cultural knowledge of the socially appropriate roles for women in Victorian society.

Mrs. Costello answers Winterbourne's question, "I haven't the least idea what such young ladies expect a man to do. But I really think that you had better not meddle with little American girls that are uncultivated, as you call them. You have lived too long out of the country. You will be sure to make some great mistake."⁷ Reflecting her earlier statement in their conversation about Daisy being "the sort of American that one does one's duty by not accepting,"⁸ Mrs. Costello answers that Winterbourne should not associate with Daisy. Mrs. Costello suggests that because Winterbourne has been living in Europe for so long, he is going to be unable to understand Daisy's American behaviors, and will ultimately make "some great mistake."

When Winterbourne first meets Daisy, Daisy asserts:

"In New York I had lots of society. Last winter I had seventeen dinners given me; and three of them were by gentleman,' added Daisy Miller [...] she was looking at Winterbourne with all her prettiness in her lively eyes and in her light, slightly monotonous smile. 'I have always had,' she said, 'a great deal of gentlemen's society.'⁹

⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 11.

Daisy's association with "a great deal of gentlemen's society" is something that proper Victorian women do not do, and something that Winterbourne wants to understand, so that he can categorize Daisy in accordance with Victorian social labels.

Despite Mrs. Costello's warning that Winterbourne "should not meddle with little American girls," Winterbourne continues to appropriate Daisy in accordance with his knowledge of women's social identities in Victorian Europe. Winterbourne continues in his discussion of Daisy's behavior:

'But don't they all do these things—the young girls in America?' Winterbourne inquired.

Mrs. Costello stared a moment. 'I should like to see my granddaughters do them!' she declared, grimly.

This seemed to throw some light upon the matter, for Winterbourne remembered to have heard that his cousins in New York were 'tremendous flirts.' If, therefore, Miss Daisy Miller exceeded the liberal license allowed to these young ladies, it was probable that anything might be expected of her.¹⁰

As the novel progresses, Daisy's behaviors continue to come into conflict with Victorian social etiquettes, particularly because of her socializing with men in the streets. Lynda Nead writes:

[In Victorian Britain,] [w]omen played a particular role in this image of city life. Respectable women, it was claimed, could not be part of the public sphere of life. If women left the safety of the home and were on the streets, it was claimed, they became corrupted by the transgressive values of the city. They would be thought to be either prostitutes or vulnerable working women—within both groups the victim of a hostile and threatening environment.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹ BBC, Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain.

In consequence, Mrs. Walker attempts to acculturate Daisy through confrontation, and suggests that Daisy is not behaving appropriately, “[i]t may be enchanting, dear child, but it is not the custom here,’ urged Mrs. Walker, leaning forward in her Victoria with her hands devoutly clasped.”¹² Attempting to change Daisy’s behavior, so that she is assimilated into the Victorian social structure, Mrs. Walker continues:

‘You are old enough to be more reasonable. You are old enough, dear Miss Miller, to be talked about.’
Daisy looked at Mrs. Walker, smiling intensely. ‘Talked about? What do you mean?’
‘Come into my carriage and I will tell you.’
Daisy turned her quickened glance again from one of the gentlemen beside her to the other. Mr. Giovanelli was bowing to and fro, rubbing his gloves and laughing very agreeably; Winterbourne thought it a most unpleasant scene. ‘I don’t think I want to know what you mean,’ said Daisy presently. ‘I don’t think I should like it.’¹³

Daisy rejects Mrs. Walker’s invitation because she believes she “should [not] like” what Mrs. Walker has to say. When Mrs. Walker presses her on the issue and points out that Daisy is being improper by Victorian social standards, “Daisy gave a violent laugh. ‘I never heard anything so stiff! If this is improper, Mrs. Walker,’ she pursued, ‘then I am all improper, and you must give me up.’”¹⁴

¹² Henry James, *Daisy Miller: a Study*, 42.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

Winterbourne quickly concludes that Daisy does not fit into the traditional category of a “well-conducted young lady,”¹⁵ by Victorian social standards. Shortly after the incident between Mrs. Walker and Daisy Miller, Daisy, again, is confronted for socializing in the streets with men. However this time, Daisy’s behavior is not indicted by Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello’s traditional Victorian social beliefs. Winterbourne critiques Giovanelli and Daisy’s agreement to socialize with him in public, stating, “he would never have proposed to a young lady of this country to walk about the streets with him.”¹⁶ Daisy responds, “About the streets?” [...] ‘Where then would he have proposed her to walk? The Pincio is not the streets, either; and I, thank goodness, am not a young lady of this country. The young ladies of this country have a dreadfully poky time of it, so far as I can learn; I don’t see why I should change my habits for *them*.”¹⁷

While Winterbourne has been acculturated to understand why a woman walking in the streets is suggestively licentious, Daisy has not. In explaining their problems of Daisy’s behavior, both Mrs. Walker and Winterbourne simply assert that her behavior is not socially acceptable. They do not explain *why* Daisy’s behaviors are inappropriate. As Geertz suggests in his ethnographic study of winking, in order for someone to understand

¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

proper actions and behavior, one must become acculturated so that they can understand the cultural meanings behind their behaviors. Unlike Isabel Archer, Daisy Miller does not gain cultural knowledge of proper Victorian manners. In consequence, Daisy continues to choose to walk in the streets and to spend time with Giovanelli, because it makes her happy. Daisy does not understand why she needs to “have a dreadfully poky time of it,” nor why she “should change [her] habits for *them*.”

In a letter to E. Lynn Linton, James describes Daisy’s perception of Giovanelli and Winterbourne’s accusation of her inappropriate behavior:

In Giovanelli she got a gentleman who to her uncultivated perception was a very brilliant one—all to herself; and she enjoyed his society in the largest possible measure. When she found that this measure was thought too large by other people—especially Winterbourne—she was wounded; she became conscious that she was accused of something which her very comprehension was vague.¹⁸

As James notes, Daisy is not acculturated to Victorian society, and therefore has, by Victorian perspectives, an “uncultivated perception” of Giovanelli and her actions. Following Winterbourne’s critique of Daisy’s behavior with Giovanelli, Winterbourne gravely asserts to Daisy, “I am afraid your habits are those of a flirt.”¹⁹ James ethnographically details that while “giving him

¹⁸ Henry James, E. Lynn Linton, Letter to My dear Mrs. Lynton, in Appendix I: Henry James on 'Daisy Miller' to *Daisy Miller: a Study*, by Henry James (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), 70-71.

¹⁹ Henry James, *Daisy Miller: a Study*, 49.

her little smiling stare again,”²⁰ Daisy flirtatiously asserts that her habits are one of a flirt and that she believes flirting is a behavior Winterbourne’s Victorian society understood:

‘I thought they understood nothing else!’ exclaimed Daisy.
‘Not in young unmarried women.’
‘It seems to me much more proper in young unmarried women than in old married ones,’ Daisy declared.²¹

Daisy’s initial observation that she believes Victorian society “understood nothing else” but flirting suggests that she genuinely does not have the cultural knowledge and understanding of Victorian social expectations. However, Daisy’s observation that flirting is more acceptable by young single women than old married women shows that she does have some understanding of social propriety. Winterbourne’s response that flirting by “young unmarried women” is inappropriate in Victorian Europe is the first time that Daisy receives an explanation for why her specific behavior is not in accordance with Victorian social standards.

However, Winterbourne never provides a cultural justification for why Victorian society does not understand flirting in “young unmarried women.” Winterbourne continues, “Though you may be flirting, Mr. Giovanelli is not; he means something else.”²² This statement by Winterbourne demonstrates

²⁰ Ibid., 49.

²¹ Ibid., 50.

²² Ibid., 50.

that he possesses the cultural knowledge that distinguishes differences in flirting. However, Winterbourne does not explain to Daisy what flirting means in Victorian society—when it is appropriate, etc. In consequence, Winterbourne does not provide Daisy the opportunity to gain the cultural knowledge necessary to act in accordance with Victorian social propriety.

In response to Winterbourne's statement, Daisy asserts "with vivacity"²³ that she and Mr. Giovanelli are not flirting, and they are too close as friends to engage in such an activity. To which Winterbourne responds:

'Ah!' rejoiced Winterbourne, 'if you are in love with each other it is another affair.'

She had allowed him up to this point to talk so frankly that he had no expectation of shocking her by his ejaculation; but she immediately got up, blushing visibly [...] 'Mr. Giovanelli, at least,' she said, giving her interlocutor a single glance, 'never says such very disagreeable things to me.'²⁴

Daisy's comment that she and Giovanelli are not flirting suggests that, like Winterbourne, Daisy has some understanding that there are differences in flirting. However, Winterbourne's subsequent sarcastic response to Daisy and Daisy's embarrassment, "blushing visibly," illustrates that Winterbourne and Daisy have a different social understanding of what flirting is and what it means. As James noted in his letter, Daisy is wounded by Winterbourne's accusation. Daisy's reaction, in which she dismisses herself from Winterbourne, blushing, and asserts that Giovanelli does not speak to her

²³ Ibid., 50.

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

that way, illustrates that Daisy is wounded by Winterbourne's comment, but is not explicit in detailing why she is offended. In consequence, as James suggests in his letter, Daisy is "accused of something which her very comprehension was vague."

After this incident, Daisy, once again, socializes in public with Giovanelli. However, this time she is in the Coliseum. Lynda Nead outlines:

Modern urban life presented the Victorian middle classes with many complex social and moral problems. The public sphere of the city was regarded as dangerous and corrupting. It was the location of crime and poverty and anyone could succumb to diseases generated in the slums and carried on the air by an invisible smell, or 'miasma.'²⁵

In accordance with the cultural belief that socializing in the public sphere makes anyone susceptible to diseases, Winterbourne confronts Daisy in the Coliseum, "I am afraid," said Winterbourne, "that you will not think Roman fever very pretty. This is the way people catch it."²⁶ James's choice to have Daisy die due to the "miasma" in the Coliseum is an appropriate treatment of Daisy's actions. However, Daisy's death is important for more than the fact that it is a historically appropriate treatment. As Nead points out, the *general* "public sphere of the city was regarded as dangerous and corrupting" and that "anyone could succumb to diseases." The social perception was *not* that the city was "dangerous and corrupting" *only for women*, but that the

²⁵ BBC, Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain.

²⁶ Henry James, *Daisy Miller*, 60.

city was a concern regardless of gender. Winterbourne acknowledges that *Daisy* can catch Roman fever by socializing in the Coliseum; however, he and Mr. Giovanelli are not concerned with the disease that leads to Daisy's death... somehow these men are immune.

David Lodge continues in his introduction, "In the story the fever is represented as a lethal threat exclusively to Daisy. It operates as a symbol, or what T. S. Eliot called an 'objective correlative', of Daisy's jeopardy as a woman who refuses to abide by the rules, designed for her protection, of the society in which she finds herself."²⁷ Lodge's assertion that Roman Fever is a symbol "of Daisy's jeopardy as a woman who refuses to abide by the rules" is not correct. As aforementioned, in regards to flirting, Daisy does not "refuse to abide by the rules," Daisy is oblivious to the social rules regarding flirting in Victorian culture.

Moreover, James writes in his letter to Mrs. Lynton that Daisy is not defiant, which means she does not refuse to abide by the rules:

[S]he tried not to think of what people meant & easily succeeded in doing so; but to my perception, she never really tried to take her revenge upon public opinion—to outrage it & irritate it. In this sense I fear I must declare that she was not a *defiant*.²⁸

Daisy does not try "to take her revenge upon public opinion" in the novella.

Daisy does not behave the ways she does because she is challenging,

²⁷ David Lodge, introduction to *Daisy Miller: a Study*, xxxvi.

²⁸ Henry James, E. Lynn Linton, Letter to My dear Mrs. Lynton, 71.

resisting, or attempting to subvert Victorian social expectations. Rather, Daisy acts the way that she does because she is never assimilated into the Victorian social structure. Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello reject Daisy almost immediately, thus never helping her gain the cultural knowledge that is necessary to abide by their Victorian social rules. In addition, Winterbourne is so preoccupied with analyzing and observing Daisy that he does not help her modify her habits so that they are socially appropriate, he merely asserts that her habits are not appropriate. In consequence, Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Costello, and Winterbourne force Daisy into her social isolation, and subsequently her death.

In the context of the question: is 19th century women's identity socially determined or do 19th century women have the liberty to forge their own identities, as they see fit, "Daisy Miller" offers some important insights. First, as Daisy proves, 19th century women have a social identity regardless of the approval of Victorian social structures. Second, Daisy does not *actively* embrace her liberty to forge her identity. Daisy's behavior creates her identity through Winterbourne's categorical appropriation of her, thus demonstrating that 19th century women's identity is constructed by social perception. Finally, while Daisy does not subvert the tyranny of social convention, she does demonstrate that 19th century women do not have to conform to social expectations.

David Lodge continues, “When it was first published, ‘Daisy Miller’ was subtitled ‘A Study’, an interestingly problematic term. [...] it could mean ‘a discourse or literary composition devoted to the detailed consideration of some question [...] [or] ‘a careful preliminary sketch for a work of art.’”²⁹ For James, “Daisy Miller” was an experiment “devoted to the detailed consideration” of female liberty against the social tyranny of Victorian patriarchy. Despite Daisy’s attempts to assert her “fullest freedom,” she ultimately succumbs to the wickedness and reckless and barbarous stupidity of Victorian patriarchy. Given James’s problem with the tyranny of persons over each other, James does not kill Daisy as some sort of authorial punishment. Rather, Daisy’s death functions as a prophecy for women in European society if they do not abide by social expectations.

²⁹ David Lodge, introduction to *Daisy Miller: a Study*, xxvi.

Section IV: Material Girl

Leon Edel argues, “Henry James saw, with his large grasp of reality, that one of the great questions of the dawning century would be the role of women in the world.”¹ “Daisy Miller” was James’s preliminary sketch of “the role of women in the world,” and, in particular, how 19th century women construct their identities and negotiate their power in society. For James, “Daisy Miller” was, “[...] intended for his own guidance in his subsequent work’ to ‘a drawing, painting or piece of sculpture aiming to bring out the characteristics of the object represented, as they are revealed by especially careful observation.”² The Portrait of a Lady, titled literally as “a work of art,” is James’s “subsequent work” which “careful[ly] observ[es]” how Isabel Archer *can* choose her identity and fate without suffering the social isolation and literal death that Daisy Miller experiences. While “Daisy Miller” illustrates female identity *versus* Victorian patriarchy, The Portrait of a Lady investigates how Isabel retains her liberty, and thus identity, within the paradigm of Victorian patriarchy.

In addition to Daisy Miller, James also drew heavily on George Eliot’s Gwendolen Harleth for his construction of Isabel Archer and The Portrait of a Lady. Edel continues in his introduction, “James wrote much about George

¹ Leon Edel, introduction to *Portrait*, v.

² David Lodge, introduction to *Daisy Miller*, xxvi-xxxvii.

Eliot. He admired her intelligence, her “applied” art, her renderings of the English scene. [...] the terms which the novelist used to describe Gwendolen Harleth in a dialogue he wrote about *Daniel Deronda* corresponded to his vision of Isabel Archer.”³ In Henry James’s dialogue, *Daniel Deronda: A Conversation*, three characters, in conversation with one another, debate the merits and shortcomings of Daniel Deronda by George Eliot. Near the end of the dialogue, Theodora asserts:

Since when is it forbidden to make one's heroine young? Gwendolen is a perfect picture of youthfulness—its eagerness, its presumption, its preoccupation with itself, its vanity and silliness, its sense of its own absoluteness. But she is extremely intelligent and clever, and therefore tragedy can have a hold upon her. Her conscience doesn't make the tragedy; that is an old story, and, I think, a secondary form of suffering. It is the tragedy that makes her conscience, which then reacts upon it; and I can think of nothing more powerful than the way in which the growth of her conscience is traced, nothing more touching than the picture of its helpless maturity.⁴

The opening part of Eliot’s novel gives us the portrait of a young Gwendolen Harleth, whose “youthfulness” is only overshadowed by her natural beauty. As Theodora points out, Gwendolen’s “youthfulness” encapsulates her “preoccupation with [her]self.” Gwendolen’s reality is finite; only existing in terms of her relationship with other people—and, most of the time, her reality is composed by people’s aesthetic interpretation of her,

³ Leon Edel, introduction to *Portrait*, xvii.

⁴ Henry James, *Daniel Deronda: A Conversation* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 24.

which allows Gwendolen to view her reality in terms of her “own absoluteness.” Like Daisy Miller, Gwendolen’s social identity is constructed by society’s perception of her. However, unlike Daisy, Gwendolen is aware that her identity is being constructed in this way, and she willingly embraces society’s aesthetic interpretation of her.

Given that Eliot was “addicted to moralizing and philosophizing,”⁵ when Eliot constructs Gwendolen as “extremely intelligent and clever,” and Gwendolen still winds up “suffering,” we have to wonder what Eliot is saying about women. In a similar vein, we also have to wonder why Isabel’s tale ends in tragedy and suffering. Theodora’s assertion is that because Gwendolen is smart, Daniel Deronda can be read as a novel in which “tragedy” has “a hold upon” Gwendolen. And, this makes sense. In literature, you will be hard pressed to find a *stupid*⁶ heroine whose story is one of tragedy that subsequently functions as a moral or philosophy *for* women. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Daisy Buchanan, in “The Great Gatsby,” is by all accounts a pathetic female character: she promises to wait for Gatsby until after the war, but upon meeting Tom and comparing his wealth to Gatsby’s poverty, Daisy Buchanan breaks her promise. Fitzgerald constructs Daisy Buchanan as an evil female, and thus her story is a philosophy *about*

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Whether stupid takes on the connotations of ignorant, immature, uneducated, bumpkin, coquette, etc is irrelevant. What matters is that the heroine not be “extremely intelligent and clever.”

women. Moreover, Fitzgerald's failure to provide Daisy Buchanan with the sort of mental faculties Eliot provides Gwendolen makes it hard to read Daisy Buchanan's fate as a tragedy or a situation of suffering; you merely read Daisy Buchanan's fate as a plot-point of Gatsby's story.

Theodora argues that it is the tragedy that creates Gwendolen's conscience: Gwendolen's "recognition of the moral quality of [her] motives and actions; the sense of right and wrong."⁷ As the novel progresses, Gwendolen matures from her youthfulness, that allows her to see herself with absoluteness, because of her tragedy: Gwendolen marries Grandcourt, a man who "is before all things brutal,"⁸ despite his mistress and children. Their marriage is a tragedy and Gwendolen's situation, in marriage with Grandcourt, is one of suffering. Gwendolen's pride is what forces her to endure, in Theodora's words, "helpless maturation." Because of her pride, Gwendolen will not leave her marriage. And, the more Gwendolen suffers in her marriage, the more she has immoral thoughts about her husband, such as wishing his death. Each time Gwendolen suffers, because she has too much pride to leave her marriage, her conscience matures, because she realizes these immoral thoughts are ones she should not have... or at least

⁷ Context for the definition of "conscience" in the OED. "conscience, n.". OED Online. November 2010. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/Entry/39460?rskey=fcXlpG&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 20, 2011).

⁸ Henry James, *Daniel Deronda: A Conversation*, 9.

not act on. Therefore, Gwendolen's tragedy causes her ideological maturation. James takes Eliot's paradigm of tragedy creating one's conscience and reverses it for Isabel's tragedy: for Isabel, her social conscience makes her tragedy. James uses Gwendolen's narrative as a sort of scaffolding for Isabel's story, and James constructs Isabel, in opposition to Gwendolen, to see if Isabel can escape the tragedy and suffering Gwendolen faces.

Although James writes in the dialogue that Gwendolen's "conscience doesn't make the tragedy; that is an old story, and, I think, a secondary form of suffering,"⁹ Isabel Archer's tale is not an "old story." Both Gwendolen and Isabel suffer from their pride. Gwendolen's pride is ignorant, forcing Gwendolen to stay in her marriage and not consider different options. Isabel's pride is her social conscience, which enables Isabel Archer to choose her tragedy. Additionally, because Isabel has a conscience before her tragedy, Isabel knows that suffering is not her only option, as it is for Gwendolen, even after making a mistake. Near the end of The Portrait of a Lady, when Ralph is dying and questions whether Isabel is going to return to her tragic marriage, Isabel answers:

I don't know—I can't tell. [...] Here on my knees, with you dying in my arms, I'm happier than I have been for a long time. And I want you to be happy – not to think of anything sad; only to feel that I'm near you and I love you. Why should there be pain? In

⁹ Ibid., 24.

such hours as this what have we to do with pain? That's not the deepest thing; there's something deeper.¹⁰

When Ralph, in his final painful moment, inquires if Isabel will return to her painful marriage, Isabel suggests that there is something deeper and more important than “pain” and suffering: love.

Using Isabel Archer’s conscience to make her tragedy, James makes an important shift with Isabel’s narrative trajectory: James gives Isabel the conscious awareness that she has the option to escape her suffering, which results in Isabel Archer realizing that there is something more powerful in life than suffering: love. Love is important for 19th century women’s social identity. While Victorian patriarchy forces women to be socially defined by their relationships to men, women are gaining the social opportunities to negotiate their power and identity in their relationships. If women do not have to marry a man for financial security or social status, women have the power to choose who to marry based on love, a concept that is unique and will mean something different for every woman.

One of the key differences between Eliot’s Gwendolen and James’s Isabel is that James gives Isabel financial security so that money never has to be part of her decision process. Eliot gives Gwendolen two financial options: become a governess or get married. Gwendolen asserts, “I must

¹⁰ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), 471.

decide for myself. I cannot be dictated to by my uncle or any one else. My life is my own affair.”¹¹ Being a governess does not afford Gwendolen enough financial freedom for her to be in control of her own life. In consequence, marriage, for Gwendolen, is an opportunity for her to gain financial security, as well as, in her opinion, have control and power over her life.

At the beginning of The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer is in a similar financial situation to Gwendolen Harleth. However, unlike Gwendolen, Isabel is not personally concerned with gaining financial security and independence. Gwendolen believes that the key to power in society is money. By contrast, Isabel believes that retaining her liberty, so as to choose her fate, is what gives her power in society. Consequently, Isabel views her poverty positively, believing that it will allow her the ability to act however she sees fit, regardless of social expectations:

I'm not in my first youth – I can do what I choose – I belong quite to the independent class. I've neither father nor mother; I'm poor and of a serious disposition; I'm not pretty. I therefore am not bound to be timid and conventional; indeed I can't afford such luxuries. Besides, I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me.¹²

¹¹ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2005), Book III, Ch. XXI, Pg. 206.

¹² Henry James, *Portrait*, 141.

Isabel asserts that she is not “pretty” and therefore “bound to be timid and conventional.” In contrast, Gwendolen uses her beauty to negotiate her power in society. Gwendolen believes that her aesthetic beauty will afford her the opportunity to marry into wealth, and thus wield power in society. James shows that money is not crucial for Isabel’s social power. Isabel Archer is most concerned with her liberty, because she can use her liberty to negotiate her social identity, as well as control her fate in life. As the novel progresses, while Isabel retains her desire to use her liberty to control her fate, Isabel will become concerned with acting in accordance with “what other people think it compatible with propriety” to do.

At the beginning of the novel, Isabel is described as:

[I]ntelligent and generous; it was a fine free nature; but what was she going to do with herself? This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own.¹³

Since Gwendolen did not want to be a governess, her best option for financial security was through marriage, which requires her to wait “for a man to come [her] way and furnish [her] with a destiny.” Isabel is not in the same situation. Even though, at this point in the novel, Isabel is not wealthy, she believes she can be in control of her own life and have her own intentions in

¹³ Ibid., 63.

living her life. Ultimately, James never puts Isabel in a position where she has to worry about money or social status. In consequence, the question James is trying to answer, through Isabel, is if women do not need to marry for reasons of status or money, can women marry for love?

Isabel's marriage is strikingly different from Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt. Even though Gwendolen believes, like Isabel, that she will have supremacy over Grandcourt, "Gwendolen wished to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself, with a spouse by her side who would fold his arms and give her his countenance without looking ridiculous."¹⁴ Despite Gwendolen's intention to assume power in her marriage, Grandcourt brutally seeks supremacy over her throughout their marriage. Even in describing Grandcourt's thought process during his proposal to Gwendolen, Eliot depicts Grandcourt as a tyrant, wishing to control and triumph over Gwendolen:

At that moment [Grandcourt's] strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature [Gwendolen]—this piquant combination of maidenliness and mischief: that she knew things which had made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance; and he was believing that he should triumph.¹⁵

Leon Edel points out, "What James asked himself was whether a young American girl, endowed with a large measure of liberty in the form of substantial wealth and adequate social position, would know how to order

¹⁴ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Book II, Ch. XIII, pg. 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Book III, Ch. XXVII, Pg. 265.

her life and “affront her destiny.”¹⁶ Despite Isabel’s self-assertion that she can be independent without money, Isabel does receive a sizable inheritance from her uncle, which subsequently gives Isabel “substantial wealth and adequate social position” that Gwendolen is never afforded. In addition, James also eliminates, for Isabel, the power of male tyranny that causes both Daisy and Gwendolen to suffer. Unlike Daisy, Isabel is never assigned a role in society through a man’s appropriation of her. In fact, Isabel marries Osmond under the presupposition that *she* has control over *him*: “[s]he would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence.”¹⁷ Leon Edel concludes:

Isabel and Osmond, then, are mirror images of power. Their marriage is that of two persons who see each other as objects they wish to subjugate and possess. They have an irresistible need for each other, because power is attracted to power; but they cannot suffer one another, because power also cannot endure power: it must always seek supremacy.¹⁸

¹⁶ Leon Edel, introduction to *Portrait*, v.

¹⁷ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Riverside ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 351.

¹⁸ Leon Edel, introduction to *Portrait*, xii.

Section V: What's Love Got to Do With It?

Initially, when Isabel is courted in Europe, Mrs. Touchett comments on Isabel's social etiquette:

“Of course you're vexed at my interfering with you,” said Mrs. Touchett.

Isabel considered. “I'm not vexed, but I'm surprised—and a good deal mystified. Wasn't it proper I should remain in the drawing-room?”

“Not in the least. Young girls here—in decent houses—don't sit alone with gentlemen late at night.”

“You were very right to tell me then,” said Isabel. “I don't understand it, but I'm very glad to know it.”¹

Like Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer enters into Victorian society without the cultural knowledge of Victorian social expectations. However, Isabel is in a different situation than Daisy; Mrs. Touchett offers to help Isabel gain the cultural knowledge necessary to act in accordance with social propriety and assimilate into Victorian society. In addition, Isabel is receptive to learning the proper, expected behaviors of Victorian society. As the novel progresses, Isabel becomes more concerned with acting in accordance with social norms and expectations. The more Isabel acts according to Victorian expectations, the more Isabel assimilates into Victorian social institutions, which decreases the chance that Isabel will be forced into social isolation like Daisy Miller.

¹ Henry James, *Portrait*, 66.

However, Isabel is not complicit with abiding by social expectations without first questioning if she wishes to comply. The conversation between Mrs. Touchett and Isabel Archer immediately continues:

“I shall always tell you,” her aunt answered, “whenever I see you taking what seems to me too much liberty.”

“Pray do; but I don’t say I shall always think your remonstrance just.”

“Very likely not. You’re too fond of your own ways.”

“Yes, I think I’m very fond of them. But I always want to know the things one shouldn’t do.”

“So as to do them?” asked her aunt.

“So as to choose,” said Isabel.²

In much the same way Daisy is determined to act so that she is happy, as Mrs. Touchett points out, Isabel is fond of her own ways, While Daisy is unaware of Victorian social codes, what matters to Isabel is that she has the ability and liberty to choose if she wants to abide by European social codes. Like an ethnographer, Isabel is interested in how a culture functions, as well as a culture’s norms and expected social behaviors. However, Isabel is not an ethnographer of Victorian patriarchy, in the way that James is in “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady, nor does Isabel observe and study Victorian society in the way Winterbourne ethnographically studies and categorizes Daisy. Because Isabel’s desire for gaining cultural knowledge is so that she can judge and discern how she wishes to act, she is not acting as an ethnographer. Isabel Archer wants to know social expectations and then be

² Ibid., 67.

able to consider her choices: to act in accordance with her own desires or to conform to social expectations.

For Isabel, the most important thing is that she retains her liberty, her ability to construct her identity, and her ability to choose her fate. In consequence, the critical debate of The Portrait of a Lady surrounds the two instances in which Isabel leverages her liberty, through her social identity, to choose her fate; both times, the result is suffering. First, why does Isabel choose to marry when she is in the financial position not to do so? Second, given her financial position and social status, why does Isabel return to Osmond and their unloving marriage at the end of the text?

While James give us an in-depth, realistic psychological portrait of Isabel, when Isabel marries and when Isabel returns to Osmond, the two situations in which she gives up her power and independence, James only recounts that these events have happened after the fact. Unlike Eliot's treatment of Gwendolen, in James's Isabel, we do not get psychological insight that details why she chooses to give up her freedom. In taking the psychological out of these events, James forces us to look at these social decisions as consequences of Victorian patriarchy. The primary reason Isabel chooses to get married and return to Osmond at the end of the text is because of Isabel's cultural adaptation. Radcliffe-Brown describes the three-part process of social adaptation in Structure and Function in Primitive Society; the final process of social adaptation is cultural adaptation:

[T]here is the social process by which an individual acquires habits and mental characteristics that fit him for a place in the social life and enable him to participate in its activities. This, if we wish, could be called cultural adaptation.³

As the novel progresses, Isabel Archer acquires habits and mental characteristics that allow her to participate and wield power in society. First, through the “social process” of men courting her, Isabel acquires the desire to get married. At the onset of the text, Isabel Archer is not concerned with *starting her life* in marriage. In a discussion between Isabel Archer and Caspar Goodwood on the subject of marriage, Isabel asserts, “I really don’t want to marry, or to talk about it at all now. I shall probably never do it—no, never. I’ve a perfect right to feel that way.”⁴ However, upon receiving a substantial inheritance from her uncle, she becomes “placed in the social life” and “enabled to participate” in social activities. Consequently, Isabel engages in various social interactions that encourage her to find a husband.

While James does not chronicle why Isabel decides marriage is a good social situation for her, James does catalogue an important conversation between Goodwood and Isabel, in which Goodwood suggests that Isabel’s only option to retain her liberty is in marriage:

“Who would wish less to curtail your liberty than I? What can give me greater pleasure than to see you perfectly independent – doing whatever you like? It’s to make you independent that I want to marry you.” [...] “An unmarried woman – a girl of your

³ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure And Function*, 9.

⁴ Henry James, *Portrait*, 137.

age – isn't independent. There are all sorts of things she can't do. She's hampered at every step.”⁵

Throughout “Daisy Miller,” Daisy is “hampered at every step” by Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Costello, and Winterbourne. Daisy’s flirtatious expressions of her liberty, through “all sorts of things she can’t do,” results in her social isolation and subsequent death. Goodwood observes that the same social reality will be true for Isabel if she chooses to remain unmarried. Goodwood’s rhetoric is reminiscent of Winterbourne’s assertion to Daisy that Victorian society does not understand a young unmarried girl who is a flirt. As Winterbourne and Goodwood suggest, Victorian society has expectations for how a woman is to behave. Thus, a woman is never “independent,” she is bounded by cultural expectations that “hamper” “all sorts of things [women] can’t do.” While Winterbourne cites a specific social behavior that is unacceptable, Goodwood more generally asserts that Victorian society limits women’s social options. Therefore, if Isabel wishes to retain her liberty and be able to choose her fate, she must abide by Victorian social expectations and construct her social identity within marriage.

For Isabel, choosing to marry affords her the opportunity to avoid the social death Daisy Miller faces, and, like Gwendolen and Goodwood’s beliefs about marriage, marriage also allows Isabel to exercise her liberty. Isabel’s liberty is inextricably linked to her identity. Like Daisy and Gwendolen,

⁵ Ibid., 141.

Isabel's identity is connected to society's interpretation of her. Given that Isabel does not need to marry for financial security nor social advancement, Isabel Archer has the freedom to choose whomever she wants to marry. In her decision to marry, Isabel holds onto her own interpretation of herself as an independent, intelligent woman by making *her own* decision about who to marry, in accordance with *her own* paradigm. First, Isabel rejects Lord Warburton's proposal, "it appeared to her there had been no choice in the question. She could not marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to support any enlightened prejudice in favour of the free exploration of life that she had hitherto entertained or was now capable of entertaining."⁶ Despite society's approval of Lord Warburton, Isabel is fearful of losing her liberty by being co-opted into his aristocratic lifestyle, which would force her to abandon her identity as an independent woman. In consequence, she rejects Lord Warburton's marriage proposal. Second, Isabel rejects Caspar Goodwood's proposal by asserting that she believes he will take away her liberty:

"Don't think me unkind if I say it's just *that* – being out of your sight – that I like. If you were in the same place I should feel you were watching me, and I don't like that – I like my liberty too much. If there's a thing in the world I'm fond of,' she went on with a slight recurrence of grandeur, 'it's my personal independence."⁷

⁶ Ibid., 100-101.

⁷ Ibid., 140

Despite Goodwood's prior assertions that he does not wish to hamper Isabel's liberty, Isabel knows that in a marriage with Goodwood, she would not be able to exercise her liberty however she chooses. Isabel does not want her identity to be constructed by her sexuality; Isabel fears her sexual attraction to Goodwood, because she will lose her liberty and ability to negotiate power in society, in a relationship with him.

Kurt Hochenauer continues in his article:

In her quest for personal independence, Isabel must check her sexuality. If she must define herself in marriage it will be her decision, a decision unclouded by sexual impulse. The man *she* will choose must recognize her intellectual capabilities, her ideas. For her potential suitors, Isabel flaunts her brain not her body.⁸

Similar to Daisy Miller, Isabel challenges Victorian patriarchal interpretations of the appropriate social roles for women. However, unlike Daisy, Isabel is conscious that the functionalism of Victorian patriarchy can force her body and sexuality to be the determinants of her fate. By asserting her intelligence with her male suitors instead of her body, Isabel avoids the patriarchal social labels that Winterbourne ascribes Daisy.

For Gwendolen, Grandcourt's power through masculine sexuality was not only a threat to her independence, but it also directly caused her suffering in the novel. In consequence, James gives Isabel Archer the conscious awareness that the power of sexual impulse, particularly the power

⁸ Kurt Hochenauer, "Sexual Realism," 22.

of masculinity, is a threat to her independence. Sex and sexuality for Isabel are subversive threats to her individual identity. As Nancy Cott outlines in The Grounding of Modern Feminism,⁹ Victorian society understood women's social role through the domestic sphere, through motherhood. If Isabel becomes a mother, she is stripped of the power she holds in society; no longer would she be seen as an independently, valuable individual in society, she would be fulfilling a socially acceptable role for all women, because of the function of her body. As Goodwood previously pointed out, outside of marriage, young women are not "independent" in Victorian society; women cannot act however they please without regard to social propriety. Therefore, if Isabel gives into sexual impulses outside of marriage, she falls victim to the social isolation Daisy Miller struggles with throughout her novella, because Victorian culture regulates, in Goodwood's words, "all sorts of things [women] can't do."

Finally, Isabel Archer decides to marry Gilbert Osmond, "Pray, would you wish me to make a mercenary marriage—what they call a marriage of ambition? I've only one ambition—to be free to follow out a good feeling. [...] Do you complain of Mr. Osmond because he's not rich? That's just what I like about him."¹⁰ Unlike Gwendolen, Isabel will not marry for money. Isabel

⁹ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (Binghampton: Vail-Ballou Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Henry James, *Portrait*, 287.

believes that marrying a poorer man will allow her to embrace her liberty and also a loving relationship; in choosing to marry Osmond, Isabel believes “he admired her [...] because she was the most imaginative woman he had known.”¹¹ Isabel’s choice to marry Osmond over her other suitors demonstrates her tenacity in retaining her liberty and independence, and simultaneously represents her cultural adaptation. Isabel does not have sexual impulses for Osmond that would force the structural functionalism of Victorian patriarchy to label her “immoral.” Nor does Osmond assert the sort of sexual aggression with Isabel that Grandcourt uses to overpower Gwendolen.

In short, Isabel’s social conscience, as well as her need to retain freedom, informs her decision to marry Osmond, which subsequently creates her tragedy given that her marriage is loveless and results in suffering. James’s choice to have Isabel marry someone who is not a threat to her power parallels Gwendolen’s decision to marry Grandcourt: “in the need to dominate”¹² Gwendolen accepts Grandcourt’s proposal because she is “overcome by the suffused sense that here in this man’s homage to her lay the rescue from helpless subjection to an oppressive lot.”¹³ Similar to Eliot’s tale

¹¹ Ibid., 350.

¹² George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Book III, Ch. XXVII, Pg. 265.

¹³ Ibid., 265.

of Gwendolen, Isabel's approach to retaining power in her marriage becomes the source of her powerlessness.

It is once Isabel marries Osmond that she opens herself up to lose her independence by engaging in social processes, through which she acquires habits and mental characteristics that co-opt her into traditional Victorian patriarchal society. Lynda Nead details, “[in Victorian Britain,] [t]he ideal of femininity was encapsulated in the idea of a ‘woman’s mission,’ which was that of playing model mother, wife and daughter.”¹⁴ Upon marrying Osmond, in an attempt to become a mother, and therefore fulfill the “moral” role of women in Victorian social behavior, Isabel assumes the appropriate role of wife in Victorian patriarchy and engages in sexual activity with her husband. However, as Kurt Hochenauer details, “[h]er sexual relationship with Osmond only results in the death of a child and the spiritual death of Isabel herself.”¹⁵ In spite of marrying Osmond with the presumption that she would retain her freedom, she loses her independence, their marriage is unloving, and since she does not birth a child, a failure by the norms of Victorian marriage.¹⁶

¹⁴ BBC, Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain.

¹⁵ Kurt Hochenauer, “Sexual Realism,” 23.

¹⁶ Interestingly, James accounts for Isabel's “mother issue” in the same way Eliot accounts for Gwendolen's “mother issue:” while neither heroine is a biological mother, both are, in a sense, step-mothers. Isabel is the step-

Isabel's failed and unloving marriage is a tragedy and illustrates the struggle Isabel has in trying to consciously assert her freedom within the wickedness and reckless and barbarous stupidity of Victorian patriarchy. Isabel Archer is forced into her tragedy: she must evolve culturally if she is going to survive socially, and yet it is her cultural evolution that leads to her suffering. The moment when we see Isabel Archer as the product of Victorian cultural adaptation is at the end of the text when she has the choice either to return to Osmond or escape to live a life with Goodwood.

mother of Pansy, and since Grandcourt has illegitimate children, because he is married to Gwendolen, she is arguably his children's step-mother.

Section VI: Isabel's Portrait

Despite being given the opportunity to assert her independence and happiness, Isabel Archer chooses to give up her power and return to Osmond and their unhappy and unloving marriage. Once again, James does not give us psychological insight into why Isabel chooses to return to Osmond.

However, reading Isabel Archer's decision to return to Osmond as a product of the structural functionalism of Victorian patriarchy suggests that Isabel returned to preserve social propriety and uphold Victorian etiquette. In consequence, it is Isabel's social conscience that creates her tragedy.

Near the end of the text, Henrietta questions why Isabel stays in her marriage with Osmond:

"He's very hard to please!" cried Miss Stackpole. "Why don't you leave him?"

"I can't change that way," Isabel said.

"Why not I should like to know? You won't confess that you've made a mistake. You're too proud."

"I don't know whether I'm too proud. But I can't publish my mistake. I don't think that's decent. I'd much rather die."

"You won't think so always," said Henrietta.

"I don't know what great unhappiness might bring me to; but it seems to me I shall always be ashamed. One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate. One can't change that way," Isabel repeated.¹

Isabel suggests that she would be "ashamed" if she were to leave Osmond, thus suggesting that her social conscience is playing a role in informing her appropriate course of action. Isabel recognizes that her marriage with

¹ Henry James, *Portrait*, 399-400.

Osmond is a mistake and that she is going to have “great unhappiness” if she continues her marriage with Osmond. However, unlike Gwendolen, Isabel does not stay in her marriage because she is “too proud.” Rather, Isabel returns to her marriage with Osmond because she believes that “publish[ing] [her] mistake” is not “decent,” and she would “much rather die.” Isabel’s identification that leaving her marriage is not “decent” suggests that Isabel has become acculturated to Victorian society and learned what “decency” means in the context of social manners. Isabel’s conclusion that she would “much rather die” than suffer social indecency suggests that Isabel acknowledges that her identity is socially constructed through her actions and behavior. Isabel’s comment that she would “much rather die” than be indecent is reminiscent of Daisy’s story: in her flirtations, Daisy was not decent by Victorian social standards, she suffers a social death, and she dies at the end of the text. Therefore, Isabel’s choices are: “accept [her] deeds” and uphold social decency, or be indecent, by leaving her marriage, and suffer a social death like Daisy Miller. Ultimately, Isabel’s social conscience forces her to stay in her marriage, because of social propriety.

Isabel’s social conscience forces Isabel to construct her social identity in accordance with Victorian social expectations. In Victorian social life, a “woman’s mission” was socially appropriated through the structural functionalism of Victorian patriarchy: women were to be *model* wives,

mothers, and daughters. At the end of the text when Osmond and Isabel fight over the state of their relationship, Osmond asserts:

“I take our marriage seriously; you appear to have found a way of not doing so. I’m not aware that we’re divorced or separated; for me we’re indissolubly united. You are nearer to me than any human creature, and I’m nearer to you. It may be a disagreeable proximity; it’s one, at any rate, of our own deliberate making. You don’t like to be reminded of that, I know; but I’m perfectly willing, because – because—“ [...] “Because I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!”²

While this statement is made by Osmond, Osmond’s belief that his marriage to Isabel makes them “indissolubly united” is representative of marriage in Victorian society. Osmond’s interpretation of their marriage is different than Isabel’s. Osmond asserts that “[Isabel] is nearer to [him] than any human creature.” Osmond’s stake in his marriage is not an issue of decency or social conscience, as it is for Isabel. For Osmond, his marriage to Isabel is an issue of “proximity,” or control.

Isabel and Osmond are not divorced or separated. And Osmond appeals to Isabel’s social conscience when he argues that the most value in life comes from the “honour” in “accept[ing] the consequences of our actions.” In order to be a model wife and a model mother, Isabel must return to Osmond and Pansy, her step-daughter, at the end of the text, despite the state of “great unhappiness,” suffering and lovelessness, that decision forces her into. Moreover, if Isabel chose instead to leave her social responsibilities

² Ibid., 438.

and pursue her sexual impulses with Goodwood, she would be socially isolating herself like Daisy Miller, as well as subjecting herself to the possibility of the same sort of sexual tyranny Grandcourt forces onto Gwendolen.

Isabel's previous discussion with Henrietta about her social obligation to "accept [her] deeds" in her marriage with Osmond shows that the reason Isabel chooses to return to her unloving marriage is because of expected social norms. In consequence, Isabel's liberty changes in her return to Osmond. While Isabel does sacrifice her personal freedom to her social conscience, Isabel *chooses* to abide by her social conscience, therefore constructing her liberty and social identity within the paradigm of Victorian social expectations.

The Portrait of a Lady develops from the preliminary sketch of "Daisy Miller" to show how 19th century women can construct their identities and negotiate their power in society, without suffering social isolation and death. In consequence, like James's ending to "Daisy Miller," and unlike Eliot's treatment of Gwendolen, James's final treatment of Isabel is not authorial punishment. Isabel Archer's ending in suffering and lovelessness emulates the outcome of the social struggle 19th century women faced in the oppressive tyranny of Victorian social expectations.

It is important that Isabel Archer's story is titled The Portrait of a Lady and not Isabel Archer: a Study. As aforementioned, "Daisy Miller" was

a preliminary work for James's true work of art, The Portrait of a Lady. This text is not simply the story of Isabel Archer in Europe, the way that "Daisy Miller" is the story of Daisy Miller in Europe. The title of: The Portrait of a Lady, for Isabel's story, suggests that James is using Isabel as a model for what it means to be a "lady." If Isabel had chosen to marry Lord Warburton, by political title, she would be a "Lady." However, her refusal to marry Lord Warburton, in conjunction with the title of text, suggests that Isabel Archer is a "lady," because of her *model* actions and behavior.

James's construction of Isabel has striking similarities to Eliot's construction of Gwendolen. However, the primary difference between Isabel and Gwendolen is that Isabel's social conscience informs her decision to abide by model actions and behavior, whereas Gwendolen does not have a social conscience. Earl L. Dachslager writes in the Introduction to *Daniel Deronda*, "Gwendolen is pretty much the complete egoist and narcissist and, arguably, no lady."³ Despite being married into aristocracy, Gwendolen's egoism, narcissism, and desire for her husband to die, are certainly not "model" attributes one would attribute with being "a lady," in a social sense. If Gwendolen is no lady because of her actions and behavior, and the primary difference between Gwendolen and Isabel is that Isabel demonstrates *model* actions and behavior, Isabel is a "lady," because of her social conscience. In

³ Earl L. Dachslager, introduction to *Daniel Deronda*, by George Eliot (New York: Barnes and Nobel Books, 2005), xxxiii.

the same way that the structural functionalism of Victorian patriarchy informs Isabel Archer's actions and behaviors, so too does James's title of "Lady" appropriate Isabel, as woman, through a structural functionalist lens. Isabel, as "lady," becomes the "good," "moral" woman that Victorian patriarchy idealized.

James's title, The Portrait of a Lady, serves as both a social and historical contradiction. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines "lady" as, "A woman who is the object of (esp. chivalrous) love or devotion."⁴ The OED goes on to contextualize that this definition can be traced to D. G. Rossetti in 1881 when he writes in *House of Life*, "My lady only loves the heart of Love."⁵ Isabel, James's "lady," does not love Osmond, nor does Osmond have a "heart of Love" for Isabel; Isabel married Osmond because of social expectations and as an attempt to preserve her liberty, and Osmond married Isabel for her money. In addition, similar to Sir Thomas Malory's Guinevere in Le Morte de Arthur, Isabel is worshipped from afar from male admirers, but does not have a lot of sex. Le Morte de Arthur never explicitly accounts that Sir Lancelot and Guinevere were adulterous, but the book does repeatedly suggest that Guinevere was the recipient of courtly love from

⁴ "lady, n.". OED Online. November 2010. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/105011> (accessed November 26, 2010).

⁵ Ibid.

Lancelot. Similarly, Goodwood does admire Isabel throughout The Portrait of a Lady, and does ask Isabel to be adulterous at the end of the text.

James's titling of Isabel as "lady" also serves as social and historical criticism. As I have argued in this paper, Isabel Archer represents the struggle 19th century women faced in trying to actualize their agency within the wickedness and reckless and barbarous stupidity of Victorian patriarchy. Through an anthropological reading of The Portrait of a Lady, I have established that in order to survive socially, Isabel was forced to adapt culturally, which forced her into her tragedy of suffering and lovelessness at the end of text. In other words, in order to preserve social propriety in Victorian patriarchy, in order to be a "moral" and "good" woman, Isabel does not have an option to escape her tragedy. Which means: since being a "moral" and "good" woman is a "lady" in Victorian patriarchal society, and Isabel equals "lady" both according to James's titling and Isabel's *model* actions and behavior, James is arguing that "lady" in Victorian social life inherently means a woman who socially suffers.

As is typical with most of James's work, James creates The Portrait of a Lady both in accordance to and pushing against aestheticism in his titling of Isabel's story as a "portrait." James's process, in which he experiments with the preliminary sketch of "Daisy Miller", in order to develop his work of art, The Portrait of a Lady, suggests that James is participating in the aesthetic creation of art in the way that any painter or sculptor would go

about creating their work. In calling his literary work a “portrait,” James aesthetically situates Isabel as a work of art similar to Rossetti’s painted portraits of women from Victorian society. In a similar aesthetic move, Eliot describes Gwendolen in the context of portraiture near the beginning of the novel, “Sir Joshua would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than a historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth of change—only to give stability to one beautiful moment.”⁶

Gwendolen is not “a lady,” but still is socially viewed as something so beautiful, she needs to be immortalized in portraiture. A portrait is aesthetic and does not revere action—it reveres physical beauty. By contrast, Isabel is a portrait of a lady, because of James’s aesthetic appropriation of her in his titling, and because of her model actions and behavior. In consequence, James’s title, The Portrait of a Lady functions to push against the aestheticism of Victorian society. In conjunction with the deconstructive analysis I just gave on “lady,” The Portrait of a Lady can literally be interpreted as a work of art, “Portrait,” that aesthetically reveres the social suffering of Isabel Archer, “a Lady.” This idea is very disturbing and is James’s social criticism. As aforementioned, given that the idealized form of Victorian woman was to be “good,” “moral,” to be “a lady,” James’s title is a

⁶ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Book II, Ch. XI, Pg. 100.

social criticism of, what James calls his “measure of truth” in the preface to the novel: the wickedness and reckless and barbarous stupidity of Victorian patriarchy’s belief that the ideal state for women is suffering.

Eliot offers a refrain at the end of Chapter XI in Book II, “Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant?”⁷ Neither Isabel nor Gwendolen are capable of making their lives pleasant. And, while Daisy’s comic dismissal of social expectations illuminates her preoccupation with having a pleasant life, her death at the end of the novella is certainly not gratifying. As aforementioned, James knew that a primary question of the 20th century would be the role of women in the world. Therefore, “Daisy Miller” and The Portrait of a Lady serve as social criticism of Victorian patriarchy’s social oppression of women. Daisy’s death and Isabel’s suffering are a decisive point for the future of women if they are not allowed their fullest freedom to construct their identities, outside of the wickedness and reckless and barbarous stupidity of Victorian patriarchy. If society is going to socially survive, death and suffering cannot be the only social options for women.

⁷ Ibid., Book II, Ch. XI, Pg. 107.

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