

Research Article

# Navigating the Complexities of Marriage and Romantic Relationships in Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady"

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**Abstract** - This research paper examines the complexities of marriage and romantic relationships portrayed in Henry James's novel, "The Portrait of a Lady," focusing on the 19th-century societal norms and constraints that impact the characters' choices. The review utilizes a Realist and Psychoanalytic theoretical framework to understand better the characters' motivations and actions within the context of their profound psychological struggles. This research adopts a qualitative approach, using textual analysis and thematic coding of specific entries and interactions from the novel. By applying Realist theory, the review explores the portrayal of 19th-century society, its traditions, and social expectations regarding marriage and relationships. Furthermore, applying Psychoanalytic theory enables a deeper assessment of the characters' subconscious desires and psychological conflicts. Analyzing "The Portrait of a Lady" through a Realist lens reveals a faithful representation of 19th-century societal norms and their effects on characters' choices regarding love and marriage. The characters' interactions and concerns about wealth and social status epitomize the pragmatic considerations prevalent during this period. Additionally, the use of Psychoanalytic theory provides profound insights into the character's inner motivations and emotional complexities, shedding light on their struggles to reconcile personal desires with societal expectations. The research emphasizes how societal constraints frequently lead to marriages driven by financial interests rather than genuine love, resulting in the characters' conflicts and unfulfilled relationships. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the review offers a comprehensive exploration of the complex themes of love, marriage, and societal norms in "The Portrait of a Lady," contributing to a deeper understanding of human relationships in 19th-century literature.

**Keywords** - Marriage, Psychoanalytic Theory, Realism, Romantic Relationships, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Society.

## 1. Introduction

Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, published in 1881, is broadly viewed as a foundation of nineteenth-century writing, acclaimed for its commitment to both authenticity and psychological fiction. Nonetheless, while James gives a significant investigation of individual organization and social assumption, a prominent gap in the ongoing writing is the top-to-bottom examination of the original's portrayal of marriage as a prohibitive establishment inside Victorian culture, standing out from contemporary social stories. This exploration addresses this gap by analyzing James' nuanced portrayal of marriage, autonomy, and orientation jobs, which wanders from customary portrayals of heartfelt associations in writing of the time. Expanding on past investigations emphasizing the psychological profundity of James' characters, this paper particularly contrasts *The Portrait of a Lady* and another nineteenth-century novel to highlight the developing view of marriage and cultural tensions. Unlike existing exploration that underlines more extensive cultural settings, this study focuses on Isabel Bowman's excursion, utilizing the Women's activist Hypothesis to feature the

prohibitive orientation assumptions set upon her and other female characters. This approach considers a new point of view on how James investigates Victorian marriage regulations and the restricted jobs accessible to ladies. The story focuses on Isabel Archer, a youthful and free American lady who, after acquiring an enormous fortune, leaves on an excursion that resists the period's orientation standards. Despite the way that Isabel's overflow at first seems to offer her the opportunity to shape her destiny, her marriage to the manipulative Gilbert Osmond reveals how social necessities as often as possible, overpower individual desires, paying little psyche to money-related opportunity. By portraying Isabel's psychological and significant fights, James uncovers the limited association that remained with ladies inside the resolute Victorian social design. The first's emphasis on psychological authenticity enables James to make rich, complex characters whose unnoticeable internal conflicts and motivations drive the story. This concentrates further on the hope of understanding how James' strategy significantly assesses marriage as a social creation laden with power components, control, and complex compromises. By using



effective coding through emotional programming, this assessment methodically reviews the message's portrayal of marital positions and gendered suppositions. As such, *The Portrait of a Lady* not simply fills in as a psychological examination of its characters but as a fundamental talk on personal development, moral decency, and care costs. This paper contributes novel pieces of information by organizing James' work inside the greater socio-certain setting of nineteenth-century marriage guidelines and ladies' opportunities, offering a point-by-point relative examination that edifies James' unique assessment of social norms. This study proposes a new orientation for research on autonomy and character in nineteenth-century composing, specifically focusing on the strain between individual adaptability and social commitment in Victorian culture.

## 2. Literature Review

Mrtvá (2005) conducted a careful comparative examination of Edith Wharton's "Period of Honesty" and Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady," meaning to explore the portrayal of women's roles and identities inside the context of marriage in the late nineteenth 100 years. The review featured the difficulties and constraints faced by women during that period, revealing insight into the similitudes and contrasts in how the two novels addressed the societal expectations put on married women. Mrtvá's research showed that the two novels portrayed women's struggles to explore the patriarchal society and the societal pressure to conform to customary gender roles. In "The Portrait of a Lady," Isabel Archer's excursion as a love bird permitted readers to observe her desires, dreams, and goals getting trapped inside the confines of marriage, offering a nuanced perspective on the complexities women of that time faced. Wooler's (2014) doctoral dissertation dug into the transformative excursion of the novel's hero, Isabel Archer, inside the confines of her marriage to Gilbert Osmond.

The investigation zeroed in on how Isabel's anguish and loss of hopeful dreams contributed to her personal growth and self-discovery. Wooler's work gave top-to-bottom character investigation, showing how the marriage to Osmond forced Isabel to confront her own vulnerabilities and become familiar with the brutal realities of life. The concentration likewise underlined the limits forced on her as a married woman, adding profundity to exploring the complexities of her romantic relationship. It demonstrated that Isabel's excursion inside her marriage was not merely a romantic story but instead a significant exploration of the human condition and the intricacies of relationships. In "The Woman's View" (2020), Henry James himself discussed the theme of marrying for some unacceptable reasons or to some unacceptable person, drawing models from "The Portrait of a Lady." James' experiences gave important context to grasping the inspirations and consequences of the characters' conjugal choices and explored the complexities of their relationships. James' direct commentary permitted readers to acquire a deeper comprehension of his authorial intentions and the

thematic underpinnings of the novel. His appearance on the characters' choices and repercussions offered a significant investigation of the human psyche and the consequences of doomed choices. Sloan (2005) examined James' more extensive exploration of the conjugal organization in his works, including "The Portrait of a Lady," close by "The Bostonians" and "The Golden Bowl." This comparative examination featured recurring themes in James' portrayal of marriage and relationships, offering a comprehensive comprehension of the complexities and difficulties inside the establishment. Sloan's research exhibited how James involved marriage as a canvas to paint intricate pictures of force elements, societal expectations, and individual desires. By comparing various works, the review revealed patterns in James' portrayal of marriage and relationships, giving readers an additional, comprehensive perspective on the creator's perspectives on the complexities of human connections.

Zhang (2021) presented a conference paper that dove into the grievous parts of Isabel Archer's marriage, inspecting the profound and psychological cost it took on her. The examination shed light on the fundamental variables contributing to the appalling idea of her conjugal association and gave nuanced experiences into the characters' internal struggles. Zhang's research offered a fresh perspective on the novel's profundity, featuring the effect of the characters' choices on their profound prosperity and the novel's exploration of the human limit concerning resilience and self-mindfulness. Saoudi's (2008) doctoral dissertation explored the representation of women and marriage in late Victorian literature, including "The Portrait of a Lady." This historical context grasped the societal norms and expectations that molded the characters' choices and activities, giving a more extensive comprehension of the novel's themes. Saoudi's work revealed what societal norms and gender roles meant for the characters' choices while likewise revealing insight into the nuances and contradictions present in James' portrayal of women in the novel.

The review's historical perspective contributed to a more extravagant interpretation of the characters' inspirations and activities. Girdharry (1984) analyzed the structural and emblematic parts of marriage in James' writings, including "The Portrait of a Lady." Through a mathematical focal point, the review offered extraordinary experiences into the interconnected relationships in the novel, revealing the intricacies of the characters' interactions inside the conjugal context. Girdharry's unconventional methodology displayed the complex snare of relationships formed by James' characters, focusing on the fundamental math of human connections inside the story. Vickery (2009) participated in a comparative assessment of "The Portrait of a Lady" and Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" to research marriage as an impression of cultural change. The review explored how the novels presented shifting societal attitudes toward marriage and how these attitudes affected the characters and

their relationships. Vickery's comparison of James and Hemingway demonstrated how every maker dealt with the theme of marriage abruptly, revealing insight into the greater cultural shifts during their respective periods. Through this assessment, Vickery gave a fresh perspective on James' portrayal of marriage and its sociocultural significance. Sheppard (1976) offered a comparative assessment of love and marriage in Thomas Strong's "Far from the Madding Crowd" and Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady."

The review compared the treatment of romantic relationships in the two works, highlighting James' wonderful method for managing and exploring the complexities of fondness and marriage. Sheppard's research edified the contrasting representations of love and marriage in the two novels, featuring James' distinct style in looking at the psychological subtleties of characters and their relationships. Akshey (2016) dove into the theme of human identity in Henry James' novels, including "The Portrait of a Lady." By dissecting the characters' struggles with self-mindfulness and identity, the review added profundity to the comprehension of their inspirations inside their conjugal relationships, giving a nuanced assessment of human psychology in the novel. Akshey's research demonstrated how James utilized the theme of identity to explore the characters' inspirations, activities, and personal growth, lifting the novel past a simple romantic story into a significant investigation of human nature and the intricacies of self-discovery.

### **3. Methodology**

Realism is an appropriate theoretical framework for "The Portrait of a Lady" by Henry James since it precisely represents human nature, provides context and relevance to the societal norms of the Victorian period, challenges romanticism and vision, reflects contemporary society, and encourages empathy and identification with the characters. By utilizing realism, James portrays the complexities of marriage, love, and personal desires authentically, revealing insight into the struggles faced by women in a society overwhelmed by societal expectations. The story undermines customary romantic plotlines, offering a candid exploration of characters' inspirations and feelings while welcoming perusers to empathize with their situations and choices. Realism considers a deeper comprehension of the characters' internal universes. It provides a mirror to the societal elements of the time, making it a reasonable framework for dissecting the novel's themes and complexities.

#### **3.1. Realism Theory**

Realism is a literary and creative development that arose in the nineteenth century, expecting to portray reality and human experiences honestly and precisely. In the context of "The Portrait of a Lady," realism provides a focal point through which we can look at the novel's portrayal of marriage and romantic relationships inside the societal norms and constraints of the time.

#### **3.1.1. The Portrayal of Nineteenth-Century Society**

Realism looks to present a reliable representation of society, including its traditions, social structures, and virtues. In "The Portrait of a Lady," Henry James meticulously creates a nitty gritty portrayal of nineteenth-century upper-class society in Europe and America. The characters' interactions, concerns about riches and social status, and adherence to societal conventions are intelligent of the time's social realism. For example, Gilbert Osmond's marriage proposition to Isabel Archer epitomizes the monetary calculations and strategic considerations associated with nineteenth-century marriages:

"He had kept an eye on her fortune; it was not large, but it was still a fortune for a girl who had been brought up as Isabel was brought up. He had known her before; he had admired her very much; he thought her the finest creature of her sex. He had a desire to possess her fortune. It seemed to him that a lively young woman of eccentric, not to say extravagant tendencies, who had refused a brilliant Englishman the year before at Newport, might be moved to listen to a plain man of middle age with a small income but a great deal of taste." (Chapter 42)

In this section from Part 42 of "The Portrait of a Lady," Gilbert Osmond's marriage proposition to Isabel Archer is dissected in the context of nineteenth-century marriages and their monetary ramifications. Gilbert's proposition represents the down-to-earth and strategic considerations that frequently assumed a significant part in marriage choices during this time. He recognizes Isabel's modest fortune; however, he considers it significant for a woman of her age. Gilbert's reverence for Isabel and his desire to have her wealth is evident; however, he also considers her previous behavior, alluding to her dismissal of a "brilliant Englishman" at Newport. Gilbert sees an opportunity to win her over by presenting himself as a reasonable and elegant choice despite being a plain man of middle age with a limited income. This entry reflects the analytical mindset and monetary calculations prevalent in nineteenth-century marriages, stressing how personal feelings were often intertwined with societal expectations and considerations of wealth and status.

#### **3.1.2. Social Norms and Expectations**

Realism explores societal norms and expectations for the characters' choices and activities. In "The Portrait of a Lady," Isabel Archer's struggle to find a harmony between her desires and societal expectations is central to the story. Her choice to marry Gilbert Osmond, despite growing warm gestures for Caspar Goodwood and Master Warburton, features the conflict between individual satisfaction and conformity to societal norms. Besides, the portrayal of the character Madame Merle epitomizes the limits put upon women in society. Her previous choices and activities are impacted by the social constraints of her time, demonstrating the consequences of attempting to explore inside prescribed gender role:

"Madame Merle had gone far; she had been farther than Isabel knew. She had committed the fault of disagreeing with her best friend, and it was this betrayal that Isabel felt now with a sudden, a passionate resentment." (Chapter 42).

### 3.1.3. *Exploration of Human Psychology*

Realism digs into the complexities of human psychology, portraying characters with their strengths, defects, and moral ambiguities. In "The Portrait of a Lady," the characters' inspirations and inward conflicts are presented in a nuanced way. By giving profound experiences into their brains and feelings, James offers a realistic portrayal of their way of behaving and choices. For example, Ralph Touchett's complex affections for Isabel and his internal struggle to reconcile his warm gestures with the societal norms of their time are evident in the accompanying entry:

"He was embarrassed, but he was not dismayed; he felt even a sort of zest in his distress, and it was nothing new to him to reflect that he had a high spirit. He had been sure beforehand that he should like her and was not disappointed. He had a kind of ideal of his own, a conception of what a charming girl might be – to which Isabel Archer's slender, picturesque figure seemed to furnish a happy illustration." (Chapter 18).

Therefore, the use of Realism theory in the examination of "The Portrait of a Lady" empowers us to figure out the intricate trap of marriage and romantic relationships as a result of the novel's devoted portrayal of nineteenth-century society, its norms, and its significant exploration of human psychology. The interplay between characters and society features the complexities and difficulties faced by individuals during this period, making "The Portrait of a Lady" a surprising work of Realist fiction.

## 4. Discussion

In Henry James' novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, the author quietly underscores his commitment to review marriage as a model for other important relationships while at the same time evaluating those life partners who focus on their desires over their conjugal commitments. Isabel, the protagonist, constantly helps herself to remember the holiness and responsibilities inherent in marriage, respecting its sacredness. Conversely, Mrs. Touchett, similar to Stanton, applies a systematic approach to her conjugal life, considering herself "basically isolated from her husband" and comparing marriage to forming a partnership exclusively for the motivation behind setting up a family (75, 385). She regards her wedding bond as an "experiment" that she can leave as effectively as a hasty business understanding (66). This viewpoint profoundly inconveniences Isabel, as her auntie obscures the limits between the commercial and close-to-home parts of marriage, obscuring the distinction between temporary, self-interested exchanges and enduring, tender ties. Isabel disagrees with her auntie's conception of marriage, perceiving it as an

arrangement that ought to get through just as long as it helps the gatherings in question. Here, Isabel articulates James' perspective that Mrs. Touchett's outrageous individualism is problematic. Mrs. Touchett's affection for her particular manners and disregard for others' necessities lead her to see marriage with a disconcerting individualistic focal point (75). Through the portrayal of Mrs. Touchett, the novel features the consequences of applying a contractual rationale to intimate relationships. It brings up vital issues about the ramifications of regarding marriage as a simple game plan that can be discarded once it no longer serves personal interests. James recommends that such extreme individualism inside the context of marriage can prompt significant issues, imperilling the genuine embodiment of enduring, significant connections between individuals. The novel, "The Portrait of a Lady," wrestles with a complex and conflicting perspective on the possibility of miserable companions looking for lawful relief through divorce. It is both attracted to and grieved by the idea that dissatisfied individuals could go to the law to end their miserable marriages. Following the thoughts expressed by Owen, Powers, and Stanton, the novel puts significant accentuation on close-to-home prosperity and compatibility inside a marriage. James handily portrays the psychological cost of Isabel's despondent marriage, accentuating the importance of recognizing her psychological agony.

Besides, the novel proposes that stringent divorce regulations are not guaranteed to prevent troubled couples from tracking down their particular manners to address their conjugal difficulties, regardless of whether it implies disregarding their commitments. Like Greeley, Woolsey, Allen, and James Sr, the younger James has additionally put resources into marriage's sacredness, permanence, and security. He is very much in the know about the psychological cost that excess in a hopeless association can take on an individual. Notwithstanding, he is similarly concerned about the moral and social ramifications of embracing more liberal divorce regulations. As a result, the novel wrestles with the pressure among liberal and conservative viewpoints in the context of divorce discusses. It tries to track down a resolution while attempting to adjust the competing interests of the individual's bliss and the prosperity of society. The struggle lies in reconciling the desires for personal satisfaction and individual freedoms with the customary qualities and social norms encompassing marriage and its holiness. The novel, fundamentally, endeavors to arbitrate the complex and conflicting cases of both the Individual and Society concerning the institution of marriage and the possible ramifications of changes in divorce regulations.

### 4.1. *Love, Desire, and Complexity of Marriage*

Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady" digs into the intricacies of adoration, desire, and marriage, presenting a rich tapestry of relationships that enlighten the human quest for self-satisfaction and profound expression. Through his breathtaking storytelling and insightful realism, James

presents a nuanced exploration of romantic relationships and their profound effect on the characters' lives. At the novel's core is the protagonist, Isabel Archer, whose excursion is characterized by her quest for affection and autonomy. Isabel's character typifies the complexities of a young woman looking for genuine close-to-home connection while likewise longing for personal freedom. Her underlying captivation by the perplexing Gilbert Osmond fills in as a poignant illustration of the charming idea of desire. Osmond, with his clean charm and baffling emanation, enraptures Isabel, and she ends up attracted to becoming a piece of his reality. Notwithstanding, James capably portrays the duality of such desires, exhibiting how they can prompt both strengthening and entanglement.

Isabel's choice to marry Osmond, inspired part of the way by a desire to state her freedom, ultimately becomes a wellspring of profound close-to-home consequences as she wrestles with the realization of her husband's manipulative and controlling nature. Isabel's relationship with Ralph Touchett, her dear companion and confidant, represents one more aspect of affection and desire in the novel. Ralph, a sympathetic and warm character, fills in as a contrasting figure to Osmond. He exemplifies a more progressive perspective on women's autonomy and supports Isabel's quest for a significant life. Their friendship demonstrates the importance of profound connections and features the significance of dispassionate relationships in satisfying one's feelings.

One of the central themes explored through these relationships is the conflict between societal expectations and individual desires. In the Victorian period, marriage was much of the time seen as a social institution designed to maintain class distinctions and preserve family fortunes. As a young woman from a rich foundation, Isabel faces huge pressure to conform to these societal norms and marry in a way considered reasonable by her family and companions. Her cousin, the good-natured yet conventional Mrs. Touchett, typifies this perspective when she attempts to direct Isabel's choices per customary qualities. Besides, Madame Merle, a complex and common character, fills in as a cautionary illustration of the consequences of surrendering to societal pressures.

She has gone into a cold marriage herself, revealing the staggering impacts of sacrificing personal joy for the sole purpose of conforming to societal expectations. Throughout the novel, James utilizes strong language and distinctive symbolism to highlight the personal disturbance his characters face in their quest for affection and self-satisfaction. Quite possibly, the most critical section representing this is when Isabel thinks about her inward conflict: "The most effective way to realize ourselves is to know our desires, and the most effective way to realize we desire is to analyze the idea of our misfortunes and frustrations" (Chapter XXIV). Here, James smoothly conveys that self-mindfulness and understanding one's desires are fundamental for accomplishing close-to-

home satisfaction and going with significant decisions in affection and marriage. Therefore, "The Portrait of a Lady" is a magnificent exploration of affection, desire, and marriage that resonates with readers across time. From the realism perspective, Henry James presents a complex and nuanced portrayal of romantic relationships, featuring the close-to-home consequences of seeking specific paths over others. The novel's persevering relevance lies in its portrayal of characters exploring the conflict between societal expectations and personal desires, empowering readers to contemplate the profound complexities of affection, autonomy, and self-discovery.

#### ***4.2. The Impossibility of Victorian Marriage Co-Existing with Female Independence***

In Henry James' novel "The Portrait of a Lady," the central character, Isabel Archer, arises as a savagely free young woman who overcomes societal presumption. Passing on America to explore Europe, not set in stone to focus on personal opportunity, will not surrender to the conventional thought of a woman being dutiful and reliant upon a man. All through her excursion, Isabel's enrapturing personality draws in various marriage proposals, particularly from men of high social standing and abundance. Nonetheless, not at all like customary Victorian novels with an emphasis on blissful associations, Isabel's story goes in a new direction.

Despite her desire for personal opportunity and autonomy, Isabel's choice of husband drives her into a marriage with Gilbert Osmond, who eventually reveals himself as a controlling and manipulative individual with little respect for female freedom. This marriage becomes an image of ensnarement for Isabel, reflecting other undesirable associations portrayed in the novel. These portrayals recommend that genuine female freedom is out of reach inside the confines of Victorian marriages. In the context of realism theory, "The Portrait of a Lady" embodies the complexities of human relationships and societal norms during the Victorian period. The novel's emphasis on Isabel's desire for freedom and her resulting disillusionment in marriage permits readers to engage with the realistic struggles of individuals trying to explore societal expectations while staying consistent with their qualities and yearnings. James' portrayal of Isabel's character and her process fills in as a mirror to the challenges faced by numerous women during that period, featuring the conflict between personal desires and societal pressures inside the context of romantic relationships and marriage. Through the novel "The Portrait of a Lady," Isabel Archer's activities are driven by her strong desire to state her opportunity both to herself and to society at large. This requirement for autonomy becomes particularly evident when she stuns her companions by dismissing marriage proposals from both Ruler Warburton and Caspar Goodwood. These two men represented profoundly advantageous social matches; some other woman of Isabel's time could have enthusiastically acknowledged such offers. In any case, Isabel's character is far from

conforming to societal norms. During the Victorian period, women were expected to marry, and marriages were frequently set up for social and monetary profit instead of for affection. Because of logical considerations, such associations were commonly acknowledged and respected in society. Nonetheless, Isabel resolutely will not be influenced by these conventions. Instead, she strongly turns down the proposals of marriage, seeing her unmarried status as an image of her autonomy in a culture where male desires hold a significant impact. Following realism theory, Henry James intricately captures the internal conflict inside Isabel's character. Her refusal of the advantageous proposals mirrors her firm assurance to resist being limited by the expectations forced on women of her time. James capably portrays Isabel's internal struggle, exhibiting the complexities of her desire for personal opportunity and autonomy, even notwithstanding societal pressures. One of the essential minutes that embody Isabel's statement of autonomy happens when she dismisses Ruler Warburton's proposal.

In response to his insistence on her conforming to customary roles, she declares, "I would rather not tie myself up. I would rather not be claimed. I'm exceptionally attached to you; however, I'm not in adoration with you" (Chapter XXVII). This candid statement exhibits Isabel's refusal to respect societal expectations and insistence on controlling her own life. James explores the complex interplay of societal norms and personal desires by underscoring Isabel's dismissal of the two admirers. Isabel's activities challenge the customary thought that a woman's worth is tied exclusively to her conjugal status and the social advantages that come with it. Instead, she tries to cut her path, embracing her individuality and picking a day-to-day existence that lines up with her qualities and standards. Fundamentally, Isabel's resistance against societal expectations aligns with the center precepts of realism theory, which looks to portray life as it genuinely is, digging into the complexities of the human way of behaving and relationships. Her refusal to compromise her autonomy in her quest for adoration or social standing makes her a compelling and relatable character for readers of any period, resonating with the immortal struggle for personal opportunity and self-assurance.

#### **4.3. *Struggle for Opportunity, Autonomy, and Marriage***

In "The Portrait of a Lady," Isabel Archer's marriage to Gilbert Osmond unfurls as a complex and unexpected turn as she continues looking for personal opportunity and freedom. At first, Isabel accepts that marrying Osmond is a product independently, a conscious choice she makes despite his absence of social status and riches. She sees this choice as a demonstration of her freedom, accepting that she is engaging Osmond to seek after his respectable, tasteful beliefs with the abundance she has inherited. Nonetheless, the reality of her marriage proves to be not quite the same as her expectations. Isabel's choice to marry Osmond prompts the sacrifice of her freedoms as opposed to the satisfaction of her autonomous

soul. Readers, as well as Isabel's friends, are shocked by her choice of husband. Despite alerts from her loved ones about Osmond's sketchy character, she remains dazed by her perception of him as a respectable person of good taste.

As the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that Isabel's free choice was painstakingly orchestrated by others, particularly Madame Merle, a companion of her auntie, Mrs. Touchett, and Osmond himself. This revelation breaks Isabel's faith in her agency and features the manipulative forces at play in her life. Osmond's actual character arises after the marriage, and he proves to be a controlling and oppressive husband. His disdain for female freedom is evident in his treatment of his girl, Pansy, whom he raises to be completely submissive. Isabel's marriage becomes a fastened presence, and she winds up dependent upon the impulses and desires of her husband.

In her disillusionment, Isabel is presented with an opportunity to escape with Caspar Goodwood, who offers her a path of least resistance to her miserable marriage. Be that as it may, Isabel decides to respect her commitment to Osmond, feeling limited by her moral standards. This shift in her character improvement denotes a takeoff from focusing on a woman's choice and freedom to respecting patriarchal and social authority. Isabel's internal conflict is a strong portrayal of the complexities of human relationships and the conflict between individual desires and societal expectations. The storylines up with the precepts of realism theory, offering readers a candid portrayal of the consequences of choices made under societal pressures and the unintended ramifications of apparently free choices.

#### **4.4. *Failed and Dysfunctional Marriages***

In "The Portrait of a Lady," Henry James presents a distinct portrayal of failed and dysfunctional marriages that highlight the limits and constraints forced on women inside Victorian society. These models feature the prevailing theme that female freedom is smothered inside the confines of customary Victorian marriages. Royal Lady Gemini's notable infidelity illustrates the disillusionment and dissatisfaction that can emerge inside a marriage. The revelation that Gilbert Osmond was untrustworthy to his most memorable spouse further underscores the defective idea of these associations. Indeed, even the marriage of the Touchetts, which seems respectable on a superficial level because of the actual detachment of the companions, demonstrates the absence of genuine, profound connection and satisfaction in numerous Victorian marriages. Throughout the novel, James portrays marriage as a restrictive enclosure that restricts women's agency, forcing them to adapt to their husbands' desires and societal expectations. This portrayal challenges the prevailing idea of marriage as a wellspring of bliss and satisfaction for women during that period. Despite being caught in a terrible marriage with Osmond, Isabel Archer's character remains resilient and not merely a heartbreaking figure. At the novel's conclusion, Isabel decides to return to Rome to live with

Osmond, practising her own will and regarding her ethical commitment. This choice is perplexing, as it is by all accounts both a review opportunity of choice, recognizing her autonomy in simply deciding, and an eventual fate of devoted wedding dutifulness, tolerating her responsibility to satisfy her conjugal commitment. The portrayal of Isabel's choice mirrors the complex interplay of personal desires, societal pressures, and ethical commitments. In his realist approach, James presents a nuanced exploration of human nature and the intricacies of direction, even notwithstanding challenging conditions. It is important that Henry James, as a married man, resisted his family's writer's wishes in such a manner, which seems to stir up misgivings about the honorableness of marriage through the novel's portrayal of different dismal associations. As evidenced in the story, his distrust of the institution of marriage mirrors his unconventional perspective. It may act as a commentary on his time's societal norms and expectations. Therefore, "The Portrait of a Lady" is a strong exploration of the constraints and challenges faced by women inside Victorian marriages.

Through failed and non-utilitarian associations, Henry James underscores the societal constraints put on women and their struggle for autonomy. Isabel Archer's choice to return to her repulsive marriage demonstrates the complexities of human direction, featuring the interplay between personal opportunity and societal commitments. James' portrayal of these conjugal tragedies expresses a candid and impression-provoking commentary on the institution of marriage and challenges the conventional thoughts of joy and satisfaction associated with it. In the last pages of "The Portrait of a Lady," Isabel does not withdraw the promises she made during her marriage to Osmond, and the reader gets the feeling that she will never. Despite the psychological expenses and pain she experiences, Isabel remains committed to the sacredness and permanence of marriage. Her choice mirrors a choice to focus on the societal norms and values associated with marriage over her desires for personal joy and satisfaction. James' portrayal of Isabel's endurance in maintaining her conjugal commitments underscores the novel's position on the supremacy of social conventions and responsibilities in deciding the course of one's life. The novel proposes that despite personal struggles, individuals might decide to maintain their commitments to society and stick to the ethical ramifications associated with marriage, regardless of whether it implies persevering through personal hardships and sacrifices.

## 5. Conclusion

Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady" masterfully engages readers with a profound exploration of marriage and romantic relationships within the constraints of the nineteenth century. The novel intricately illustrates the battle between personal aspirations and societal expectations, offering a powerful lens to understand individuals' struggles in their search for love and fulfillment. As we follow Isabel Archer on

her poignant journey of self-discovery, we are challenged to confront the far-reaching consequences of her choices, prompting us to reflect on the enduring complexities of human relationships and the timeless relevance of this distinguished literary work. At the novel's heart lies a crucial tension between societal demands and individual desires. Isabel, despite her discontent in a suffocating marriage with Osmond, bravely chooses to ignore Henrietta's advice and considers pursuing a divorce through America's progressive divorce courts. The desire for escape into the "extraordinary salt desert of modest Divorce"—a theme James would further explore in "The Golden Bowl" (1904)—is left tantalizingly unfulfilled within "The Portrait of a Lady" (134). While the narrative strongly suggests that Isabel should genuinely contemplate this option, James intentionally refrains from crafting a dramatic courtroom climax, distinguishing his approach from Howells' vivid portrayal in "A Modern Instance."

This choice not only highlights Isabel's internal conflict but also underscores James's deeper commentary on the constraints imposed by society. Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady" intricately examines the multifaceted nature of marriage and romantic relationships against the backdrop of the restrictive societal norms of the nineteenth century. The novel paints a vivid picture of the inner lives of its characters, particularly focusing on the intense struggle between their personal desires and the weighty expectations placed upon them by society.

This exploration illuminates the emotional turmoil that individuals endure in their quests for love and contentment and reveals the broader implications of these struggles on personal identity and autonomy. As readers immerse themselves in Isabel Archer's compelling journey of self-discovery, they witness the depth of her internal conflicts and the profound consequences of her decisions. This narrative invites us to reflect on the timeless intricacies of human relationships, making the novel a strikingly relevant examination of the human condition. The conflict between societal pressures and the longing for individual freedom is central to the novel's theme. Isabel, caught in an unfulfilling and oppressive marriage to Gilbert Osmond, makes the courageous choice to disregard Henrietta Stackpole's heartfelt advice.

Instead, she contemplates the possibility of seeking a divorce through the progressive and more liberal divorce courts available in America. This pursuit of liberation through the "extraordinary salt desert of modest Divorce," a concept that James would later expand upon in his subsequent work, "The Golden Bowl" (1904), lingers as a tantalizing yet unrealized option throughout "The Portrait of a Lady" (134). Although the narrative powerfully hints at the imperative for Isabel to seriously consider this radical course of action, James intentionally avoids crafting a dramatic courtroom showdown, opting instead for a more nuanced exploration of her inner



turmoil. This choice sharply contrasts with the intense courtroom scenes depicted by Howells in "A Modern Instance," thereby emphasizing Isabel's internal struggle and the complex interplay between her individuality and societal expectations. In doing so, James invites readers to engage deeply with the challenges of navigating personal desires

within the confines of societal norms, ultimately enriching our understanding of the human experience.

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