Portrait of Three Ladies:
Nonconformity and its
Results in Three Novels
by Henry James

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The young girl looked at him more gravely, but with eyes that were prettier than ever. "I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me, or to interfere with anything I do."

"I think you have made a mistake," said Winterbourne. "You should sometimes listen to a gentleman—the right one."

At a time when much of America was extremely concerned about conformity and correctness in all levels of social intercourse, Henry James was writing books about interesting young women who refused to conform to what was expected of women of their age, class, or situation.

These young women create various degrees of furor in both Europe and America. The reaction to their nonconformity is as interesting as their behavior itself, for it says much about society's expectations of women. An examination of three European-American novels by the author led her first to believe that the entire problem-causing force in these books was the difference in European and American customs and values. While this idea is an important part of these books, total reliance on this theme would produce little more than a local color story.

Therefore, the author would like to give the European-American theme secondary importance and view the three chosen novels in respect to women—the three important nonconformists particularly and the role of women in society in general. She would, in presenting these ideas, like to discuss the specific motivation, behavior, and results of this behavior of Daisy Miller in Daisy Miller (1878), Gertrude Wentworth in The Europeans (1879), and Isabel Archer in Portrait of a Lady (1881). She would also like to show through these women general problems of women in society in confrontations with both other women and
with men.

Daisy Miller would be a difficult character for nonconformists to champion simply because so much of what she does is out of sheer ignorance. Add to this ignorance a tremendous amount of self-confidence, and one has a dangerous combination. Daisy doesn't really want to defy the world. She just thinks that the people in Italy are a little stuffy, and she's just having fun. Yet, before the unfortunate conclusion to her stay in Italy, she has been shunned by nearly every American in the community. (146) What is it in her personal life and in the tone of those around her that caused someone who really wanted friends to be so completely rejected? Background influences such as that of Daisy's mother, her social class and her personal code should be examined.

A big factor in Daisy's life was her mother. Mrs. Miller was almost totally ignorant of her new role in society and unable to escape her lower-class background, or even child-raising problems. She is a fuzzy-minded, self-involved hypochondriac who now happens to have diamonds in her ears. (111)

Evidence of Mrs. Miller's lack of understanding of her role in society can be seen when she is contrasted with the many "vigilant matrons" (114) who screen their daughters' companions, chaperone them constantly, and correct their behavior. Mrs. Miller stays in her room often, avoiding the opportunity to meet Daisy's friends. (111) When meeting Mrs. Walker, an American hostess, Daisy asks to bring a friend to her party. Mrs. Walker turns to Mrs. Miller, and assures her that any of her friends are welcome at the party. Mrs. Miller replies, "Oh, they are not my friends...I never spoke
Mrs. Miller, although she dresses elegantly, (111) although her rooms are "a bigger place.... all gold on the walls," (122) is still very lower-class in her ideas and has no ability, apparently, to change. Her grammar and word usage reflect her class, ("they have taken her right in") (124) as does her interpretation of words used by others. When Mrs. Walker discusses whether or not it is "safe" for a young lady to participate in a certain activity, she is entertaining the upper-class notion that safety has to do with personal reputation. Mrs. Miller, (and Daisy) cling to the idea of safety in very practical, physical terms. Mrs. Walker says that it is not safe for Daisy to walk the streets with a gentleman in early evening. She is thinking of what others, out in their carriages, might think. Mrs. Miller agrees, for Daisy may get fever. (126)

It would seem that Mrs. Miller's forte might be practical, simple discipline of her children. Nothing could be further from the truth. An excellent example of Mrs. Miller's abilities and approach (a combination of desperation and laissez-faire) is Randolph, who had seven teeth remaining in his mouth due to overindulgence in sweets. His mother "counted them last night, and one came out right afterward. She said she'd slap me if any more came out." (95) Mrs. Miller neither takes preventative action before this time, nor does she take specific action now. She simply and weakly informs him that he will be slapped if he looses more. She prefers to leave such problems to Eugenio, the family courier. (109)

Perhaps part of the reason for Mrs. Miller's light discipline of her children is her own self-concern. In another example of
what not to mention in society, Mrs. Miller waxes eloquent on her dyspepsia and on the doctor at Schenectady: "oh, at Schenectady he stands first; they think everything of him... he said he never saw anything like my dyspepsia but he was bound to cure it." (123) Mrs. Miller also has said that she is very nervous and never sleeps. (108) Perhaps she has problems coping with the family's changed circumstances, her noisy, active children, and the seemingly remote Mr. Miller, and so uses her sickness to avoid situations.

How does Mrs. Miller affect Daisy and her life? First, Daisy cannot learn, let alone play, the role of proper traveling daughter because Mrs. Miller has no idea how to be the proper mother. Secondly, since Daisy seems to have made her own decisions on how to behave in Italy, she was probably making decisions in the past on how to behave in New York. While Daisy may have fared well in New York, her practical provincial thinking causes problems in Italy. Finally, Daisy seems to know how to get a desired reaction from her mother, and tends to try to generalize her unfortunate technique. Her resulting activities cause her to be known as "a dreadful girl." (107)

An excellent example of Daisy's mother's absence causing problems for Daisy comes when Mrs. Walker informs Daisy that "You should walk with your mother, dear,..." Daisy replies, "With my mother dear!...My mother has never walked ten steps in her life." (131) Few gossips would probably believe that any mother would be so negligent, and so Daisy would look as if she has defied her mother, when her mother has actually given her little to defy, accept, or reject. (143)

Because of Mrs. Miller's lack of guidance, Daisy, with the
help, perhaps, of other new-rich friends, seems to have developed a social code which worked out very well in her society in New York. Daisy said that she had had seventeen dinners given her, "and three of them were by gentlemen." (101) This, plus her beauty, made Daisy self-confident enough to tell Winterbourne that she would continue being a flirt, ignoring the advice of older women because "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." (137)

Finally, Daisy's mother in rarely noticing Daisy's activities, leaves Daisy with a desire for someone to make a little fuss. It is Daisy who initiates introductions of her friends to her mother; Mrs. Miller would rather not be bothered. Daisy says of her, "She's down right timid. She always makes a fuss if I introduce a gentleman. But I do introduce them—almost always." (111) To get a fuss from Mrs. Miller, Daisy has to behave in some extraordinary way that even impresses Mrs. Miller. One night, she teases to go for a moonlight boat ride with a young man, and both Mrs. Miller and Eugenio object. "Oh, I hoped you would make a fuss," said Daisy. 'I don't care to go now.'" (115) Daisy tries to get a similar reaction out of the taciturn Winterbourne by using similar tactics: she raves about "The beautiful Giovanelli;" (126) she makes a great fuss about Winterbourne not staying at Vevey while others in the American community listen. (124) This, too, has an adverse affect on her reputation in the community. All of these factors working together show that Mrs. Miller, who should have a very positive effect on Daisy's position in society, has a very
negative effect.

Yet, there is more involved in Daisy's problem than a mere reaction to her mother. Being a bit simple, she behaves, all over Europe, exactly as she would in America. The entire tone of Daisy's thought and style can be seen when Randolph, like a small trumpet, first announces his sister: "She's an American girl!" (96)

Daisy's young American nouveau riche social thinking is different from European social thinking in several ways which greatly affect Daisy's standing in the two societies: Americans were more tolerant of the young, and more concerned about money and less about family as an indicator of social class.

When Daisy mentions that she has many gentleman friends, dinners, and dances in New York, she is reflecting a society that lets young men and women play a large part in its activities. Contrast this with a passage from a travelogue by Henry James on Venetian society:

...Such old, old women with such old, old jewels; such ugly, ugly ones with such handsome, becoming names; such battered, fatigued gentlemen with such inscrutable decorations; such an absence of youth, for the most part, in either sex....It was not a society-- that was clear-- in which little girls and boys set the tune; and there was that about it all that might well have cast a shadow on the path of even the most successful little girl.

Not only did youth play a minor role in European society, European girls did not flirt as much as their married counterparts. Winterbourne told Daisy that the custom of flirting was not for "young unmarried women....Flirting is a purely American custom; it doesn't exist here." (138) In fact, earlier, when he first reacts to Daisy, Winterbourne recalls "two or three women--persons older than Miss Daisy Miller, and provided, for
respectability's sake, with husbands—who were great coquettes—dangerous, terrible women..." (102) Daisy, who continues to flirt because it seems to her more proper "in young unmarried women than in old married ones," (138) is unusually wild by European standards, but little more than a flirt by American standards.

Besides tolerance of youth, Americans used money rather than family very often as an indicator of social level. This made their criteria of what constituted a person of the upper class more tangible than European criteria. For families like the Millers, fine clothing, good manners, gold-encrusted rooms, and money constituted the earmarks of the upper class. Randolph boasts of the family money and fine hotel rooms. (122) Daisy and her mother dress "elegantly." (111) So, when Daisy meets handsome, well-dressed Italians possessing "a good deal of manner and a wonderful mustache," (121) she sees them as people who are excellent escorts. These men must have been dazzling, for James wrote to a friend in 1873, "But no one looks handsome in Rome beside the Romans." Yet, Daisy is condemned because these men are not of good family. "If he were only a count or a marchese!" (142) says Mrs. Costello when she hears about Giovannelli. Winterbourne observes that the family has not reached a level of culture which would make them desire to catch one. (142)

Contrast the American idea of money with the European one expressed in this James travelogue: "

In France and Italy, in Germany and Spain, the count and countess will sally forth and encamp for the evening, under a row of coloured lamps, upon the paving stones, but it is ten to one that the count and countess live on a single floor and up several pair of stairs.

So, it is evident that there are several important differences
between American and European thinking that bring Daisy to grief. Yet, this book cannot be about the conflict between Americans and Europeans because only Americans condemn Daisy. Winterbourne, a representative American man, defends her again and again, only to break down when he misconstrues the motives behind her Colosseum visit. (148) Why, however, do the American women so harshly condemn Daisy so quickly and with such vehemence? The answer can be found in a remark made by Mrs. Costello to her nephew: "Of course a man may know everyone--men are welcome to the privilege!" (121)

In this statement, Mrs. Costello shows the difference between the basic social training of men and of women at the time. A man is allowed to meet all types of people, to choose and participate in all types of activities. If he has the ability to reason, he is able to evaluate people on a broader basis than women.

What must women do? They, instead of having a great variety of experiences, receive a simplistic set of rules to conform to or be considered "bad." As they advance in society, the rules change, but the strict conformity to them does not. Because women are trained to conform, they very quickly judge other women (especially those attempting to attain their rank) by their ability to keep the rules, rather than their kindness, generosity, or innocence. Winterbourne, reacting to his aunt's dislike of the Millers, says: "They are very ignorant--very innocent only. Depend upon it they are not bad." (121) Mrs. Costello shows the limits of her ability to judge when she says, "They are hopelessly
vulgar.... Whether or no being hopelessly vulgar is being 'bad' is a question for the metaphysicians. They are bad enough to dislike, at any rate; and for this short life that is quite enough." (121) Again, when Winterbourne discusses any of Daisy's activities with his American hostesses, they respond in generalities. Instead of saying "That was thoughtless," or "She must be lonely," they respond with "What a dreadful girl!" (107) This philosophy of conformity is breaking down, but continues today as an excellent example of a general problem for women: other women. Ultimately, the force of condemnation by women can cause men to break down and condemn the girl, too. This is what happened to Winterbourne, who felt that his condemnation of Daisy was finally a relief. (148)

A second problem of women against women is the immense competition between women. Daisy, who was pretty, young, and ignorant, was having a great deal of fun in a nonconformist manner. Mrs. Walker took it upon herself to mother Daisy, bring her back to the fold, and forgive her so that she could feel like a superior type of mother to this girl. While at first kind in her requests for Daisy to conform, she later takes more stringent action, going out to publicly save Daisy. Daisy, however, shocked at the implications, refuses to be saved, and causes Mrs. Walker's personal triumph to melt in a pool of tears as she commands Winterbourne into the carriage. She demands him to do so, for she needs very badly to save face. Her plan did not work, and, as Winterbourne said, "That was not very clever of you." (133) She tries to regain her position by ordering Winterbourne to forget Daisy, but he refuses.

Mrs. Walker enjoys getting her revenge at her party. When
Mrs. Miller appears without Daisy, Mrs. Walker seems genuinely upset. Yet, even in this state of mind, her ability to compete comes through ironically. "Elle s'affiche," (she's showing off) says Mrs. Walker. (136) Mrs. Walker is simultaneously showing off in her attempt to make any listener at hand believe that, in times of stress, she naturally speaks French. Mrs. Walker triumphs in snubbing Daisy, however, when Daisy and Mr. Giovanelli leave. Although many women would agree that this was the right thing to do under the circumstances, Winterbourne deems it "cruel." (139)

Although through the efforts of Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Costello, Daisy's reputation snowballs, Daisy seems unaware of her situation and so does not feel the need to act. Winterbourne found it "painful to hear so much that was pretty, and undefended and natural assigned to a vulgar place among the categories of disorder." (142)

The women, ironically, do some of their best gossiping at St. Peter's. (142)

Yet, despite Daisy's beauty and naturalness, her nonconformity is not allowed to triumph in terms of the plot. Due to her evening visit to the fever-infested Coloseum and her realization that Winterbourne's opinion of her was not what it had been, she dies. What comment is James making in allowing her to die?

First, the alternatives must be examined. Henry James was more or less a realist who realized that a sudden change of heart and proposal to Daisy on the part of Winterbourne would be extravagantly romantic. Yet, since her situation was deteriorating so badly, it would have been cruel to send her and her new reputation
back to America. Instead, James chooses to be slightly romantic in letting this innocent die young. The touching scene takes place "beneath the cypresses and the thick spring flowers." (151) Giovanelli sprinkles the words proving Daisy's innocence like holy water on her grave. Winterbourne realizes that he should have never broken faith with Daisy in order to achieve peace of mind. (151) The tableau is a pretty one, indeed. Daisy does receive a very tender end, suggestive of that of a young saint in this land of saints. Even the daisies blow in the graveyard—little relics. (151) The idea is that, while Daisy was sick with a physical disease, it was her realization of her rejection by society that really caused her death, a martyr to the gossips. (149)

However, Daisy, unlike most saints, is soon forgotten. Although Winterbourne keeps Daisy on his mind for almost a year, he clears his conscience by telling his aunt that "she had done her [Daisy] an injustice." (152) After this, he returns to Geneva where it is suggested that he is involved with "a very clever foreign lady." (152) In other words, he is involved with a woman who is outwardly conforming but inwardly corrupt, the opposite of Daisy. Society kills and forgets. Daisy, although prettily buried, is forgotten.

Gertrude Wentworth, in The Europeans, is an interesting type of nonconformist because she is one of the few James heroines of this type who achieve any happiness because of unusual behavior. Gertrude changes from a confused, undirected, restless person who explains herself as "sometimes wicked" to a happy, relaxed person who is confident of her behavior because she is loved for it. (364)
Gertrude, however, is not as easy to discuss as Daisy Miller because she is handled in an impressionistic style without great background. Because *The Europeans* is a light, comic novel with many intrigues and subplots, the characters behave in a more plot-oriented fashion and so less of their personalities are seen. Most of the problems are easily solved and the ending is rather cheerful. What, then, is the importance of such a book in this study? Besides the interest generated by Gertrude's personality in such a simple setting, there is a problem presented here which is familiar to many intelligent, easily-bored women: that of security and boredom versus freedom and an uncertain future. Another way to express the comparison is the idea of the "I love what I want you to be" man versus the "I love what you are" man. The author, therefore, would like to discuss the transformation of Gertrude with the help of Felix, and show how the good Mr. Brand would have been all wrong for Gertrude.

From the first time the reader sees Gertrude in comparison with her sweet-voiced, passive, kindly, dumb sister, (221) he realizes that Gertrude is a surprising product of this household, which is wealthy but plain, clean, and stiff-backed in nature. (236) Gertrude, totally misunderstood, is restless, imaginative, sensual in her perceptions, and exotic in her tastes.

Gertrude is first seen as restless, for she can find no pleasing way in which to direct her energy. This is shown when Gertrude, after refusing to go to church with the family, feels that she would like to do something different and interesting:
This agreeable sense of solitude, of having the house to herself, ... always excited Gertrude's imagination .... It always seemed to her that she must do something particular--that she must honor the occasion; and while she roamed about, wondering what she could do, the occasion usually came to an end. (227)

We can also see her lack of direction in her comment to her sister, who says, "...are you very sure you had better not go to church?" (222) Gertrude replies, "I am not very sure of anything!" (223)

She even uses some of her energy to puzzle others, simply because she enjoys understanding what they do not understand. (226) Charlotte, if she had enough perception to judge the situation, would certainly agree with Gertrude's simple statement that such actions are wicked, (226) and never do such a thing.

Gertrude is also more sensual in her observation of that around her, especially nature. She picks lilac sprigs simply for the sniffing, then tosses them aside. (223) She stays home from church simply because "the sky is so blue." (225) She does not bother, as it would seem likely for her family to do, to link nature with God and His works and therefore go to church seeing the day as manifestation of religious doctrine. Others around Gertrude see nature more as a backdrop than something to be consciously admired. Mr. Brand, for instance, says: "I have heard of young ladies staying home for bad weather, but never for good." (225) The same scene that Mr. Brand classifies purely as a "beautiful Sunday stillness," Gertrude sees as "breaking buds, shining distance, the blue sky..." (226)

Gertrude also possesses a good imagination, which is considered a bit awkward in such a God-oriented household. A good
example of this imagination is shown early in the story when Felix
says that he has come to announce his sister: "Gertrude found her-
self trembling again. A Baroness Munster, who sent a brilliant young
man to "announce" her; who was coming, as the Queen of Sheba came
to Solomon ...presented herself to Gertrude's vision with a most
effective unexpectedness." (232) An active imagination was not
appreciated in the Wentworth household because it is a manifestation
of man as creator. A typical response to a similar idea comes when
Felix offers to paint Mr. Wentworth: "Mr. Wentworth looked grave;
he felt awkwardly ...'The Lord made it,' he said. 'I don't think
it is for man to make it over again.'" (268)

Gertrude also seems to have a definite taste for the exotic,
as seen in her choice of Sunday morning literature: Arabian Nights.
(227)

Yet, these qualities, although unappreciated by Gertrude's
circle (with the exception of Robert Acton), (252) are allowed to
develop happily because of the coming of the Baroness and her brother,
Felix. This development comes in several steps: on the part of
Gertrude, there is excited entertainment, awareness of a chance
to use her faculties, acceptance of an alternate way of life, and
acceptance due to that action.

At first, Gertrude sees the Europeans as simply creations
from another world leading marvelous lives. This provides enter-
tainment and instruction for her. She thinks, on first meeting
Felix:

She had never in her life spoken to a foreigner, and
she had often thought it would be delightful to do so.
Here was one who had suddenly been engendered—for her
private use; and such a brilliant, polite smiling one! (229)
This same idea of entertainment and instruction is part of her motivation for requesting a private house for the Europeans. She says of the little guest house: "I am sure the Baroness will make it pretty. It will be very interesting. It will be a place to go to. It will be a foreign house." (252) She adds, "I want to see how they will live. I am sure they will have different hours. She will do all kinds of little things differently. When we go over there it will be like going to Europe." (253) This same curiosity and desire for entertainment is seen when Gertrude urges Charlotte to write a social note simply to see what the Baroness will do in return. (262)

Although these attitudes do not break and change (most are simply compounded upon), the next major idea Gertrude sees is that with the Europeans she can interact in a way that would puzzle or slightly anger members of her own circle. When Felix first relates the story of the Baroness, lightly tossing in French expressions and unfamiliar terms as he speaks, Gertrude is charmed. "...It [the style of narration] seemed ...to convey a certain flattery to herself, a recognition of her wisdom and dignity." (233) Gertrude uses a metaphor which would probably not be accepted in her circle. Felix asks her if the Baroness is not charming, and she replies, "She is very brilliant ...but I can't tell yet. She seems to me like a singer singing an air. You can't tell till the song is done." (243) Felix is delighted. "Ah, the song will never be done,' exclaimed the young man, laughing." (243) Contrast this reaction with one in the family circle when Gertrude makes the apt observation that the Baroness will be interested in Robert Acton. All eyes silently turn to Gertrude as her father asks, "Why do you attribute motives,
Felix enjoys Gertrude for her imagination, sensitivity, and wit, which cause her to cultivate these qualities. Felix tells the Baroness about Gertrude: "...She is very interesting and very different from what she seems. She has never had a chance. She is very brilliant. We will go to Europe and amuse ourselves." (340-1)

Gertrude reaches a third stage when she is able to evaluate her own upbringing, realize that it is not the only acceptable way of seeing life, and accept Felix' philosophy. This acceptance takes an effort on her part, because her core is still filled with Puritan indoctrination, her reason for seeing herself as wicked when she manipulates a situation, however good the result might be.

Felix and Gertrude discuss life during a painting session. He observes that she is different from the rest of the family, whom she has termed "dreary." Her basic personality conflict between upbringing and desire shows in her reply: "To say that one's self is like saying-- by implication at least-- that one is better. I am not better; I am much worse. But they say themselves that I am different. It makes them unhappy." (271)

The discussion of views of life leads Gertrude to suggest that there is a great deal of misery in the world. Felix replies that he has not seen it in America, only in Europe. America is a paradise. (272) Up until this time, Gertrude has pictured happiness in terms of living everywhere, doing exciting things. Felix seeing her home as paradise gives her pause. She then asks a number of questions, countering his answers with Puritan ideas. Fin-
ally, she asks what one should do to be happy, "to give parties, to go to the theatre, to read novels, to keep late hours?" (273)

Felix tells her then that it is a matter of approach rather than activity. Life should be seen as "an opportunity." (273) Gertrude has always been taught to see it as a discipline. (273) To further illustrate his point, he dispels any of her illusions about his glamorous life or great talent, describing himself as "a petty personage." (273) To add to this, he begins to tell her tales of his innocent, humorous adventures in Europe, stories with situations, probably, that would discourage most people. His point of view in telling these stories would probably show that his approach to life kept him from possible despair. (274)

Slowly, Gertrude, when she sees that Felix' approach to life is not wicked and wrong, begins to absorb this approach and use it. When she sees that it would be more wrong to marry Mr. Brand and make them both unhappy than it would be to go against her father's wishes, Gertrude tells Mr. Brand exactly what is on her mind. Where before, she avoided the topic carefully, now, when Mr. Brand asks her to marry, she tells him simply to "forget that." (277) She can now admit to him that she never really opened her mind to him. (277)

Later, when she discovers in one day that Felix is interested in her and Charlotte is interested in Mr. Brand, she does not become upset but rather listens to a plan Felix has for marrying Mr. Brand and Charlotte. "Gertrude's heart began to beat; she was greatly excited; she had never heard anything so interesting proposed to her before." (308) Felix explains that everyone would
be very happy. However, Gertrude is not to the point where she can admit a negative happiness for herself; she must admit a positive happiness for her sister. She cannot be overjoyed at the prospect of ridding herself of Mr. Brand. She must, instead, think how nice it will be for her sister to marry a good man. (308)

With the plan in mind, she once again strongly discourages Mr. Brand while trying to suggest that Charlotte is interested in him: "There is something else you might have that you don't look at—something better than I am. That is a reality!" (312) She then confronts her disciplined sister with her knowledge of Charlotte's secret love for Mr. Brand. She informs the horrified Charlotte that she will tell Mr. Brand unless he is kept away from Gertrude. Charlotte deems her wicked, but "...with this she [Gertrude] walked away, very conscious of what she had done; measuring it and finding a certain joy and a quickened sense of freedom in it." (314)

The innocent success of this plan helps Gertrude finally accept herself. When Felix asks Mr. Wentworth for Gertrude's hand, Mr. Wentworth tells Gertrude, "You have always had a difficult temperament." (372) Gertrude replies, "Why do you call it difficult? It might have been easy, if you had allowed it. You wouldn't let me be natural. I don't know what you wanted to make of me. Mr. Brand was the worst." (372) Gertrude later defends her personality: "I have profited....You wanted to form my character. Well, my character is formed--for my age. I know what I want; I have chosen. I am determined to marry this gentleman." (373) Her confidence and strength comes from Felix' admiration for her unique personality. He says to Mr. Wentworth, "Although you are Gertrude's progenitor I don't believe you know how attractive she is." (369)
By the end of this charming story, every couple in question, (except for Robert Acton and the Baroness), is either married or planning to do so. It is a very Shakespearean "Jack shall have Jill" comic ending, since both Gertrude and Mr. Brand have lovers much more suited for them.

Yet, the story presents an interesting problem a number of women have faced: the problem of the Mr. Brands of the world. Sweet, docile women conform well to the expectations of these men, but the air of the clever woman appeals more to their self-image. A brief time spent with such men will generally bore an intelligent girl to tears, but she finds that men of this type do not let her go easily if she has ever professed to any of their beliefs. In Gertrude's case, leaving was more difficult because her parents liked Mr. Brand.

Gertrude is in rebellion from the first time the reader sees her. The handsome, chubby, "good as gold" (224-5) Mr. Brand is already an inevitability. Charlotte suggests that Mr. Brand might like some cake. "I don't like men who are always eating cake!" complains Gertrude. This suggests a certain lack of a romantic image connected with a man who, as the French say, "sits better at a table than on a horse."

What qualities does the Mr. Brand type possess? He is, first of all, a rank egotist, wanting above all for his lady to agree with him, conform to his standards. When a lady quits doing this, he is concerned that he is distressed and tries to bring her back to normal. Yet, even then, his desires dominate the conversation. Growth or change in a woman scares him, and he will, if permitted,
spend the rest of his days reminding the lady of the idyllic moment when they both agreed that he was right, and urge a return to that time. Mr. Brand is a perfect example.

Mr. Brand shows concern at Gertrude's changing attitudes when he deems her "depressed." (225) According to later information, Gertrude has just gone through a period when she has tried to conform to Mr. Brand's thought and action because he is good and she is wicked. (311) Gertrude wants to honestly discuss her problem: "You told me to tell you about my--my struggles," she says. (226) Mr. Brand replies, "Let us talk about them. I have so many things to say." (226) He does not want to listen to Gertrude. He merely wants to use this opportunity to present his case for wanting to marry her.

True to form, Mr. Brand carries out his second phase of attack after Felix and Gertrude have been enjoying each other's company a few weeks. He tells her that he liked her as she was in the past, and urges a return to that time. He says, "I have known you a long time, and I have loved you as you were." (278) She tells him bluntly that she has changed, that her real personality has emerged, but he says, "...I will leave you, for the time, to yourself. I think you will remember--after a while--some of the things you have forgotten. I think that you will come back to me; I have great faith in that." (278)

The final step, if the woman is lucky, is the realization that the woman has changed. After Gertrude has informed Mr. Brand that he has made her dishonest, that he made her talk "a great deal of nonsense," (311) that no, he does not know her nature nor what
is right for her, Mr. Brand seems to begin to comprehend. His last remark, amazing in its lack of insight, is "Gertrude, Gertrude!... Am I really losing you?" (312) It is difficult for such men to see beyond themselves and their own concerns to the point where they can perceive reality.

Even Mr. Brand's last act, that of wishing to marry Gertrude and Felix, is, in line with his nature, not as unselfish as it seems. Gertrude says, "...he wanted to do something fine....He wanted to have a final moral pleasure....He thought of it a great deal, night and day. He thought it would be beautiful....He felt exalted; he felt sublime. "That's how he likes to feel. It is better for him than if I had listened to him." (377) It is convenient for the sake of the plot that this was Mr. Brand's desire. However, it indicates no likelihood of moral change within him.

Mr. Brand is not an original character. The author has encountered several, and knows of many other women who have as well. The great problem is that there is a great number of men who have varying degrees of Mr. Brand in them, who cannot accept, as Felix can, a relationship in which each partner influences the other, (364) and each is free to develop. Gertrude is saved by an extraordinary man; most women aren't so lucky.

What is James saying about nonconformity in this story? First, he allows a woman to triumph for her utter honesty, her refusal to conform to the standards of a conventionally good but somewhat inflated man, who represents her society. Secondly, he lets an unpretty, honest woman have success while an unpretty, traditionally charming woman fails. If this book can be taken as a progression in his thinking, he has at least raised nonconforming women to
the point where they no longer have to be killed off like little 
rabbits for their ignorant mistakes.

Perhaps it is the woman with the greatest potential for hap-
piness in the most unusual situation who suffers most of the three 
women. Like Gertrude, her main manifestation of her nonconformity 
comes because of her choice for marriage. Unlike Gertrude, her 
marijuana is a terrible failure. Isabel Archer, the suffering woman 
in Portrait of a Lady, receives enough money to make her utterly in-
dependent. With this money, she is supposed to be "soaring far up 
in the blue" for quite a while. Too soon, she losess her freedom 
and she is locked in, miserable. Many see the entire source of 
evil in the story as the manipulation of Isabel by Madame Merle 
and Osmond, "dangerous--like some chemical combination." (225) 
Yet, the problems of Isabel Archer Osmond stem primarily from-- 
Isabel Archer. She, of all people, was a most unfortunate choice 
for the gift of a fortune. The author would like to show why 
this is the case, and explain what in Isabel's nature made her 
the perfect candidate for the unhappiness in the marriage she 
chose.

To show why Isabel is unfit for the power money brings 
her, certain aspects of her background and personality must be 
considered, including her totally unfounded air of superiority 
and confidence, her inability to perceive and judge, her inhu-
manity, her inability to act, and, later, her proud adherance to 
certain ideals of a simpler time in her life. Then, it will be 
shown how these traits helped to lead her into a very bad mar-
riage.
First, it is imperative to see why Isabel's self-confident superiority is largely unfounded, for it is this attitude which at least partly causes her to receive her fortune. Isabel is an unusual person because she has never come up against authority or had her views or behavior questioned in her entire life. Her father had provided no regular home for his children, leaving them primarily to the care of bad nursemaids and governesses. Isabel did not go to public school: on her first day in such a school, Isabel objected to the rules and was never required to return. (32) Almost her entire education, then, was self-supervised and obtained by random reading, art, and travel. (41) While this indeed provided her with information, it gave her several problems; she felt that she must know a great deal, yet she didn't know what she didn't know. This random reading filtering into her young mind made "her thoughts ... a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgement of people speaking with authority." (53) But, she rarely realizes this, for she speaks with such a superior air that other ignorant people think that her opinions sound good. (56)

A second part of her superior attitude stems not from the intellectual, but the emotion, although she cannot really differentiate between the two. Isabel had a wonderfully sheltered, happy childhood. Her father kept all unpleasantness out of her life. (39) This gave her a very peculiar, vicarious reaction to unpleasantness: "She had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest and even of instruction." (39) This attitude toward misfortune increased her feeling
of superiority; never having contended with misfortune other than
in books, she thought that it was "detestable to be afraid or ashamed."
(53) This same lack of contact with misfortune makes her almost in-
human in her attitudes toward the unfortunate. She felt that it
might be nice to be involved in some difficulty "so that she should have
the pleasure of being heroic as the occasion demanded." (54) Why does
she think that she will fare well? Most of her experiences come from
books, which she easily apprehends and analyzes. She thinks life
is like the books, and therefore as easily analyzed. Her connect-
ion between life and simple books can be seen, for example, in that
she wonders if the English will be nice to her, for "they're not
nice ... in novels," (58) in that she wants to know the number of Eng-
lish social classes, supposing it to be about fifty, (58) in that
she tries to classify people as specimens. (64) While this persuit
of pat information amuse exceptional men like Mr. Touchett, she is
not informed of their true reactions, thus continuing her attitude.

Finally, ignorant people saw her as superior, branding each
sister in the family, and choosing her as the intellect because she
liked to read. Even prospective suitors treated her according to
this reputation, (41) strengthening her own convictions about herself,
producing a girl with a "general air of being someone in particular."
(47) It is this, plus her air of having "mysterious purposes-- vast
designs" (76) that cause her to receive the money for carrying out
those designs for the entertainment of her cousin Ralph. (158-9)

However, Isabel enjoyed the luxury of having vague, vast de-
signs when she had little money. She had never proven her ability
to carry out even a small design, however, nor had she ever had to
carefully judge people or situations in order to know how to act. Whenever Isabel tried to analyze or judge, her imagination took over, and she gave it up. (39) As her friend Henrietta says to her: "You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views—- that's your great illusion, my dear." (185) Although Isabel claims to have "a passion for knowledge," (50) a desire to do great things, she has no real plans, no concrete ideas. Most of her life has been spent in passive observation. She has never had to plan or execute an idea for herself. Indeed, after her father's death, she had no idea of the amount of money she was receiving. (35) For all her brilliance, she has never had to discipline herself into active use of it: "...the girl had never attempted to write a book....She had no talent for expression and too little of the consciousness of genius; she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were rather superior." (53)

In a simple, sheltered life, these traits give no problem. However, when Isabel must first make decisions about suitors and then about money, they become critical.

Why, first of all, does she refuse to marry one of two excellent prospects for happiness, Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood? Perhaps the first reason is that of timing. Isabel has just begun to enjoy the delights of Europe and does not want her world narrowed by either marriage. (101, 140) She wants "free exploration of life." (101) Although Goodwood rightly informs her that there is much that a young, unmarried girl must not do in Europe, (141) she sees her superiority as rising above that problem. Yet, the basic reason that Isabel will not consent to either man is that of her pride.
Both men are accomplished and wealthy. Both could offer Isabel many opportunities. Both, although they have at times corrected her, (159, 161) think of her as brilliant and accomplished. (160, 162) She could do almost anything: "You can pick out your climate, the world over," says Warburton in his plea. Yet, Isabel decides that she must do something greater. In her position as Lady Warburton or Mrs. Goodwood, Isabel would not have the chance for acclamation she might have if she did something spectacular on her own. She thinks, that "If she couldn't do such a thing as that /marriage/ then she must do great things, she must do something greater. (138) She tells Goodwood that she doesn't need "a clever man to teach me how to live." (138) She explains to Warburton that she needs to experience life and not separate herself "... from the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer." (118) She finally tells Goodwood that "I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me." (141) She wants to do something marvelous on her own, with, as she says, no parents, no money, no beauty. (141) Several parts of her personality come into play here. First, her untried potential as seen through self-loving eyes make her think that she can cut through convention. Secondly, her inexperience with non-literary emotion makes her think that one cannot experience suffering under everyday circumstances. Finally, her inexperience in acting upon her ideas makes everything in her visions fit into place with dream-like easiness.

It is just after her refusal to both men that Isabel receives
her money. While before, she could dream of great things and resign herself to her lack of money, she now found everything both permissible and possible. Mrs. Touchett explained to her that the rich could get away with more. (187) She is stunned with the idea at first:

...but we shall not now attempt to explain why her new consciousness was at first oppressive. This failure to rise to immediate joy was indeed but brief; the girl presently made up her mind that to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to do, and to be able to do could only be sweet. (180)

Yet, Isabel refuses to exercise her power. She confesses to Ralph, her unknown benefactor, that she is honestly afraid, and wonders if there is not more joy in being powerless. (190)

Isabel finally gets used to her money, has visions about it, sees it as part of her beauty, (190) and yet does nothing amazing. She travels, she associates with Madame Merle, she is introduced to Gilbert Osmond, one man who doesn't fit her set of specimens. It is in Isabel's image of Osmond that we see evidence of her earlier problem: her attempt to judge usually results in conjuring romantic ideas. (39)

Osmond has a very charming nature when he wishes to show it, (239) and, at the insistence of his old lover, Madame Merle, pulls himself out of his solitary, self-centered, complacent life (217) and charms Isabel in order to marry her. He tells her how much he loves his daughter who has been going to school at a convent, yet he neglects to say that he never visited her. (200) He presents his life as one in which he is "content with little." (222) "The events of my life have been absolutely unperceived by anyone save
myself..." he says. (223) Isabel should have looked at Osmond's irritable nature, his comment that he was conformity itself, his observation that she had too many ideas. His life, as he presents it to her, is dry, but Isabel's "imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting." (223) Her imagination builds until she sees him as "a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man, ... holding by the hand a little girl whose bell-like clearness gave a new grace to childhood." (232) She sees him as having a "lonely, studious life in a lovely land; ... an old sorrow that sometimes ached to-day ... a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but had an element of nobleness ... a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated...." (232) She sees him as having a "quaint half-anxious, half helpless fatherhood." (233) Her imagination, although not entirely to blame for her good opinion of him, nevertheless makes her mental image of him much nicer than it should be.

On her part, however, her desire to be seen as brilliant by such an intellectual causes her to profess to certain beliefs not her own: "A part of Isabel's fatigue came from the effort to appear as intelligent as she believed Madame Merle had described her and from the fear (very unusual with her) of exposing -- not her ignorance, but her possible grossness of perception." (221) Isabel would have been annoyed to like something that Osmond, with his superior knowledge, wouldn't accept. (221) "She was very careful therefore as to what she said, as to what she noticed or failed to notice; more careful than she had ever been before." (221)

Because of her pride and effort to be seen as brilliant, Osmond sees Isabel as worthy of possessing, almost "as smooth to his general
need of her as handled ivory to the palm." (254) It could be said that he plans to use Isabel, for although he professes to love her, (259) he tells Madame Merle simply that she is "not disagreeable." (239) He tells Isabel that he has too little to offer her, and therefore would not think of asking for her hand, but "for me you'll always be the most important woman in the world." (258)

His non-proposal, of course, feeds Isabel's ego perfectly. She sees this studious, artistic man as only limited by paucity in pursuing examples of his excellent taste. The marriage-patronage, she decides, will be her mission. She will pull him up out of poverty, make life good for him. She will be an important part of this marriage to this "nonentity," (258) as she calls him. As she reflects later, her "money, a burden that filled her mind with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some more prepared receptacle. What would lighten her own conscience more effectively than to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world?" (351) She said of him that "she would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence." (351)

Osmond and Isabel clearly see their partners as insignificant in the relationship, each a stand for the other's heavy ego. She will marry her favorite charity, and he, since he had wanted to be a duke, will marry someone who had turned down nobility. (255) When these two selfish people enter marriage and lose their illusions, Osmond grows to hate her vulgarity (350) and Isabel begins to seethe at his petty conformity and fabricated tradition. (353) While Osmond is a hateful character, Isabel's lack of ability to judge and desire to feed her ego both in choosing Osmond and defending this choice is as bad as Madame Merle's plan to marry them in the first place. Madame Merle merely introduced and pushed.
Isabel's pride allows her to fall easily.

Although Isabel comes to know sorrow many times over, she tries to do nothing to ease her pain, preferring to be proud and conform with her earlier simplistic creed. She sees the solution to her marriage as no solution:

...the sole source of her mistake had been within herself. There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked and considered and chosen. When a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it—just immensely (oh, with the highest grandeur!) to accept it. (334)

Isabel, because of her pride has ironically raised herself to great tragedy in that she sees herself as the whole decision-maker who will now heroically accept her choice, sort of a Titan. This attitude makes her present a tight but pleasant mask to her concerned friends, preferring to bear alone the mistake that she cannot suggest has been made. She dramatically sees her life as over. (458)

Although Isabel's final confession of unhappiness shows a woman who is beginning to accept herself and mature, her last action in the story shows that her pride is still great. She still wishes to suffer to be heroic. Isabel is offered a chance to escape her unhappiness, which, as she sees it, should last to "the end." (458) Goodwood once again attempts to marry her. He reminds her of all the alternatives possible with her money and position. She turns him away with violence and leaves again for her hated life in Italy. (203) While not proposing Goodwood as a good alternative, the author sees her action of one more instance of the pride that chokes Isabel. She says: "Wasn't all history full of the destruction of precious things? Wasn't it more probable that if one were fine one would suffer?" (458) Isabel, although she has sharpened her
vision, has learned about sorrow, has tasted the cup of experience she only wished to touch, has not yet learned about pride. Her self-consciousness and pride will simply manifest themselves in new ways.

Three American women behaved in an unconventional manner during a very conventional period in American social history. The first, in a typical situation, is too ignorant and self-confident for her social and personal safety, and so dies in a charming manner. The second, in a typical situation, finds an extraordinary man who helps her bloom. The third, given highly atypical conditions she felt she could master, strikes out and condemns herself, in her own eyes, for the rest of her life. What can be said about this progression? James, by the third book, quits showing such deference to the ladies, depicting some, such as countess Gemini, as honestly corrupt, and others, such as his heroine, as ridiculous in her air of superiority. In addition, this time, the woman is allowed to work out her own problems without being killed off or finding a nice man to work them out with her. Isabel has matured to the status of a person rather than merely a somewhat-protected woman. It is a difficult status, but in its own way a far better one than that of the typical female of the time, a purveyor of Victorian morality. James raises almost all his women above this level. They have pride, they make mistakes, they argue, they are unbelievably dumb, they take lovers, they plot, they have much more of a vibrancy than the women of many lesser writers of the period. James did women a great favor by generally broadening their image and power. He allowed his women to go out into the world and live, as humans do.
Footnotes

1. Henry James, "Daisy Miller" in The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Novels (New York: New American Library, 1962), pp. 128-9. (All other references in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from this source and cited in the text.)


6. Henry James, "The Europeans" in Washington Square and The Europeans (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1959), p. 226. (All other references from this section are from this source and cited in the text.)

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