

# Interpretation of Typical Image of Pessimistic Feminism in Henry James' Psychological Realism Novels

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**Abstract:** Psychological realism is a literary phenomenon in the transitional period from traditional realism to anti-traditional modernism. The famous American writer Henry James is a typical representative of psychological realism, and transfers the external events of realism art to the inner world. The pessimistic feminism images in James' novels are divided into different types, given different cultural levels, and a deeper understanding of the growth and maturity of women under different cultural circumstances. Specifically, they are divided into three types. One is cultural women in America, and they also include the naive ignorant type and the free romantic type. Second is cultural women in European also include the elegant temperament type and the declining aristocratic type. Third is Europeanized American women also include virtual phenotype and completely Europeanized type.

**Keywords:** Henry James; Psychological realism; Pessimistic feminism; Interpretation of typical image

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of psychological realism is not only the need for the development of the novel itself, but also the result of psychological influence, which is inextricably linked with psychology. Psychological realism is a literary phenomenon in the transitional period from traditional realism to anti-traditional modernism. On the one hand, it reflects reality and the objective world through the psychology of characters; on the other hand, the description of psychological content is combined with objective reality to pursue the real world and the organic unity of the spiritual world. The famous American writer Henry James is a typical representative of psychological realism. He has made a new attempt on the art of fiction, from the external world to the inner world, and from the objective environment to the subjective spirit. James pays attention to the psychological activities of the characters in the works, transfers the external events of the realist art range to the inner world, and realizes the transformation from realist literary creation to modernist literary creation.

## 2. Cultural Women in America

American cultural women were born in the United States and grew up to develop in Europe, and were influenced by American culture. Women under the influence of American culture burst with infinite enthusiasm. Their distinctive personality is their passionate pursuit of freedom and romance.

### 2.1. Naive Ignorant Type

The heroine Daisy in "Daisy Miller" is a typical representative of innocent nature. "Daisy Miller" is an early work created by Henry James, which has won James an international reputation. Critics have long regarded "Daisy Miller" as expressing Henry James's "international theme". She opposes traditional shackles, constantly undermines inherent laws, chooses a lifestyle according to her own will and freedom, and expresses the new women's desire to break through the old shackles and find freedom.

Daisy has an extraordinary appearance, a bright face, a beautiful nose, bright eyes and white teeth, all intoxicating and enviable, and her elegant dress reveals the "princess charm". Daisy came to Europe

from America and was despised and rejected by Americans living in the upper class of Rome. In the eyes of many people, Daisy is uncultivated, vulgar and frivolous, which humiliates Americans. Daisy eventually contracted malaria and died. She was a victim of tragedy. The novel is not a criticism of Daisy, but a great sympathy for this girl, criticizing the Europeanized American in upper class.

Daisy regards the criticism, even malicious slander, of the people around her as merely "unfriendly", and is confused by the complicated environment and the cold attitude of the people around her. The most ironic thing is that in the whole novel, the only person who knows and appreciates Daisy's innocent nature is precisely Gilvanari, who has damaged her reputation. Daisy has fallen victim to the struggle against unspoken social rules. Gilwanari was deeply moved in front of Daisy's grave, thinking that Daisy was the most beautiful and cutest woman, and of course the simplest and most innocent.

## **2.2. Free Romantic Type**

Freedom and romance are the symbols of American personal spirit, and individualism is the most important value of Americans. Isabel in "The Portrait of a Lady" is a typical representative of the free and romantic type. Such women are independent, love freedom, and their "pilgrimage" to European culture reflects their romantic temperament. With material wealth, Isabel has set foot on the European continent under the influence of culture. She has her own way of behavior, and the American spirit of freedom adds vitality to her life in the European continent.

For Isabel, freedom is the highest value of life, the sum of all the dignities of life, and freedom means a clear understanding of life. The freedom in Isabel's ideal is the individual's freedom to fully display himself and to be the master of his "own system and track". When frustrated and trampled, he always maintained his lofty ideals and clung to the last spiritual fortress. Freedom was sublimated and manifested as a higher form, inner freedom of consciousness.

Isabel is energetic, smart and studious, advocating American-style freedom and independence, and living according to her own wishes; she is also intoxicated with the charm of European culture, full of longing for noble and elegant exotic customs. Because of this, he rejected Lord Warburton and Guttwood's marriage proposal, and instead married Osmond, a freelancer without rich wealth and prominent status. She believes that by combining with someone who has no social identity, she can maintain her independence and find the best way to experience freedom.

## **3. Cultural Women in Europe**

After the vicissitudes of life, the ancient European land exudes irresistible charm. In the novel, the images of European women are elegant, but there are also aristocrats who are declining.

### **3.1. Elegant Temperament Type**

Comparing with the ancient European civilization, the nobility of European women is not inferior to that. The noble lady Vianne of Paris in "The Ambassadors" is a typical representative. James is particularly good at portraying characters and expressing their innermost heart. "The Ambassadors" is one of James' most eye-catching works in his later period, and the author's most satisfying work. The plot is simple and easy to read, using different narrative angles and techniques to create a perfect structure and perfectly present the rich inner world of the characters to readers. James did not directly describe the elegance of Mrs. Vianne, but indirectly described the noble temperament of Mrs. Vianne through the personal experience of Mr. Stritze.

On the other hand, Stritze met Mrs. Vianne in Notre Dame Cathedral, just like a person living in Europe to observe European culture. This woman was covered with a charming veil, and her noble and elegant temperament deeply attracted him. Although Mrs. Vianne is very strange to him, she appreciates her good qualities very much. He sees the beauty and nobility of Mrs. Vianne and regards her as the most perfect woman in the world. He is the most charming and charming woman in his life, one of the educated and most exciting women. With her self-cultivation and temperament, Vianne educated her American boyfriend Chadway, turning him from a vulgar swinger into a gentleman. Mrs. Vianne is a representative of a typical European aristocratic woman. Not only is she noble in temperament, she also has a cultured manner and has a certain internal influence on the people and things around her.

### **3.2. Declining Aristocratic Type**

In James's works, there is also a class of aristocratic women who are fading away. With the loss of economic foundation, the traditional aristocratic temperament cannot be continued. Miss De Mofu in "Madame De Mauves" is a typical representative. Miss De Mofu's attitude towards money and the contrast between her identity and pursuit vividly reflect the declining aristocracy.

"Madame De Mauves" reveals the oppression of women by the patriarchal society and expresses the author's concern about women's living conditions. Miss Yu Feimei is the heroine of "Madame De Mauves", from the middle and upper classes of America. She is a pure and clean American girl. She is deeply influenced by American liberal and democratic ideas. She is a "person from a democratic country on the other side of the Atlantic" and has the opportunity to "read some books with free thoughts". Because of the cultural inferiority complex in the subconscious, he yearns for the European civilization with profound cultural heritage and "dreams of marrying a person with noble rank". Miss Yu Feimei married the French aristocrat Baron De Mofu according to her imaginary aristocratic scale. In fact, the baron was both depraved and carefree, always pursuing sensuality, and the drawer was full of unpaid bills.

Baron De Morford is a typical male chauvinist. He is only interested in Miss Yu Feimei's money and spends all the money on eating, drinking and playing. He believes that "women are not slaves or playthings", like light-colored gloves that can be thrown away if they are soiled. In this unfortunate marriage, Mrs. De Morford has been in a repressed position, becoming cold and silent, losing her vision of the world, and her life is shrouded in a gloomy, pale, mechanical and indifferent atmosphere. The emotional life is It was dark and deserted. Miss De Mofu used the title of nobleman as a bargaining chip in exchange for marriage, completely losing the noble temperament of the noble lady.

## **4. Europeanized American Women**

In Henry James' novels, American women who have lived in Europe for a long time are increasingly influenced by European culture. Some of these women are just mere appearances, and some are completely Europeanized.

### **4.1. Virtual Phenotype**

James is good at portraying the psychology of women in the upper class, drawing pictures of wealthy middle-class ladies. Mrs. Meyer in "The Portrait of a Lady" is an elegant, mature and sophisticated woman who makes readers sad and hateful. Mrs. May violated the moral bottom line and became Osmond's lover. She willingly gave up her body, but never got the promise of marriage, and gave birth to her daughter Passy. Mrs. May has realized this man's profit-seeking nature, and the vain Osmond would never marry her, because he has found a new prey for him, rich Isabel, to please him. The marriage with Isabel brought Osmond a huge wealth and a luxurious life, but the founder of this marriage, Mrs. Meyer, got nothing. As a result, she was completely abandoned by her old lover, disgusted by her daughter, the dissatisfaction and contempt of friends, and the hatred of former admirers.

Women represented by Mrs. Meir are easily confused and dare not adhere to their own values. They can only please men to obtain the meaning of survival. This is the shackles women put on themselves. Mrs. Meyer finally woke up, "What did I get? No husband, no children, no property, no status, no trace of beauty, and never before." Coming to Europe from America, the purpose is to build herself into a "educated person", but her life has turned a corner. She is neither as frank as the new American women nor possesses the qualities of traditional European aristocratic women. It is only the distorted fruit from the collision of European and American culture.

### **4.2. Completely Europeanized Type**

Many American women who have lived in Europe for a long time have accepted European culture and living habits, and the unique characteristics of Americans have disappeared. Redefining my life based on European cultural standards, lacking the most primitive tolerance and universal love. Mrs. Costillo and Mrs. Walker in "Daisy Miller" are typical representatives of Europeanization, complicated and sophisticated, abiding by stereotypes, and believing in dogmatism. The innocent Americans represented by Daisy met the sophisticated and sophisticated Europeans represented by Mrs. Stilo and

Mrs. Walker, and character conflicts naturally arose.

James did not use too much words to describe Mrs. Costillo, but only a few words created a lifelike image of a Europeanized American. Mrs. Costillo has a deep-rooted concept of class system, and her evaluation of Daisy is based entirely on the value scale of European culture. In her eyes, Daisy is frivolous, lacking education, and wearing tasteless, which is a naked prejudice and exclusion. Seeing Miss Daisy's kindness to the servants made me very disgusted, thinking that the Daisy family were low-ranking people and had no status, and were unwilling to approach them.

Mrs. Walker played an important role in this conflict. She is an American who has lived in Europe for a long time and is deeply influenced by its culture. At a party hosted by Mrs. Walker, when Daisy said goodbye to her, "She turned around in front of Miss Daisy and left gracefully", reflecting the hypocritical, indifferent and sophisticated side of the European upper class. The upper class in Europe has strict social etiquette and standard of behavior, and the social status of women is still very low. The estrangement between Mrs. Walker and Daisy was caused by Daisy's failure to observe European women's social etiquette.

## 5. Conclusions

The ideal woman in James's mind is a person with both ability and political integrity, with a woman's independent spirit and traditional values, compatible with the free spirit and moral vitality of America, and the rich experience and wisdom of Europe. James' contradictory view of women comes from two aspects: one is that he is deeply influenced by his father and brother's patriarchal consciousness, showing a preference for traditional women; the other is that it is closely related to his cultural outlook and is the absolute protagonist of James' international theme. The attitude towards women is influenced by cultural views and is reflected in the portrayal of new women. The pessimistic feminism and feminism social culture expressed in James's pen have become a key to the interpretation of James and opened the window of James' literature. The pessimistic feminism images in the novel are divided into different types, given different cultural levels, and a deeper understanding of the growth and maturity of women under different cultural circumstances.

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