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剑桥美国小说新论·25  
(英文影印版)

New Essays on

*The Portrait  
of a Lady*

《贵妇画像》新论

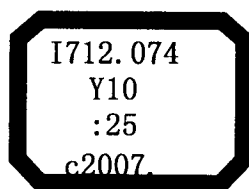
Joel Porte 编



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组稿编辑: 张 冰

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电子邮箱: [fd@pup.pku.edu.cn](mailto:fd@pup.pku.edu.cn)

# 导 读

北京大学英语系教授 陶洁

近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪80年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐



释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枫树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在20世纪30年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志100部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头50年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得不服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

## Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott

University of California, Riverside



## A Note on the Text

Because the 1881 and 1908 (New York Edition) versions of *The Portrait of a Lady* represent two quite distinct texts, and have been so treated in the critical literature, contributors to this volume have chosen to work with the one or the other depending on their own arguments and interests. In each case the text used is identified at the start of the essay, and subsequent references are by chapter. Citations from the original book publication of *Portrait* (1881) are drawn from the only conveniently available reprint, that edited by Oscar Cargill for the New American Library (Signet Classics) in 1963. Citations from the New York Edition text (1908) may most conveniently be found in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Robert D. Bamberg (New York, 1975).

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剑桥  
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Introduction:  
*The Portrait of a Lady*  
 and "Felt Life"

JOEL PORTE

## 1

**A**MONG those novels of the nineteenth century which continue to be read and discussed as models of fictive craft and as major contributions to humanity's comprehension of itself, *The Portrait of a Lady* stands out for the complexity of its chief character, the compelling nature of its story, the density of its range of cultural reference, and the artfulness of its conception and execution. Like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Middlemarch*, it focuses on the question of a woman's destiny and the conditions and consequences of modern marriage. But, like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, *A Modern Instance*, and *The Awakening*, it places those pressing issues in a specifically – indeed, uniquely – American context, in that international context of Americans returning to the Old World which was largely to define the work of Henry James.

Why was the "international theme" so central to James's work in general, and to *Portrait* in particular? For one thing, James considered it a "complex fate" to be an American, by which he meant, to take his phrase literally, that that fate was woven of many strands – European descent (for good or ill, James's world is resolutely Eurocentric), a Puritan background set against a developing libertarian tradition, a kind of self-imposed cultural barrenness, a presumptive innocence or at least detachment from the ills and iniquities of Europe, a sense of oneself as open to new opportunities and modes of self-definition. The list could go on, but a tentative point needs to be made: as distinct from the "provincial" works listed above, James's novels place most of his protagonists in a setting in which putative national characteristics are pro-

gressively tested and modified under the pressures of apparently alien circumstances. It is as if James wished, by way of experiment, to detach the individual strands of that “complex fate” and examine each cultural gene for its nature and influence. Europe was in effect the laboratory setting for his experiment – the matrix out of which these new creatures called Americans had evolved and to which, as to an abandoned and perhaps unrecognized parent, they needed to return for praise, punishment, advice, education, consolation, refreshment, reassurance, and ultimately a sense of their own identity. For to be an American is precisely to be defined by an “other,” by something that has been left behind in the excitement of making oneself over. The return to origins represents the recapturing of a repressed past, the relearning of a language that one did not know one understood. For James, America was Europe in translation; his work amounts to a continual comparing of the two texts.

That work begins in some of the earliest tales and provides the themes for most of the major fiction of James's first period: *Roderick Hudson*, *Daisy Miller*, *The American*, *The Europeans*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*. What distinguishes *Portrait* is that the broad strokes of melodrama and conventional characterization – the hallmarks of James's apprenticeship – have been subtilized and subordinated for the sake of one thing: the portrait of an extraordinary young American woman “affronting her destiny.” *Affronting*, not *confronting*: James's word appears to stress Isabel Archer's defiance, her boldness, her desire to put the world to the test. This, we might say, is the principal mark of Isabel's Emersonian spirit.<sup>1</sup> She seems to say, with the early Emerson, “You think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstance. . . . I – this thought which is called I, – is the mould into which the world is poured like melted wax. The mould is invisible, but the world betrays the shape of the mould. You call it the power of circumstance, but it is the power of me.”<sup>2</sup> Who can resist this self-reliant representative of imperious American femininity? Those who surround her immediately enter her orbit. She winds a noble English lord around her finger; a strong-minded American businessman whose name is synonymous with the very latest method of spinning cotton is

spun in emotional circles by this willful girl; a wealthy expatriate American banker is persuaded to leave her a fortune. How can one fail to admire the power of such virgin excellence and self-possession? No one can, apparently – least of all the sympathetic reader, who cheers Isabel on in her pride and refusal to be dissuaded from her own stern claims and perfect circle. Even Gilbert Osmond, who might strike some as a mere fortune-hunter, knows and appreciates the true American article when he sees it. Would he ever propose to a *merely* flirtatious and rattle-brained American princess like Daisy Miller? It will be a test of his *own* mettle and self-possession to harness so much innocently arrogant energy and turn it to his use.

Isabel, of course, like the elder Emerson of “Fate,” will discover that “we have two things, – the circumstance, and the life. Once we thought, positive power was all. Now we learn, that negative power, or circumstance, is half.”<sup>3</sup> That is both sobering and consoling, for it is not simply that life is swallowed up in circumstance but rather that it is qualified by it, reduced by half but not annihilated. Osmond represents “negative power,” the force of the alien “other” that seems to be “European”; but, as we know, he too is an American – though one who has consented to worship at the altar of convention, propriety, whatever seems to be “aristocratic” and nonvulgar. Such “Osmondism” is also part of the American scene, though Isabel had been protected from it, perhaps by her romantic and free-spirited father. So, we might say, she had to travel to Europe to discover a type of specious aristocrat she could easily have met in America. But James has other fish to fry, for Europe will provide not only the trap for her innocence but also the opportunity for her to repossess her dignity and sense of freedom by identifying with those who have been compromised before her. Eventually Isabel will learn to take “old Rome into her confidence” (New York Edition, Chap. 49), and the city will repay that trust by taking her into *its* confidence, returning a measure of what she has lost. Thus, Isabel will learn the further Emersonian lesson of compensation – that things go by halves indeed, and that nothing can be considered purely evil. It is a question of reciprocity – “Europe” taming her “American” half, “America” finding a way

to recoup its “European” loss by means that Europe itself provides. Why does Isabel need to leave Rome when it will contrive finally to meet her halfway?

Such a traditional humanistic reading of *Portrait*, whereby “America” and “Europe” stand as the metonymic poles of “innocence” and “experience” between which this essentially noble New World everywoman must negotiate her perilous way – a view reinforced by obvious Miltonic echoes in the book suggesting an archetypal “fall” from grace and expulsion from the “garden” at the hands of an egoistic “devil,” leading to entry into an uncertain world of “choice” and the exercise of right reason<sup>4</sup> – such a familiar reading of *Portrait*, while clearly justified, is probably also inadequate. There is still something left over that baffles interpretation. So, for example, although the publication of *Portrait* in 1881 was greeted by a barrage of praise from leading critics – William Dean Howells in *The Century*, W. C. Brownell in *The Nation*, Horace Scudder in *The Atlantic Monthly*, John Hay in *The Tribune* – a persistent negative report also began to be heard. R. H. Hutton, writing in the *Spectator*, remarked of Isabel that “the reader never sees her, or realises what she is, from the beginning of the book to the close. She is the one lady of whom no portrait is given . . . the central figure remains shrouded in mist.”<sup>5</sup> Margaret Oliphant, in *Blackwood's*, agreed, complaining that the book’s title was unjustified, for “of the heroine, upon whom the greatest pains have been expended, and to whom endless space is afforded for the setting forth of her characteristics, we have no portrait.”<sup>6</sup> So, too, *The Atheneum*: “There are, indeed, portraits of ladies enough and clear enough; the only one who is not portrayed so as to make the reader understand her is the heroine.”<sup>7</sup> Even James’s friend John Hay, turning this supposed defect into a virtue, noted that “the interest of the novel comes in great part from the vagueness of our acquaintance with Miss Archer.”<sup>8</sup> And later critics amplified the point. Carl Van Doren, in 1921, spoke of the “never quite penetrable fiber of the heroine.”<sup>9</sup> Quentin Anderson, in 1957, observed astutely that “the clarity, the light and sure touch, of the prose playing about the figure of Isabel only to reveal an obscurity, a

darkness within her lovely presence, has an effect which is among James's greatest achievements."<sup>10</sup>

*Chiaroscuro* – that is surely a principal Jamesian technique, refined from the work of Hawthorne. Isabel is presented initially as a creature of the sunshine whose perception is "clear" (Chap. 2) and who believes that one "should move in a realm of light" and of "happy impulse" (Chap. 6). But she is not, after all, the fair Rowena of Scottian romance; her eyes are grey, not blue, and her hair is "dark, even to blackness" (Chap. 5). Isabel figures her own nature as "garden-like" and therefore thinks of "introspection . . . [as] an exercise in the open air," but she is often reminded of other places, "dusky, pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery" (Chap. 6). She believes that "if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely," but the image itself frightens her. This fine American girl, so hopeful-seeming and expansive, determined to "regard the world as a place of brightness" (Chap. 6), nevertheless finds herself attracted to the equivocal "golden air" of Gilbert Osmond's "early autumn" (Chap. 29). Her imagination goes forward to meet this obscure figure; yet, even as he declares himself, it hangs back, sensing that "there was a last vague space it couldn't cross – a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous and even slightly treacherous." At this point the author admits that his "young lady's spirit was strange," and informs us that she was to cross that tract despite its perilousness (Chap. 29). Isabel Archer – perversely, as it would seem – turns away from the light (as she will do on the last page of the novel) and walks steadily into the dusk.<sup>11</sup>

That last word represents James's figure for what appears to be Isabel's true destiny and desire throughout *Portrait*. Before she consents to marry Osmond, when the "world lay before her" and "she could do whatever she chose," Isabel chooses to walk alone through London in the "early dusk of a November afternoon" and positively enjoys the "dangers," losing "her way almost on purpose, in order to get more sensations" (Chap. 31). That quasi-Gothic indulgence in the pleasures of terror all too innocently prefigures a later scene, in which Isabel returns to London to be with the dying Ralph and feels helpless and anxious. Now she is



glad that Henrietta is there to accompany her, for “the dusky, smoky, far-arching vault of the station, the strange, livid light, the dense, dark, pushing crowd” fills her with “nervous fear”; and she remembers how she enjoyed walking away from Euston station alone “in the winter dusk . . . five years before. She could not have done that to-day, and the incident came before her as the deed of another person” (Chap. 53).

Yes, we note, Isabel has changed, for she has taken the full measure of Osmond’s shadowy world where the lights have been put out “deliberately, almost malignantly,” and the “dusk [which] at first was vague and thin” has deepened and become “impenetrably black” (Chap. 42). But is she entirely different? Will James really permit us to believe that Isabel’s taste for the *crépuscule* had nothing to do with her decision to marry Osmond? In Chapter 42 the author allows his heroine to be “very sure” that the shadows of Osmond’s stifling spirit “were not an emanation from her own mind,” but the reader may be excused for wondering. There is something obscure in the soul of this American woman – though we are assured she was not “a daughter of the Puritans” – that draws her to the dark tracts of experience.<sup>12</sup> Why, otherwise, at the end of the novel, when Caspar Goodwood glares at Isabel “through the dusk” and bestows the “white lightning” of his kiss, does she turn away in terror and feel that when the “darkness returned she was free”? That “certain light” to which, it is suggested in Chapter 6, Isabel “could give herself completely” has now apparently dawned but indeed proves “too formidable to be attractive” (Chap. 6).

If the “straight path” that Isabel discerns after turning away from Caspar and toward the darkness is viewed in Dantean terms, it gives a strangely ironic twist to the opening of the *Inferno*. There the poet finds himself in obscurity (“una selva oscura”), where the “straight path” is unclear (“che la diritta via era smarrita”), and eventually spends a long time working his way up to the light of paradise. But Isabel’s “straight path” will apparently lead her back to Gilbert Osmond’s hell and the obscurity of her own dusky nature. Just fourteen years after the appearance of *Portrait*, Thomas Hardy would produce a final novel dedicated to exploring the treacherous