

THE EMBODIMENT OF PERFECTION TO THE LITERARY WORKMANSHIP ON HENRY JAMES'S THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

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ABSTRACT

This study performs the model of the end product of language artist namely Henry James denoting the perfection of craftsmanship equipped with the figure of a lady that behaves far from mere the sheep on the flock. Henry James in *The Portrait of a Lady* used the exaggeration of the lady's character to heighten the tension of his mission to search perfection that exhibited something as better or worse than it really is. The shadow of valuing the given character that determined to have an odd choice in her life postulated the congruence within incongruence between what the readers expected and the deed of a lady character. The design of this study initiated with the main theme that is the perfection of workmanship comprising of three sub heading first, the centrality of vision; second, the harmony of a studio life; and the last, the landscape of an American literary tradition. The study operates the aesthetical perspective adopted from *Response to Literature* by William J. Grace. The conclusion of this aesthetical perspective depicts the dramatic situation of life in which the lady character prefers to confront the will to perfect instead of the will to power in the arena of modern world where the money generally deemed the God.

INTRODUCTION

The Perfection of workmanship

This analysis perceives the literary work as entity that has promptly exhibited its value. The value broken down in this part dealt with seeing the innocence of Henry James in the search of perfection of his creation as advocated by John Whalen-Bridge

written on the subtitled Political Fiction as Impurity in American Literary Criticism. “Seeing for innocence is a form in which the object of one’s perception is distorted so as to enable to see oneself as innocent.”(Whalen-Bridge, 1998). The beautiful object of human nature as imaginary realm as the paradise of the artist to achieve autarky or self-satisfaction was illustrated in exaggeration not to be meant in vulgar sense but literally as the device to heighten the tension of his mission to search perfection.

The perfection of Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* as an object of investigation regarding to his innocence by generating distinct subject will be partly perceived in its beauty in the medium of the author’s contemplation revealing his solidity specification through the consciousness of the American woman character portraying her felt life. William J. Grace noted on *Response to literature* that the postulation of “beautiful” (Grace, 1978), in the word of James Joyce, the writer of *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* consisted of three characteristics: integrity, harmony, and individuation.

The Portrait of a Lady exhibited an organic unity of woman life story in the late nineteenth century told as a foolish history centered on the single character namely Isabel Archer. The whole elements performed the march of full of instruments as superadded satellites to the American young woman central character like the well-organized big orchestra performance in the stage, in the word of Henry James called solidity specification. The compact arrangement of social reality presented the portrait of an American young woman generation who felt to have a burden possessing the

bourgeois legacy of previous regime that was a portrait of the dead wall of tradition for the women progress in early modern era. The happiness and sorrow about the former story in the post American Civil War atmosphere looked so vivid as the description of the class effort of a certain woman in seeking another ideal that was never concrete compared to the concreteness of the well-arranged imaginative life story in *The Portrait of a Lady*. They were not mere collection of parts that stood without being united with the substances of art but in the medium of aesthetic setting that enable it perform its best beauty of literary perfectness.

The proper proportion and relationships of the parts to one another and to the integrity of the whole work of art was essential for making the harmony of the workmanship. Henry James applied the harmonious scale in *The Portrait of a Lady* by dividing into two scales; first place the center of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness; second the consciousness of the heroine's satellites, especially the male. The unity or oneness of incidents was altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a "subject," certainly of a setting, were necessary to be superadded, altogether in this discussion operated the issue on the centrality of vision. *The Portrait of a Lady* will be sought its peculiarity as a distinct object to reflect the spirit of novelty and exceptional as the landscape of American literary tradition. The proper proportion and relationships of the parts to another will be the vice of the beautiful object in the manner of harmony as being looked from the integrity of the whole work of literary

art, which depicted the harmony of a studio life. The innocence of Henry James in treating the American young woman as the descendant of Eve was through designing a certain woman who was not touched with the court of any authority due to her actions mere liable with the sin of self-esteem. In the sense that the approach of the perspective of morality about the actions of that American young woman in *The Portrait of a Lady* was not in the domain of morality but in the domain of a personal feature that was unrelated to character. (Dillon, 2003) asserted as in: “While self-esteem can be based on personal features that are unrelated to character, and the assessment it involves need not be from a moral point of view.” (Dillon, 2003) Henry James vividly described the American young woman having self-esteem and he had a belief as Aristides who convinced the Athenians to believe the subjective apology in his writing. The quotation exhibited the self-esteem of the American young woman in the perspective of Henry James as follows:

Let me explain. When I say she exaggerates I don't mean it in the vulgar sense-- that she boasts, overstates, gives too fine an account of herself. I mean literally that she pushes the search for perfection too far--that her merits are in themselves overstrained. She's too good, too kind, too clever, too learned, too accomplished, too everything. She's too complete, in a word. I confess to you that she acts on my nerves and that I feel about her a good deal as that intensely human Athenian felt about Aristides the Just. (James, 1975)

Henry James had a great endeavor to imitate the success of Aristide, Greek

Christian author The Apology of Aristides in driving away the Athenian to cultural belief and elegantly proposed the ruler to reform the bad track of traditions. The difference was the apology of Henry James dedicated on the literary devotion through a single character namely Isabel Archer to be the vehicle of Henry James to alter the opinions of American literary tradition within which the story about human nature was much great deal virtues in it. Reading about poor Southern whites and cowboys on the one hand, and gangsters and gamblers on the other was interesting but he advocated reading a human nature much better.

Henry James perhaps wished that the beauty of American lady's mind and spirit was hopefully believed and extant in the mind of the readers. This Classical ambition as the greatest good of intellectual enrichment influenced the mind of Henry James to pursuit the great achievement of literary artist paradise. If the achievement was far away from the hope of public opinion, someone felt contented with acquiring the self-satisfaction or autarky. Culturally Henry James differed to the modern thinking with replacing self-satisfaction or autarky into practicing self-esteem. Henry James created the woman ready to be forgotten in which the will to power as the modern philosophy was replaced with the will to perfect with unlimited hope. The modern thinking beyond the notion of modern determined the choice of Henry James suitable of being placed at the level of a literary ultra-modern in the sense that Henry James thought beyond the philosophy of modernity.

That is to say that the individuality or individuation of the writing of Henry

James in *The Portrait of a Lady* in the perspective of aesthetic outlook seen from the beauty of uniqueness of the ultra-modern literary American tradition was harmless the literary tradition. Henry James retained exposing the uniqueness of literary cultural tradition with moral innocence's principle in exhibiting morality or code of conduct in the cross- cultural perspective in the social arena depicting the foolish history of the late nineteenth century.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Uniqueness of the ultra-modern literary American tradition

1. The centrality of vision

The centrality of vision exposed on the novel as the concrete entity exhibiting its beauty depicting the perfectness of workmanship. The air of reality in *The Portrait of a Lady* presented an architectural stone-corner of fabulist art that was as a kind of the display of the peculiar American lady consciousness. It was ornamented with the elements of the superadded pioneers as the substance to unite the subject-matter becoming concrete entity, in this case, regard to the consciousness of heroine's satellite being merged into the proportion of oneness. The term "element" in the word of Henry James on his preface as follow: "that element is but another name for the more or less close connection of the subject with some mark made on the intelligence, with some sincere experience." Preface on (James, 1975) The felt life by the heroine and the males as her satellites generated the visions of its reality expectedly believed by Europeans

and Americans. The centrality of vision in *The Portrait of a Lady* was an accomplishment of Henry James's notion about the beauty of novel namely "solidity specification" which existed in *The Art of Fiction*, 1884 as a kind of lenses of factual world about human nature in society. Henry James's expression in *The Art of Fiction* quoted here: "One can speak best from one's own taste, and I may therefore venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel". *The Portrait of a Lady* yielded an extant social and cultural civilization in the late nineteenth century human creature, which enlightened them in the province of Henry James's innocence in denoting a completed consciousness having connected the visions largely with moral images as given in the citation from the preface of the novel here:

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connection than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. The question comes back thus; obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to "grow" with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or weakly, the projected morality. (James, 1975) Henry James reminded the readers to be more patience in judging the superiority of heroine until she had unfolded her consciousness to get an impression of life. He convinced the readers not to give prejudgment before exploring the whole story in order to get satisfaction in perceiving the vision of liberty

in an American young lady as narrated in the novel: "Isabel was stoutly determined not to be hollow. If one should wait with the right patience one would find some happy work to one's hand."(James, 1975) (Volume I:71)

The sublime soul of the American lady might invite debate as revealed in the novel: "the visions I have just spoken of were mixed with other debates." The consciousness of literary thinker on Henry James toward the American menu, which was devoted to the world of business compared to Europeans who were still devoting to the world of ideas and perceptions, was altered with the consciousness of an American young woman who accomplished her liberty to seek the great knowledge. Isabel Archer's satellites, which devoted to the world of business was her previous suitor namely Caspar Goodwood, the owner of Goodwood mill's patent in America depicted as the portrait of American modern man criticized by Gilbert Osmond, American dilettante as the narrated in the novel as follows:

The whole American world was in a conspiracy to make you so. But you resisted, you've something about you that saved you. And yet you're so modern, so modern; the most modern man we know! We shall always be delighted to see you again." (James, 1975), (Vol. 2:309) S. Gorley Putt commented in the book titled Henry James, as the proof of Henry James's uneasiness toward the energies of Americans, which were spent in prosperity of physical achievement under the flag of economic power as their pursuit of happiness by neglecting the tradition of intellectual society as myriad supreme of civilized modern life as asserted here:

This dissatisfaction with the American mental menu was acknowledged time and again through his life, and never more acutely than it was accompanied by a feeling of guilt at his apparent ingratitude of response to the country of his birth and the people who were, after all, his comrades and compatriots. (Putt, 1985)

The solitary of Henry James and his regret toward the empty apology from the native land did not make him scattered his ambition and vision to give his best effort to the literary tradition in American type. The treasurer of a synthetic understanding of great knowledge and great liberty produced a solid vision. The compact vision of *The Portrait of a Lady* yielded the heroine having uniqueness or individuation committing to be the liberty of a choice and moral responsibilities in the beauty of her soul that might make anyone especially the men uneasy to her bent habits. The garden as the American myth to be the new land of the earth paradise retained to be lovely mastered by the heroine even she had been reminded to flee from that cage that was the cage of American spirit and mind. The innocence of Henry James was solidly envisioned in the consciousness of the American lady and the consciousness of her satellites particularly for the characters of men.

Her nature had, in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one's spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of

roses. But she was often reminded that there were other gardens in the world than those of her remarkable soul, and that there were moreover a great many places which were not gardens at all--only dusky pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery. (James, 1975), (Vol. 1:72)The morality of Henry James was extraordinary subtlest that could not be easily detected as told by Joseph Warren Beach here; “And it derives partly too from the fact that the moral values of James are not at once recognized in the street.” For this research the researcher had found the centrality of Henry James’ vision in the novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* as the great endeavor of Henry James to apology his native land through the piety of character in the sphere of man-made American woman reality. That is why his way of thinking and feeling represented true America, and represented in a measure the whole ultra-modern, a radical world that had been formerly cited. Henry James narrated on the novel: “Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty.”(James, 1975), (Vol. 1:322)

The *Portrait of a Lady* portrayed the subject matter or the life story, which orbited the uniqueness of excessive vision of a marginal American lady to have a burden to study the human nature with the lack of sophistication of cosmopolitan. “The solidity specification” or concreteness of the subject matter was center on the sublime soul of the American young lady to be the revelation of Henry James’s vision in propounding the possible future potentiality of unique woman character. The spirit and mind of American woman character preferred to choose its destiny being a guardian of

moral image born not to be as a daughter of Puritan but incarnation of classical tradition, which longed for the search of personal struggle to self-enlightenment from innocence, through temptation, and achieving virtue; according to Socrates virtue is knowledge. The strong character of Isabel Archer to value prominent person not in possessing the power from economic success but the gentleman having character and wit in his mind and in his talk as mentioned here:

When she had thought of individual eminence she had thought of it on the basis of character and wit--of what one might like in a gentleman's mind and in his talk. She herself was a character--she couldn't help being aware of that; and hitherto her visions of a completed consciousness had connected themselves largely with moral images. (James, 1975), (Vol. 1:143)

2. The harmony of the studio life

A personal feature of American young woman in the hand of Henry James was an articulation of harmonious arrangement of subtlest substance producing effect of image to the readers about the beauty of the collection of material arrangement in which one to another performed its uniqueness portraying a harmonious studio of life. The concept of beauty in *The Portrait of a Lady* pictured the consciousness of the heroine toward the ideal beauty melted in her soul being the American garden of the world commonly said to be the revelation of Henry James's innocence. William J. Grace, *Response to Literature*, Fordham University asserted the aesthetical perspective on the

harmonious element as one of the criteria of beauty of literary field as in:

Most literary works of art examples of an art of conflict-the short story, the novel, the epic, the play; in these you cannot find the simple harmonies with which you may too easily and exclusively associate the beautiful – Therefore, you cannot have an art of conflict without presenting the evil, the untrue, the ugly. (Grace, 1978)

Henry James exhibited the image of a natural beauty in the beholder of a simple genuine American young lady which superficially offered the great energy to the inexperience to cultivate the beauty of Roman past unless the mystification of power on an eminent person highly attributed as the first gentleman in Europe. The possessing a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man as the requirement of the lady was perfectly arranged in the degree of the literary subtlest enrichment using the minimal device as described in the preface of the novel here: “the question here was that of producing the maximum of intensity with the minimum of strain.” Preface on (James, 1975) The postulation of Henry James’s creation particularly the incident of the heroin consciousness in line with the object, subject, and contact of the beautiful entity was part of the elements of heroine satellite to intensify the coherence of an image of studio life. The image of Mr. Gilbert Osmond in the dictum of author as the critic offering superstition about the decay of ancient Roman civilization which left a lonely studio of life as if telling the happiness and sorrow of the past that still echoed its fame in the modern era. The magnate of Italy as the representative of a studious life in the word of

Henry James as a lonely but lovely land became the contemplation to yield the greater effect by the coming of the American young woman mingling in the complexity of Italian's atmosphere beheld as object of her admiration about the old events in Florence. Ironically, she entered into the studio and played herself as the subject of the drama of life moreover Henry James wore Florence, Italia as the battle field of showing the war between the ripe American modern life represented by Isabel Archer having no tradition against the old American dilettante played by Gilbert Osmond who was found of tradition. Henry James's creation on the concept of American aristocrat formulae in the early modern fall into two different classes-effort that were the American young generation escaping the tradition and the old American generation devoting the old tradition. To the young was better to choose the combination of great liberty and great knowledge; and to the old preferred to have a dream in mastery of property and high prosperity. The atmosphere of Roman legacy in Florence, Italia denoted on this illustration:

. . . those of a rich association; of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land; of an old sorrow that sometimes ached to-day; of a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but that had an element of nobleness; of a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated together that the career appeared to stretch beneath it in the disposed vistas and with the ranges of steps and terraces and fountains of a formal Italian garden--allowing only for arid places freshened by the natural dews of a quaint half-anxious, half-helpless

fatherhood. (James, 1975) (Vol. 1:400)

The way of Henry James propounded the beautiful atmosphere distinct to that of Romanticism point of view, which clearly devoted to the nature. The garden of American lady was not performed in the ideal places of nature like romanticism, on the contrary this novel escape from the genteel tradition. The alteration of condition from the enlightenment to ultra-modern thinking to be the impact of Darwin, Marx, Comte, Spencer, and others advancing a scientific view of human beings influenced the notion of religious life particularly in literary writings. The Gilded Age and the emergence of social and science invention such as the successful Atlantic Cable in 1866, Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, the invention of telephone in 1876 and manufacturing the automobile with the inter-combustion engine in 1880's identified the death of the American dream. The condition was complicated with declension of the order of the older religious view melted during two hundred years in American thought.

The Portrait of a Lady depicted the distinctive formula as previously said "I'm not the daughter of Puritan" waking up the readers that his formula referred to traditions beyond the ordinary literary culture in that period and the narration of this novel said "she had a system and an orbit of her own." That is to say that the orbit of Henry James referred to the ideas to compile the scattered values of the past especially in literary cultural tradition of the Roman literary basic root which was altered into subject analysis. This proof entered in the novel: "From the Roman past to Isabel Archer's

future was a long stride, but her imagination had taken it in a single flight and now hovered in slow circles over the nearer and richer field.” (James, 1975) (Vol. 1:415)
The Americans belonged to the most grossly superstitious, the same thing happened to the Roman Empire as cited here: “The Roman was by nature a very superstitious person.” <http://www.roman-empire.net/religion/religion.html>.

In his apology Henry James appeared on *The Art of Fiction*, which revealed as in: “The old superstition about fiction being 'wicked' has doubtless died out in England; but the spirit of it lingers in a certain oblique regard directed toward any story which does not more or less admit that it is only a joke.” (Abram, Kathryn, and Johnson, Roy, 2000-2001)

The superstition of Henry James of course differed to that of Romans. The Romans had a belief that objects, or living being could possess special properties like stones, trees, springs, caves, lakes, swamps, mountains - even animals and furniture and were deemed to be hosts to spirits (*numina*). While Henry James, on the contrary, put the spirit of the American young woman generation as a great energy to yield a fabulist art that was better than that of the coarse-minded of southern people of America, the Bass reliefs, Gothic Cathedral and other finest arts.

Henry James created the unique character namely Isabel Archer, the American young lady described as a woman having a unique perception in judging the value of eminence person. She preferred to choose the widower with his innocent daughter in

the state of poverty but possessing wit in his mind and talk instead of the artless commercial person having no system. She better denied a proposal of the British peer instead of being ceased her liberty and extinguished her cultivation of great knowledge of life.

The beauty of a studio life in the contemplation of Henry James looks as vivid as the vividness of the Indonesian moral consciousness against the corruption of Indonesian legal institutions nowadays, appropriately in the early November 2009. Henry James portrayed the man-made human character for the better future prospect of the American woman character in the close quarter of nineteenth century. While the Indonesian consciousness regarding to the criminalization of KPK (Corruption Watch Commission) was the portrait of primitive demand in light with the cynical view of the simple genuine grass roots to the concreteness of handling over the social justice in the land of Indonesia particularly in the domain of a corruptive officer culture.

3. The landscape of an American literary tradition

The purity of Henry James's mind to bestir to commit to his literary tradition by putting the subject matter of life and art on the single departure brought him to synthesize the consciousness of as an artist and social creature as well. The tradition of Henry James in probing the deepest reaches of the psychological and moral nature of human beings formed the peculiar landscape that brought the attitude as a kind of innocent child who created an extraordinary exhibition penetrating the unlimited

imaginary elements. On one hand, Henry James provided the innovative and a great power of the American young woman to sail the liberty and freedom to experience the world artistically narrated to depict the landscape of local color of interior American life spirit with its garden-like culture and nobleness of outline. The revelation was in Florence, Italy presenting promise as a paradise of finding the knowledge of life, the fame and decay of Roman life. The other hand, Henry James operated the ambitious feminine nature with unlimited hope ready to experience to the garden, which served the forbidden fruit of life that would spoil to those who lived in ignorance and stupidity. This provocation was an impression through the thorough reading in the given novel as cited here:

The air was almost solemnly still, and the large expanse of the landscape, with its gardenlike culture and nobleness of outline, its teeming valley and delicately- fretted hills, its peculiarly human-looking touches of habitation, lay there in splendid harmony and classic grace. . . . "I shall certainly come back," she returned, "in spite of what you say about its being bad to live in Italy. What was that you said about one's natural mission? I wonder if I should forsake my natural mission if I were to settle in Florence." In this story Henry James propounded the conception of an American woman mission as stated: "A woman's natural mission is to be where she's most appreciated." (James, 1975) (Vol. 2:380)

From the citation suggested, that Henry James' conception had served as a

beacon of hope of literary tradition not only for Americans but echoed endlessly around the world. Yet Henry James remained to give balance on the action of the character by criticizing that the garden-like culture within with the character possessed not only hurt the character herself but also another characters. That is to say, that Henry James in his innocence had shot the double bullets. First, he obtained the perfectness in dealing with life and art as literary tradition as mentioned by Ezra Pound in *The Norton Anthology of American literature* in third edition/volume 2 as in:

Twain, James, and Howells together brought to fulfillment native trends in the realistic portrayal of the landscape and social surfaces, brought to perfection the vernacular style, and explored and exploited the literary possibilities of the interior life. (Pound, 1985) Secondly, Henry James denoted the American spirit and mind possessing quality as a certain garden-culture to be admitted as conceit to show the superiority as the addiction of innocence to reach the high extreme achievement to be the most powerful nation in the world, on the contrary the actions were often guided by emotion and instinct at best. The narration of the novel following exposed the evidence to it about which the American woman character acted with her own way equipped with “the system and an orbit of her own.” (James, 1975), (Vol. 1:144)

Her nature had, in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to

the recesses of one's spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses. But she was often reminded that there were other gardens in the world than those of her remarkable soul, and that there were moreover a great many places which were not gardens at all--only dusky pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery.

(James, 1975), (Vol. 1:72)

The landscape of American literary tradition in the novel *The Portrait of a Lady* suggests the perfectness of Henry James to exhibit the reality represented the American color that can be similar to no one. This gives proof his apology to the young literary generation not to think of optimism and pessimism in catching the color of life as told in *The Art of Fiction* here “Don't think too much about optimism and pessimism; try and catch the color of life itself.” But nothing to lose and do as the best the rational creature but not to be ignorance and stupidity in the pursuit wisdom as the best virtue of knowledge.

Literature is an art in particular which reflects a distinct object, a distinct point of view as the criteria of individuation or individuality. It means that *The Portrait of a Lady* had presented the criterion of individuation or uniqueness shown on the actions on the feminine nature of an American young woman having the spirit of achieving the unlimited hope by empowering her greatest good will to the will to perfect. Gail Hamilton (Mary Dodge) wrote a letter published in 1901 and said that Henry James had a way of surprising that is highly amusing. She was in a position to call attention to Henry James's treatment of women as she said: “His women, if they are wicked or

foolish, have their own way of being so. They are not the block-women handed down by tradition, . . . “The uniqueness of woman in Henry James also denoted the admiration of M. Sainte-Beuve’s conception about women in literary work as he expressed on *Literary Reviews and Essays by Henry James* edited by (Mordell, 1957) in page 77 as follows:

- a. Be deep appreciation of the characteristics of women.
- b. Takes women as they come, neither ideally beautiful nor ideally gifted, full of foibles, and disenchantments and incompleteness, and places his faculties at their service to act upon society; waits upon them, interpret them exhibited them, repeats their faint accents a lauder key.
- c. The extent and the limitation of his conception of the feminine nature by saying that he deals only with as established in society, and that he uses the word society in its artificial and modern sense of good

CONCLUSION

The embodiment of perfection to the literary workmanship is as the media to express of a life felt by a lady’s character in a tangible or visible form consisting of the confrontation between the vision of real self and ideal self that yielded the woman character ready to be forgotten in the eyes of Henry James’s aesthetic vision. The perfection of the lady character prefers to confront the will to perfect instead of the will

to power in the arena of modern world where the money is generally deemed the God.

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