

# Otherness' Different Literary Approaches and Human Shapes in Henry James' Writings

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**Abstract**— *The concept of otherness is related to various social realities in its different perceptions. Across disciplines, it is linked to many social phenomena, resulting from people's categorization into Us and Them or Self and Other. That social view sometimes deprives people of their sense of togetherness. Regarding otherness social consideration, its various approaches and their impacts are explored. In James' writings, such as Daisy Miller, The American and The Portrait of a Lady, the transatlantic writer represents the other, considering various criteria such as those related to the physical and social environment and people's individual experience. Those aspects let us figure out two characters of the other in his works. James first links people's categorization to spatial and social realities. The latter make evident dissimilarities in terms of ways, manners and customs. He then portrays the other evolving in the same social circle but representing different features and ideologies resulting from his experience.*

**Keywords**— *Otherness, milieu, social space, worldview, character.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous are the perceptions people have of their fellows. In everyday life, individuals are indexed, taking into consideration different criteria. Those aspects of social differentiation put a barrier between people, making dissimilarities the main characteristics of definite individuals. That social regard shapes the other. Otherness stands for the features of distinct individuals. The concept of otherness is widely regarded because of its different perceptions and representations. The other is portrayed in fields of thought such as sociology, philosophy, and literature, to list some. Its various approaches reflect the social regards of people seen as different.

Defined as the mirror of society, the variety of shapes of the other in the literary field, particularly in James' writings, is the concern in this work. In his transatlantic writings, especially in *Daisy Miller*, *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, James pictures different aspects of otherness taking Europeans and American people as prototypes. Before emphasizing James' portrayal of the other, the work will focus on the multidisciplinary approach to the notion of otherness. Its human shapes and the social views in James' writing will be afterwards the centre of interest.

## II. OTHERNESS: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND DYNAMIC NOTION

Even if otherness is unanimously seen as the mark of dissimilarity, of the distinct, it varies in definitions and

perceptions according to social circumstances, fields and also the context it is portrayed. Its various social regards require a review aiming to make explicit some of its representations. The view of people as different has dynamic perceptions depending on the fields, epochs and social characteristics. Its various regards instantiate the diverse conceptions people have of differences. While considering otherness the main concern in post-colonial studies, Franz Fanon defines it, emphasizing dissimilarities as characteristics of the other. For him, "*the other is the "not me" he is the Other*" (Al-Saidi, 2014: 95). For Fanon, otherness can be seen as the outer, whoever is different from a definite I. As an aspect of individual differentiation, every distinct person can be categorized as the other.

In "Representation de l'Autre" (BELLE Isle: 1994), Isabel Kaine portrays the other focusing attention on his distinctiveness in terms of acts. For her, dissimilarities in acts shape the consideration of people as separate. From her point of view, he is the one who does not do things in the same way as I. Therefore, one can regard him as an individual who experiences disparate circumstances so that he reacts differently when exposed to the same situations.

The other's feature is also defined in some works according to social belonging. Belongingness not only characterizes the individual regarded as different but also influences people's ideas of his self. Such an aspect corresponds to how people seen as dissimilar are pictured in Gothic literature. In "Evolution of Otherness in Gothic Literature" (Jin H: 2017), Jin H shows how unfamiliarity with an individual's ways directs people's view of him/herself. In such a case, the effect of differences transcends categorization; dissimilarity becomes a threat.

Consequently, every individual's act and deed becomes menacing toward people evolving into another circle—that social perception results in phenomena such as exclusion, discrimination and bullying. The latter experiences are because people mature in different milieus. In Jin H's "Representation of Otherness", he defines it and then shows how the others' features shape the individual's social consideration. He also highlights the social impact of such a construct.

From Jin H's point of view, otherness is an essential concept in Gothic literature, which usually represents how one group often views another. For him, the concept refers to any person or anything perceived by the in-group as not belonging, as threatening, or different in some fundamental way. In literary works, representations of "otherness" are always used

to express writers' or the whole society's concern about certain things or phenomena, usually things that could not be understood or controlled.

Even if Jin H points out differentiation as the cause of social situations without precizing their nature, in "Self-other" (Sibley: 2009), Sibley affirms the social impacts of people's distinction, particularly the way the opposite sides it establishes, reveal the origin of groups state of relationships, especially their social division. The social division into self and other consists of attributing positive values to the self. The latter word is, according to Cambridge Dictionary, "*who a person is, including the qualities such as personality and ability that make one person different from another.*" (Cambridge, 2022). At that same moment, otherness stands for the devoidance of values, ways and the pejorative.

In his definition, Sibley also mentions the dynamic aspect of otherness in the example of human geography's new approaches. For him, group tensions and cleavages have been examined in terms similar to those now used to describe self-other dualisms. However, in recent works in human geography, racialized minorities, the mentally ill, and the physically disabled have all been represented as othered groups.

In the same line of ideas, many facets appear as features of people considered different. The other is so seen as the personification of any contrasts to the self. Those features attributed to people because of dissimilarities shape their identity and deprive them of values fundamental to human beings. In contrast to the self, "*the Other by definition lacks identity, propriety, purity, literality. In this sense he can be described as the foreign: the one who does not belong to a group, does not speak a given language, does not have the same customs; he is the unfamiliar, uncanny, unauthorized, inappropriate, and the improper.*" (Al-Saidi, 2014:95)

That definition of otherness compared with the self requires exemplifying such conditions pictured as the impact of categorization between us and them or self and other. From Clio Presvelou and Robert Stretchen's (1998) points of view, the dialectical approach shapes the binary opposition between familiarity and strangeness, equating acceptance and rejection. André Padoux *et al.* (1987), inspired by the case of the Indian society, regard self and other in terms of "Purity and Auspiciousness" versus "impurity and Inauspiciousness". In any case, no matter the expressions or denomination, the other is the embodiment of negative features.

The multidisciplinary aspect of the concept of otherness makes the variety of its definitions which, in turn, shapes its dynamic. In other works, the essence of that otherness stands for different facets which characterize the social being. In its conceptualization by Ivy Panda (2019), various criteria are considered. For Panda, otherness is the quality or condition of being different. In this world, people always come up with sets of differences based on skin colour, nationality, and even sexuality. These are the factors we, as individuals, use to categorize ourselves as 'us' separated from 'them' or simply 'the other'. Referring to Panda's words, many aspects found people's categorization such as phenotype characteristics,

citizenship and gender. Even if those aspects are dependent on circumstances, they put a divided line between people.

Besides, although the view of the other as an individual who evolves in a different milieu, space or has some particular physical characteristics still holds, otherness is also distinguished according to some different attributes. In "Itineraire Anthropologique" (1987), Marc Augé considers that dissimilarity is not just a matter of group, race and belongingness. It can, however, be related to people's level of identification. Otherwise, people can identify their ways and views with individuals who are neither linked by the same space nor social belonging. That reality directs Augé's answer as far as the figure of the other is concerned. For him, the two others (the farby one and the nearby one) make one.

The farby one is culturally shaped. In other words, his distinctiveness resides in the fact that he evolves in different cultural frames. Seen as the underground rivers which run through people's lives and relationships, giving them messages which shape their perceptions, attributions, judgements and ideas (Lebaron: 2003), cultural realities make dissimilarity evident. For Augé, the nearby one is physically close but, at specific points, reveals contrasting views, attitudes and ways.

Across disciplines, the other has a wide range of perceptions. Even if its diverse conceptions imply people's distinct features, otherness' shapes vary according to the criteria regarded. Henry James characterizes the other by considering different parameters in his transatlantic works, taking Europeans and American people as prototypes. His views of the social environment impact how people will be regarded.

### III. THE OTHER: A PERSONIFIED FIGURE OF THE SOCIAL AND SPATIAL FEATURES

In his transatlantic works, through European and American characters, James pictures his different protagonists in relationships regarding various parameters. Those aspects considered in his contrast, characterization, or even portrayal are shells that individuals, as social beings, can identify themselves or can be identified through. Such conditions make their categorization as others or them. The various others pictured have different features which let perceive the social environment influence the individual's social development. While shaping people socially, the milieu inculcates values which make their distinctiveness.

In works such as *Daisy Miller* (1878), *The American* (1877) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), the geographical space can be seen as an evident sign of dissimilarity. While portraying both sides of the Atlantic, James first exposes the influence of space on people's social development. James points out the physical surrounding as an obvious sign of differences. In his literary depiction, he shows its social impact, meaning how circumstances occurring in a given place affect people's social regard. Otherwise, the ways geographies make histories which in turn become an object of categorization. Europe and America and their different characteristics at given periods are among the mould of otherness in James' works.

The features of Europe and America pictured in James' works are remarkable in the protagonists' ways, mentalities and perceptions. James portrays the American society during the Gilded Age: a period characterized by gross materialism. The Gilded Age is distinguished by a noticeable economic explosion nicknamed the Gospel of Wealth, a transformation of the economy accompanied by technology, government development and a change in social behaviour.

At the same time, American people were enjoying that change in every social field; Europeans, on their side, experienced an epoch characterized by the development of art and music. Europe was the centre of high culture. It owed its fame and attractiveness to architecture. These periods' characteristics were not without consequences on people's interrelations because of the mentality they made people the embodiment. That atmosphere reflects in people's social considerations.

On the American side, Daisy and Newman are the typical characters epitomizing the surroundings' features. In Daisy's way, the high regard for wealth in the American society is foreshadowed. She not only considers the new social scale wealth helps her reach in America but also regards it as a passport in every social environment, particularly the European one. Her belief in privileges wealth allows her, directs her ways in the European's society. First, as the dress reform was among the benefits of the social changes, particularly on women's side, Daisy paid particular attention to her appearance. She takes the liberty to dress splendidly well.

The appearance is not Miss Miller's only preoccupation; she manifests freedom in terms of acts. American Gilded Age offered other privileges to women. Apart from the dress reform, they gain visibility through evening outings and bicycling activities. Such conditions in America influence Daisy's attitude in Europe. She thinks it is her right there to go wherever she intends. On their first meeting, Daisy visits the Chateau de Chillon in Winterbourne's company. She also had no misperception about walking around with Giovanelli and attending ceremonies in his company.

Seen as the reflection of the milieu since Daisy left America, where such ways are social realities. At the moment, her habits are those of a typical American young lady during the Gilded Age; she is eyed up differently in Europe. Winterbourne and Europeans' various impressions while considering her ways instance such a belief. On their first meeting, he forms many ideas regarding the girl while analyzing her beauty and manners. Although he is not well acquainted with her, he bases on the perceptions people have of young American girls but also considers her reactions in situations compared to that of a typical European lady. Thus Europe and America help him in such a portrayal of Daisy: "He thought it very possible that Master Randolph's sister was a coquette (...) He was inclined to think Miss Daisy Miller was a flirt—a pretty American flirt. (...) she was very unsophisticated; she was only a pretty American flirt (...) "She is completely uncultivated," Winterbourne went on. (Daisy Miller: 243- 247)

While being a product of the American Gilded Age, in the eyes of Winterbourne, Daisy's attitudes stand for vulgarity,

inconduite and impropriety. The realities in America, which are the traits of the era she witnesses, found the perception of Daisy as the other. First, the distinct milieus and their characteristics let us consider differences related to manners and mentalities, particularly the expectations from a girl of her age. Referring to the last mentioned aspect, Daisy owes many attributes, especially pejorative ones, to her status as an American girl. Most of the time, her condition, as other, is pointed out while magnifying European young ladies. Each of her ways considered in her categorization stand for typical American characteristics. As a consequence, Miss Miller also found her view of otherness. In different comments, she distances herself from Europeans, particularly girls, as far as manners and social perceptions are concerned, as is the case in her following observation while discussing with Winterbourne "I don't see why I should change my habit for them" (Daisy Miller: 281)

Besides, Daisy's social background does not just lead to her categorization; her family's ways are also eyed up according to the American social circle. While acknowledging to have socially distanced herself from their circle, Mrs Costello takes the liberty to judge their ways. For her: "They are very common, they are that sort of Americans that one does one's duty by not, not accepting" (Daisy Miller: 250). Further, she adds: "They are hopelessly vulgar" (Daisy Miller: 265). The Miller family's regard for their courier was not also favourable to them. The latter relation reflects American social stratification. In James' portrayal of their social system, people's condition as employers and employees is not regarded. Such a social construct constitutes another ground for categorization in the European circle.

They are bad enough to dislike, at any rate, and for this short life that is quite enough" (...)

They treat the courier like a familiar friend-like a gentleman. I shouldn't wonder if he dines with them. Very likely they have never seen a man with such good manners, such fine clothes, so like a gentleman. He probably corresponds to the young lady's idea of a Count. He sits with them in the garden, in the evening. (Daisy Miller: 250-251)

Therefore, in the novella *Daisy Miller*, the various characteristics which serve James in his picture of otherness stand for the social and environmental features. At the same time, the Miller family behaves according to the American lifestyle; their ways inspire commonality and vulgarity. Such regard Europeans have of them influences their social conditions in Europe. Therefore, any time Daisy is accused of *inconduite*, her mother's responsibility is indexed.

Furthermore, in *An International Episode*, the portrayal of Bessie Alden can be seen as a way, for James, to confirm the idea according to which people's view of otherness is, firstly, directed by the distinct milieu in time and space. While picturing the situations Bessie Alden experiences in Europe, James emphasizes the importance people bestow on her American background. That criteria of differentiation not only incites people, particularly Europeans, to get ideas but also influences their behavior toward her. Lady Lambeth, the

prototype of Europeans, bases on her ideas of young American ladies to judge her ways:

The Duchess, (...) "Lambeth says he has seen so much of you", she presently began.

"He has been to see us very often-- he has been very kind", said Bessie Alden.

"I dare say you are used to that. I am told there is a great deal of that in America" said the Duchess.

"A great deal of kindness?" the young girl inquired, smiling.

"Is that what you call it? I know you have different expressions".

"We certainly don't always understand each other "Said Mrs Westgate (...)

"I am speaking of the young men calling so much upon the young ladies, the Duchess explained. (International Episode: 397)

Referring to the Duchess' ideas, individuals' acts and deeds are mostly linked to people's perceptions of a definite milieu. Such an opinion, as in the example with Lady Lambeth, influences the regard of individuals who evolve in distinct spaces. In her case, Lady Lambeth need not be in contact with Bessie, her own idea of American people directs her relation with the young lady.

Besides, the very influence of the social environment features in people's view of the other is also conveyed through the character of Mrs Westgate. While deploring the conditions people face in foreign places because of dissimilarities, Kitty Westgate names some social characteristics which can shape people's ideas of otherness. To welcome her guests, Lord Lambeth and Percy Beaumont, in the American circle, she underlines the different aspects of the other related to the physical and social space "*You must take us as we come- with all our imperfections on our head, of course we haven't your country life, and your old ruins, and your leisure class, and all that*" (International Episode: 346)

In addition, James also portrays Newman, another personified aspect of nineteenth-century America. The different attributes Christopher owes the social milieu in time and space shape Europeans' regard for him. Newman as well as Daisy are products of the American Gilded age. A period which characteristics are not unnoticed in their ways. Newman's high consideration of his social status and itinerary contrasts with Europeans' sense of success. James' mention of Newman's aspirations and beliefs paints an American prototype. He feels eager to let know his ways toward success. He sees his itinerary from rags to riches as a form of motivation. Although, at the time, his situation inspires pride, Europeans, particularly the Bellegarde family, regard it as a shame. The American view of success, nobility and destiny directs The Bellegarde, mostly Urbain and The Marquis's ideas of him. Far from its view in America, his commercial attributes are what Newman owes rejection, discrimination and even betrayal. Such characteristics are mostly used to express people's social rejection in the case of the Duchess's justification of her disapproval of his marriage with Claire. For the Marquise, Newman's professional penchant is not

favorable to him. As nobles, they cannot concile themselves to a commercial person.

Apart from the features typical to a given social space, James shows the ways national characteristics put a distance. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, "*the national character stands for the general personality characteristics attributed to the people of a nation* (APA: 2022). In his works, through characters' choices in given situations, James highlights the way people's regard and interaction with the other are directed by a given nation's attributes. As an example, when the Lord fails to persuade Isabel to marry him, he first refers to his status as Englishman as an entrave. "*I am afraid it's my being an Englishman that makes you hesitate*" (Portrait of A lady:127)

The influence of the milieu on people's views and choices is the idea James conveys through Warburton's affirmation. Thus, while moulding individuals, the social environment directs their possible course of action. That view, the environment helps shape, can be the object of negative perceptions of people resulting in discrimination and rejection. Caspar Goodwood's impression of Englishmen is the perfect illustration. When Isabel associates him with the Lord because they are wooing the same girl, he denies any possible link because of his status as an Englishman. "*That does not make him my companion. Oh those people; they are not of my humanity, I don't care what becomes of them (...)* Besides, he's an Englishman (...). Oh those people 're not of my humanity and I don't care what becomes of them" (Portrait of a Lady: 180).

Based on various social features, James shows how social and environmental features influence people's regard and opinion. At the moment, Europe and America are through different epochs, people from each side regard social characteristics as means to shape an idea of the other. A figure whose social environment characteristics inspire categorization, which is an open gate to rejection and discrimination. Next to such a portrayal of otherness, James alerts us that dissimilarity is not only the impact of distinct social spaces; people can be from the same social milieu and differ in attitudes, worldviews and mentality.

#### IV. DISTINCTIVENESS: AN INDIVIDUAL CONSTRUCT

James first portrays the other as an individual who evolves in a distinct milieu and is surrounded by different realities, starting from the space and its various features. Then, he pictures that other as a human being whose distinct facets are not linked to any of those characteristics. James, therefore, foreshadows the dynamic perception of otherness. He thus personifies the possible dissimilarities, which are neither aspects related to a given space or social entity. Such cases direct his various portrayal of people's apprehension of otherness or even their categorization as other.

In James' various works, distinct characteristics can be the product of experience. Despite sharing the same milieu, people can also be exposed to situations that direct their different tastes and worldviews. Such a possibility is what James conveys through Merle's description of some features people do not at all owe a definite milieu. They are the result

of one's experience. For Merle, those characteristics of the nearby other are perceptible in different ways. From her point of view, they constitute the self. To have Isabel grasp her idea of personal character and how it can erect a barrier between people, Serena Merle puts it into the following words.

When you've lived as long as I, you'll see that that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances (...) One's self – for other people – is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garment, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these are all expressive. (Portrait of a Lady: 174-175)

Through Serena's words, the nearby other results from the individual's experience, which shapes ideologies, tastes and perceptions that make the difference between people from the same group. Such an individual construct is painted through the character of Isabel Archer. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel's ways, manners, ideologies and choices inspire foreignness. Compared to her sisters, she values her independence and self-reliance. In her circle, she owes her label of being written in a foreign tongue to her choices and lifestyles.

Isabel represents different characteristics in terms of thought and perceptions. Through her particular attributes, James pictures a different figure of otherness, the one whose manners and ways put a distance. Miss Archer's free and independent mind stems from the situations James depicts, starting from her relationship with her parents. While portraying Isabel, James makes a process that helps understand the young lady's ways. She was given a sense of freedom and initiative Mead characterizes the "I". (Mead: 2007)

In her socialization process, Isabel has learned to regard life as a matter of choice. She lives without her mother, who died in her early years. Her father, on his side, adopts a free way of educating Isabel. For Mr Archer, children should be open to realities. The fact that Isabel is motherless does not make him a guardian. Mr Archer could travel and let her in the care of a maid for months. That way of living voids Isabel from the ordinary course of social integration. That stage of the individual's life is mostly the one children spend in a family circle, learning to fit into social standards. Isabel's experience living in hotels, in different countries and most of the time without her parents' guidance justifies her social approach. Thus, in her case, she develops ways according to experiences she has living with maids and people she comes across during her pilgrimages.

Another influential fact in her character is that Isabel did not attend a school like children of her age. Her self-education reflects in her ways. Before being an educative frame, school is a social one. Miss Archer's self-education frees her mind in some way. At the moment, Isabel evolves in an environment of books. She is allowed to discover by herself. Through such a picture of Isabel's life, James shows the evidence of the individual's ability to act for himself and depart from most

social perceptions. The ideological construct she comes to build shapes her foreignness in her circle.

The nearby other James portrays in the character of Isabel Archer, meaning an individual whose ways and manners inspire more foreignness is in some way Marc Augé's idea when he perceives otherness as a matter of identification. An idea that his contact with some African people illustrates. In his ways, manners, worldviews and beliefs, he identifies himself more to his African interlocutors than his neighbours, sister-in-law or colleagues. In various situations, they appear closer than people bound by their physical surroundings.

The young Lady Bellegarde is another character James pictures to reflect that the sense of physical proximity is not always an agent of the individual's self-identification. While talking about her conception of companionship, the Young Marquise expresses her perception of togetherness. The Bellegarde's social rules and lifestyle impose relations based on social position criteria. A social construction they define in terms "name for name" and "fortune for fortune. Despite such a belief, the Young Marquise develops her sense of personal choice as far as people she gets along with are concerned. From her standpoint, she considers social relations referring to her impression of people. Her self-description tells enough about her perception of the stimulus of relations compared to her social circle:

I don't care a pin for my pedigree; I want to belong to my time (...) a child of the age! (...) I like clever people, wherever they come from, and I take my amusement wherever I find it. I don't pout at the Empire. (...) "Strong people" (...) –les gens forts-- were in her opinion equal, all over the World. (American: 144)

Apart from the individual's experience and self-perception, which are the agent of categorization, James also portrays the nearby others characterized by particular traits, especially those related to his physical health. In his portrayal of Ralph Touchett, he shows how people's regard as different can be determined by their health condition. In the circle Ralph evolves, his lung illness seems a barrier to many opportunities in terms of social dealings. Despite being well-read, he cannot pursue his professional career since his lung problem is seen as a weakness. The professional field is not the only social domain where his is unable to practice. As far as his love affair is concerned, Young Touchett departs himself from the circle of people bound to enjoy a love alliance, justifying such consideration by her health condition. For young Touchett: "*people in an advanced stage of pulmonary disorder should not marry at all*" (Portrait of a Lady: 203).

In his different portrayal of the other, Henry James pictures people linked by the physical environment. However, the latter are separated by a great gulf regarding social experience, ideologies and perceptions. From his view also, categorization is not always related to people's ways and views, physical characteristics appear in most situations as an agent of social categorization or the individual's self-exclusion.

V. CONCLUSION

In its various conceptions, otherness is people's social differentiation regarding aspects such as belongingness, national origin and phenotype characteristics. Social categorization is not only seen as a way to put barriers between people since it implies the classification into US versus Them. It also gives rise to most social phenomena, such as discrimination, rejection and stereotyping. While exposing the realities on both sides of the Atlantic, in his transatlantic works, James reflects how the characteristics of the milieu in time and space shape people's ideologies and ways. Through the characters of Daisy and Christopher Newman, he personifies the possible other subjected to exclusion, discrimination, rejection and stereotyping because of his particular social features.

However, through characterization, James also highlights the fact that the other is not only about people distinct in terms of milieu; otherness can be a member of a given group whose social experience shapes different views, ideologies and social regard. James alerts us by the way that in the same milieu, people undergo categorization.

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