

**The Deceptive Dress in *The Portrait of a Lady*:
Decoding the Reflexive Self of Henry James's American Girl**

左惠連 Huilian Zuo

Abstract

The tension between clothes as revealing and clothes as concealing of identity runs through Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*; therefore, this essay focuses on the transformation of color in Isabel's dress, mainly black and white, arguing that the change of color points actually to the manners and morals popular in that era. In addition, this paper attempts to decode the symbolic code of dress, paying special attention to how it is bound with the spiritual growth of the heroine, initially her adventures in the marriage market, then her attempt to remove her status anxiety and finally her success in gaining independence. Such an approach will enable us to examine the novels of Henry James from a new perspective, reflected in the drawing attention to the commodification of women and their fight against commodification through the choice of their dress color.

Keywords: deceptive dress, *The Portrait of a Lady*, the reflexive self, American girl