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Research Question: Analysis of the reasons of the collapse of the protagonists in Henry James' "Daisy Miller" and "The Portrait of a Lady"

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ABSTRACT:

Henry James, with not only his realistic manner but also with his feministic point of view, is a well-known writer of 19th century. He combines the themes *realism* and *feminism* in two of his works: “Daisy Miller” and “The Portrait of a Lady”. In both novels, one of the major themes is “the cultural differences of New World-Old World” which is investigated as the main reason of the collapse of the protagonists. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to analyze how the clashing values of America and Europe, in regard to the protagonists’ perception of independence, lead the way to their collapse.

The ideas of the protagonist, Daisy Miller, an innocent American lady, greatly conflict with the European values, while Isabel Archer, the protagonist of the Portrait of a Lady, is also a young American woman who struggles with the conflicts she faces during her visits to Europe. The affairs of the protagonists are drawn firstly through a denial process which is entailed from the American-European clash, then through a phase in which the protagonists become the concern for the society.

Therefore in this paper, the collapse of Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer is analyzed through their “being new in Europe”, “becoming gossip in town”, “denying the requirements of European culture”, “acting independent” and their inevitable tragic end arising from the “clash between the Old and the New World”.

With these investigations, it is beyond dispute that the cultural differences would affect the choices of the young ladies. As a consequence of their choosing independence over being suitable for the society, reflected with Henry James’ feministic approach, they face various conflicts and problems. So this work, in a chronological sequence, proves how the choices are affected by different cultural values and how these decisions bring protagonists’ self-destruction.

(298 words)

I. INTRODUCTION:

“It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe.” – Henry James

As a consequence of being an American-born writer, who became a British citizen, and was named as one of the novelists of trans-Atlantic literature, Henry James presents us highly detailed descriptions of places, events and inner and outer conflicts which the protagonists go through. Henry James takes *this superstitious valuation of Europe* as a subject for many of his works, two of which are *Daisy Miller* and *the Portrait of a Lady*.

The term “New World” was first used by a Spanish scholar d'Anghiera, after the discovery of America. Although this term has been used to refer to the newly found land mass for almost 100 years, its meaning as a cultural indicator has gradually evolved to emphasize the differences between New World (America), and Old World (Europe). Though America was discovered by Europeans and inhabited by them, this continent that could be labelled as the “child of Europe” has developed a culture that is fairly different than that of Europe's. With people adopting different life philosophies and different geographic conditions, it is indeed possible to label America as “new” in every aspect. Therefore, the statement could be reversed: *The complex fate of being a European involves guarding against a superstitious “valuation of” America.* (Rinehart)

“The *Portrait of a Lady*” and “*Daisy Miller*” both deal with the journeys of young American girls (*Daisy Miller* and *Isabel Archer*) to Europe. Both girls aiming to *affront their destinies* in a completely different atmosphere try to get accustomed to European traditions and strive to adapt to their new environments. The narration of these journeys emphasizes the differences between the American society and the European Society and points out the never-ending incompatibilities between The Old and The New. While the New World represents the freethinking and assertive people, the Old World is the representation of settled traditions, devotion to strict values that conceal the underlying corruption.

The apparent gap between the Old and the New World is strictly shown through conversations, thoughts and conducts of the protagonists. Henry James, employing a third person, unbiased narration, enables reader to observe and analyze both the cultural and social differences of the figuratively opposite sides of the world.

Stuck amidst the clash of two cultures, Daisy Miler denies becoming an advocator of what she actually does not believe, while Isabel Archer is portrayed as an independent young lady who refuses to obey the requirements of Europe. Presented around Henry James' Feminist Approach and Jamesian realism, protagonists' approach to marriage, attitudes towards the rules of European Society, unchanging manners towards the customs, and denials, show the main problem which is Girls' need for "independence" and society's contempt towards this quality. After settling in Europe both Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer fall into a denial process so that they resist the societal requirements of their new environments. Gradually becoming the gossip in town with their inconsiderate behaviours, they try to live by their own customs and thus they become a grave concern to the society and as a consequence of their wrong choices they cause their own destructions. Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer, two representatives of the assertive New World in a corrupted Old World become the victims of the Old World-New World Clash.

In guidance of all the issues of culture and independence, this paper will analyze the journeys of two American women to Europe in consideration with Girls' novelty in the society, their denial processes, their gossip producing existence in town, and their choices that lead them to self-destruction in reference to the research topic:

Analysis of the reasons of the collapse of the protagonists in Henry James' "Daisy Miller" and "The Portrait of a Lady".

II. NEW IN EUROPE:

Since the protagonists of “The Portrait of a Lady” and “Daisy Miller” are both young American girls who travel to Europe, it would be beneficial to juxtapose the reasons that lead them to the decision to travel, as well as adaptation processes and their unfitting nature to European society. They were both raised according to the American culture, which was the reason why they tried to live by the American rules on European land and experienced many problems. Before delving into the reasons and the after-effects of their choices, it is necessary to outline their first acquaintances to the almost queer and idiosyncratic culture of European society.

The opening scene of Daisy Miller employs a conversation between Daisy, her little brother and Mr. Winterbourne. Through this conversation reader is informed that the Miller Family is new in Geneva and heading up to Italy. While she discovers the values and traditions of European society, she builds her own life in guidance of her personal philosophies. For Daisy being new in a society means being overt to the public eye. Since she is always under the observation of her society, she is obligated to be careful of her behaviours. However, instead of being careful in her behaviours, she gives more importance to her look.

Like Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer travels to Europe to find her own identity. She undergoes an “adapting process” in which she deals with many problems in adjusting herself to the requirements of European society. The customs she is raised by and her independent inclination becomes obstacles blocking her way to adopt the values of her new environment. She observes and grows by the manners of his father; thus she sees life through her father’s perspective:

“Even when her father had left his daughters for three months at Neufchatel with a French bonne ... she had been neither frightened nor ashamed... Her father had a large way of looking at life...” (Portrait, 41)

Only after Isabel Archer comes to England, she can realize that European society, itself, is far different from the descriptions she has read in books. She also understands that living in a foreign

country requires her to make efforts to imitate the prevalent way of living and thus being new in town she delves into a deep search of knowledge “*She questioned him immensely about England, about the British constitution, the English character, the state of politics, the manners and customs of the royal family, the peculiarities of the aristocracy, the way of living and thinking of his neighbours.*” (*Portrait*, 59) She thinks that being new in society should not be an obstacle for her in her adapting process.

For both Isabel and Daisy being new in society brings many difficulties and obstacles to deal with. They become obligated to choose between their American values and adaptation to England. In parallel, they both want to combine old and new world but this choice makes them struggle with the adamant traditions of Europe resisting any sense of independence in women. New in Europe, both girls with their choices initiate series of actions that will set the foundation for the novels.

III. DENIAL PROCESS

‘Denial involves blocking external events from awareness.’

~ C. George Boeree

Denial could mean refusing to acknowledge the reality when the reality disturbs one and it can also be considered as a *defense mechanism*. (Dr. Sanity) After their journeys to Europe, both Isabel and Daisy go through denial stages so that they develop a defense mechanism that enables them to ignore their problems that arise when adjusting to the new society.

Being new in town can only last for a while and with passing time Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer start to see that their mentality is incompatible with the European way of thinking. It is beyond dispute that both protagonists have their own ideals, demeanours and attitudes which are apparently shaped by their own cultures. Their history’s projections make them uncultivated and heedless from a European perspective. Eventually this causes society to label them as ‘inappropriate’ but characters ignore labels to preserve their independence and they start to deny the reality of the forming negative public opinion about them.

Stubbornness of Daisy Miller entails many troubles like her rejection from the society, and this causes her not to yield but instead act more repugnantly. Throughout the novel, she is characterized as a hedonist person who does everything she likes without thinking about the consequences. During her stay in the hotel, she receives guests at late hours. Although she knows that this is a speculative behaviour about a lady’s integrity, she does not get bothered by the possible consequences of her actions. Mr. Winterbourne, who acts as an observer of Miss Miller throughout the novella, initially considers Daisy Miller just as a naive, uncultivated, nice girl but after Daisy’s behavior, he reconsiders his thoughts about this seemingly naive girl. “*And then he came back to the question whether this was, in fact, a nice girl.*”(Daisy, 57). With increasing number of warnings Daisy Miller receives, she starts to deny the rules which she is forced to obey. In her denial stage she acts as if the European traditions and moral laws do not apply to her instead she becomes the opponent of traditions. Knowing that she is not a European youth, she finds it easier not to belong and be free. “*I, thank goodness, am not a young lady of this country. I don't see why I should change my habits for THEM.*” (Daisy, 68). One of the milestones of her

denial stage is her relationships with various men in town. The numerous warnings that come from her acquaintances do not apply to Daisy because she believes that she does not do anything wrong. Hence, when she is warned about the fact that it is inconvenient to take a walk at 11 pm, she still denies the requirements and she responds: *"Gracious me! I don't do anything improper."* (Daisy, 53)

Isabel Archer also tries to understand the requirements of England, where she meets new traditions, rules and attitudes. She questions these requirements because they contradict with her own opinions. While she is talking with her cousin and their neighbour, Lord Warburton, at late night, she is disappointed by the warning of her aunt:

"-- Girls here -in decent houses- don't sit alone with the gentlemen late at night."
(Portrait, 69)

The denial process starts for Isabel with the recognition of her alienation from European way of thinking.

In order to fit the requirements of England, she needs to change her opinions, ignore her own culture and modify herself into this new culture. Instead she finds an easier way and she starts to deny everything needs to be done according to the European culture. She starts to deny the rules, the society, and the attitudes. That's why she wants to be in her own land, in Albany. Although she wants to live by her own way, the guidance of her environment limits her actions.

*"-- You can't stay alone with the gentlemen. You are not at your blest Albany, my dear.
-- 'I wish I were,' Isabel said."* (Portrait, 68)

Herewith, both the protagonists find themselves in a denial process. Firstly, regardless of the outer environment their minds deny the change that they have experienced but as the warnings make them aware of the situations they use denial as a defense mechanism. Hence, this denial frees them from responsibility but also hastens their tragic ends.

IV. GOSSIP IN TOWN:

“America and Europe stand as the metonymic poles of ‘innocence’ and ‘experience’ between which this essentially noble New World, every woman must negotiate her perilous way.”(Porte)

It is inevitable to avoid gossip, especially if one is a foreigner with a free thinking spirit and in order to avoid gossip one should be careful and reason before her actions. But Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer act in a way that their flagrant mistakes make them the *gossip in town*. However for the society, it is not only their inconvenient behaviours which make them improper, but also their so called banality and “common” characteristics.

In Daisy Miller’s Europe travel, her father does not accompany her and being away from the father means being away from obligations. Due to the strict line drawn among being American and Europe, Daisy Miller’s every act violating this line, becomes a concern for the society of Geneva. Daisy’s carelessness and stubbornness fastens her transformation to become the society’s sole subject of gossip. Without doubt she becomes the *gossip* in town because she ignores each and every warning, and she does not even try to fit in the rules. With both direct warnings made to her and gossip circulating behind her back, her inconvenience and unreasonable nature becomes apparent. Mr. Winterbourne, who is extremely worried about the situation of Daisy, warns Daisy Miller many times. After many conversations made with Daisy, Mr. Winterbourne admits that he has never seen this much talkative girl in his whole life. Although Daisy acts very congenial and friendly to Mr. Winterbourne, it is in fact rather uncommon for a young lady to speak with a gentleman. *“In Geneva a young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely occurring conditions.” (Daisy, 12)* Daisy continued her inconvenient acts without heeding to Mr. Winterbourne’s first euphemistic warnings *“I think you have made a mistake” (Daisy, 56)* than rather direct and blunt ones *“When you deal with natives you must go by the custom of the place. Flirting is a purely American custom; it does not exist here.”(Daisy, 69)* Also Mrs. Walker, who is a friend of Daisy Miller’s mother, is concerned about the situation of Daisy Miller. Her tries to make Daisy understand that the society will talk about her behaviours that are unfitting. *“It may be*

enchanting, dear child, but it is not the custom here, you are old enough to be more reasonable. You are old enough, dear Miss Miller, to be talked about." (Daisy, 59-60)

Apart from the warnings, speculations occur. Mrs. Costello, Mr. Winterbourne's aunt, instructs her nephew about not to continue seeing Daisy. "*You had better not meddle with little American girls that are uncultivated,* (Daisy, 27). The rumours, gossip and speculations continue as Daisy ignores every warning and in parties, in hotel and in daily trips everyone talks about Daisy and her acts: "*Flirting with any man she could pick up; sitting in corners with mysterious Italians; dancing all the evening with the same partners; receiving visits at eleven o'clock*" (Daisy, 69)

Isabel Archer is also a victim of the conflicting cultures. Her reputation reaches England before her and on a telegram her aunt sends to Europe, she is described as a "quite independent" girl. Although this initially "just independent" girl poses no concern for the society, as she manifests her inclination to free behaviour, the gossip and speculations start. Firstly after she stays late night with the companionship of her cousin and Lord Warburton, she faces with a warning that she should not be with men after certain hours. But society, with no regard to guiding her, starts to talk behind Isabel.

In a two week time, she greets an expatriate from America, who endlessly insists for Isabel to marry him, while their interactions with Lord Warburton make him fall in love with her. Ironically while she reads the letter of the American expatriate's marriage proposal, she gets proposed by Lord Warburton in hand of marriage. Her popularity among young gentlemen and her long private walks with Lord Warburton make the somehow jealous community gossip about and slander her. In no time Isabel's Aunt's remarks made about her elder sister seem to be made towards Isabel "*Your sister must be a great gossip. Is she accustomed to staying out so many hours?*" (Portrait, 37)

Overall, considering the time that both novels are set, being gossiped about, can cause a young girl's reputation along with her name. Although their popularity among young gentlemen causes gossip, gossip causes noble gentlemen to shun both Isabel and Daisy. For their case words become detrimental.

V. CHOICES LEAD TO DESTRUCTION:

Every choice has its consequences. While some of them are considered as good, some result in bad circumstances. In *Daisy Miller* and *the Portrait of a Lady*, the decisions of the protagonists lead them to self-destruction. Before delving into the collapse of the protagonists, it is required to analyse their choices and effects of them.

Despite all warnings, Daisy Miller chooses to flirt with any man she could pick up; she chooses to stay late with different companies and receive visits at eleven o'clock at night. Also she walks with two men at once and takes no notice of what people think; also walking with Mr. Giovanelli to Pincio at night, she neglects the fact that she could get the fever.

"'Alone, my dear - at this hour?' I don't think it is safe, my dear,' 'You'll get the fever, as sure as you live.'" (*Daisy*, 52).

Just like she ignores each and every warning, she still prefers to ignore this one, as well. Although caused by her juvenile mind, her unconcerned manner towards taking any measure to prevent any kind of illness leads her to be inflicted with deadly fever. To society's belief, if a person stays out at night, he/she will eventually get a deadly fever, which is what exactly Daisy Miller does. Therefore, Henry James gives a simple societal message through the destruction of young Daisy Miller, as well.

Just like Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer's choices cause her destruction. She chooses to turn the Lord's proposal down based on the notion that she can live on her own with no need for an opposite-sex to lead her. Also changing her mind she marries Gilbert Osmond who explicitly tells Isabel that he does not have anything to offer to her. She also chooses not to leave Gilbert Osmond even after she shares an unforgettable kiss and plans to run away with Casper Goodwood. Her late realization of the fact that she needs to shoulder her responsibilities leads her to understand that she cannot leave everything behind. After she learns that Gilbert Osmond cheats on her, she becomes well aware of the consequences of her decisions that lead her to be the wife of this adulterous man. Her introspective moments make her consider whether it would

be different if her aunt has not come to Albany to persuade her to visit Europe. “*She was wondering whether if her aunt had not come that day in Albany she would have married Caspar Goodwood.*” (*Portrait*, 481) She admits the fact that her own decisions are the reasons of her despair. Therefore, her own choices lead the collapse of the protagonist.

For both girls the fun of the juvenile teen years ends quickly and their inconsideration to rules and devotion to “independence” end up with their making decisions that they will regret. Shortly they choose to be companion to wrong people, they go to the wrong places in wrong times and they cause their own miseries and destruction in a rather young age.

VI. HENRY JAMES' APPROACH TO FEMALE INDEPENDENCE (FEMINISM):

In *Daisy Miller* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James presents us with two female protagonists who struggle to create their own livings in Europe. Recounting two women's pursuit for goals brings feministic interpretations that could be explained through the explanation of Henry James' common themes Female Independence and Feminism. Feminism in most basic sense symbolizes a woman's independence and liberation from the patriarchal way of thinking. Female Independence in these novels is indicated as the ability to make one's own decisions with no consideration to the requirements of European society. When the theme of independence merges with the female protagonists, Henry James' approach to feminism and female independence find their meanings.

Daisy Miller is reflected as an independent young lady, who decides for herself and does not let anyone interfere with her decisions. It is also necessary to underline the fact that she is never disappointed with her decisions, even though they cause problems, or they put her in inconvenient situations. With her own words: *"I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me, or to interfere with anything I do."* (*Daisy*, 56) she indicates that she exists on her own, and does not require any companionship for survival. Her independence and rebellion is a reflection of Henry James' feminism.

The Portrait of a Lady is simply a novel of Feminism. Isabel Archer is reflected as an independent, self-standing and strong character who admits that she does not need a society or a person from other sex to maintain her own way of living. When she is addressed as 'a candidate for adoption', she responds in a harsh manner indicating that she is a wise woman and not a puppet of others. Her own saying *"I'm very fond of my liberty."* (*Portrait*, 30) summarizes her world conception indicating that, though unlabelled, she is a devoted feminist. *"She held that a woman ought to be able to live to herself... - and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without - a person of another sex."* (*Portrait*, 57) Her contradicting choices to reject Lord Warburton's proposal in excuse that she does not wish to marry anyone but accept the proposal

of Gilbert Osmond who is poor and inadequate as a husband also shows her feministic tendencies. She chooses Osmond over Lord Warburton because she wants to protect her independence. So in order not to be controlled by a powerful husband she prefers having not-so-qualified life standards with a man who cannot control her.

Though the theme of feminism and independence can be tackled in much further scope, a general analysis leads us to conclude that these themes indeed create the backbones of James' characters. Without the feminist motivation neither Daisy nor Isabel would be able to resist the strict societal requirements and go by their own ways. The tragic ends of our independent characters hint at James' perspective on female independence indicating that he believes that a woman of that age cannot survive on her own.

VII. CONCLUSION:

The analyses lead us to conclude that 19th century women who witness the differences of the Old and New World experience an internal transformation and a kind of awakening about their sexual identities and rights. Our characters Isabel and Daisy symbolize two examples of this type of women.

Firstly, their journey starts with their being new in Europe. Just like Daisy and Isabel, the process of getting adapted would eventually slow down due to one's *being new* to an environment. Therefore, *denying*, instead of taking responsibilities, speeds the process of destruction. The reckless conducts of protagonists provide a basis for their *becoming the gossip* in town. They try to live their American culture in Europe and they act *independently*, hence they make *decisions* that they will regret afterwards.

In the light of these analyses of each section and the acquired conclusions, it could be stated that they learn the concepts of female independence from the liberated notions of America but they fail to make adamant Europe adapt these concepts. In a way they are feeble against the rules, so rules devour them. With their awakening and with their conducts according to their beliefs, gradually they bring their own collapse. For example, if Daisy Miller had chosen to be a *nice European girl*, she might not have found herself struggling in European society. Hence, she could not have died out of fever. Likewise, Isabel Archer could choose a comfortable life with a Lord over independence.

Both the protagonists act as a scapegoat of feminist representation which leaves them between the clash of liberated America and orthodox Europe. With these analyses, it has been concluded that both Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer were not able to persevere their principles while adapting to a new environment without self-destructive behaviours.

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