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“A Comparative Study Of Cultures In The Portrait Of A Lady.”

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Abstract:

For Henry James the prime concern of the novelist is to focus on the real problems of an emerging nation - the problem of national identity. So, he turned to the moral and psychological problems of America and attempted to analyze and project them against the background of Europe. For him his Americans were naïve, innocents confronting a complex and often corrupt established society. So he wanted to examine carefully American's national identity and international role in the late Nineteenth Century – e.g. By his portrait of one young American Lady – “Isabel Archur.” In a word she is too perfect social animal who is connected with every incident and character of the novel. Through the study of her character, the novelist depicts the culture of both countries – America and Europe.

KEYWORDS:

Culture, Nation, Social.

INTRODUCTION

Henry James is the most well-known American novelist of the 19th Century (1891). Basically, James believed that novel should not only communicate the beautiful details of the age; but to represent life-all life. The experienced reality is the virtue of the novel. So, he generally concerned with and concentrated on the aesthetic dimensions in the novels. The novelist frequently examines, develops and communicates its character with psychological dimensions also. He always focused the material of his novel from characteristic point of view. He wants to explore the contrasting culture of two (countries) or more countries as characters from one country visit other, confronting the history, customs, manners etc. of the new country in terms of their own backgrounds. His novels are also called as the “Novels of Manners” which treat questions of social conventions and tries to give solution to it. James explores various dimensions, motivations and problems of the Human mind. He didn't involve only country, city & house but he involves the whole civilization of The Age. So, “A Portrait of A Lady” is called 'the Portrait of an Era. The Canvas of “A Portrait of A Lady” is very large which depicts the culture of two countries – America an Europe. Actually, Henry James' father' believed in Global Civilization. So he wanted that his son might become 'A Citizen of the World' because his father did not believe in a single religion. James also followed the same track; When he arrived on the literally scene in the 1917, he found that American Novel was largely concerned with mere story-telling and adventures. The popular novels of Cooper (1789 to 1851) and sir Walter Scott were celebrated in Europe and America but Games felt that these Novels are simply worth of escapist. So, he wanted to focus on the real problems of an emerging Nation- National Identity which required an immediate attention. For James this was to be the prime concern of the novelist.

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THEME:

As the title tells us the major theme of the novel is to compare and contrast two cultures I.e., America and Europe the novelist always focuses on the characters, their behavior, their relationships and their manners because he believed that a character is major source of his novel. He wanted to focus on the cosmopolitan cities, because he thought that not life but the 'Impression of Life' is to be taken as the subject of the novel.

Actually, the characters in the novel tell to us that the major theme of the novel is “Marriage.” From the first chapter to the last chapter, we get a discussion about Marriage, (Esabel archur) and a selection of a proper companion for a marriage. So, Marriage is the major theme of the novel. The novelist tells us that marriage is a matter of choice but it can be the chance of the wrong choice and the results of such wrong choice is a major focus.

A second theme of the novel is to compare and contrast between the culture of America and Europe. The situation of the Americans who have chosen to leave his own country and migrate to Europe. Actually the rich American want to marry with sophisticated English to get the name, fame and stylish life style also. The writer wants to focus on the social, political, Economical and Cultural aspects of the contemporary life of America and Europe. The detailed analysis of the American and European characters is the main theme of the novel. By doing it, the novelist wants to depict the sub themes of the novel, such as the marriage and choice, the position of women in society, the cultural differences, easy or redymade money (inheritance- Isabel) and its side effects.....etc. Again the tendency of the men toward women (Osmond/Isabel). The researcher gave importance to the secondary theme of the novel which is concerned with the collapse of the old world- the world of European Aristocracy and inherited wealth. The novelist compares the traditional English manners and sophisticated life style with the Naïve and state forward Americans. The novelist has depicted or created a set of American characters (Mr. And Mrs. Touchett, Mr.Godwood, Mr.Osmand etc.) who has chosen to leave their own country to dwell in Europe.

The world of “The Portrait of a Lady”-

Henry James wrote one critical essay 'The Art of Fiction', in which he claims that a novel is always superior to history because it is a fine combination of 'Fact and Fancy' he did it in the novel. Here, we find the detailed but interesting study of personalities; A Study of Personal relationship between the Countries so the novel is more than a character study. It is a portrait of an era. In the world of novel, we find detailed information about the cultures and all the characters. The novelist has created a fantastic world of his own experience and imagination, in which there are two cultures, two nations and all types of characters. We met the characters from high aristocratic class (Mr. and Mrs. Touchett, Mr.Goodwood, Lord warborton) and the middle class also (Heneritta Stacpole, Mr. Osmond and Madam Merle and others). The novelist widens the circle of his characters slowly but firmly which indicates the development of the plot of the novel.

The Art of Characterization:

The American Henry James has become so successful novelist only because of his perfect Art of Characterization. He takes his characters from one country visit other countries. So he is called as “An International Novelist.” James has created his characters from two cultures – America and Europe. Those characters are totally contrast to one another; they represent their own Type. He felt that certain characteristics or types dominates a particular culture. They represent an entire complex of sensibilities for exa. Isabel – she is not merely American lady but also a representative of American Confronting the history, traditions, entire culture and the pattern of Europe. The novelist gave time introducing characters and identifying the cultures through a description of places, things, houses and landscapes.

In the novel, the novelist has created two words of characters – Male characters and Female characters. 1 Isabel Archer – The Heroine of the novel development of her character is the interest of the book. She is introduced as bright and charming lady whose fate is of interest to her family and friends. She is the young lady of charm, intelligence, independence and confidence. She is introduced as a real character with human qualities. She wants to live life in real sense, all phases of life. On this ground she rejects the proposal of Lord Warborton. Actually she is so charming lady, who attracts all suitors around her.- Lord Warbortan, Osmond, Mr.Goodwood and Ralph Touchett but she rejects them politely and accepts to marry with Gilbert Osmond. – one of the Americans who has spent his life in Europe. He pretended that he is not interested in her money but only in her she is also attracted by the false appearance of the Osmond and married with him which is proved a very serious mistake on her part. It turned the successful life on Isabel in to the darkness and hellish life. The single mistake about wrong choice of companion changed her life

completely. Other female characters are also important but they are supportive characters to Isabel.

Male Characters – In the portrait of novel, we met a no. of male characters also by focusing on various male characters, the novelist wants to focus on the difference between the contemporary life of America and Europe. All these male characters directly and indirectly connected with Isabel. All the male – “Osmaond, Mr.Goodwood, Lordworbourton” are standing in a line to propose Isabel. But she does the wrong choice and accept Osmonds proposal in the last part of the novel her life became dark, hopeless and meaningless. But she gives importance to her duties and comes back to Mr.Osmond. She accepts it as 'A Fate'. As a perfect Architect, he carefully built the structure of the knowledge and the heroine's character. So, we can call her (Isabel Archer) as a corner stone of the Novel. A Portrait of a Lady is really a masterpiece of unity and structure.

CONCLUSION:

To compare and contrast the culture is the goal of the Novelist. Because of his Zig-Zag life course, the novelist experienced the contemporary life of both of the countries. So Henry James presents an insightful world of 'The Portrait of a Lady' and proved himself as a gifted writer. He analyzed critically the protagonist Isabel Archer, a young American woman, who is fooled during his travels in Europe moves slowly but steadily toward the path of self-destruction.

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