



Ulusallararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 7 Sayı: 34 Volume: 7 Issue: 34

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

DEPICTING THE CONTRASTS THROUGH SYMBOLIC CHARACTERS

Davood Mohammadi MOGHADAM*

Wan Roselezam WAN YAHYA**

Abstract

One of the most prominent figures among American novelists is Henry James, who is mostly famous for his international novels. Through his international novels, he had professionally practiced his international theme to show the contrasts between America and Europe. This contrast is depicted between their societies, cultures, ideals, conventions and characters. James is called by Howells as the master of portraying the American girls, because he practiced his international theme through portraying the American girls in the European society. But what makes his *The Wings of the Dove*, different among his other works, is the fact that his basic pattern of depicting a deceived American girl in a sophisticated European society, enabled James to practice his international theme through using symbolic characters. Milly Theale, the heroine of this novel, is the symbol of an American innocent girl. This paper is going to study that how James had putted a sophisticated European girl, Kate, against Milly to show the contrast, which he had thought to exist between America and Europe in those days. Actually Milly and Kate are the symbol of their countries, and the story propel through their interactions.

Keywords: Henry James, International Novel, International Conflicts, America Versus Europe.

Introduction

Henry James in most of his International novels used his basic pattern of depicting a deceived American lady European, to bring into the stage the conflicts between America and Europe. In *The Wings of the Dove*, which is one of his most famous international novels, he brought Milly Theale, who is an American girl, into a European society to depict his international theme of America versus Europe. James, in his international novels, had practiced his international theme of America versus Europe so professionally, that in most of his works the contrasts is shown in all aspects like social, cultural, and even between the characters. *The Wings of the Dove* is one of his novels, in which a big contrast is represented between American and European characters, and interestingly this time the contrast is emphasized between two young girls, Milly and Kate, who are standing as the symbol of their countries. In this novel the conflicts are obvious between the ideals of Kate as a sophisticated European character, and those of Milly who is an American innocent girl. The contrast between Kate and Milly, is the symbol of the conflict between America's morality and Europe's high culture which is deviated and out of morality and is moving toward materialism. So while Kate is educated and trained in a materialistic deviated culture, she is able to set plan, with the help of Densher, to easily deceive Milly who is Innocent which means to be inexperienced. The adventure of Milly and her behavior, in comparison to that of Kate, shows the conflicts which James is trying to show between America and Europe.

* Corresponding author, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.

** Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.

Discussion

So the contrast between European society and American society in this novel can be revealed through the characters of Kate and Milly, although Densher plays an important role between their interactions. The European society with its high culture instructed or better to say trained the experienced characters like Kate and Densher and because of the moral decadence of this culture these experienced characters are less careful about morality and have no problem in deceiving other in order to reach their goals. In the other side the American society which is the place of innocence and morality trained an innocent character as Milly Theale. Even a European character like Densher when traveled to America, the innocence and truth is revealed to him and the corruption and the eagerness for deceiving others is weakened in him and he is only convinced by Kate and her love to deceive Milly. The difference between these characters can be understood through the dialogue between Kate and Milly:

Milly: But it is a secret one-nobody must know. I must be wicked and false about it.

"Then I am your woman," Kate smiled, "for that's the kind of thing I love. Do let us do something bad. You're impossibly without sin."

Milly: "Ah I shan't perhaps come up to your idea. It's only to deceive Susan Sheperd."

"Oh!" said Kate as if this were indeed mild... "And for cheating.....my powers will contribute? Well I'll do my best for you." (James, 2001: 167)

This contrast is more emphasized in the characters of Kate and Milly who are the symbol of the society in which they had grew. Christof Wegelin discusses about the function of Milly and Kate and their characters in his book:

Milly and Kate are representative of the civilizations which have formed them... If Milly is in a sense typical, so is Kate. Both personify the moral bases of their native civilizations... The difference between Kate and Milly is the difference between the civilizations which have molded them. (Wegelin, 1958: 117-120)

Kate in this novel stands for Europe, at the beginning of novel she is not so concern about money she was not as immoral to think of money by any means, the prove is that if she was so concern about money she would not fall in love with Densher who was a poor man with no hope of being wealthy a day. But she had lived in a European society where innocence has no place and the corruption and moral decadence is felt in its culture, so as she gradually became experienced in such a materialistic society, she gradually became same as her society and reached to the belief that not being wealthy is a shame so she started her attempt for wealth and did not care about any immoral plan to reach to an easy wealth, so she started to deceive first Aunt Maud and then Milly Theale for their wealth. In that society she felt no disgrace or regret about her deceitful character because the attempt for being wealthy in any way it was, was not a shameful attempt in the society in which she was living. Christof Wegelin about the gradual corruption of Kate and the depth of that believed:

Nothing makes the deep perversion of her (Kate's) sense of values more painfully clear than that she makes a virtue of subordinating her passion for Densher to her passion for wealth..... She can, indeed, bear too much; for the sake of "great" future, she can do violence to the integrity of her own feelings. Her deep corruption lies in the *use* she makes of her own love and of her own great endowments, in her *abuse* of one sort of value for ends of quite another sort. (Wegelin, 1958: 119)

Actually Kate is manifestation of her society and is a true and clear symbol of European society. As was discussed Europe possesses aesthetic features because of its high culture but actually its inner quality was corrupted, again Kate was handsome and beautiful, as James explains about her in the novel:

She would have been meanwhile a wonderful lioness for a show, an extraordinary figure in cage or anywhere; majestic, magnificent, high-coloured, all brilliant gloss, perpetual satin, twinkling bugles and flashing gems, with a lustre of agate eyes, a sheen of raven hair, a polish of complexion that was like that of well-kept china and that-as if the skin were too tight-told especially at curves and corners. (James, 2001: 39)

Completely like Europe, although she had a beautiful appearance, but her inner character was deviated and out of morality, she tried any wicked plan to deceive people around her like Aunt Maud and even her helpless friend Milly Theale in order to reach to an easy

wealth. Her appearance shows the beauty of Europe and her hidden character shows the moral decadence of Europe. Wegelin in his book discussed that:

Kate is tremendously present as the force, a form, a beautiful apparition, "the handsome girl" as Milly keeps thinking of her a symbol of the English society which is the subject of Milly's fascinated observation and from which Densher finally emancipates himself thanks to the light which Milly has thrown on it for him. Kate is all action, while Milly is spiritual suffering, and Densher physical response and finally intellectual rejection. Kate acts, Milly is, Densher judges. The relations between the three make up the substance of the story. (Wegelin, 1958: 107)

On the other side Milly is the symbol of America. As the characteristics of the society in which she had grown up, in Milly one can find so many contrast with Kate, because she is grown up in America and is defined to represent America through her character's qualities. Howell in his essay *Mr. Henry James Later Work* discussed:

At this point I hear from far within a voice bringing me to book about Milly Theale in *The Wings of The Dove*, asking me, if there is not a heroine of the ideal make, and demanding what fault there is in her that renders her loveable. Loveable I allow she is, dearly, tenderly, being too good, too pure, too generous, too magnificently unselfish... Milly Theale is entirely American in the qualities. (Howells 1916: 126-131)

Milly is innocent and had not enough experience and one of the reasons that she wants to travel to Europe was that she was curious and wanted to learn more and gain more knowledge and experience to prepare a better life for herself. Her innocence and softness turned her as explained by James like a dove; "Milly was indeed a dove; this was the figure, though it most applied to her spirit... So far as one remembered that doves have wings and wondrous flights, have them as well as tender tints and soft sounds" (James, 2001: 364). Ulker Erkan also explains, "the word 'dove' defines the general qualities of Milly Theale's character. People around Milly associate her with dove because of her softness, goodness, and generosity. Milly is enormously rich but an orphan" (Erkan, 2001: 14).

So in this novel Milly is identified through the image of "dove". James used the image of "dove" to explain the character of Milly because as Ünal Aytür believed James wanted to define the inner characters of Milly, the reason that why James shows Milly as innocent and through the image of "dove" is discussed by him; "image and simile is an effectual device in order to help James to render the invisible to be visible, and to present the vivid and interesting inner worlds of the characters whose points of view he uses" (Aytür, 1977: 133).

Milly was a real gentle lady and because of her lack of knowledge she was pure and wondered by everything in Europe. In spite of her wealth and high social situation she was never selfish and in opposite of Europeans she was never materialistic and worldly. In contrast of Kate who represents the outer beauty and inner decadence of Europe, Milly represents the moral beauty or better to say the spiritual beauty of her country America. Ulker Erkan discusses in his paper:

James is very successful in describing people: Kate resembles to a lioness who acts according to her interests and gets the best as she can whereas, Milly is soft and helpless resembling especially to a dove. These characters also reveal the characteristics of the society that reflect its members. (Erkan, 2001: 5)

In Milly as an American character, James represents the characteristics which are completely in contrast with those of Europe shown in European characters especially in Kate who is the symbol of Europe, and through this way of characterization especially those of Milly and Kate, Henry James is going to show the contrast of American and European society. Wegelin in his book referred to the issue of showing the contrast of America and Europe through the characters of Milly and Kate, believed:

The fundamental contrast between Milly and the England of her abysmal experience is elaborated in a multitude of ways, but dramatized most pointedly through Kate. Kate has representative value because, as James shows with meticulous care, her character and conduct are determined largely by the circumstances of her life.....Which enslave her by the strong appeal of "Material things" (Wegelin, 2001: 119)

As was mentioned the main contrast between Milly and Kate was the case of outer and inner beauty, morality and decadence of morality, superficial beauty and spiritual beauty. Discussing these contrasts in details one can declare that based on the level of morality in them

and based on the ideals of the societies, there is a deep difference in the way that Milly valued a person and Kate does it. For Kate and all European characters a person is praised based on his/her wealth and outer appearance, for them the value of a person is related to how much money that person has. But completely in contrast, Milly Theale as an agent of American society valued a person based on his/her inner character (if her innocence allow her to judge the inner quality of a character in a correct way), for her the inner quality of a person is more important than his/her appearance. She look to the people based on their human and personal worth, the value of peoples is defined by her based on their spiritual beauty not based on their social and financial situation, the proof is how truly she loves Densher who had no social or financial privilege, although because of her innocence she misjudge the inner character of Densher and was deceived by him.

Other contrast between Milly as an American and other European characters which is so clear, prominent and obvious to have the merit of being mentioned is the contrast between their attitude toward wealth and money. As was discussed, European because of the ideals of their society were so concern about money, they tried everything even deceiving others for the case of earning money, for them a good person or partner was a rich one. Even the attempt of Kate and Densher for deceiving Aunt Maude and then Milly was because of money, they wanted to gain an easy wealth by deceiving Aunt Maud and especially Milly, even Lord Mark wanted to marry Milly because of her wealth not because of his love for her, and again Lionel's agreement with the condition of Aunt Maud for taking Kate was for his hope for her daughter to inherit Aunt Maud's wealth, actually for them money was the only concern.

But on the other side in contrast of these Europeans, Milly Theale as the agent of America is not so concern about money even she is not proud of her wealth, a wealth which caused the sophisticated Europeans to deceive her, she had everything, she is called "princess" by Susan and as Kate said to her "there's nothing you can't have, there is nothing you can't do." (James, 2001: 169) She knew that she had everything but she was not selfish because of her wealth, even she behaved in a way that show that her wealth had no importance for her. Unlike Europeans she did not forget morality for the case of money; she did not look after easy wealth. And unlike the way of looking that the Europeans had, she did not look inferior to the persons who were poor.

So there is a deep contrast between the ideals of Milly who is an American lady with the ideals of other European characters, but Milly in the search of experience came to Europe because she thought that she could gain a high knowledge and experience through the high culture of Europe. But when she encounters to Europe and Europeans, she as an innocent person is hunted by immoral plan of Europeans who as a result of living in a European society are more experienced than her so able to deceive her. She unknowingly was caught like a mouse in a snare that is made by the ideals of a European society.

Some critics believed that Kate and Densher may be taken less guilty if one consider the ideals and immorality of a society in which they had lived and grown up, a society in which money is everything and gaining an easy money is a great success, a society which easily convinces and tempts its people to think only for money and try whatever immoral plan for earning money and being wealthy. Wegelin believed that the "England has taught" Kate and Densher to be immoral:

And one wonders whether Milly's final magnanimity is perhaps in part recognition of the fact that Kate and Densher, too, live not so much as they will but as they can, as England has taught them... Nothing, finally, strikes Densher more than the moral inadequacy of the civilization which has led him and Kate into the "dreadful game" they have played for Milly's money with Milly's life. (Wegelin, 1958: 120)

Again about the influence of European society on Kate, UlkerErkan declares, "to us, Kate is not completely guilty since her determination is the result of a behavior she developed in order to survive and be acceptable in her society. And the reason that corrupts Kate's personality is the existing values of the society" (Erkan, 2001: 10).

This society not only persuaded the low class person as Kate and Densher to deceive Milly to earn her wealth, but also persuaded the noble class character as Lord Mark to compete with Kate and Densher in deceiving Milly and earn her wealth. One can be sure that based on the ideals of the society in which Lord Mark had lived her proposal to Milly to marry her was not because of his true love to her but because of his eagerness to earn more money through Milly's wealth. And his compete with Kate and Densher to caught Milly is revealed at the time when his proposal is rejected by Milly, he informed her from the secret engagement of Kate and Densher while he knew that Milly has a fatal disease and may be brokenhearted by knowing this fact in the last days of her life, because he knew that how hard Milly is in love with Densher and this fact may turn her life more disastrous in its last days. If he really loved Milly he could keep the fact hidden from her to help her enjoy from the remained days of her short life through marriage with her beloved Densher. And this behavior of Lord Mark again represents that how corrupted and out of morality the European society is.

But in any way the persons to whom Milly trusted but was deceived by, were Kate and Densher. When Kate was informed by the fatal disease of Milly the wicked plan had sparked in her mind that while Milly has a true and severe Love toward Densher so they should keep their engagement hidden from her and Densher should simulate a love to Milly and so they could marry and after Milly's death Densher would inherit her wealth, so after that Kate and Densher could manifest their engagement and marry together with Milly's wealth. So as Milly was innocent and they were experienced, they easily deceived her. Although Milly was informed at the end of the novel from the wicked plan of the person whom she chose as her best friends, she understood that she is deceived and did not reach to what she expected from Europe so brokenhearted she embraced her death. But what she gained through her death was the true and real love of Densher for her memory, as Kate declared to Densher:

But your change came—as it might well—the day you last saw her; she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you DID... I used to call her, in my stupidity—for want of anything better—a dove. Well she stretched out her wings, and it was to THAT they reached. They cover us. (James, 2001: 486)

And as Densher was less guilty than Kate in deceiving Milly because what forced him to participate in wicked plan of Kate and to simulate his love for Milly was first his love for Kate and then the kindness that he felt for Milly because he knew that Milly was severely in love with him and what gave her a hope to live in spite of her fatal disease was the will to live for his love. So he maybe was forced to simulate a love for Milly for his kindness to her and his love for Kate. But when he was placed in such a situation, he learned a lot through Milly and his soul and ideals were changed and after the death of Milly he remained in love with the memory of Milly and believed that they should return back the money which was left by Milly for him to Milly's solicitor he said to Kate that "I won't touch the money."(James 484) He wanted Kate to marry him without the money and when Kate asked Densher to say "Your word of honour that you're not in love with her memory", so wanted him to swear that he is not in love with the memory of Milly he remained silent "He heard her out in stillness, watching her face but not moving", so Kate "turned to the door", and left him while saying "We shall never be again as we were!"(James, 2001: 487)

Even in the story Densher himself had felt the revelation of his soul and the sacred changes that happened to him through the lessons which he had learn from Milly. James in the novel explained these changes in a way that after the death of Milly, Densher sees himself as:

in a relation inconceivable,... hushed, passive, staying his breath, but half understanding, yet dimly conscious of something immense and holding himself painfully together not to lose it... something had happened to him too beautiful and too sacred to describe. He had been, to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed. (James, 2001: 445)

So Milly Theale is another American young innocent lady who had left America and traveled to Europe in the search of knowledge, experience and a better life but to what she encountered in Europe was completely in contrast of what she thought and expected from it. Because of her American innocence, she was deceived in Europe by sophisticated Europeans and suffered as the result of her mistake in judgment about the correct personality of the people

around her; she met her death while being brokenhearted in Europe. But what she gained through her suffering and her death is the lesson which she as an American gave to Densher as a European; she educated him about truth, innocent and a true love, he learned from her that how pure and innocent a person could be and how money is worthless in life and how one can loves other not because of money, Wegelin in his book believed that:

While *The Portrait of a Lady*..... is almost purely a story of the American experience of "Europe," *The Wings of the Dove* is both that and, even more, the story of the European experience of America. It is written from, fundamentally, two points of view, Milly's and Merton Densher's, the Englishman's....what matters is not the physical action but the gradual revelations which it brings to Milly and above all to Densher. (Wegelin, 1958: 107)

Through his relationship with Milly, Densher becomes aware about the meaning of true love, as Wegelin continues, "for Densher everything now is changed, and most of all Kate. In Venice his sense of what she had done for him by her physical surrender had already incurred a qualification: he came to feel that in returning to London Kate provided for her "ease" while leaving him "peculiarly alone"" (Wegelin, 1958: 116).

In "The Wings of the Dove" there are only two prominent American characters, the first and most prominent one is the heroine of the story Milly Theale, and the other one is her companion Susan Stringham. Susan is the observer of the story, she comes with Milly from America to Europe but it is just Milly who is at the center of the battle made by the contrasts of America and Europe, Milly is in the front to show the ideals of her country and to play the role of a proper symbol of America but Susan is only an observer to observe this battle and watch the adventure of a young American innocent lady in Europe. Susan is there to comprehend the contrast between her country and Europe and then does her duty which is to take the story of Milly to America and to report what she had observed and comprehended in Europe. Wegelin about Susan's mission stated:

Milly's (her point of view), though, is supplemented by that of her American companion, Susan Stringham, whose function as a "choral" *ficelle* is to supply "an *Animated* reflexion of Milly Theale's experience of English society," to give what Milly herself would give if she were less purely spirit incarnate. (Wegelin, 1958: 107)

Conclusion

Actually one can say that the story of Milly in Europe, like the story of James's other American heroines, is the story of America in Europe. While Susan is there to only take back the experience of Milly to America, Milly is a symbol of her country. In the other hand Kate is standing as a symbol of Europe, and through depicting Milly and Kate and their interactions, James is showing the contrast between America and Europe, which is mostly between American morality, and European high sophisticated culture. And as was discussed, James depicted many American girls in Europe in the memory of his young cousin Minny Temple, who died in Europe while she was very young. Among all the heroines of James's international novels, Milly Theale is more influenced by the image of Minny Temple as their names are so similar to each other. Erkan in his paper about the influence of Minny Temple on Milly Theale explained:

In fact, Milly is model led after James's cousin Minny..... Minny Temple had died on Henry James' twenty-seventh year in 1870 where he stood on the threshold of his literary life..... This novel (*The Wings of the Dove*), somehow, can be regarded as Henry's attempt to recapture the drama of Minny's ultimate end who died of tuberculosis. James called his heroine Milly Theale echoing Minny's name. Her death in Venice became the death in Venice of *The Wings of the Dove*. (Erkan, 2001: 10-11)

REFERENCES

- AYTÜR, Ünal. *Henry James ve Roman Sanati*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1977.
- ERKAN, Ulker. "The Art of Fiction in Henry James' Novel *The Wings of the Dove*." *Ege University* Dec 2001. <<http://www.mockingbird.creighton.edu/english/Erkan.htm>>
- HOWELLS, W.D. "Mr. Henry James Later Work." *The North American Review*, Vol. 203, No. 725 Apr. 1916: 572-584.
- JAMES, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove*. The Pennsylvania State University: A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2001. <<http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/jjmspdf.htm>>
- WEGELIN, Christof. *The Image of Europe in Henry James*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958.