

*Article History*

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<i>Received/Geliş</i>	<i>Accepted/ Kabul</i>	<i>Available Online/Yayınlanma</i>
<i>14 /12/2017</i>	<i>24/01/2018</i>	<i>1/02/2018</i>

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**Female Identity between Personal Independence and Patriarchal**

**Authority: An Anti-Feminist Reading of Henry James's**

***Washington Square***

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**Abstract**

Over the last two centuries certain concepts like freedom, patriarchy, and independence acquired considerable significance. In keeping with the occupied nations' movement toward liberty and independence came the issue of women's demands to be liberated from the dominant tradition of enslaving them and locking them up in their houses. In the family, the traditional image of the father as the domineering figure was no longer considered in society. Hence, Feminism called for treating women on equal terms with men in almost all aspects and fields of life. This radical alteration was mainly caused by political, social, and intellectual factors that came to not only reshape the position of woman in society but also to modify her own self-image in accordance with her newly-discovered identity.

Such change was evidenced in the writings of some distinguished English novelists of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paper is mainly dedicated to discussing Henry James's *Washington Square* (1880). Though James throughout this end-of-era-novel rarely states clearly whether or not the heroine's drive is for personal independence and self-will, there are signs showing that such female independence and liberty should always be triggered by and coupled with maturity. In other words, if women are by no means mature enough to have a step forward towards self-improvement, they must, then, be kept under the authority of male figures.

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This paper deals primarily with an anti-feminist reading or rendering of James's novel, showing to what extent women's attitudes are determined in a male-dominated society. It is divided into three sections and a conclusion. Feminist approaches to literature and to novel are discussed in the first section. The second section shows how Henry James, as a well-known realist writer, is concerned with feminist issues in many of his major works. His *Washington Square* is discussed in the third section of the paper as text where the writer is giving signs of what most of the twentieth-century feminist writers are chiefly concerned with, that is, the females' aspiration to getting rid of their inadequate traditional roles as submissively obedient to authoritative male figures.

**Key words: patriarchy, freedom, identity, freewill, authority**

### **1-Feminism: Cultural and Critical Background**

As a reaction to a culture organized in the favor of men, feminism, as a movement, reflects, in effect, concern with the silencing and marginalization of women. Feminist literary criticism developed mostly since the beginning of late-twentieth-century women's movement. Inspired by such figures as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Betty Friedan, the movement examined a female "self" constructed in literature by male authors to embody various male fears and anxieties. As a result, literary texts served as models and agents of power (Wilfred L. Guerin, et al. 222-223). The rediscovery of the female role and identity was among the major aims that the movement aimed to achieve.

Throughout history, the female tends to be defined by her lack of ability to identify both male powers and the male's character traits that are presumed, in the patriarchal view, to have achieved the most important scientific and technical inventions as well as the major works of civilization and culture. While they were being socialized, women were conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination. As a result, they were taught to internalize the controlling patriarchal *ideology* (that is, the conscious and unconscious presuppositions about male superiority). The prevailing concepts and traits of gender that constitute the

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masculine and the feminine in identity and behavior are, for the most part, culturally generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of the western civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) believes, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine. By this cultural process, the masculine has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be recognized as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional. The additional claim is that this patriarchal, masculinist ideology pervades such writings as *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, *Tom Jones*, or *Faust*, which have been traditionally considered great literature (Abrams 89).

The women's movement rejected the Marxist clear incapability of explaining the particular conditions of women as an oppressed social group, or of contributing significantly to their transformation. For the oppression of women is indeed a material reality, it cannot be reduced to the mere factors of motherhood, domestic labour, job discrimination, and unequal wages. It is also, as Eagleton puts it, "a question of sexual ideology, of ways men and women image themselves and each other in male-dominated society, of perceptions and behavior which range from the brutally explicit to the deeply unconscious" (128-129). This new recognition brings about an awareness that is associated with past experience (repressed in the subconscious) and mingled with a future perspective of women representation.

Within the traditional symbolic order, the feminine gender is normally judged inferior to masculine power. Women are represented within male-governed society, which entails that the woman is "both 'inside' and 'outside' male society, both a romantically idealized member of it and a victimized outcast. She is sometimes what stands between man and chaos, and sometimes the embodiment of chaos itself ...." (ibid 165).

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As a distinctive and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism took shape late in the 1960s. Behind it, however, such books as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) indicate the long women's struggle for the recognition of their cultural roles and achievements on the one hand, and for their social and political rights, on the other. Much of feminist literary criticism has come to serve the movement through political feminists' call for social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality (Abrams 88). Since the 1960s modern feminism has been examining the category of "women" in terms of such fixed and stable notions of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, it has come to deal with the relationship among gender and class and race, power structure, and the semiotic codes through which ideology operates (Habib 253-254).

In gender criticism, the impact of sexual identity on the creation, interpretation, and evaluation of literary works is essentially examined. This critical approach suggests that literary study "had been so dominated by men that it contained so many unexplained 'male-produced' assumptions (Kennedy & Gioia 793). The shift of emphasis from being a minority to a superior position where their value is accurately assessed helped in the rise and emergence of women writers and critics shedding light in their gender-based studies on the injustices women have been treated with in literary texts and in social contexts.

An important name that is worth mentioning in feminist criticism is that of the British writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) whose *A Room of One's Own* (1929) together with numerous other essays on women authors comment on the cultural, economic, and educational disabilities within what she calls a "patriarchal" society that has hindered or prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities (Abrams 88).

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In fiction, there has been a radical alteration. The discovery of buried plots in women's texts has revealed a lasting narrative concern with women stories. Feminist literary criticism, as Elaine Showalter states, "presents a demand that we see meaning in what has previously been empty space. The orthodox plot recedes, and another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint" (Elizabeth Abel 163).

In the fiction written during the 1970s, the woman novelist, writing behind the mask of her heroine, reflects on the hard struggle she and her persona have to go through to realize themselves as entities"

[T]he protagonist is herself a developing writer who must find a way to overcome the dictates of inherited literary codes in order to locate her own voice and devise her own form. Because this struggle is represented directly through a narrative that reflects the character's thinking, it becomes a part of her story and a part of the fiction that tells her story. (Peters 1)

Characteristically, feminism, during the 1960s, received a major stimulus from the civil rights movement in the United States of America. In her influential work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan (1921-2006) expressed the fundamental protest of middle-class American women, their entrapment within private, domestic life and their complete inability to pursue public careers (Habib 254). The female rejection of playing the stereotypical roles of an object that is in subordination of man's superiority is, in fact, in keeping with the ideological transformation from the power group to the individual emancipation.

Similarly, Kate Millett (1934-2017), in her significant *Sexual Politics* (1969), indicates the mechanisms that express and impose the relations of power in society; she analyzes Western social arrangements and institutions as secret ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the

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dominance of men and the subordination of women. In addition, she, in her book, attacks the male bias in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and also analyzes selected passages by D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet as revealing the ways in which the authors, in their fictional works, exaggerate "their aggressive phallic selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects" (Abrams 89).

### **2-Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Henry James's Fiction**

Despite the varieties in the feminisms in America, England, and France, they share the basic view that "Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father)—that is, it is male-centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic" (ibid). The patriarchal system stems not only from religious beliefs but also from social norms and traditions.

In literature, the patriarchy, for the most part, question is viewed realistically. Two dominant themes can be detected in the fiction of Henry James (1843-1916). The first is what might be referred to as the "international subject", which deals with the Americans in connection with or relation with the Europeans. The other dominant theme is that of innocence corrupted and despoiled by the sophisticated who appear to possess all the good things sought by the innocent (Allen 264). The second point is particularly relevant to the analysis of James's perspective of woman's seeking to attain identity and personal independence.

Despite the repressive and restraining social roles they are obliged to play, the female characters in James possess strength and prevail morally. In contrast with the uncertain and defeated male characters, they are presented as determined and self-willed (Kazin 225). Interestingly, James, in *What Maisie Knew* (1897), presents the adults through the young Maisie's eyes.

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The sensitive Maisie learns how not to live by watching her divorced and careless parents (Shinn 46). The knowledge she acquires, however, comes at the expense of her childhood. Moreover, in the absence of an actual guide, her knowledge is characteristically limited to that of the domestic environment, the matter which leaves her quite vulnerable in confronting the outside world.

*The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) follows the development of the immature, inexperienced, young Isabel Archer who suffers from the ignorance of her parents, from leaving schools and from being left to the care of a governess. Generally, the novelist seems to criticize the aristocratic people in London and in Europe. Such a class gives attention to parties, balls, meeting in drawing rooms, gambling, and the like (Minter 7). Isabel is an imaginative girl who lives in the world of her dreams. She has many theories about life, marriage, and freedom. She is so fond of her liberty that she virtually becomes unable to encounter the hostility of the real world (Tanner 69). Isabel's idea of freedom is her greatest illusion, a pure abstraction that cannot stand the test of reality and experience. Arising from her romanticism, she believes in "a highly idealized personal freedom, a sense of absolute and inviolable independence vested in her inmost self" (Kaul 308).

James's *Washington Square* (1880) figures out how women have deeply internalized response to men's patriarchal authority. The novel thus helps account for the apparent paradox of *The Bostonians* (1886), a book that is entirely devoted to displaying a remarkable knowledge of the positions of the feminist movement along with its historical actualities (Izzo 353).

In conclusion, the females in James's fiction are helpless prisoners who, unless entrusted to the protection of a reliable patriarchy, become easy victims whenever they venture out.

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### **3-Anti-Feminism in Henry James's *Washington Square***

*Washington Square* earned James wide popularity long after his death though James always regarded it as a trifling work, stale and flat and without the experimental values of his best narratives. It is a vigorous drama of parental misunderstanding and cruelty. The story is about a plain girl who lives in a big house with her wealthy father, but who is prevented by him from having the dishonest lover she wants to marry (Edel 23). James's popularity can be understood based on the novel's lack of any sentimental undertones that such types of plots are capable of engendering. Even though the immature girl squanders a large amount of emotions on her romantic suitor, she is in no way a subject of pity or sympathy. In other words, readers are unlikely to share with her their sympathies over her misery and misfortune.

To some readers, *Washington Square* presents the *archetypal* figure of the cruel father sadistically enjoying the loving daughter's agonized resistance to his authority. Within the main core of the story is the emergence of the scheming young suitor persistently exploiting the daughter immature romantic emotions. The development of the plot revolves around the conflict between "the fulfillment of the heroine's wishes and the self-righteous satisfactions of Victorian morality, opening that fissure between drives and duties where the protagonists'... rebellion may take root" (Izzo 356). It should be noted that Catherine's resistance is essentially silent and purposefully meant by the author to convey his anti-feminist attitude.

The events of *Washington Square* are set in New York in the early 19th-century Manhattan, and its action revolves around a shy, repressed, and socially graceless heiress, Catherine Sloper, the daughter of a prominent widowed physician. Dr. Austin Sloper who shelters his daughter, providing everything except genuine affection. Catherine is Sloper's second child (the first, a son, died at age three), and her birth caused her mother's premature death. Embarrassed by what he considers Catherine's lack of the same intelligence and the social skill as her late mother, the patriarchal Sloper



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rules his trusting, good-hearted daughter and his household with a firmness aimed at protecting her from opportunists seeking her substantial inheritance (Haralson 163).

James was chiefly inspired to write the novel based on a real story he had heard from the actress Fanny Kemble (1809-1893). Thus, he resolved to make it a purely American story because his homeland represented to him both a unique mixture of optimistic aspiration and stifling provinciality. Therefore, the setting of *Washington Square* becomes a place of promise. In like manner, Morris Townsend, one of the novel's protagonists, sees it as the land for speculation. Yet, it is a prison to Catherine, who is confined in a world to which she rarely belongs and in a household where she can only be tolerated (ibid 108).

In their evaluation of James's work, reviews of *Washington Square* combine praise of the novel's detailed depiction of a relationship between a father and daughter with criticism for its lack of action. Critics have praised the novel for an ambiguousness that leaves such interesting questions as the validity of Catherine's decisions in dealing with her father and with Morris or the authenticity of the father's care for his daughter unresolved. Answers are debatable and central in explaining the novel's lasting popularity. The level of genuine affection Morris may feel for Catherine is never made clear by James to Catherine or anyone else, although there is little doubt that he is more interested in wealth than in marriage (ibid 169).

Within a few decades, however, the novel emerged as one of James's most frequently read works. Critical reception improved with T. S. Eliot praising its merits and Graham Greene describing it as reminiscent of Jane Austen's novels. Rich in details of an upper-class American life set in a representative New York neighborhood in a precise historical era, *Washington Square* presents its small, self-contained world without clear references to events or cultural issues of greater magnitude in American society. Focusing on the relationships of the four major characters—father,

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daughter, aunt, and suitor, James critically observes the customs and values inherent in these individuals and their world (ibid 167).

A deeply psychological work, *Washington Square* takes place mostly within the minds of its characters, conveyed by a nameless narrator who recalls events and comments on them (ibid 169). *Washington Square* may be read as an intellectualized, unfortunate love story without many of the typical romanticized trappings of marriage tales. However, James seems less interested in exploring the romantic passions of his characters than in directing his attention to the diverse psychological motivations in their lives (ibid 168)). When the father recognizes that his strength is failing, all that he can do is to request her not to marry Morris in the future amazes her and leaves her silent for some moments; "it opened an old wound and made it ache afresh" (James 144). As it is usual in James's novels, the protagonist is a complex woman who seeks fulfillment of the most fundamental human desire—to be loved. Catherine unsuccessfully yearns for a sign of her father's genuine affection, but when a prospective suitor appears in the person of Morris, Catherine's deep need for affection is largely awakened (Haralson 168).

Embarrassed by his daughter's social inadequacy, Sloper can see her only as victim of fortune hunters: "She is so soft, so simple-minded, she would be such an easy victim!" (James 58). According to her father, Catherine "doesn't take many impressions; but when she takes one she keeps it. She is like a copper kettle that receives a dent; you may polish up the kettle, but you can't efface the mark" (James 88). Sloper may well be correct in this assessment, but his conviction is in no way merely protective. He is overwhelmed by his need not to be outwitted by a calculating schemer (Haralson 168). Judging Catherine to lack intelligence and charm gives Sloper the right not only to keep her activities under his rigorous control but also to become the domineering force in her protected life.

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The grievances Catherine Sloper suffers from as a result of the dominant presence of male figures in her life leave her not only quite vulnerable to the impact of what they have done to her but also a victim of a kind of self-denigration. The father's underrating emphasis on Catherine's social value and physical beauty, which he readily expresses to Morris and to Lavinia, brings the young girl down to earth and shuts her up in an eternal prison. Catherine's shocking experience opens her eyes to the reality from which she has long been hiding. It is extremely traumatic for Catherine to live with the distorted identity she has just found out for the rest of her life. To her, there is nothing as bad as being haunted by tormenting memories for life:

Nothing could ever undo the wrong or cure the pain that Morris had inflicted on her, and nothing could ever make her feel towards her father as she felt in her younger years. There was something dead in her life, and her duty was to try and fill the void. (James 138-139)

Apparently, nothing and nobody has the magical power to ease the hopeless Catherine of her sense of despair. Imagining herself the substitute for her niece's dead mother, Aunt Lavinia Penniman, Dr. Sloper's middle-aged widowed sister, helps in promoting Catherine's relationship with Morris, but her attempts to manipulate the situation on Morris's behalf costs her Catherine's trust. Lavinia is captivated by Morris's charms, imagining he would be the sort of husband she would have preferred for herself. She is so convinced that Catherine could find happiness with Morris that she allows herself to be blinded to the young man's calculation (Haralson 168-69). The aunt, in her dealing with the issue of her niece, goes so far as to believe that Catherine should absolve Morris's faults. She tries hard to rationalize Morris's act of abandoning Catherine and getting married with another woman by saying that people in Europe marry "a marriage of reason" (James 145). Essentially, the aunt fails tremendously to provide for that which Catherine badly needs. Initially, she is the nearest one to her niece's heart,

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yet, practically, she is no more than "an idiot," as Morris sees her, a weak-minded woman, or "a goose" as Sloper rightly thinks Morris has found her.

Sloper is a clever, witty, intellectual who believes himself a figure of some significance in his elite community of New York. The early death of his wife and the loss of a son who died at age three, have hardened Sloper against emotion. The doctor has grown into a logical man unmoved by romanticism or appeals to feeling; as such, his only surviving child, Catherine, is starved for affection and emotional release (Haralson 169). Sloper's narcissistic ambivalence to others' feelings further isolates him, considerably reducing his capacity for interaction and turning him, predominantly in the home environment, into a tyrannical patriarchy.

Sloper is "stiff and dry and absolutely indifferent to the presence of his companions" (James 92). The author's anti-feminist attitude is well expressed in the father's perspective. Sloper is in no doubt that Catherine is "unhappy" by his decision to reject Morris. Nevertheless, "it is better to be unhappy for three months and get over it, than for many years and never get over it" (James 76). Sloper would rather make his daughter conceive of him as tyrant for a lifetime. Sloper's patriarchy here is absolutely protective. He is determined to not consent on her marriage to Morris no matter how long time passes. For that reason, he wants her to give Morris up once and for all:

I should like you to know that if you have encouraged him to believe that he will gain anything by hanging on, or that I have budged a hair's-breadth from the position I took up, ... you have made yourself believe that I can be tired out. This is the most baseless hallucination that ever visited the brain of a genial optimist. (James 111)

Sloper's judgment is "the result of thirty years of observation" (James 33), the belief which invariably obliterates the possibility of his being wrong in his calculations. Dr. Sloper commits a moral wrong against his daughter by controlling her life – even after his own death – and preventing the only kind

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of marriage open to her (Ethel 144). Together with his long experience of dealing with diverse kinds of people, Sloper's probable skill at physiognomy grants him a capacity for deep insights into people. Hence, the first impression he has formed of Morris proves considerably correct:

I dislike him [Morris], exclusively, as a son-in-law ... [whose] function, which, in general, is to be a protector and caretaker of my child, who is singularly ill-adapted to take care of herself. It is there that he doesn't satisfy me. I confess I have nothing but my impression to go by; but I am in the habit of trusting my impression. ... He strikes me as selfish and shallow." (James 59)

Sloper, as the main protector of his daughter and the one who is to defend her rights, confronts her suitor with the basic invalidity of both the proposal for which he has come and for the dishonest plan he has in mind:

Your absence of means, of a profession, of visible resources or prospects, places you in a category from which it would be imprudent for me to select a husband for my daughter, who is a weak young woman with a large fortune. In any other capacity I am perfectly prepared to like you. As a son-in-law, I abominate you!" (James 50)

He feels not obliged to stand on ceremony, or to welcome his young guest whose purpose is not merely to ask for the hand of a plain but rich woman. Haralson (169) argues that in spite of Sloper's inability to fully comprehend the depths of his daughter's emotional or intellectual nature, he dies recognizing that she is as capable of firm resolve as he is.

In courting Catherine on the pretext of his deep love for her, Morris, the attractive young man who is without financial resources of his own, seeks a life of leisure through a profitable marital relationship. He fails to win neither Catherine nor her fortune, and his prospects for finding the life of comfort he desires are ultimately destroyed by this and his own failure in

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business (ibid 170). Morris is, practically, good for nothing, a failure whose efforts are always in vain.

Morris, as Doctor Sloper sees him, can by no means be a gentleman; he is nothing but a "selfish idler" (James 77), who "has led a life of dissipation, and has spent a fortune of his own in doing so" (James 48). Accordingly, "[i]f Morris Townsend has spent his own fortune in amusing himself, there is every reason to believe that he would spend yours" (ibid). Moreover, Sloper believes that Morris pretends to like Catherine because she is "so simple and so good" (James 46). Therefore, Morris is looking for a "position of husband of a weak-minded woman with a large fortune" (James 37). For such a quick-witted person like Sloper, it is hard to perceive Morris romantic approach in isolation from his pragmatic, selfish ends. Indeed, the young man's elastic love for Catherine allows him to confess to Lavinia that he, as a matter of fact, does like Catherine's money. As Catherine can on no account be strong enough to respond to his request by either choosing him or leaving him, or simply by either pleasing him or her father, Morris concludes that he "must give her up" (James 116).

As if living under a spell or in a dream the end of which looks tremendously brilliant, Catherine Sloper is so carried away by her romantic feelings for Morris that she once scolds her aunt, thinking that she has spoiled her relationship with him. She even feels independent and in no need for help from others. Unconcerned by the possibility of her being disinherited by her unfeeling father, Catherine declares to him that if she does something that displeases him or that he dislikes; she ought not to stay with him anymore.

Since Catherine is basically afraid of her patriarchal father, she sometimes tries to appeal to and count on his softer side, demonstrating her willingness to wait if delaying the marriage can be satisfactory to him. She declares that if she fails to "marry before his death, she'll not after" (James 78). In like manner, she displays her obedience to his orders by not seeing

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Morris because he has forbidden it. She still keeps some fresh hopes that the father may one day be weakened by age or by her obedient patience and, as a result, may yield positively to their sincere love feelings:

The idea of a struggle with her father, of setting up her will against his own, was heavy on her soul, and it kept her formally submissive, as a great physical weight keeps us motionless. It never entered into her mind to throw her lover off; but from the first she tried to assure herself that there would be a peaceful way out of their difficulty. The assurance was vague, for it contained no element of positive conviction that her father would change his mind. She only had an idea that if she should be very good, the situation would in some mysterious manner improve. To be good, she must be patient, respectful, abstain from judging her father too harshly, and from committing any act of open defiance. (James 64)

Finally, Catherine's cool resolve in rejecting Morris displays her moral growth within her community and seems a true heroine who recognizes that a life with Morris would be intolerable. For this reason, she "chooses to sacrifice romantic illusions to embrace reality, becoming a woman much closer to the model her father had espoused" (Haralson 168). When she meets Morris towards the end of the novel, she still has the familiarity of her "old voice," yet, it lacks its "old charm" (James 144). Instead a voice is echoing in her, reminding her of Morris's unforgettable bad treatment which she has suffered from for years. Therefore, she "can't begin again—[she] can't take it up. Everything is dead and buried. It was too serious; it made a great change in [her] life. [She] never expected to see [him] here" (James 150). Ultimately, she "would rather not see him" (James 144) again.

Evidently, the novel, in some respects, is a bildungsroman. In a bildungsroman, or a novel of formation or education, the focus is upon a character's development from early youth to some sort of maturity

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(Hawthorn 18). In James's novels of bildungsroman, the women are supposed or meant to develop from a state of submission and subjugation to that of liberty and independence. It is a movement from a sense of inferiority to a better understanding and awareness of one's own value and potentials. .

Catherine is the most complex of the novel's characters. At the outset, she appears to be an inactive person who meets her father's wishes and derives self-respect from his approval. By the novel's end, however, she has gained wisdom through suffering and has found in herself the strength to stand alone. Along the way, she discovers that her presumably caring aunt is more interested in her own sentimentalizing view of Morris than her well-being. James chooses not to present her as merely a victim; instead, he slowly reveals her expanding strength of character that results from a terrible sense of loss. Catherine emerges as a survivor, a woman of unexpected courage able through the arc of the story to accept the realities that have shattered her illusions and to become a more fully realized human being (Haralson 170).

Although the novel's conclusion may, in many respects, have a tragic quality, James constructs his story in such a way as to employ symbolic elements to infuse the experiences of his characters with universal significance. Jamesian symbols show up clearly in many aspects of the novel, describing, for example, Catherine's needlework as standing for her domesticity (ibid 168).

James's use of Irony appears in the character of Sloper, who sees himself as an important doctor but who has been unable to save the lives of his wife or infant son. It is similarly ironic that Sloper's prejudiced view of women blinds him to the very qualities within Catherine's persona most like his own. In addition, irony here makes the tension that has already been building up more intense and effective. Morris, as a lover and a prospective future husband for Catherine, is, in reality, nothing more than a villain, a grafter who would more likely fail Catherine in marriage, as he may be seen



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to fail her as a lover. James's sense of irony is noticeable in the realization that as Sloper is seemingly proven right about Morris's motives he also ruins his relationship with his daughter. To the readers, the points of interests are the characters' minds and hearts rather than the development of a simple plot (ibid 169-169).

James's novel was written long before feminist ideas and notions were in vogue, yet his heroines break, in a way, the rules of the patriarchal system while looking for their true selves and identities. James, while writing ahead of his time, appears to be warning against the dangers of women's running the risk of encountering the evil of the outside world. Although feminism strongly calls for women's liberation from their old-fashioned roles and for their assumption of social and cultural roles as equally as men do, it leaves women pay the high expenses of their probable making of terrible mistakes or wrong judgments that affect their entire life.

### **Conclusion**

Through his novella, Henry James seems to be hinting at a vital point that individual women have to consider before they can make any crucial decisions in their life. Based on cultural and social factors, women are in no way capable of understanding the outside world in the same way as men or males do. Since their ultimate kingdoms are basically their homes, their main dominions are confined to what might be termed as the domestic borders. Therefore, any uncalled for encounter with the outside reality, for which women are usually unprepared, may bring about their final destruction as entities aspiring to achieving their personal independence and liberty, or, at least, scratch, once and for all, their self-image that they have worked so hard to maintain or preserve.

Skilfully, *Henry James's Washington Square* puts the feminist issue of women's independence to the test: Dr. Sloper, the main male figure in the story, is a representative of the guardian who, though appears to be hatefully

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domineering, proves to be experienced enough to know the world and the varieties of the behaviours of its people. Though tired of this debilitating sense of male superiority, Catherine, his daughter who is also the heroine of the story, is well aware, when she gets mature by the end of the novella, that the patriarchal role in her life is indispensable until she becomes possessed of the power through which she can have her complete and ultimate self-independence.

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