



A Comparative Study of the Psychoanalytical Portrayal of the Women Characters by Virginia Woolf and Zoya Pirzad

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Abstract :

Looking backwards at a century of capricious discourses, now after another turn of the century, one easily comes to the common point in all Feministic discourses; which all are as efforts to prove women's presence and their equality to men in various aspects of life. The passage of the decades did not mutate the nature of all these feminine studies; just have posed the topic in diverse areas; for the whole body of the Feminist dialogisms and ideas were appointed by patriarchal discourses. This indicates that the current feminist dialogisms are not totally feminine discourses, rather, feminine-masculine ones formed out of men's mischievousness saving their patriarchal authority which changes the discourses to a masculine/feminine relation. However, what nowadays Feminism, as a school of thought, needs is a feminine intuition, that is a moment of feminine epiphany, by which not only women will be able to reach a new understanding of femininity but men also will recognize the essence/existence of females. Discussing Virginia Woolf's dialogism in 'A Room of One's Own' and two novels by Zoya Pirzad (Persian narratives of a highly male dominated society) the study concludes that Feminism needs an intuitive feminine epiphany; an epiphany that both sexes should come to in a society, to enable the school of feminism to come to a purely feminine dialogics and be released from all the mischievous feminine-masculine discourses.

Keywords :

Feminism; Feminine-masculine discourse; Feminine Epiphany; Feministic Dialogism.

I. Introduction

Feminist literary criticism through its various lineaments has invested hyperfastidiously in harnessing sign systems so as “to find out how woman comes to be positioned in preordained social roles—daughter, wife, mother—within the restrictions of an inherited patriarchal circuit” (Wright, 14). The entire social mores for feminists had been built on virility of signs in their world; so that the pompous macho would have called any attempt pursuing muliebrity as the ‘witch in the attic’. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) cryptically asserts the feminist penchant for having a room of their own in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, though the socioeconomics of nineteenth century would not facilitate women for even a clear-cut proclamation, let alone for having such a room. Despite all the efforts of female—uncanonized—writers of the age such as Kate Chopin (1850-1904), feminist had to wait till Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) create a first draft of a conceivably feminist manifesto in ‘*A Room of One's Own*’ (1919).

For Gilman's narrator the only possible loophole of her masculinized ‘asylum-room-home’ is ‘insanity’. She has the room as one for herself, though yellow wallpaper surrounds her perpetually so that she becomes more cognizant of her status qua as the ‘lady of the home’, and of the social expectations of her to be the ‘angel in the house’, the true woman. Put it otherwise, although she has a room, the more she ponders on the chaotic patterns of its wallpaper, the more lucidly she beholds the woman behind the bars. She is entangled in opaque chaotic ivy patterns of the wall. In this regard, even having a room of one's own would not sooth the challenged femininity. However, Woolf's abstruse notion of a room goes beyond opacity of a wallpapered room. She

pursues socioeconomic datums to come to a room of her own. Woolf asserted that men treated women as low-level, nether creatures till the time and would continue their way. In her view, what 'being a woman' means is sketched by men; so, women need to do something about the masculine outlook of femininity.

While the two World Wars and the subsequent economic crisis marginalized the newly blossoming feminist ideas, till 1949 when '*The Second Sex*' was published by Simone de Beauvoir. The French author once again, approximately two decades later, attracted criticisms to feminism. In her book, gradually regarded as the basic manifesto of feminists in twentieth century, de Beauvoir insisted the previously posed ideas that all societies are patriarchal, as identical to Woolf, she believed that this is masculinity that defines what 'being a human' is.

II. An Overview of Feminism: Feminine Epiphany

In de Beauvoir's view if women really want a status, they should deconstruct the structures of the masculine society and present their own definition of femininity. This definition would be the proof of woman's presence and existence counter-intuitive to masculine canon of knowledge in power. It can be asserted following Hesse-Biber that:

Feminist perspectives also carry messages of empowerment that challenge the encircling of knowledge claims by those who occupy privileged positions. Feminist thinking and practice require taking steps from the "margins to the center" while eliminating boundaries that privilege dominant forms of knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known. For Virginia Woolf, it is the demarcation between the "turf" and the "path"; for Simone de Beauvoir, it is the line between the "inessential" and the "essential"; and for Dorothy Smith, it is the path that encircles dominant knowledge, where women's lived experiences lie outside its circumference or huddled at the margins. (3)

Yet, living in the present era, having passed the century posing all these discourses, it should be no longer a necessity for women, according to de Beauvoir, to prove their existence; rather they have to recognize the feminine aspects of their existence, and to define the feminine aspects of humanity. Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland confer that feminists "have made a range of claims about the position of women in relation to men, and about male domination of social theory. As a result, recent feminism and its claims to knowledge have confronted with three different sources of criticism" (3).

They gauge the challenges to 'feminist knowledge' claims that are rooted in the "dominant approaches to science, reason, progress and truth" in relation to women's experience. Besides, the 'colonial and imperial history', and the 'uneven development of global capitalism' for them is rudimentary to such knowledge. They indicate the current criticism on feminists failing to 'produce rational, scientific, or unbiased' knowledge. The result is that feminist thought "has been treated in many academic institutions as marginal, or as intellectually inferior to existing modes of thought" (They quoted from Arpad 1986; Stanley 1997). Then, if feminists claim the dominant social dialogisms as masculine, they should be able to pose an unbiased or a feminine dialogism in this knowledge. However, the current feminine dialogisms are still hefted by the masculine dialogism.

Still another challenge to feminist dialogism is the sundered discourses that waiver the possibility of generalizing any feminist idea. In the previous turn of the century (19th to 20th) when Chopin and Gillman were dominant, 'feminism' was generally an advocacy of women's rights; such as education, motherhood, sexuality, working, or political representations. Some of these campaigns led to ideas challenging male peremptory control on women's minds; which, in its

following century became the threshold for oppugning male dominance and power relations. Though, no distinctive feminist theories and practices were developed, and feminists drawn on assorted ways of thinking.

To come to some epitome of feminist discourse, feminists harnessed literary world, in which they faced cases representing the platitude role of women in literature: women were always men's beloved ones, beauty goddesses, or thoughtless creatures; no woman could have ever reach the literary canon as Wordsworth and Dickens; in all cases women were mostly of secondary and valueless roles; and men never let any female name into the literary canon. Therefore, it was crucial to find and introduce literary works by women and create a feminine literary canon. They took advantage of Kate Chopin's *'The Awakening'* (1899), Doris Lessing's *'The Golden Notebook'* (1962), and Monique Wittig's *'Les Guerillères'* (1969). In the 1980's the feminist theorist, Elaine Showalter, introduced "gynocriticism", through which she tried to unify the feminist theories and codifies the feminine criticism strategies (Bressler, 2007). Gynocriticism has been disserted on four criteria models: 1) Biological model, focusing on how the biological features of female body can influence her writings and how the images, metaphors, etc. indicates the feminine biological features in the text. 2) Linguistic model, concentrating on the different linguistic exploitations of men and women. 3) Psychological model, based on psycho analysis and feminine nature, that how feminine spirit can affect the text. 4) Cultural model, studying the influences of the society in which a female author lives on her goals, needs and viewpoints. Still, these view point were subject to criticisms:

French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (1986), Luce Irigaray (1991), and Julia Kristeva (1986) were accused by social constructionists of biological essentialism, of establishing the female body and maternity as foundational and symbolic sources of woman's psychic and sexual difference...post-structuralist critics, like Judith Butler, expose even the materiality of the body as "already gendered, already constructed." Extending her argument that gender and sex are the result of the "ritualized repetition" of certain behaviors designed to render the body either "intelligible" (normative, heterosexual) or abject (unthinkable, homosexual), Judith Butler asserts that the body itself is "forcibly produced" by power and discourse. (Hesse-Biber, 7-8)

During all these years and debates, women's effort was focusing on changing the views of the patriarchal society on women's nature and female essence. They were trying to indicate the mistakes in men's views, yet, they were not to present the true essence of women. In the opening of *"A Room of One's Own"* Virginia Woolf asserts:

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction — what, has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain...They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs. Gaskell and one would have done. But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them, or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. (1)

She continues her discussion, not on the woman and story, but on the problem of "being a woman" and woman's status in the society, and refers to 'man' as an obstacle or barrier for 'woman'. She

puts 'Lord Alfred Tennyson' along together with a Christina Rossetti¹, and focuses on the role of the later in English literature and regards her as tantamount to the former. Woolf endeavors blaming men as the only guilty party, and exonerating all women. She concludes that man is furious:

They had been written in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth. All that I had retrieved from that morning's work had been the one fact of anger...The professors—I lumped them together thus—were angry. But why? ...standing under the colonnade among the pigeons and the prehistoric canoes, why are they angry? ...What is the real nature of what I call for the moment their anger? (30)

Woolf refers to one of the unjust viewpoints of patriarchal society on women under the appellation of 'men's sense of pride and superiority over women' (31). Implied in her discussion is that this anger stems from another element often present but opaque to perceive. She confers that "to judge from its odd effects, it was anger disguised and complex, not anger simple and open" (30). Yet, she does not refer to men's intrinsic fear in defiance of women. She just, the same as other feminists of her era, tries to fight the inferiority of women in her own society, (which it is anti-feminine per se, for I think there is an implied acquiescence to feminine inferiority in such a presupposition). In my opinion, in order to obtain their goal, women have to fight this false and vacuity of the enlargement (a term Woolf uses) of men.

Woolf refers to the great literary characters, yet, since she regards them all as opposed to her viewpoint, states that they are all fiction and not real ones. If it was so, what was the necessity to tell stories about women? 'Women of Troy', 'Medea', 'Electra', 'Climestra'...., why should be all these women attract Seneca, the greatest Roman philosopher and orator. Woolf answers no more and insists on her states, and finally finishes her discussion as such:

Even so, the very first sentence that I would write here, I said, crossing over to the writing-table and taking up the page headed Women and Fiction, is that it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. And fatal is no figure of speech; for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death. (98-99)

In this case we will see again that Mrs. Woolf does not assert anything new; since Samuel Coleridge had referred to such a case a few centuries ago. Coleridge notes that 'human mind has to contain the both sexes while perfection will be achieved through the accumulation of contradictions' (Selden). Yet, it will be credulity to have the same opinion in the beginning of the new era.

III. Discussion

Pirzad's "*We'll Get Used To*" challenges the patriarchal world. The narrative moves around Arezu's feelings, emotions, and thoughts. In the beginning of the novel, she is introduced as an independent woman, working and having all the duties just as a man. She is depicted so:

Arezu looked at the white Citroen parking in front of the dairy market. She murmured: I bet you'll goof up boy; and waited putting her elbow on the car's

¹ - Tennyson's contemporary female poetess.

window pane. The goatee faced driver went to and fro, to, and came back, again to, and gave up the parking. Arezu putting her hand on the back of the side seat and looked back, the goatee boy was watching, the wheels screamed and the Renault parked. (1)

The whole story, in the same trend as the very first paragraph, goes around Arezu's challenges facing the society especially the masculinity in the society. The novel begins with the idea of proving woman presence and existence; yet, no reference is made to humanist aspects of woman existence and the female essence. Arezu's condition is not suitable and she is stuck in her family's and friends' expectations. On the one hand, she is under pressure by her ex-husband, Hamid, who insist on sending their daughter, Ayeh, to France; on the other, her mother, Mah-Monir, asks Arezu marry to the guy she wants; this is what Shirin, Arezu's intimate friend, also constantly reminds her. It seems that all her immediate people try to wield their authority over her, as if Arezu is indecisive. Thus, for proving her own existence and the ability to choose and decide, she enters masculine contests, and detaches from her own feminine essence and womanly life.

Arezu's mother believes in some unwritten rules and manner of communications; rules that all have to acquiesce to. They are some feminine aristocratic rituals, in which Arezu has no role because her part is not womanly, as if Arezu's surrounding people expect her to be a man. Before her birth, her father named his shop as "Sarem and the Son Real State"; that is she had to be a boy, not a girl. Her femininity is basically dubious. Even they did not change the name of the Real State after her birth. The father once said: "what's the difference?" and so many years later Arezu answered: "wish he were alive to see there is no difference". This shows Arezu's awareness of her condition and the others' expectations. They wanted her as a son and it seems that Arezu is only an improper patch to the family; or even she is the son of the family. [Even her name, Arezu, (in Persian meaning Hope) shows the unfulfilled hope of the family, which she has to fulfill.] Her feminine existence and nature in family is dubious.

In her marriage it seems she was forced to choose one of her twin cousins, either Hamid or Hesam. They even had ignored her feminine nature, in this regard. She chose Hamid thanks to her loneliness and being guideless. Besides the choice was due to the fact that Hamid would have taken her to France and in this case she would have been released from her family in Iran. Or that in France, where freedom and enlightenment were prevalent, she could be able to activate her potentialities as a woman and no longer experience the feeling of failure. Here, there is a question: why France? Isn't it the reason that some critics believe France as the pioneer origin of Feminism?! However, Arezu does not feel comfortable there. The masculine look that ignores her feminine nature still dominates her life. Even in the current condition, her ex-husband, Hamid, constantly tempts their daughter to immigrate to France. Yet, the daughter, Ayeh does not follow her mother; rather she does what her grandmother wants. She does not credit Arezu as a mother. In the first place it is because Arezu herself wanted to divorce her husband, and so caused Ayeh to be detached from her father. The second reason is that Arezu does not play a mother role for her daughter, let alone to be both her father and mother simultaneously. Thus, Arezu neither is father nor mother, rather a supplier. While Ayeh dreams a day Arezu plays her own role: mother. Ayeh is not able to request her wish because of social situation of her mother. So, nothing would change in the mother-daughter relation.

Throughout the novel Arezu tries to prove her femininity to other and sometimes even to herself. Since she is affected by others and sometimes finds a sort of conflict between what she knows as Arezu and what other believe. This is much more seen in her relationship with her mother. She sees Arezu as if she is someone else, not an independent woman. In this regard Arezu does not have a parental feeling towards her mother, and this feeling was absent since her childhood; rather she searches such feelings to Nosrat (the housemaid). Arezu's mother regards

her as not her own daughter, rather a woman at her own age. Arezu cares Nosrat's comments as if she is her mother. The mother senses such views. While she is sick and Arezu visits her and recites some of Nosrat's quotations, she loses her temper and says: "You like the housemaid better than me; it seems she is your mother." Such relation was made as soon as Nosrat entered the house as a housemaid, when Arezu studied in primary school. Since then Arezu found the expected look and respects as a female just in Nosrat's looking, and Nosrat also believed in Arezu as a woman, so Arezu called her: "My dear darling Nosrat".

Arezu needs someone to protect and support her. She has been in limbo since her father died. She is stuck in a world full of people not knowing her feminine needs, desires, and emotions. The two close ones, her mother and daughter, are among her rejecters. Arezu has just one friend to rely on: Shirin. Their friendship relation is a haven for Arezu. But, as soon as Sohrab, a man entering the real state as a customer and gradually became her friend, enters to Arezu's life, the friendship with Shirin loses its color. Since, now this is Sohrab who is Arezu's haven, the one who first Arezu remembers as soon as she meets a problem. For instance, once she stealthy reads Ayeh's private writings on her weblog and her eyes fill with tears, she says to herself: "I should call Sohrab." Arezu and Shirin's friendship is also a refuge for Shirin. After Esfandiar's departure (Shirin's ex-husband), for his mother's accident and death, finding Arezu was as celestial gift to Shirin. Shirin never gets marry and is still waiting for Esfandiar and at the same time she hates all men, a sort of mendacious hatred to mollify herself. She says all men are the same. Replying Arezu's question "is there any exception?" Shirin says: "none."

Every day and each time after drinking her coffee, Shirin looks at the bottom of the cup to soothsay her fortune just for the sake of finding some rays of hope in Esfandiar's return. She is anxious, waiting for the man to come back and decide for her life. But Arezu is not waiting a man to come decide for her life since she is an independent woman and lives like a man, a kind of living so many women wish to have; rather than trying to find feminine originality.

Once answering Ayeh's query about Sohrab and Arezu answers: "since, just once in my whole life I decided to keep something for my own." It might be a reason that Arezu does not introduce Sohrab to her mother. Arezu feels her mother and daughter detached from herself, and knows they do not credit such a right for her. She imagines herself in solitude. She finds a man, Sohrab, and tries to keep him for herself and postpones introducing him to her family. She desperately needs a refuge accrediting her femininity. She is a woman, the fact that nobody around heeds it, for she was supposed to be a man. She is searching for a look to see her just as a woman. All the characters in the novel regard Arezu as a man owning a real state. The very first one who sees Arezu's femininity is Sohrab. Sohrab is the only one who sees Arezu's elegance, bangs, hands, and generally her whole feminine existence.

The first time Claris meets Emile, the new neighbor, is a sample of such moments of epiphany. At moment of Claris and her husband's (Artush) entrance, Emile greets them both then bows putting his lips on Claris' hand; this short kiss on the hand is a long-time kiss during which all memories of her life and Artush's behaviors pass through her thoughts, but the masculine discourse of her thought stops her from following the stream of consciousness leading to epiphany. Claris says: "Artush coughs and the twins gaze at my hand and the head of Emile SimonieI wish my sleeve wouldn't be wet by sweat....no time to think about..." (***)

The masculine discourse dominated Claris' mind, highlighted by her husband presence, dose not let her to think of the moment of epiphany until they are at Emile's home. When Emile wants to go to Claris' house, the feminine discourse of Claris urges her to wear some lipstick as cosmetics. Claris asserts that: "two sides of my mind conflicting with each other, finally one said the other: 'being well-ordered and neat is not a sin.' So, I went to the bedroom, combed my hair

and wore some lipstick” (*****). Here this is the feminine discourse that confirms Claris, yet, as soon as Emile is about to enter, the masculine discourse overshadows her unconsciousness femininity: “the bell rang; I jumped to it in the middle of the way I cleaned up my lipstick by tissue.” (*****)

The mental challenge of Claris here is what Arezu faces with when she tries to order Sohrab’s collar. Arezu finally overcomes the masculine discourse, yet Claris is in the bounds of it. All characters that Zoya Pirzad depicted in her novels are ever challenging with masculine discourse. In “*We’ll Get Used To*” Shirin tries not to heed the masculine discourse yet in her mental background she is the captive of such discourse. Even Artush’s (Claris’ husband) secretary Ms. Noorollahi, despite being the lecturer and secretary of Women’s Right Association, is bounded in the framework of masculine discourse dominant in the society. The reason is hidden in Ms. Noorollahi and Claris’ private talk in milk-bar, when Ms. Noorollahi unconsciously reveals it in her speeches. But this canny masculine discourse by expressing the idea that one should think womanly-manly does not let them any opportunity to think womanly, and take them as the captives of the dominant discourse in the society. Such dominant discourse does not let them to have feminine thoughts.

Zoya Pirzad can imagine her characters experiencing epiphany only when she had come to a recognition and wisdom of feminine essence herself, and no more write womanly-manly. Due to such manly-womanly discourse Claris, Ms. Noorollahi, and Shirin do not experience the epiphanic moment, yet Arezu despite all challenges does experience the epiphany; since no longer does she think womanly-manly, and Pirzad also does not write womanly-manly. They both think just womanly, and had come to femininity.

IV. Conclusion

In post-human, postmodern era it is no longer true to expect women to think manly-womanly. In the posthuman feminism thought there is no emphasis on proving a woman’s existence and feminine essence for men (for there is no need to ‘prove’ so long as it is accepted as the for granted basis of humanism), rather the emphasis is on the intuitive recognition of human nature of women for all men and women. This school is not limited to women, rather all have to be familiar with. The goal of this school is achieving mental manifestation and recognition, such recognition that Woolf experiences it through Clarissa Dalloway and Lily Briscoe, and Pirzad through Arezu. That kind of recognition Forough Farrokhzad achieved through her poems.

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