Feminist Orientations in Postmodern American Literature

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ABSTRACT: American postmodern poets and authors of fictional writings write within and against the dual Anglo – American oral and written traditions . The poet either goes along with or against the disparity between Anglo – American myths and modern American reality in a sense their poetry has become more global and has been a renewed quest for some kind of pattern in its development and interest .What is raised here in this study in specific manifestation is the influence of Post – Modernity in the sense of gender, and in the interpretation of psychoanalytic theory for determination of Feminist Literary practice . In the Feminist phase, women are historically enabled to reject being behind. A generation of New Women defined the women's artistic role in terms of responsibility to suffering. It is useful to start by considering what is meant by Modernism. In relation to modernism, there can be seen as an emphasis on fundamental thinking, on the feasibility of objective knowledge and criteria which can be disconnected from its historical, social, and cultural context, and on the possibility of discovering the truth of a situation. There is emphasis on universality and on large – scale grand narratives or macro theories which are seen to be all embracing and encompassing. Postmodernist thought emphasizes diverse forms of individual and social identity where pluralism, contingency, variety, contradiction and ambivalence replace certainty, facts , objective positions and polarization of opposites .

Keywords: Post American Literature; American Literature; English Literature; Feminist Literary; New Women; Modernism

INTRODUCTION : Postmodern Feminism ; An Overview

Postmodern Feminism cannot be viewed as a unified theoretical perspective and there are authors who have variously engaged with both postmodernism and feminism . In the development of what can be termed perspectives deriving from considerations of postmodernism and feminism, (Postmodern Feminism). This term distinguishes between meta-narratives; (the histories of male dominance which claim a fundamental grounding in the philosophy of history), and large-scale empirical narratives which are non-fundamental. In relation to postmodernism, a term which is continually questioned, preferring to use the term Post-structuralism. If this comes to serve, anti-feminist purposes, although maintains this risk as a product of the very foundational matter. That it is supposed to protect feminism against anti-feminism. As a part of this project, the contribution of perspectives derived from postmodern feminism will now be examined in relation to four areas that can be regarded as keys, and which will be returned to discuss as they are; power/knowledge frameworks, notions of subjectivity, matters of difference and conceptualizations of able-bodiedness ,disabled-bodiedness and the body . It has to be acknowledged that all these areas are interlinked, and that they have been separated to highlight the applicability of perspectives drawn from postmodern feminism.

1.1.2 Historical literary survey of Feminism:

Since 1920, the feminist phase rejected imitation, and turned instead to female experience as the source of art, expanding the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature. Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, are representatives of Female Aesthetics. " Their experiments enrich the celebration of consciousness ... " (1) The position of female writers creates problems in economic situation as authors . " The clear beginning of the feminist movement in criticism and literary experience begins in the early 1970s possibly during the era of postmodern literature, aided by the formation of the Modern Language Association's Commission in 1969." (2) There is a parallel line between the Socialists and Feminists represented by the notions of class oppression and gender oppression, race would be the major source of revolutionary and reformist ideologists in modern societies .Some feminists believe that women's oppression can be understood within a large understanding of class. 

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oppression with the assumption of women's being in lower position goes back a long way. Aristotle declared that," ... the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities ..."(3)

A generation of New woman begins in the era of late nineteenth century, examples of this phase in America are the Amazon Utopias of the 1890s, by the American Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who analyzed the masculine literature with sex and war." (4) She carried George Eliot's idea of the precious special view, comparing her view of sisterly collectivity.

1.1.3 Modernity and contribution to postmodernity:

The work of Virginia Woolf is considered as a base that feminist writers such as; Tillie Olsen, Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter, and others have been building and developing definitions of women's writing, and established its lines and traditions by encouraging printing houses to reissue last works. The beginning of postmodern literature could be marked by significant publications of literary events. However, the prefix “Post” does not necessarily imply a new era, it could also indicate a reaction against modernism in the wake of the Second World War. Several Post-war developments in literature, such as the Theatre of the Absurd, the Beat Generation, and Magic Realism have significant similarities. These developments are occasionally labeled "Postmodern" more commonly some figures as significant contributors to the postmodern aesthetic. Postmodernism has been criticized for focusing on the superficial and eschewing substance or for affirming the postmodern feminisms.

Feminisms as a means of exploring tensions and making links between modernism and postmodernism has been examined. It has been argued that orientations of emanating from postmodern feminism can be used to reject both a modernist emphasis on foundationalism and postmodernist focus on relativity. Critiques emerging from feminisms of postmodern orientations between feminisms, and postmodernism have been highlighted.

1.1.4 Universality of Feminist Literature:

It is noted in Carol Fairbanks Myers' Women in Literature: Criticism of the Seventies which is a type of bibliography covers the period from January 1970 to the Spring of 1975, including new feminist criticism and traditional critical approaches that deal with women characters. Cheri Register cited in her bibliographical survey, the movement of the postmodern feminist literary movement since 1970. She also remarks that the formation of the MLA Commission as the "... beginning of an organized critical effort ..."(5) It is proved here that the writings of Josephine Donovan, Annis V. Pratt, Joan I. Roberts, and others to make an emphasis on most of the writings of the feminist critics and writers of literary types in the 1970s. Register and Pratt provide not only mere bibliography, but they give comments on the thinking and beliefs of the feminist literary writers as well. Feminists are suspicious of Freud's theory because they see it as having masculine connotations. We can see a continuity between Aristotle's and Freud's assumptions that female sexuality is shaped by a lower rank.

1.1.5 Status of Women in Society

Women provide us with the more challenging problems to deal with woman in society has the status of pan-cultured fact. However, with that universal fact, the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations of woman are extraordinary diverse and contradictory. Relatively, the actual power of woman and contribution from culture to culture, over different periods in the history of particular cultural traditions. It is notable that the problem of the genuine change emerges in the social and cultural order in which much of the range of humanity is open to women as to men. "The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, ..." (6).

The cultural attribution of second - class status of woman in society is the question of how to deal with this fact. The problem, at this level is to observe details of women's activities, contributions, powers, influence, and orientations in the cultural ideology. This observation is often adopted by Feminist Oriented Anthropologists.

The problem of devaluation of women depends not upon specific cultural data, but rather on the analysis of relative valuation of women's cross-cultural research in every known culture. It is said that women are inferior to men. This may stress the elements of cultural ideology that devalues women in their roles, tasks, and products, and this may show the social - structural arrangements that exclude women from contact with highest powers in the society. Indeed, the fact of woman's full human consciousness, her full involvement in culture, may be explained and realized by postmodernists because of woman's greater involvement with the natural functions surrounding society.

2.2. Feminist Trends in Postmodern Literature

2.2.1 Feminist Critiques of Postmodern Orientations

The field of disability for current debates has relevance in the orientations drawn from postmodern feminism. It has to be recognized that the political implications of rejecting grand theories and the consequent embracing of accounts which emphasis relatively and provisionally are
disturbing. Additionally, difficulties emerge in the one moves away from notions of truth and the possibility of absolute understanding for theories. The use of orientations drawn from postmodern feminism are presented as a means of retaining the ability to weigh criteria and respond to social divisions and social inequalities.

There are similarities between developments in Feminism and Postmodernism, and it is useful to explore both points of similarity as well as points of difference. Differences emerge, however, in that such deconstructive appraisals have tended to be based on feminist foundational knowledge frameworks, and initially within "Second Wave Feminism" emphasis was placed on the unitary category "Woman" being juxtaposed with the unitary category "Man". The ways in which such unitary categories were challenged by some feminists by means of an emphasis on essentialist notions of self and distinct subject identities, also runs counter to postmodern formulations.

2.2.2 Feminism in Practice

Cheri Register identifies, in her bibliographical article, the divisions of feminist literature as analysis of the image of woman, and she sets standards for literature that is good from a feminist point of view. She claims that this kind of literary "Prescriptive "is" … the best defined in terms of the ways in which literature can serve the cause of liberation."(7) Similarly, psychological sides fail to understand feminine consciousness. Annis Pratt says that she has been trained to be archetypal critic, but she finds that archetypal criticism fails in understanding the rule of the female. She says that she can deal with the psyche of the female hero in literature by adapting Jung’s descriptions of the quest of the young hero for adulthood and full individualism.

The new movement in feminist writings may be developed not as a new feminine vision, but as a vision of the helpful correctives to come out of the movement. As a novelist, Virginia Woolf can join fact and vision in a modernist outlook. In Three Guineas, she intends to play the political game herself, and gives a definitive statement about the practical side of reality. Virginia Woolf has pointed out many times that women could not do good by imitating the ways of men. She proposes a programme in education of a dialectic case between existing institutions and in ideal college. The profession of literature, she wrote, "… is the only profession which did not fight a series of battles in the nineteenth century …"(8).

Charlotte Bronte defies gender – obsession, and writes as outsider to literary history in her impatient plea to Lewes, "… I wish you did not think me a woman … "(9). The Bronte s are considered important women novelists. This kind of gender and genre come from the same root and their connection to literary history is almost intimate. Feminist literature and criticism may be divided into two classes; the first type is related to woman as reader, woman as a passive side of male's produced literature, as a consumer not creative, and with the way of the hypothesis of a female reader changes our appreciation of a given text. The second type of feminist literary side is concerned with woman as a writer, as an active producer of textual meaning with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literary production by woman, female creativity and female literary career.

2.2.3 Feminine - Feminist - Female

In postmodern activities of feminist literary issue, there are three phases: Feminine, Feminist, and Female. The field of feminist criticism activities has been called "gynocriticism". This issue deals with distinctive structures, themes and genres of women's writing. The nature of female creativity and language, and the historical problems facing women as writers. Women as writers have always faced social and economic obstacles to their ambitions as Woolf believes in her essay "Professions for Women," she discussed the disabling nineteenth-century ideology of womanhood. She raised up the question of Female language, and the nature of genres, and expresses the taboo of the expression of Female Passion. Woolf also accused men that they have made the genres for their own use. The women can only find a space in novel as this genre answers their interest.

The feminist novelists deal mainly with fiction because their interest in the women's emancipation movement coincided with a need to earn money, and writing was still one of the few possibilities open to a middle – class woman who had to work. Most of the feminist writers women like Emma Brooke "A Superfluous Woman", and Edith Johnstone " A Sunless Heart", were not good enough as writers to turn their material into an important challenge to the literary tradition. There had been a Bronte or an Eliot writing during the period of transition, when literature was beginning to break free from the moral strange hold of the Victorian sexual ideology. The novel was dominated for the first time, and quite accidentally by male writers.

Virginia Woolf was the only major female talent writer at the time, and she was both too late and ultimately too ambivalent to redefine women within fiction. Her primary commitment as a novelist was artistic that her artistic theories could not comfortably accommodate her feminism, and that she apparently had to choose between feminist and artistic criteria, they finally emerge as incompatibles. When she comes to write, a woman must forget her oppression. Passively, the creative mind of a woman may be receiving impressions from the outside world. This is supposed to bring
us to be close to another reason for Virginia Woolf's virtual disregard of feminism in her novels.

"Virginia Woolf undoubtedly had placed almost intolerable pressure on her. Such a passive attitude towards the writer's mental processes and towards the external world rule out any vigorous quarrel with social orthodoxies, whether they affect men or women.

### 2.2.4 Sex – Domination in Female Writings

Since the Sixties of the twentieth century, there have been a number of important women writers who have set out to do what Virginia Woolf deliberately avoided doing. They write at a conscious level about what it means to be a woman living in a society, recently writers such as Fay Weldon, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Edna O'Brien in Britain. And Mary McCarthy in America. A common feature of these novelists is that although, with the increased "Permissiveness" of recent decades, many of them have begun to write more freely about women's sexuality. They still have not recognized the importance of non-sexual, non-emotional aspects of women's lives into their novels. In their work, the tyranny of the intensely personal of the non-material is as strong in postmodern era as ever it was, and the privatized world of personal relations which was at its zenith in Lawrence remains the only one in which their women are allowed to exist. This means that there has been a real break with fictional convention. The private world has been sexualized, women have been sexualized, but the assumption that inner experiences are the most significant part of woman's life. In Doris Lessing, this tendency has become gradually more rather than less pronounced. In the last sixty years of the previous century, the novel has increasingly adopted the notion that the only true reality is within the consciousness of isolated individuals.

The inner voyage, the drama of the alienated consciousness, has become the characteristic theme of twentieth-century literature. It is believed by so many critics that the failure to break away from this subjectivism indicates that one of the problems encountered by explicitly feminist novelists at the end of the last century is being reencountered by the current generation of women writers. Although women clearly do not live the entirely privatized lives of fictional tradition or of contemporary ideology, it is equally true also that they do not yet live the kind of lives feminists envisage as a real life if distant possibility. This explains the increasing importance of non-realist narrative forms in contemporary women's writing. It seems necessary if women are to be freed in literature from the closed world of private experience of writers such as Monique Wittig, Beryl Bainbridge, Angela Carter, and Patricia Highsmith all of whom work in fantasy or thriller modes.

### 2.2.5 American Feminists

Feminist literary career displayed the political characteristics of the women's movement from the early seventies to the mid-eighties. Many leading American feminists practiced a coordinated mode of critical analysis involving socio-historical approaches to literature. The judicial tendency of feminist criticism revived the whole issue of aesthetic value, which had been repressed or down played by almost all schools of post war criticism. Many American Feminists asserted that literary texts reflected the personal, social, and political realities of writers, and that readers were moved and shaped by works of literature. Josephine Donovan declared that literature can't be separated from life any more than we believe that a writer can separate her/himself from her/his social, cultural, and personal identity. Feminists were discontent with patriarchal civilization and worked toward revolution, whereas American Feminists usually look for women's experience and history of Leading French Feminist Writers who examined the construction of the feminine in language, philosophy, and other systems of discourse.

There were three areas of significant differences between American Feminists and French Gynesis; first, American feminists took into account the sex of authors, French dismissed empirical author. Second, American writers examine images, types and characters as effects of language. American Feminists sought the truth in or behind literary vision; French explore the relation between truth and fiction.

### 2.2.6 Postmodern Literary Movements

Postmodern orientations can be seen to remove the very foundation of disability and so severely challenge modernist feminist movement. As highlighted, woman and disabled women, and men are becoming subjects of being abolished. The debate whether we now inhabit a postmodern world or whether we are in a phase high modernism, or a continuation of modernism continues orientations drawn from post modern feminisms suggest the tensions, clearly specified and can be productive. Everywhere, and in every known culture, women are considered in some degree inferior to men. This can be evaluated in three types of data:

- Elements of cultural ideology and informants' statements that explicitly devalue women.
- Symbolism devices, such as the attribution of defilement which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation.
- Social structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in society.

The first generation of the so-called "postmodern" poets was forced into a "fall-back position". Some of the features of that position were the use of traditionally formal verse structure,
at which Auden was an acknowledged master. Perhaps Auden was responsible for the Post-Modernist style of post-war America. American postmodern poets write within and against the dual Anglo–American oral and written traditions. Poetry is a part of everyday in the poem, yet it also works in distancing readers from the pause of images. In the poetry of Jane Hirshfield, postmodernism appears sometimes to be innocent of the inherent irony because its action is blankly innocent of any such devious satirical impulse for one of its basic assumptions. Her collections of poetry are *The Lives of Hearts* 1997, *Given Sugar, Given Salt* 2001, are among her distinctive poetry of *Alienating from Alienation*. Chase Twichell has a significant ideological changes in form of inner pressures of content that make it imperative as a collection of psychological demand. That is plain in her poetry collections: *The Ghost of Eden* 1995, and *The snow watcher* 1998.

3 Concluding Remarks

The feasibility of using orientations emanating from postmodern feminism to critically appraise aspects of modernism and postmodernism, and to explore tensions and make links between modern and postmodern perspectives has been examined. The application of constructively deconstructive analyses drawn from postmodern feminism to power/knowledge frameworks and notions of subjectivity have been used to facilitate the recognition and rejection of modernist "innocent" and "Privileged" power/knowledge claims, notions of a "Core" essentialist self, unitary undifferentiated categorization processes and the positing of binary oppositional frameworks. With regard to conceptualizations, critical appraisal on the basis of orientations drawn from postmodern feminism has resulted in reformulations being presented. In relation to power/knowledge frameworks, the postmodern contention that it is not possible to ground power/knowledge claims has been reformulated. Accordingly, with regard to postmodern feminisms, all power/knowledge claims are regarded as non–innocent and non–privileged, but it is seen to be possible to weight conflicting claims in particular contexts.

References

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