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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Image of Woman in William Wordsworth's *The Solitary Reaper*

تحليل الخطاب في صورة المرأة في قصيدة "الحاصدة المنعزلة" للشاعر ويليام ووردزورث تحليل نقدي

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Abstract

This study is a critical discourse analysis of the image of woman in William Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper". The importance of this study lies in exposing the idealized and marginalized image of woman. The problem of this study is that the poet presents that image from his own point of view. This study aims at clarifying that image following Fairclough's three dimensions. It hypothesizes that the figurative language works in constructing the beauty of that image. It also hypothesizes that the poet is depicting the effect the reaper has on his soul rather than depicting reality. As for the procedure, the data analysis is done by explaining the whole surrounding context that works together to build up the image of woman in this poem. This paper follows a qualitative analysis from a CDA point of view. In conclusion, the hypothesis is proved to be true by showing that the poet has the only role in constructing the image of woman.

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ملخص

إن استخدام اللغة ، ليس مسألة عشوائية ، فهناك دائماً هدف وراء هذه العملية. يتشكل الغرض من إلقاء هذا الخطاب الشفوي أو المكتوب بحسب قصد المتكلم و بيئته و نياته، وهذا يدلّ على أن اللغة مرتبطة ارتباطاً وثيقاً بالعالم المحيط بالمتكلم ، وهو ما يؤكد تحليل الخطاب النقدي ، الذي تأتي هذه الدراسة في ضمنه ، فهي تحليل نقدي للخطاب المتعلق بصورة المرأة في شعر وليام ووردزورث، وخاصةً في قصيدة (الحاصدة المنعزلة).

تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في الكشف عن صورة المرأة المثالية من خلال تصوير عملها في الحقل. تُظهر مشكلة الدراسة أن صورة المرأة مُوضّحة، من وجهة نظر الشاعر نفسه، التي قد لا تعكس الحقيقة. أمّا فرضية البحث فهي أن اللغة المجازية تؤدي دوراً أساسياً في بناء صورة المرأة، كما أن هذه الدراسة تفترض أن الأثر الذي تركته (الحاصدة) في نفس الشاعر هو ماتم نقله، بدلاً من تصوير الحقيقة. تتبنى هذه الدراسة منهج التحليل النوعي من منظور تحليل الخطاب النقدي. قامت الباحثة بتبني الأبعاد الثلاثة لـ "فيركلوف"، في دراستها. وقد أثبتت الدراسة صحة الفرضية في إظهار أثر الشاعر الوحيد في إظهار صورة المرأة، متأرجحاً بين الإعجاب والاستحواذ.

الكلمات المفتاحية

تحليل الخطاب النقدي،

ويليام ووردزورث،

صورة ، المرأة، اللغة

المجازية، الشعر

الانجليزي.

1. Introduction

The study of people's utterances and texts is called discourse analysis. In literature, and more specifically in poetry, one can imagine what he/she reads as a live picture in front of his/her eyes. This is the thing that makes the language of literature so special. Yule (2010:286) defines discourse analysis as "the study of language beyond the sentence, in text and conversation." Thus, it focuses not only on the sentence, but on the listener, speaker, culture, and context which help people to infer the meaning of any discourse. Generally, discourse focuses on how the language is used to convey

communicative goals. It studies the utterances trying to interpret what is behind them by analyzing the relationship among them. The nature of the society determines the choice of a particular discourse. In addition, discourse is highly affected by the social class including income, education and occupation. It is also affected by the gender factor as it affects the nature of the social interaction (Paltridge,2006:31).

1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Originally, Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) goes back to other linguistic disciplines like Socio-linguistics and

Pragmatics (Weiss and Wodak, 2003:11). Studying discourse analysis is based on different approaches like studying and dealing with the topics that are discussed in the written and spoken texts, which is the domain of CDA, and studying the language structure and its effect on determining meaning together with context (Gee, 1999:8).

CDA analysis reveals the sources of inequality, power and dominance inspecting how they are used in different contexts like social, political, and historical ones (Van Dijk, 1998:12). Consequently, achieving social goals by the language is the main goal behind studying CDA (Bloor and Bloor, 2007:2).

As CDA refers to the assessment of texts, it tries, on the one hand, to draw the attention to the merits and, on the other hand, adjust the demerits (Mehdi, 2016:42). It studies how the effect of power and ideology is shown on people and society. Fairclough

asserts that the relation between language and power is very close. This is proved to be true by using the language as means of achieving power (Ali and Jassim, 2022:46).

Furthermore, the historical background of the writer or poet is usually reflected in his work. As his/her idea usually originates from that person's ideas and background. (Fairclough et al, 2011:364)

Ideology is considered one of the core terms in CDA. It can be defined "as a set of beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group" (Bloor and Bloor 2007:10). It usually refers to the fixed ideas and views towards different life matters.

1.1.1 CDA and Fairclough

Norman Fairclough, the prominent linguist who plays the main role in the CDA studies believes that language is an essential part of society which is clearly realized in the different texts and social structures. (Fairclough, 2010) Critical Language Study that

is produced by Fairclough is considered one of the main approaches in CDA studies. (Fairclough, 1989:5). The objective of this approach is “a contribution to the general raising of consciousness of exploitative social relations, through focusing upon language” (Ibid:4) In addition, it is based on the idea that language is not treated as mere words, it carries sense of power within it as the language aims at achieving power (Ibid:1). The basic properties of CDA according to Fairclough are three. The first one is that it is “relational”, which means that language does not stand alone, but it is related to the social life. The second one is that it is “dialectical” which means that language and society are “separate but not discrete”. The third one is based on the idea that language utilizes other fields (Fairclough, 2010:3). Discourse, according to Fairclough, is based on three dimensions on which the data analysis of this paper is based. The first one is textual analysis which

refers to text analysis, spoken or written. It is mainly based on analyzing the structure of the text, grammar, vocabulary and cohesion (Fairclough, 1992:75). The second one is discursive practice, which is based on the context. The analysis here is based on the purpose of the text, who is its producer, and to whom it is directed (Ibid:76). The third dimension is the social practice which, in turn, consists of ideologies, i.e. grouping people according to their beliefs, goals and hegemony (Fairclough, 2015:92).

1.1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis and Figurative Language

Figuratively, understanding any text is usually based on using some tools as the figures of speech like image, metaphor and personification. The figurative language plays a vital role in CDA as it is employed to clarify the given ideas. Starting with the image, Dickenson (1959:50) defines it as "a mental representation of anything not actually present to the senses". Imagination was attached to

visualization. In literature, it affects the reader in the way it invokes images in his/her mind. This image is usually clarified by the context. Metaphor and simile in poetry are usually employed in forming images (the Routledge dictionary (Childs and Fowler), 2006:115). Cuddon(1998:413) distinguishes among three kinds of image: the literal, which does not include a figurative language, the perceptual, which is figurative in which devices like metaphor and simile are commonly used and the conceptual, which cannot be easily visualized. Generally, images can be visual, auditory, gustatory which is related to taste, abstract and kinesthetic. There might be one or combined images at the same time. (Ibid:414) We can understand that image is not only visual, it is related to all the other senses like touching and hearing. Other figurative devices, like metaphor and personification, are used to add more clarification to the main figurative device in this paper; the image.

1.2 The image of woman in poetry

Women's image in literature and more specifically in poetry can be traced back to the early ages of poetry. This image varies according to the poet's intention behind depicting it. It is sometimes shown as a lover, a beautiful creature, a lonely one...etc. The woman's image is usually affected by the surrounding social events, in addition to the poet's own experience, which have an effect upon his viewpoint towards her. In Europe and during the era of the industrial revolution, in the 17th and 18th century, poetry flourished as it was influenced by that change. Thus, people used it to reflect their current events. One of the major issues that appeared in poetry was the attitude of society towards women. (Khairi, 2020:16).

William Wordsworth, the English romantic poet, was interested in women in his poetry, as most of the romantic poets. This is due to several factors. One of them is his being inspired by his love to the

French girl, Anne Vallon, whom he did not marry (Ibid: 17). He employed the figurative devices like image in trying to describe his main themes that reflected his own background. Imagination is a core concept in the romantic poetry. This is because it is usually treated as a source of power in the romantic poem as it is based on the idea of reconciliation. In the romantic poetry, the poet usually escapes to nature running away from the artificial reality (Abdul Razzaq, 2017:443-444). Thus, Wordsworth reflected the intimate relation between woman and nature in his poetry.

2. Data analysis

The data analysis, more specifically, analyzing the image of woman in Wordsworth's poetry, is conducted by following Fairclough's (2010) model including the textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice.

2.1. Textual analysis

It is clear, and as the title suggests, that woman is the main

image in William Wordsworth's *The Solitary reaper* in which the poet tries to describe her image in an outstanding way by employing other images in the same poem.

"Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;"
(Wordsworth, 1984: 319)

The poet, in the above lines, uses a visual image reflecting the whole scene in describing the reaper as "single" suggesting her current status of solitude. The poet does not identify her; he only introduces her as an image to be seen and observed by the beholder. Generally, most of the minor images in this poem are auditory. The singing girl forms the central image as she is highly praised by the poet. The poet uses a minor auditory image in describing her warm voice that deeply affects him while she is busy reaping. She is

described as “solitary” which is emphasized by the poet in the next line He also urges people to either stand still and enjoy listening to her song or pass without making any noise that may disturb her quiet world by interrupting her singing. This shows that the poet is dealing with the reaper as part of nature rather than a laborer. This idea is emphasized by describing her as “alone” in the field. This idea reflects the gender ideology in which woman reflects nature itself, in addition to beauty and emotion. He also adds to the auditory image by deeply describing her song as “melancholy strain”. Grammatically, this poem starts with an imperative form suggesting the big impact of the scene on the beholder and directly emphasizes its beauty. In spite of this impact, this reaper is not empowered because she does never speak for herself.

“ O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.”
(Ibid)

He uses another imperative form which suggests the beauty of the song. Stressing the effect of her song, he says that even the vale is affected by that melancholic voice. Throughout the poem, and by using the imperatives, the poet is trying to control what the listener sees, hears and understands.

“No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary
bands ...”

“A voice so thrilling ne’er was
heard”

In spring-time from the Cuckoo-
bird

Breaking the silence of the seas
...” (Ibid)

The poet starts the above poetic lines with negation presenting the idea of comparison. He uses a metaphor for comparison in confirming that the reaper’s voice is even better than that of the chanting nightingale and the Cuckoo-bird. Personification is also used when the poet uses a perceptual image in personifying these two birds by comparing them to a human who

chants. In addition, this comparison also adds musical properties to the reaper. He adds that her voice breaks “the silence of the seas” showing that it is so audible, which is also a personification. He expresses its beauty as everything turns into deep silence listening to it. Furthermore, her voice does never die as it reaches the furthest places which reflects its continuity. He also continues using the auditory image to praise the woman’s sound describing it as “thrilling”. The poet includes some phonological devices trying to enrich the romantic discourse of woman. He uses alliteration as in, for example, “No Nightingale” in which the initial consonant sounds are repeated.

“Will no one tell me what she sings?—

Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:” (Ibid)

In these lines, the poet, again, uses a negative question suggesting that there is no one

there to answer this question. His question about the meaning of her song suggests that all the previous deep effect on him was because of the beauty of the auditory image of the whole scene which reflects the beauty of the image of the reaper herself. The poet gives some guesses about the themes of her song saying that it can be about different unhappy and painful things like battles and loss. After giving these guesses the poet confirms that whatever the theme is, he listens quietly and attentively. This shows that the poet does not confirm the reaper’s suffering or sadness. In fact, this description shows that the reaper is exotic and mysterious, as she is presented as a romantic symbol of purity rather than a rural reaper. The poem is also cohesive, for example, “she” is used instead of repeating the reaper which reflects the unity of the language of this poem. Moreover, as the whole idea of the poem talks about one main subject, the woman, all the other minor ideas add and

support it revealing its coherence. In spite of the fact that the reaper was working, the poet focuses mainly on the beauty of the scene. He does not refer to her economic state. The effect she leaves in his soul long after he leaves suggests that, after being introduced and interpreted, she is marginalized, as she does not have an authority, and she is absorbed by the poet. Throughout the ideological structure of the poem, the values of Romanticism are revealed through the poet's admiration of the simple scene, the idealization of the reaper, who is an ordinary person, and the interest in nature and solitude.

2.2. Discursive practice

The English romantic poet, William Wordsworth, published this poem in 1807 inspired by his past visit to Scotland with his sister in 1803. The poet tries, all over the poem, to describe the meaning of the young reaper's song but, he fails to do so. In spite of that, he turns her scene into a beauty. The

overall discursive practice of this poem is formed by a first person trying to construct the image of a lonely Highland woman which is, in turn, shaped by the speaker's own imagination and observation as the reaper does never explain herself, because the content of her song is not understood by the poet and the listeners. So, the listener's attention is guided by the poet's commands. A rural figure like the reaper is highly praised and contemplated by the poet reflecting the Romantic literary tradition. Thus, although she is an anonymous reaper, the mere interpreter, Wordsworth, elevates her to a beautiful image. Therefore, the reader's attention is directed by the poet to view her emotional impact on him rather than viewing her history and social circumstances.

2.3. Social Practice (Ideology)

Throughout the history of literature, there's a close relationship between poetry and woman. This poem reflects the ideology of the Romantic period.

Romanticism idealizes imagination, nature and rural life. Rural individuals are shown to be symbols of beauty and purity. This poem also reflects the gender ideologies of this period in which women are associated with purity and passivity. In his current poem, women are shown as seen and admired, but they are interpreted from a male point of view the thing that reflects the contradictory nature of the poem. Using "Highland lass" reveals the mysterious nature of that woman due to the cultural distance. The Romantic speaker keeps carrying the reaper's song in his heart even after he leaves suggesting that its effect is timeless and immortal. In fact, even though labor and more specifically, harvesting, is not an easy task to be done as it is continuous and repetitive, it is turned into an aesthetic scene through the eyes of an educated beholder, which may reveal the general view of society towards the working class where the people do not feel its suffering

of the working class. As a result, this poem depicts the attitudes of the Romantic era towards factors like gender and rural life.

3. Conclusion

Finally, this study concludes that the image of woman in "The Solitary Reaper" is presented through a Romantic discourse which, although marginalizes her role, highly praises woman. It is clearly shown that the figurative language plays a vital role in the enrichment of the poem and in trying to present the poet's beliefs by conveying his ideology. The data analysis, which is based on Fairclough's three dimensions: the text analysis, the discursive practice and the social practice, also shows that this image is not depicted as a subject in itself, but it appears as one of the poet's experiences in life. The woman's image is shown from his point of view regardless of what the reaper herself feels. He shapes and filters her identity through his own perspective portraying her as mysterious and beautiful. This

reveals the Romantic discourse in which the agency of the woman, who is praised and admired, is limited by the Romantic poet. So, language reflects that power is shifted, as the reaper is really seen and heard, but never understood. This study also shows how the rural femininity is idealized by the Romantic discourse. This is done by associating women with purity, emotions and nature. Therefore, the significance of this study, as a CDA one, lies in that it uncovers the ideological assumptions in the literary texts. Thus, it reveals the gender ideology of this poem. Furthermore, this study encourages the reader to be critically engaged in the literary representation of woman. Thus, *The Solitary Reaper* appears to be a poem that represents the way in which the literary language is used to reveal fundamental CDA concepts like gender, power, identity and other cultural ideas. Future studies may follow interdisciplinary approaches in examining woman in the

Romantic poetry. In conclusion, this study shows how complex is the way by which the Romantic poetry constructs and represent, elevates and degrades female which is reflected in the image of woman in this poem.

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