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A Comparative Study of the Image of Women and Diametric Extremes of Freedom and Captivity in Scott Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and Sherzad Hassan's "Fence and My Father's Dogs"

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Abstract

Women characters began to play a more active role in the world of literature during the twentieth century. Modern literature is usually characterized by realism and hence it often includes the image of strong independent females juxtaposed with images of oppressed women, to show the outcomes of their both excessive freedom and captivity in society. The study tries to make a comparative analysis of American and Kurdish literary texts through elaborating the similar fates of female characters, specifically when a female character deviates from the norms and goes beyond the limits of the society due to diametric extremes of both freedom and incarceration. The two conditions of excessive freedom and captivity bring ruin and wretchedness to the individual and the society.

In the selected stories, two female characters go with dissimilar directions in different cultures that lead to the same fatal end. Both Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) and Sherzad Hassan (b.1951) have autobiographical elements in depicting the images of women, their diametric extremes, and also their downfall. The study adopts the American model for comparative literature and ends up with the conclusions and the list of works cited.

Introduction

The American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) is famous for the realistic depiction of the roaring twenties of the twentieth century or the Jazz age. His delineation of the American society is as real as the details in his own life, because in most of his novels and short stories many autobiographical aspects can be found.

His wife, Zelda Sayer embodies most of the unconventional and rakish beauties of his works. They together represent the Jazz age and its extravagancies (Miller 434). In 1940 and due to his alcoholism, Fitzgerald's health deteriorated;

he suffered the first heart attack but determined to continue writing his last novel *The Last Tycoon*, till he suffered another fatal heart attack that led to his death in the same year (Donaldson 105-106). In spite of his short life, Fitzgerald, as Gertrude Stein thinks, "was one of the younger writers who wrote naturally in sentences....She thinks Fitzgerald will be read when many of his well-known contemporaries are forgotten"(Brucoli 22), because his name is associated with his age and its lavish style of life. "Winter Dreams" illustrates the irresponsibility of Judy

Jones, the young lady, who employs her beauty and extreme freedom to destroy others through fragile love affairs and to ruin herself at the end.

Sherzad Hassan (b.1951) is regarded as one of the pioneers in writing Kurdish short stories and novellas starting from the mid-1970s of the twentieth century. In most of his works, he criticizes the Kurdish society severely, displaying the culture and religion as confining factors to prevent the society from stepping towards change and modernity. He himself left his birth place (Erbil) due to his refusal of the norms which he reckons as old and outrageous (Tahsin 34). Hassan's story, "Fence and my Father's Dogs", is categorized with the most influential literary texts that typically illustrate Kurdish family and the patriarchy of a man with multiple wives prisoned in a house that resembles a wide grave for all the members of the big family including step brothers and sisters with step mothers. Everyone starts thinking of a plan to escape from that tyranny, among them, there is a female character called Rabee, who is one of the beautiful and young wives and plans with her eldest step son to kill her husband since it is the only way to get her freedom. She exploits the rare feeling of love from her husband to ease his murder and at the same time she seduces and uses the eldest step son to commit the crime and get rid of the tyrant (Rasul 202).

Shiwan Ahmad, the Kurdish scholar and critic, refers to the existence of autobiographical element in Hassan's novella as it is clearly shown in the words of the narrator. He insisted on having some personal and private situations of the author's life which are depicted in the scenes related to the brutality of the father and his rude treatment of his children. When he grew up and as young man, Sherzad Hassan rebelled and challenged the old traditional thoughts of his time as a late reaction to his father's harsh treatment for him and his siblings (27). As the narrator once says:

No one was able to utter a word in front of him He listened only to himself as he ordered.

No sons or daughters were allowed to stay in a place they like; he never let anyone of us to get outside the fence even for necessities. He sharply punished and rudely replied to our needs. He thought of himself as the only master of the fence which was like a fort (Hassan 20).

In the two selected stories, the two writers, Fitzgerald and Hassan, tackle social ills that cause devastation for the individuals, like the damage that is caused by getting through the two contradictory extremes: personal freedom and individual's captivity. To live in either of the two extremes .i.e. to have the uttermost personal freedom or to be confined within limits 'imprisoned', has disastrous outcomes as it is showed in the stories of Judy and Rabee , two female characters ruined, respectively, by the extremes of freedom and captivity.

II. The Diametric Extremes of Freedom and Captivity

At the turn of the twentieth century, individualism, "The quality of being different from other people and doing things in your own way"(Oxford 661), became an obsession because of the great changes in the different fields of life that affected everyone. Each individual tried to go on with his/her decisions concerning his/her life style disregarding the social traditions, customs, decency and even ethics. This phenomenon has touched the literary class and their outlook and hence they have created a set of protagonists who were not touched by reverence for custom and the established order. Fitzgerald was the spokesman of his contemporaries, he was both participant and critic of the jazz age in most of his works in which "young heroines who were essentially modern and bobbed their hair, smocked and drank...., his characters were consumers who spent lavishly and extravagantly" (Parkinson 10).

Fitzgerald's major characters are typical of the people of the age including himself and his wife. They go beyond the limits to the extremity of every human conducts since "the old restraints

and heroes were rejected and the generation claimed unfettered freedom of thought and action” (Kumar 135). The major concerns of feminist criticism, as Charles E. Bressler says, have established during the first decades of the twentieth century. Women have attained the right to vote and also practiced various social activities (171). Hence, being aided by the feminist theories, women were encouraged to act and go beyond what is established, they have gotten beyond patriarchy and even beyond the whole limits of their society.

In most of his novels and short stories, Fitzgerald seems to be a critic of the modern American women. Through their childish and irresponsible manner, they employ their femininity to dominate the men, as the authorial voice in his novel *Tender is the Night*, “offers a number of hostile judgments about the influence of American women in preventing their men from attaining intellectual maturity, even to the extent of infantilizing them”(Parkinson 62). Such a peremptory power is augmented by the devastating social, material, and sexual freedom which people misperceives as individual freedom.

Dealing with the damage that the extremity of freedom causes to those who practice it and their surroundings, Judy Jones in Fitzgerald’s “Winter Dreams” can be taken as a prototype since she is the wealthy lady that practices what her feelings incite her to do disregarding the outcomes. Psychologically and emotionally, she smashes the men around her among them Dexter Green, who insistently but vainly becomes rich to gain her love. He changes his state from a caddy into a business man:

Dexter handed in his “A Class” badge, collected what money due him from the caddy master, and walked home to Black Bear village “The best__caddy I ever saw,” shouted Mr. Mortimer Jones over a drink that afternoon. “Never lost a ball! Willing! Intelligent! Quiet! Honest! Grateful!

The little girl who had done this was eleven _ beautifully ugly as little girls are apt to be who are destined after a few years to be inexpressibly lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of them ” (Fitzgerald 2).

Hassan also portrays women and depicts their issues and lifestyle within the Eastern cultures and strictly the Kurdish society and culture. He shows women in their various forms, as helpless mothers, repressed daughters, competing wives, evils, victims, and maids. In "Fences and My Father's Dogs", he presents women as innocent creatures who are captives of a very oppressive figure as their father or husband for some of them. He tries to survey a lurid critical message of the severe condition of women violated even by the members of the same family. So, women in Hassan’s novella search for freedom and salvation, and for that they go beyond the limits of their social mores. Rabee is the image of a woman that lives in an extreme captivity and seeks for an outlet so that she might be able to escape from that captivity (Rasul 199).

In "Fences and My Father's Dogs", the author draws the stream of consciousness of his characters in terms of their dreaming of freedom when they tender continuous flow of ideas, thoughts, and feelings forming the content of an individual's consciousness which illustrates the brutality and ruthlessness of the father/husband. Lack of intellectuality is observed among the female characters to think of other options to rescue themselves except for murdering because they are incapable of facing the severe patriarch and his brutality. The narrator (the eldest son of the family) sketches the melancholy of his unmarried and old sisters within a jail-like house in which only the animal can breathe freely (Salih 154). That atmosphere makes the narrator think in an oedipal way to kill his father just to get saved and perhaps to obtain Rabee , and this creates a mutual interest for both of them to kill the father (Rashid 49). It's obvious from Rabee’s speech how they plan to carry out

their intentions and think of practical solutions for their captivity as she whispers to him:

Why do you gaze at me like that! If you are really a man, you will execute him (the father) because tonight is my turn with him, as he is quite eager to hug me and goes beyond his feelings. He gives me much more superiority among his wives; he wishes to have more types of women like me. So, be brave enough and take the chance, and I will unlock the door and keep waiting for you (Hassan 34).

In 'Winter Dreams' when Dexter meets Judy again, after rising himself to suit her rich state, she is dismissing another man from her life, as she always used to do, merely because the man views her as a perfect woman. She is heedless and irresponsible, and tells Dexter; "in that house there is a man waiting for me. When he drove up at the door I drove out of the dock because he says I'm his ideal" (Fitzgerald 7). Dexter's heart "turned over like the fly-wheel of the boat" (Ibid. 8) when she invites him to dinner. When they meet each other for the dinner, again she is depressed because, as she says; "there was a man I cared about, and this afternoon he told me out of a clear sky that he was poor as a church-mouse" (Ibid. 9). Judy's artificial feeling is extended to the extremity of deception that she practices on men. The poor man who loved her truly is not excluded because her interest in him was not strong enough, as she confesses, to outlive the problem because immediately, she finds the alternative:

A lump rose in Dexter's throat, and he waited breathless for the experiment, facing the unpredictable compound that would form mysteriously from the elements of their lips. Then he saw _ she communicated her excitement to him, lavishly, deeply, with kisses that were not a promise but a fulfillment. They aroused in him not hunger demanding renewal but surfeit that would demand more surfeit...kisses that were like charity, creating want by holding back nothing at all.

It did not take him many hours to decide that he had wanted Judy Jones ever since he was a proud, desirous little boy (Ibid 10).

She always enhances her authority over the men around her who insensibly follow her to their frustration because simply she is playing her game:

She played love as a game, and as the rule-setter,
she was up high and of great influence. She was
the one to give the demand.
When she met with
Dexter on the moon night, she spoke first as a
commander, since the author used the verb
"demand"; at the banquet to cater her lovers, she
replaced her father as the host, symbolizing her
deprivation the male of their authority (Zhang 515).

Rabee in Hassan's novella, plays a similar role of Judy, she exploits the erotic love and the exclusive eagerness of her husband for her in a time when the other wives were deprived of such feelings. In his absence, she is always complaining that he has intolerable odor but she does not show that to him and instead she yielded herself completely between his arms (Kasnazany 87). One night, he told her:

You have done a great thing that you used the jasmine perfume which I prefer, it makes me more erotic and then relaxed! And I wonder why the other wives do not know how to use such sorts of fragrance and bouquet, and you are the peak of femininity that feeds my soul with the instinct of masculinity that is evacuated between the arms of an extremely charming woman like you! (Hassan 35).

Further, Rabee seems to be extremely cunning in convincing both the eldest son and the blue-eyed farmer through love and make them

separately believe that she loves each one secretly. She irritates the son, calling him idle and weak man unable to change anything. On the one hand ,she motivates him to kill his father through cheating him by a fake passionate love in order to be well encouraged to murder his father, and, on the other hand , she is in love with the blue-eyed farmer who is kept outside the fence and not allowed to enter, she urged him to disguise as beggar or blacksmith, or even as a vendor just to see him inside the fence .Thus, she utilizes feeling and love to deceive the three men: her husband, the eldest son of her husband, and the blue-eyed farmer, and she goes beyond the limits for self-rescuing. She says:

Damn those nights that I spent in bed with your father instead of you! But it is right to do that because if the sons are hollow and feeble, then their father has the priority to get us. He played the role of an only unique man in an island that no other men lived in, and he completely navigated among our thighs, as if we were all created for him!(Hassan 39).

Judy, in Fitzgerald's story, thoughtlessly uses her physical attraction and charm to seduce men ; “she was entertained only by the gratification of her desires and by the direct exercise of her own charm. Perhaps from so much youthful love, so many youthful lovers, she had come, in self-defense, to nourish herself wholly from within” (Fitzgerald 11). Fitzgerald's heroine is not only the source of inspiration for the young man but also the sole cause of his destruction at the end. Judy , as many of her type, has got what she wants and “there was no divergence of method , jockeying for position or premeditation of efforts—there was a very little mental side to any of her affairs”(Ibid. 10). When she is sure that Dexter has been hers, she disappears with another man in her car and then, carelessly, tells Dexter that she did not kiss the other man. Dexter is glad that she “had taken the trouble to lie to him”(Ibid.). That is how Fitzgerald depicts the ruin that excessive freedom brings to both the abuser and the abused.

When Judy drops Dexter, he is engaged to Irene Scheerer but soon breaks the engagement when Judy beckons him again:

She treats the men she dates horribly, but when she notices that a man is losing interest on her, she takes time to make him feel special by granting the honeyed hour. She has the ability and makes men feel she is the unattainable object of desire. The image she portrays quickly traps men to quest for her and this same thing is what makes Dexter not exceptional (https://bohatalla.com).

Not only the golden girl, Judy, lives in an ambivalent state but also Dexter because they never realize that what they do is beyond the limits of the norms. She played with his feelings and;

had inflicted on him the innumerable little slights and indignities possible in such a case_ as if in revenge for having ever cared for him at all. She had beckoned him and yawned at him and beckoned him again and he had responded often with bitterness and narrowed eyes.... She had insulted him, and she had ridden over him, and she had played his interest in her against his interest in his work_ for fun (Fitzgerald 12).

None of them make out that she has gotten the extremity of shallowness of her character, when she disregarded the logical notion of one's freedom. In the end Judy annihilates Dexter's winter dreams; she destroys him in various ways; once in their youth when she played with his feeling bitterly and once again in her marriage and her surrender to a careless and harsh husband, as the result of her cruelty and selfishness. Devlin tells Dexter: “He treats her like the devil. Oh, they're not going to get

divorced or anything. When he's particularly outrageous she forgives him....She was a pretty girl when she first came to Detroit" (Ibid 18). It is evident that Judy has lost her beauty and dignity and paid awfully for her undisciplined freedom.

Rabee practically takes part in the murder by holding the arms of her husband while his son stabbed him. She behaves very normally during that night and that makes the son get astonished as if she had previously been in such horrible situations:

When I entered the room I found my father and Rabee having sexual intercourse and mingled tightly, so I chose the suitable time to stab him in a way that he might not be able to make an attempt to resist. When I stabbed him thrice, I saw her holding and straining him firmly to prevent him from escaping my attack. I got astonished that it was some-thing easy for her and she never hesitated and simply cleaned her hands from the oozing bloods of my father (Hassan 42).

She does not realize that such conspiracies will lead to her ruin as well, and eventually she finds herself alone shouting in the campus and nobody cares (Rasul 204). This sort of collusion and intrigue that is used for salvation, is the real reason of shattering and demolishing oneself. So, even the blue-eyed farmer leaves Rabee and turns to the daughters of her late husband, and finally she is left alone and unrelated.

In "Winter Dreams", Dexter's disillusionment and pain is greater than his feeling of triumph. When Judy loses her beauty and pays for her rakish youth, he feels disappointed and realizes that he has lost her forever and " his sense of regret for a faded world is the source of nostalgia"(Lehan 54), for a past its road is " too heavily lined with signs of waste and dissipation"(Ibid.). Judy's prodigality devastates her and her surroundings; Dexter's youth and notion of a happy future, as well as hers, all are gone. "Long ago," Dexter says, "there was something in me, but now that thing

is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more."(Fitzgerald 19).

To sum up, that is what lavish life style brings to society; reaching the extremity of freedom is to neglect the social mores and to ruin the individuals. And the same happens to Rabee, she attempts all the ways including flirting and hoaxing the step son, having a fake love affair with a farmer, and planning and killing her husband, all that caused her devastation at the end as she finds herself vulnerable, unprotected, and powerless. The family also witnesses a vast scattering; the wives flee to their ex-husbands, the daughters are lost, and the eldest son suffers from psychopathy. All that ruin has been caused by the extreme captivity that they witnessed.

III. Conclusions

The study has reached the following conclusions as jotted down below:

1. Because all the possibilities (ways) were open in front of her and she got whatever she wanted, Judy was lost, unable to differentiate between the right and the wrong choices. She lived the ecstasy of her unprincipled freedom. Unconscious about the social and traditional limits till she was lost. Rabee's extreme captivity led to her destruction. She was unaware about what a disastrous condition her plan might bring to her life. So, extremity of both freedom and captivity lead to the ruin of the individuals and hence their society.
2. Getting the extremes of freedom and captivity, one loses any sense of belonging to a certain custom or level in society. Hence they lose the sense of belonging.
3. Those who do know about the limits of freedom are usually with fragile and artificial characters. They do not value morality and its significance in their life, and captivity also offers worse material, moral, psychological, and emotional, etc. since the individual's being is managed by others.

4. Both writers Fitzgerald and Sherzad Hassan have autobiographical elements in their selected stories.

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