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Feminist Eleştiri ve Nina Baym' ın *Delikadın ve Dilleri* adlı eserinin İncelenmesi

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Özet: Feminist eleştirinin amacı, kadınlara ilişkin ataerkil varsayımlara itiraz etmek ve neyin feminen olduğuna erkekler tarafından karar verilmesine karşı çıkmaktır. Başlangıç olarak, feminist edebi eleştiriler, kadının sosyal, ekonomik, politik ve psikolojik durumunu edebi metinler ve edebi kanon içinde tanımlayıp analiz etmeye çalışır. Eril söylemin yorumlanmasına ek olarak, feminist eleştiri, erkek egemen doktrinlerde varolan dogmalara karşı direnmeyi ve meydan okumayı amaçlar. Feminist eleştirinin, kadınlara yönelik ilgi anlamında edebiyat ve kültüre yönelik tutumları da içeren geniş bir anlam yelpazesine sahip olduğu söylenebilir. Ayrıca, feminist eleştiri, cinsiyetler arasında eşitlik arayışı ve kadınlığın ikincil ve hatta daha aşağı bir pozisyon olduğu iddiasına karşı bir savunma olarak da tanımlanabilir. Her ne kadar "feminizm" kelimesi ilk olarak Fransız filozof Charles Fourier tarafından 1890' da kullanılmış olsada, kadınların ataerkilliğe ve din adamlarına karşı haklarını savunmaları daha öncelere dayanmaktadır. Eski ahitte ve dinsel söylemlerde sıklıkla kadınlar Havva olarak tasvir edilmiştir; Bu söylem orta Çağ'larda yaygın bir durum halinin almış ve bu durum kadınları tanrıdan uzaklaştıran dolayısıyla insanlığın çökmesi için sürekli olarak bir teşebbüste bulunan baştan çıkarıcı bir varlık olarak resmedilmesine neden olmuştur. Böylelikle, bu araştırmada, kadına nefret söyleminin temellerine ve ilk dönemlerine bir yaklaşım getirilirken, Feminist Eleştiri özetlenmiş ve nihayet Nina Baym'ın *Delikadın ve Onun Dilleri* adlı makalesi yorumlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Feminizm, Ataerkillik, Kadın düşmanlığı*

Feminist Criticism and Analysis of Nina Baym's *The Madwoman and Her Languages*

Abstract: The purpose of feminist criticism is to object patriarchal assumptions about women and to respond to the masculine determination of what is feminine. To begin with, feminist literary criticism tries to describe and analyze woman' s social, economic, political and psychological condition within literary texts and literary canon. In addition to interpreting masculine discourse, feminist criticism aims to resist and challenge the dogmas apparent in male dominant doctrines. It can be said that feminist criticism has a wide range of meaning including the attitudes to literature as well as culture in the sense of the interest in women. Feminist criticism can be identified as the quest for equality among sexes and an attack against the claim that womanhood is a secondary and even an inferior

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situation. Although the particular word 'feminism' was first used in 1890 by French philosopher Charles Fourier, women's resistance to patriarchy and clergy goes back to Middle Ages which often portrayed women as Eve, a seductress who caused the fall of humankind and denounced women for constantly attempting to distract men from the way of God. As such, in the present paper, I would like to bring an approach to the early roots of misogyny, a brief history Feminist Criticism and finally comment on Nina Baym' s article The Madwoman and Her Languages.

Keywords: *Feminism, Patriarchy, Misogyny…*

Early Roots of Feminism

The feminist thought has its roots from very early times of history. Even though the word 'feminism' was first used in 1890 by French philosopher Charles Fourier, women's resistance to patriarchy and clergy goes back to Middle Ages. The clergy portrayed women as Eve, a seductress who caused the fall of humankind and denounced women for attempting to distract men from the way of God. The Church disseminated the misogynist notion that woman was inferior because God created Adam first and then woman from Adam's ribs. Also, Lucifer deceived Eve first to taste the forbidden fruit, which started the chain of events that resulted human exile from the Garden of Eden. Upon God's discovery of their disobedience, he cursed Eve by saying "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Holy Bible, 1988, Genesis, p. 3).

Church held all women responsible for the original sin and believed a woman continually attempted to seduce them through carnal desires, which eventually distracted a man from his striving to reach God. Consequently, they justified Eve as Adam' s inferior and felt that women were weaker sex, less significant, intellectually and physically inferior, emotionally unstable, and morally weak. Thus, the medieval women were regarded as potential sinners who are liable to sin in nature because they were the descendants of Eve. Corinthians further reinforces the Church's view by stating:

> He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. [...] The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in-spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. (Holy Bible, 1988, Cor, p. 7).

Another major perspective to see the woman as inferior stemmed from Aristotle' s binarism. This claim established the notions that the woman is body and man is the soul. While women lacked all the privileged qualities, men were regarded as possessing the "higher elements and properties of form and activity"(Wilson, 1997: p. 56). St. Jerome, emphasized-this notion as "as long as woman is birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul!". Wilson further states:

> Aristotle appears to be a proponent of sex polarity, a theory that asserts the difference between men and women and the superiority of the male; on the basis of the works on logic Aristotle appears a proponent of sex neutrality, a theory that asserts that men and women do not differ significantly (Wilson, 1997: p. 57).

The patriarchal structure of the feudal society, the Christian interpretations of Scriptures about male superiority over women and the prejudices stemming from Aristotelian binary opposition made women vulnerable, subservient and obedient. Both the clergy and the aristocracy, the most dominant male groups of medieval society, reinforced these misogynist notions and acted accordingly. As such, the need to study the woman in literature reinforced the need to study Feminist criticism, which became a literary movement in literature.

Modern Feminist Criticism

Modern western feminism is divided into three waves. The first wave demanded to bring social, political and economic equality in the early 1900's. The second wave, which started in 1960's demanded legal and social equality for women. The third wave was perceived as reaction to the failures of earlier waves and began in 1990s. The First –wave feminism focused on the demand for equal contract, parenthood rights, marriage and property rights for women. The movement eventually focused on gaining political power and economic rights. Virginia Woolf was a leading figure in the first wave and in her major work *A Room for One's Own (1929)*, Virginia Woolf states;

> For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born today among the working classes. How, then, could it have been born among women whose work began, according to Professor Trevelyan, almost before they were out of the nursery, who were forced to it by their parents and held to it by all the power of law and custom? Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes. (Woolf, 1929: p. 600)

Woolf is essentially critical of material, and sexual disadvantages women are forced to overcome. She gives Shakespeare as an example and argues that if a woman had the same genius, she was very likely to be looked down upon and not be able to create those masterpieces Shakespeare did. The first wave feminist movement challenged past conceptions of the feminine literary scholarship and questioned male-centric literature. Elaine Showalter, another major critic during this era, divided women writers from the 1840s up to her time. In *Toward a Feminist Poetics* Showalter traced women's literature history, and divided it into three: the first phase is feminine. In this phase "women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature" (New, 1997: p. 138). Thus, first phase displays an imitation of male writers, which is far from a unique voice. The second phase is Feminist phase. This phase was characterized by women's writing that protested against male standards, and "advocated women's rights, and also demanded autonomy"(New, 1997: p. 139). When compared to the first phase of feminine this phase proved to be more unique in style and its demands. The third phase is referred as female, which is of self-discovery. In this phase women writers were able to write in their own voice and they discovered their own voice in literary canon. Showalter states, "women reject both imitation and protest and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (New, 1997: p. 140). Her influential study of *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*, she states,

> A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space' (New, 1997: p. 261).

As a continuation of First Wave Feminist Criticism, authors like Simone de Beauvoir marked the beginning of Second Wave Feminist Criticism. The second –wave largely concerned with issues of equality and saw women's cultural and political inequalities as linked to each other and tried to push women towards understanding aspects of their personal lives. Beauvoir boldly claimed that one is not born a woman, but made one. In her book *The Second Sex* (1949), She states men has labeled women as the 'Other'. Women who do not live up to expectations and norms of the dominant male society are looked down, degraded and labeled in society. Beauvoir asks;

> What is a woman?, The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. It would be out of the question to reply: 'And you think the contrary because you are a man,' for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. As for man there is no need to define what is to be a man, there is no reason because they identified themselves as the superior part. Man represents both the positive and the neutral, which doesn't need to be explain or define, and it is self-explanatory. Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in relation to herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Men are the default setting and women are considered a recessive gender. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (Beauvoir, 1949: p. 35)

Beauvoir clearly states that a woman would be defined by her relationship and proximity to man. In addition, he automatically is the superior entity while woman is not regarded as an autonomous being. Woman is the recessive gender, brought down to an object and therefore 'other'. The third wave of Feminist Criticism took the further step towards demanding equality in every aspect of life. They emphasized on ideals like abolishing role expectations, and stereotyping in all walks of life. The movement tried to challenge what it deemed the second wave's definitions of femininity and was perceived as a response to second wave's failures. As women were expected to live up to standards set by dominant male, they refused all stereotypical portrayals and condescending language towards woman. The major proponents were Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray. Those authors employed psychoanalytic approaches to their work in order to 'get to the root of feminine anxieties'. Specifically, Irigaray major work T*his Sex* claimed that women are exchanged between men like a commodity. She argued 'our entire society is predicated on this exchange of women. Her exchange value is determined by society, while her use value is her natural qualities.' Her real value was determined on her usability and her 'self is divided between her use and exchange values, and she is only desired for the exchange value.' Brought down to a level of being object of desire and admiration, this system created "three types of women: the mother, who is all use value; the virgin, who is all exchange value; and the prostitute, who embodies both use and exchange value"(Irigaray, 1977: p. 33).

In her essay "Women on the Market," Irigaray further employs other Marxist theories to claim that 'women are in demand due to their perceived shortage and as a result, males seek "to have them all"(Irigaray, 1977: p. 38). According to Irigaray the scarcity of woman has raised its value and demand by man has brought them down to passive or resilient objects. She further states that perhaps, "the way women are used matter less than their number" (Irıgaray, 1977: p. 39). Thus, the real value actually lies within the number not availability. In a further analogy of women "on the market," interpreted through Marxist terms, Irigaray points out that women, like commodities, are moved between men based on their exchange value rather than just their use value, and the desire will always be surplus – making women almost seem like capital in this case, to be accumulated. As such, women are not individuals but as capital or commodity. Irigaray argues "as commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value" (Irıgaray, 1977: p. 39). Their value is not of use but they are actually only the carriers of those values. As for the modern critical feminists Annette Kolodny states:

> What unites and repeatedly invigorates feminist literary criticism is neither dogma nor method but an accurate and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed or encoded within our literary inheritance and the consequences of that encoding for women- as characters, as readers and as writers (Bressler, 1985: p. 168).

As an example of feminist criticism, I would like to analyze women stereotypes in *The Madwoman and Her Languages* by Nina Baym to reveal their representations as serving the masculine superiority.

Analysis of Nina Baym' s *The Madwoman and Her Languages*

In her essay, *The Madwoman and Her Languages* (1984), Baym criticizes current feminist theories on the basis that the current feminist literary theory has not transcended misogynistic Freudian principles of women's identity, personality, and psychological make-up. All those stated theories have not contributed to a systematic and factual understanding of feminist but have just strengthened masculine superiority. Because the base for critical approach has been taken from male theoreticians. Baym places special emphasis on a more diverse and inclusive readings of literature written by woman. A diverse and inclusive reading will enable a better understanding and interpretation of those masterpieces.

The essay focuses on four recurrent themes in available feminist literary theory: the madwoman, female language, the father, and the mother. She discusses how each of these motifs has been treated by feminist critics and underlines how their treatments have served to uphold the 'hegemonic mindset that recapitulates and hence capitulates to fear, dislike, and contempt of women.' (Baym, 1984: p. 280)

The Madwoman section discusses Gilbert and Gubar's study of 19th century women writers entitles 'The Madwoman in the Attic'. She claims that: Gilbert and Gubar believe that these writers has to be free women to a certain extent, since being able to write in the 19th century requires a certain amount freedom from the patriarchy.

Baym says that the mistake that their explanation of the madwoman Bertha of Jane Eyre is that they are consistent with Bronte's treatment of Bertha, which is that she, as the revolt against the patriarchy, becomes horrible and that this makes her death not only acceptable but necessary for Jane's liberation. Baym criticized Gilbert and Gubar due to the fact they forgot that Bertha was a woman as well.Another major issue is that Baym's essay is the fact that the Madwoman Bertha is called as 'non-lingual' and is unable to use language to be able to defend herself with. Yet, this idea has been the basis of feminist criticism all along as the language is discriminatory and condescending towards woman. In second section called A Female Language, Baym is critical of modern feminists theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray for the fact that they believed in a specificity of female language based on a determined difference, which in itself is based on misogynistic Lacanian theories. As such they are far from establishing a common ground for interpretation. Those theories claim that female language is identified with 'madness, anti-reason, primitive darkness, mystery' (Baym, 1984: p. 283). Along with this theory, there is the trend displayed by Gilbert and Gubar in 'Sexual Linguistics' to display 'language as women's territory because of the linguistic as well as biological primacy of the mother.' (Baym, 1984: p.284) Yet, Baym believes this only serves to enforce gender discrimination with misogynist results.

The Father section criticizes Freudian views of what forms 'feminine personality based in his Oedipus complex theories.' According to this theory every boy has a latent desire to kill his own father and marry his mother. She once more denounces the conclusions set by Freud which put women into an'immature and incomplete identity' for the fact that their relationships with their fathers, and that influences their ideas and writing. Baym mentions Chodorow' s reading of Freud on the issue of girls 'not being able to separate from their mothers as an explanation for several readings by feminist writers that take this as an explanation for 'less organized, more connected and fluid personalities.' (p. 286) She describes Lacanian theories as being harsher than Freud's. In The Mother

section, Baym presents how post-Freudian analyses by feminist theories have not been able to present an adequate solution to the misogyny of Freud's ideas about the mother and the Oedipus/castration complexes. Baym notes that discussions of 'pre-Oedipal mother' still minimize the role of mothers in a child's development because they still depend on the Freudian concept of rejection of the mother at some stage of a child's life. Baym gives examples of women who expressed hatred towards their own mothers in their writing, and questions why they believe and act on Freud's theories. Baym argues:

> The Freudian and the feminist agendas may coincide because feminists do not like their mothers or because feminists prefer to endow women with a revolutionary power that we cannot have if we have been part of the system all along. To say this is not to blame the victim, but to question our ability to carry, after so many centuries of implication, any pure revitilizing force. Our powers are limited and our agendas for change will have to take internal limitation into account." (Baym, 1984: p. 289)

As such the essay essentially criticizes modern theory for being too institutionalized, or as Baym says, taking a legalist attitude in literary analysis. They both think theory should be more inclusive of new ideas and wary of complicity of traditional patriarchal misogynistic perspectives and explanations.

In conclusion, feminist criticism objected patriarchal assumptions on women and responded to the masculine determination of what is feminine. This particular criticism tried to analyze woman' s social, economic, political and psychological condition within literary texts and literary canon. This literary movement resisted and challenged the dogmas of male dominant doctrines. The study adds to our understanding of the early roots of misogyny, a brief history Feminist Criticism and analyzed Nina Baym' s article *The Madwoman and Her Languages*.

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