

The Predicament of Woman: a Feminist Reading in Selected Victorian Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the plight and the predicament of woman during the Victorian age. The thematic concern of this study casts light on the predicament of women in form of discrimination, segregation and oppression. The feminist theory is applied in analyzing the texts that are selected for the study. The study is limited to two major poets of the Victorian age namely Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning. The poems are *My Last Duchess*, *The Lady of Shallot* and *Mariana*. The paper shows how woman are dehumanized and reduced to inferior entity and a kind like slaves who whenever wants to cross the borders of the gender roles to get the penalty that reaches to extermination.

Keywords: Woman Predicament, Feminine, Tennyson, Browning, Gender Boundaries.

Introduction

The era of the 19th century in England is entitled as the Victorian Age, due to the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). This period was characterized by the development and the dramatic changes in industrialization, politics, economy, social views and the socio- cultural upheavals that grow as the consequences of such sharp and the cute alterations in the society. This era was also considered as the transient age that witnessed the passing from the rigid and rigorous traditions and values of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries to the loss of moral conduct of the modernism that evaded the earlier decades of the 20th century. There is no doubt that the Victorian age was one of the optimal eras for English Literature, such an era of literary achievement is nourished by the preceding contributions of Romanticism, poets like William Blake, Lord Byron. S.T. Coleridge, Shelly, Keats and Wordsworth who have had an impact on the Victorian poetry; some of these poets were even tagged as Victorian, like Wordsworth. On the social level the Victorian era has been a prosperous span of time. As with such background the Victorian doctrine of social and moral codes continued to grow more rigid and restrict, thus the role of woman is affected accordingly. Moreover the seventeenth century namely the Elizabethan era also had its own impediment on the roles of woman whether in the house or the representation in drama that was the ripe art of the period. We see the roles of the woman are to be assigned to boys. "The stages of the earlier 17th-century commercial theatres were all-male preserves: women were part of the play-going audience and worked in the theatre buildings but they did not act on the commercial stages"(Korda,2011). Thus, when *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* were first enacted on the stage in (1600–01) and (1599), the roles of women characters were performed by highly skilled boys. As a result the writings of the age call in their literary product for new poetic approaches particularly by women writers to condemn gender-bias rules and marital confinement such images of bondage, entrapment, look more like enslavement for women's social position. "The position of wife is similarly depicted as one of enchainment, confinement, and domination by men" (Darby,1995).

Elizabeth Thomas, Mary Chudleigh, Sarah Egerton, Elizabeth Toilet, and Mary Leapor, are among the few famous poetesses to name only to examine the sufferings of women in such as terms. The core of this study is to discuss in an argumentative approach the theme of the predicament of woman through the imprisonment and isolation from the public sphere in the selected Victorian era poetry. The restrictions and limitations on woman's role and confine her to

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the domesticated duties. These themes are covered in all types of literature particularly the fiction writings, dramas, but the excellent poems were also produced, nevertheless, some problems in the period pushed the increasing of writing prose than the poems. The upper class and the aristocratic layer of the Victorian society is the subject of these works that focused on the issues of women and the matters of inequality. As we have mentioned it was an era of prose, many novelists have made a great impact on readers, like Jane Austen (1775-1817) who despite of her death in 1817 before Queen Victoria was crowned, yet her fiction had found its echoes during and after the Victorian era. Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) and many others, their works display the sufferings of women and children who were affected by the devastating effects of the industrializations. The writings of this era have almost covered all the strata of the Victorian society ranging from the lower to the upper class. The special characteristic of the poems in Victorian period was the lessening of spontaneous lyrics found in Romantic poems. It was replaced by the serious tone and mostly about reflective, questioning, and critical. The social problems, science, and religion were the main subject of the poems in Victorian Era. The Victorians are more disciplined and practical people with a sense of 'materialism' the life with its rapid changes and tiresome environment had called upon the exploitation of the labors from both women and children and the examples are ample in the novel of Charles Dickens *Hard Times* (1854), and the poem of Elizabeth B. Browning *The Cry of the Children* (1843). Beside such harsh realities and subjugated atmosphere of labor, women at home were also subject to segregation and subjugation by their husbands, no matter what they are simple, lower class or even aristocratic as in the case of Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* (1842).

The domestic way of the Victorian, with the acute dividing of the domestic sphere and the public one, has also obliged woman to the domestic tasks, their 'proper sphere', and to keep themselves a loaf from outside world of engagement in man's tough and rude 'masculine' sphere of publicity. The 'cult of true womanhood' and the 'canon of domesticity' revised the essential equalities for woman – devotion, immaculateness, obedience to domestic rules in a way to keep her entirely separated and safe from the callous and challenging, public world of man labor. John Ruskin wrote in 1865, "A man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender... But the woman's power is... for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (Ruskin, 2013). such statement, assumes the roles of man and woman an innate, probably also biological in a sense, ordering to send men to engaging world and preserves woman to home, adding that such separate environments are the right place of their respective natural gifts. The second half of the Victorian era is known for hosting the throes of exceptional changes, due to industrial revolution, scientific discoveries, suffragette movement consumerism, Unitarianism, evangelicalism that had a great impact on poets. The restrictions have led to isolate woman and turn it into inferior. As in the 20th century gynocritic Elaine Showalter's diagram that vividly displays both of the tightly-separated spatial realms in that she calls the "Victorian model": she puts two spheres or circles beside each other, one is larger than the other and wrote 'Men' inside of the big circle and also she inscribed 'Women' inside the small circle. The small circle is a place where the society had isolated woman as an 'other'.

On the Scientific level, the theory of Charles Darwin "the Origin of Species" has made a great impact on all the researches about the universe. Moreover, many inventions have been introduced in that century altogether. Despite all of these dramatic changes, the woman didn't get their full rights. Certain ideologies concerning the features the woman and her role in the society had made an impact so clear on the Victorian Era. At such as time, the perfect woman is to be safe of any sexual assault. Hence, her basic duty in the society was a homemaker. Thus, she is totally detached from public life that was mainly a men's realm. "While the men were active participants in social life, women were not to participate in any kind of social life since there was a belief that it would taint their pure virtue" (Lawrence, 2009). Such a notion of the sample of the ideal Victorian woman was hugely witnessed in many literary products of the Victorian Era. Especially these works by the main poets of the era like Browning and Tennyson.

Significance of the Study

This paper would highlights one of the most important issues of all times, that is the predicament of women, as a restrained and cornered at house sphere, particularly the plight of the Victorian women who were isolated, segregated

and discriminated against, in a very aesthetic and artistic approach the two Victorian poets have provided examples of such predicament in their poems, Robert Browning *My Last Duchess* (1842), and Alfred Lord Tennyson *Mariana* (1830) and *The Lady of Shalott* (1833). The examples of the subjugation and oppression are evident in these three poems as universal texts that belong to the Victorian era, yet still echo the predicament of woman all over the ages.

Problem Statement

The main issue of this research paper is to examine the position of the woman during the Victorian Era, how the male centered society had isolated the women and limited their function, assigning her to a simple and domesticated duties.

Research Methodologies

The researcher in this paper uses the analytical, descriptive and comparative approaches to examine the poems laid out for the discussion. There is a primary source to be consulted whenever needed. The secondary sources are also utilized to sustain and support the hypotheses of the study. The paper is sufficed to Robert Browning *My Last Duchess* (1842), and Alfred Lord Tennyson *Mariana* (1830) and *The Lady of Shalott* (1833). Only these poems share a common theme of women as being treated as an “other” and confined by the rules of the Victorians.

Question of the Study

This paper puts to discussion the status of woman during the Victorian age, to what extent the woman has been isolated and discriminated? What is attributed to the predicament of woman?

My Last Duchess

Robert Browning (1813-89) is a pioneer Victorian poet who belongs to a middle-class society. He was raised with the love and the grace of the family of a disciplined father and “his mother was a kindly, religious woman whom he loved and respected as she imprinted in him the devotion to religion, music, flowers and animals” (Kearns, 1984). *My Last Duchess* was published in 1842 demonstrates Browning's utilization of the dramatic monologue that is “A poem in which an imaginative speaker addresses a silent audience, usually takes place at a critical moment in the speaker's life and offers an indirect and unconscious revelation of his or her temperament and character” (Coyle, 1984). The poems delineate the theme of predicament of woman, as in the poem the main speaker shows the agonized wife. She was killed due to her open and liberal character. Browning uses such a method to examine the women condition during the early burdensome Victorian era (1830-47) that is characterized with the lack of love, evil of materialism and patriarchal oppression are to be shed light on. “The persona of this poem is a duke of Ferrara, a city in northern Italy” (Kennedy, 1995), who addresses the envoy whose master's daughter's marriage to the Duke, is to be prepared. The poem starts with the Duke's describing painting of his dead wife that he hanged on the wall of his gallery. In fact, the Duke attempts to show the kindness that he has for his passed away wife and show the portrait of her to the envoy. “That's my last Duchess painted on the wall / Looking as if she were alive” (lines 1-2). Nevertheless, the Duke, later, begins to fret about the way his last wife's behavior. The Duke was so restrict type of Victorian conservative, that he resents the dead wife's style of favoring all people, regular people and her husband equally that what makes the duke resentful. The husband believes that she should deal with him differently as he is aristocratic and worth her pleasure only and fundamentally for him. And that can be intensified in *My Last Duchess*, as Browning mentions:

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. (Line 20-4)

Moreover, Browning, in another quotation of the poem, displays that the wife doesn't sound a noble as she is ignorant the customs of the grand nobility to which the duke belongs. Her openness is a transgression in the duke's perceptions, as a result he thought of it as an ignorance of his nobility that dates back to hundreds of years: "Somehow- I know not how-as if she ranked My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old man With any body's gift" (lines, 32-4) Accordingly, the wife can't grasp the egoism [thinking too highly of oneself] (Hornby, 1995) of her husband, rather she persist on her innocence and simplicity to the people around her. And as she go softer and tender with others, her husband goes cruel and furious. Thus, the wife is treated with contempt, the duke wanted to keep her away and unappreciated. Such way of isolating the woman from the society results in developing an image of "other". Moreover, this predicament of the wife is escalated as she reaches the end of the rope, that is the inevitable death. As the reader also listens to the confessions of the duke who admits to the envoy the act of murder while fed up with the bold behavior of his wife. He orders his knights to execute her, and her death is confirmed by:

Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive. (lines, 43-7)

The poem finishes with the duke's demand to have the envoy's master's daughter as the inevitable wife since the envoy's master's benevolence, concerning the bride's dowry, is out of question:

The Count your master's known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretense

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; (lines, 48-51).

Hence, the grotesque materialism and the joules and the false love, as part of the Victorian values, are obviously alluded to. "The word "dowry" indicates materialism, since the former is a financial settlement given to the bride by the bride's father as an Italian custom" (Kearns, 1984). The duke is cunningly taking the opportunity; he agrees to marry the woman whom he hasn't been intimate with, merely for her abundance and aristocracy. Therefore, he doesn't care about love; his aim was momentary and glorified status, and that what the word "count" suggests.

"The Victorian Age lacks love as it glorifies materialism, assured by the fact that half-a-million Victorian women were unmarried due to the Victorian greed. Matter opposes emotion and love. Thus, you can't find someone who is greedy and lover simultaneously since seeking chance and utility entails making heart out of emotion and senseless as a stone... As well, the percentage of poor Victorian women exceeds the rich's, and so the poor were left without marriage as a result of the absence of love and the pursuit of money and position" (Abrams, 2000).

Moreover, the Duke's intended for a recent marriage, and forgotten his love to his dead wife as he doesn't declare his sadness for her death. Contrarily, he comments on her drawbacks that agitated him to murder her, rather mentioning her advantages. It's clear, then, that the Duke had ignored and subjugated wife in life and after her death too, when alive she was treated as inferior, and when died she was neglected and unappreciated. "This attitude towards women is strongly refuted by the second-wave feminist criticism refutes since women are no longer trapped inside a male truth, but women are able to express themselves better than man do" (Selden, 1993). "Who'd stoop to blame / this sort of trifling? ..And I choose / Never to stoop" (lines, 34-5, 42-3). The Duke denies her virtue and he did not mention the real reason of killing his wife, as she was kind to poor people from the lower-class, as well as her liberal behaviour that intensively annoys him. Thus, the Duke chooses not to "stoop", to reduce himself to a woman or his wife, because of his nobility. The Duke, who stands for the ruthless Victorian man, thinks that it defames his manhood if he argues with

woman her immoral behavior. Eventually, he chooses the straightforward and hard penalty, and what can be desired for harder punishment other than death as if his wife made a crime. The dominance of the Duke stands for him being as the god-like figure; meanwhile the wife symbolizes the image of the "Other" in her predicament, and powerlessness. His oppression, created to his wife, is clear as he utilizes his dead wife after her death. "The husband exhibits his dead wife as a bad model not to be followed by the new wife; otherwise the latter will face her counterpart's similar fatal end" (Keach, 1996). The notion of the arranged marriage is an exquisite example of the Victorian fatherly oppression that the Victorian woman endures as "they are imprisoned in the golden, fundamental holy-like family. The Victorian women cannot decide their inevitable decisions". (Abrams, 2000). Finally, the allusion to the painting of "Neptune." "Notice Neptune / taming a sea-horse." (Lines, 54-5). "Neptune" is the Roman god of sea, identified with the Greek 'Poseidon', who is Herculean and responsible for sending storms and earthquakes" (Lurker, 1987). Neptune, thus, reflects the feature of the despotism of Victorian Age; "sea-horse" signifies the weakness that Victorian women are recognized with since "sea-horse". The use of the term "tame" accentuates, again, the harsh Victorian treatment to women. Beside the segregation of woman and treating her as another, Women were also Symbol of colonization, as a religious reared man Browning referred to his resistance to the Victorian colonization through the dead Duchess. The helpless dead wife represents the powerless nations whose depravity, naiveté and innocence confirm the duke's, as an emblem of the selfishness of the Victorian materialists, abuse or colonization.

In light of the argument of the Victorian woman's predicament in Browning's *My Last Duchess*, brought about by the Victorian man; this paper sets Browning's implied criticism of the husband transgression of the Victorian Women. Browning intelligently utilizes the advantage of implementing "the internal monologue" that describes the dead duchess, a symbol of the tormented Victorian women, as the victim of the Duke's pride and arrogance. The wife's single wrong deed was in granting the duke's respect and position a blind eye. Therefore, he killed her without mercy. In fact, Browning can be considered as a feminist just because he was in opposition to the paternal dehumanization of the woman during the Victorian era, when he rejects the idea of the Victorian woman as victim of male's domineering nature. It deserves mentioning that he does deliberately uses the setting of Renaissance in Italy his poem to approximate the potential image of the urban exaggerated Victorian community to the readers. In fact, the 'Renaissance' denotes the prosperity of humanity and civilization which started earlier in Italy than even in Britain; however, the Italians picture of humanism and civilization didn't alter the stereotype idea about women in the sense they do not get dignity and honor. Beside, the Victorian woman circumstances were further worsened at the early stages of the chaos of the industrial revolution and its pandemic ramifications. The society has dehumanized children and women forsake of production of the factories that exploit them and increased their upheaval.

Lady of Shalott

Alfred Lord Tennyson the poet laureate in England was one of the most important poets of the Victorian era, who set the roles for the others to follow. The thematic concern of woman as being isolated and made as another has found its echoes in the two poems of Tennyson that are selected for this study. *Lady of Shalott*, a poem of four sections, delineates the account of the doomed Lady who is imprisoned in the island of Shalott. She is prevented from to even take glance out of her abode; she is to weave everyday a tapestry that symbolizes the external world that she is excluded from. Such theme of the poem can be seen as a metaphor of the life of woman during the Victorian era. Thus, the researcher finds the theme of predicament clearly manifested in the lady.

As a background to the poem, Tennyson alluded to Elaine of Astolat "the Arthurian legend, who was in unrequited love with Lancelot, and died right after ordering her body to be floated down the river towards Camelot" However, Tennyson imparts several factors to that story for certain reasons: "...He did not completely adopt the story of Elaine as it was to be found in Malory...and the Italian novella of La Damigello di Scalot, which was presumably its more

immediate source, had no tower, tapestry, mirror, or curse". There is in addition ambiguous situation of viewing fall as part of the settings of the poem. Winter is made of several warm and clear days and yet some are cold and dim days. Such ambivalence would result in a feeling that fall is neither cold nor hot, thus, a confused situation of the woman is manifested. Namely, fall is a gray, it is neither white nor black, this can be seen the sixth line of the second stanza when the poet describes the lady of Shalott's room as, "Four gray walls, and four gray towers." (Part. I, Line 15) Likewise there are several key quotes that would help the reader to understand the three different stages her life. Tennyson categorizes the first one where lady is cursed and disconnected from the world as cold and melancholic. The lady is entangled in the snare of weaving, is incapable of making her own decisions. When the curse arrived to her, she stretched "robed in snowy white," (Part. IV, Line 17) in her virginal status to drift towards Camelot. Thus she is spotted, again, not able to act upon her own will and reaches "dead faint" to destiny.

Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* gives a straightforward story of the isolating of a woman from outside association. In the poem, Tennyson uses both the external and inner spheres in order to explain the predicament of the isolated woman. "The poem contains such vivid and powerful representations of fallen women during the era that it influenced a movement of absorbed artistes who thrived upon the idea of a sheltered woman (Wilbur, 1907). In multiple ways, the poem *The Lady of Shalott* stressed the belief of the confined woman in the Victorian Age, yet the poet uses the title to allude to the fact that it will focus on a woman character; Tennyson places emphasis on the natural surroundings of the poem. There is seclusion during the Victorian age that is practiced on woman's existence; the lady is kept in her prison that isolates her from Camelot. She is a humbled and obedient woman who has accepted her situation at home by engaging her journey of weaving: "She weaves by night and day/a magic web with colors gay" (Part. II, Line 45-6).

The lady's captivation in the tower portrays the domestic sphere which destines her to play her effeminate task of weaving all day long. Contrarily, out of window there was Camelot, that is the representation of the manly public world in which man prevails. Despite the fact that Tennyson has placed the setting in the feudal philosophy, still the poem has the beliefs, measures, and the standards of the Victorian era. The woman in that tower is the portrayal of the ideal Victorian woman with an innocent, proper and gentle presence. The case is in some way resembles most of women during the Victorian era who had to engage only in their domestic tasks and not partake in world beyond the fence of their home. "Her gender, her domesticated fate, and her act of weaving all represent Tennyson's idea of an ideal woman of the Victorian age" (Tennyson and Roberts, 2011).

The abandoned Lady of Shalott dwells in a dark world, the one manner through which she may watch the outside world is through a magical mirror that symbolizes her solitarily. It is not reflecting her thoughts but the shadows of others. Such attitude shows her urgent need to be indulged in the public activities outside of her abode; she feels the pain and the agony of being less or inferior to man. The reflection is deliberately limited and narrowed to show how she is not meant to be concerned with others in other words the lady is meant to be in her solitude. In such imprisonment, she imagines all the assets that she couldn't conceive but would very much like to experience. Such as the lovers, Knights, the shepherd, and the women at the market, the view of the newly married lovers provokes the awareness and the sense of revolt, and she shouts out, "I am half sick of shadows" (Poulson, 1996).

Apparently, it is the marriage as the social establishment that encourages women for the desire to engage love and break away from the life of shadows. By departure from the interior sphere and accessing the sphere of man, eventually the woman takes an initiative to overstep gender borders. With the lady's behaviors that sound to be liberal and revolutionary yet have a better motivation to find chance of marriage. Tennyson doesn't seem in any way to challenge the Victorian ideals, rather he is boosting them. In fact, Tennyson in the writing poem of *The Lady of Shalott*, he adds a contribution in form of response to the political settings that were set during the Victorian time. Nonetheless, it is clear that the poet stresses the anxieties that every individual Victorian woman went through, hence, creating feelings of uncertainty and fear within the lady. That is a warning of the issue that the lady is growing isolated and treated as another.

In the second half of the poem, Tennyson gives an exact detail of his opinions concerning the functions of the Victorian woman. As the reader witness the punishment that falls on the female protagonist. It was merely because after the lady had a glance at the world outside her confinement, as a result that she gets cursed from Camelot. "death is the punishment for this fallen woman who chose to break the Victorian ideals and look into public space" (Hartley, 2008).

The agonized woman demonstrates confrontation by taking it to the transit from the reserved and feminine realm to the communal and male-centered space. The death penalty is a representation of Tennyson's rigid warning to women of the Victorian age to acknowledge such fatal consequences. The fate of The Lady of Shalott reaches to maturation as she touches land. Therefore, her exploration of the social life was never fulfilled giving her earlier death: "For ere she reached upon the tide/The first house by the water-side/Singing in her song she died (Tennyson ,2011)." A similar penalty is received in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) when the God sent Adam and Eve out of heaven due to the behavior of Eve. The assumptions of the regular Victorian woman were to continue virginal and chaste and keep her status in accordance with the conventional gender roles; however, the lady has gone astray from these ideals. Consequently, Victorian woman who thinks about protestation against the gender-specifications that are lined by society are immediately isolated and made tagged as "immoral". Thus, Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* reflects the predicament of the Victorian women who encounter accusations of not sticking to the traditional Victorian ideals. "Tennyson portrays her as mad in a bid to hide the fact that there are problems in his society in general" (Tennyson and Roberts, 2011).

Tennyson, in the words of Lancelot discards the sexual supposition of scrutinizing at the flat female body through considering only the face and the audience of God. Tennyson's watery life suggests a significant outlook for reading *The Lady of Shalott*. The female gender is marginalized and treated as passive and weak for quite considerable time in one hand, the male gender is the active and practical one with an inclination to dominate. Women who steps out of the line of the feminine domain encounter burdens as they always should be aware of their conduct.

Mariana

In his poem *Mariana* Tennyson tries to scrutinizing and challenge an average male literary characteristic by taking hint from another poet, namely Shakespeare, and placing a secondary feminine character as the main protagonist in his poem, this may be viewed as a way for Tennyson to exhibit his feminine feature. And is settled in a way in which he introduces an erratic kind of womanhood in *Mariana* that looks to be questioning the inflexible gender roles of the Victorian era. Initially, "*Mariana* embodies characteristics of the typical fallen Victorian woman who has rejected the ideals of the gender roles designed by the Victorian age" (D'Amico, 1992). Apparently, Mariana seems to the reader as an unmarried woman, and she was deserted by her lover. In addition, she eventually abandons the farmhouse that she resides in a total mess. On contrary, Shakespeare's adaptation of events where the female character ultimately gets married with her lover. Meanwhile, in *Mariana* the lover never returns. Tennyson represents Mariana as a 'miserable' example of the Victorian woman by assuring that she will not be married at the same time is not at any cost virginal.

As we all know that in the Victorian age where any type of sexual activity beyond marriage on the woman part would be classified as sinful and eccentric. "Sexuality for a woman was not only condemned and stifled outside marriage but within it. The expectations of women were to be a sexual and display a bigger measure of maternal instinct" (Gilmour, 1993). Therefore, Mariana is treated as a depraved Victorian woman due to her experience of not being married and due to her sexual behaviors as a single woman. Mariana's role as a lost Victorian woman and her nonconformity had additional interpretation when she made woke up at night by a point of darkness that made even the waters black. In the Victorian tradition, it was customary to match the darkness to woman's sexuality. Therefore, Tennyson attempts to present the reader to Mariana's sexual aggression. In many literary products, the predicament of the Victorian woman is manifested in the dark colour and sadness or the one that is not fair. Apparently, Marianna is

not satisfied, and she announces that to the reader as she declares, "My life is dreary." (Line 9).

Tennyson as a result draws upon the association between darkness and Mariana which is clear sign that she is an instance of the Victorian woman with the predicament of being alienated. In opposition to the so called decorum in the Victorian era where the house management was the main duty of the woman, Mariana disregard her farmhouse. She neither runs the house morally nor physically. Thus, she tries to break the image that is drawn to woman as an 'other', as well as a direct attack on the Victorian principles of gender roles. Mariana's unwillingness to maintain her domesticated duties attributed to the fact that she doesn't have a husband to arrive at the farmhouse where she is isolated. In addition, the bodily corrosion that is obvious in the house is signifying the moral carelessness in her home. The poem opens:

Were thickly crusted, one and all
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable wall.
The broken sheds looked sad and strange (Lines 1-5).

There is an opinion that the environment may be a thought of the internal conflict that chases Marianna and not her sensual mishap. Nevertheless, the real logic behind the decaying nature of the house is attributed to Marianna's sexual unethical behaviour. "She represents the typical fallen Victorian woman whose source of power appears more of a femme fatale who is not able to exhibit skills of the domestic nature" (Richards, 2001). There is a flower pots that has a dark moss symbolizes her status of otherness. The sheds which have been broken and now seem as crooked as Mariana's irregular behavior that has altered the view of the ideal Victorian of womanhood.

Tennyson constantly utilizes the dark imagery in the poem to explain the extent of Marianna's violations of moral codes. She is unable to "...look on the sweet heaven" (Line 15), and this indicates that she is neither heavenly nor virginal. Mariana's relationship with the surrounding landscape associates her with the status of the plight and the inevitable predicament that have toppled Victorian woman. There exists more than just a projection of Mariana's mood to the settings around her. The scene and Mariana are tied in amicability to express Mariana's viewpoint. In the poem Mariana seems to be the speaker of it as everything in her home is described as noticed by Mariana. However, in spite of the existed affinity between Mariana's feelings, and the settings around her, yet there are some stark differences. "Tennyson makes this clear by the four lines at the end of each verse, which serves to explain that Mariana and her landscape are not totally in harmony" (Tennyson and Roberts, 2011). In Mariana's speech, that is a reflection of her psychological status, stays caught in a state stasis. They constantly revolve, and this doesn't indicate only her despair and loneliness but also her inactivated and narrowed womanhood and the sense of otherness. In this consideration, the idea of refraining her argument enforces the same gender stereotypes of the Victorian age which Tennyson tried to employ in the struggle and opposition by making her the central character that is the protagonist. Her status as a miserable Victorian woman causes her much agony from within. The major reason of this is the absence of her lover; moreover, her happiness gets started as lover arrives. "Her desire to marry or die is complementary to the ideal notions of womanhood in the Victorian age" (Gilmour, 1993).

The majority of women during that period had little or no substitute for marriage. They groped with eagerness marriage and sharing companionship and assuming domestic responsibilities were the final aim in their life. In the poem Mariana did not get married as she at last realizes that her lover wouldn't comeback. The moralistic purpose of the poem is attributed to the urge for closeness, house contentment, and societal acceptability. However, Mariana the stereotypical Victorian miserable woman, she sounds more orthodox than sinful. Mariana does not reach to such perception and she is not having or even thinking of any choice but to die or marry. "This lack of aggression against the Victorian ideals of gender roles is indicative of Tennyson's personal view that women belong in the privacy of the domestic setup and not the rigors of public life" (Lawrence, 2009). The persisting model in the Victorian era is that of an enclosed family scene. This encircled feature of the family produces a protection from the turbulence and disorder of the life. Hence, an independently made miniscule idealization did not survive in the overall society. Likewise,

Mariana represents such an image of enclosure and remoteness in her endeavour to find peace from the anarchy and loneliness, which recognizes the reality of her life. This is truly recorded by the fluctuation between her spoken words and the details that Tennyson provides about the natural world around her. Yet, her secluded life might also be interpreted as guardianship. The place she resides in and eventually, she has deserted symbolizes a cage for her. "This emotional shelter could either destroy her or create a new destiny for her". (Richards, 2001). In "Mariana," Tennyson stresses circular images that serve as manifestation to Mariana's prison, she is the prisoner of her monotonous thinking. Her correlation to her away lover has disappointed and thwarted her. Such desertion on the account of Marianna has cornered her and depraved her from the ideal role as Victorian woman. This is because, in Victorian mindset, it is for the sake of a man that a woman makes sure that, the house is tidy, and that all domestic duties are undertaken (Gilmour, 1993). Thus, the paucity of gratification due to the absence of her lover is the impetus to her being in a predicament as a Victorian woman.

Conclusion

The notion of the plight of Victorian woman was a popular factor in most works of the Victorian era. The researcher in this context had the opportunity to explain several aspects that had been applied by the Victorians on women and their sexual activities. The focus of the argument was to highlight the stark Victorian moral codes that contribute to the predicament of women and the manner these two poems advocate or blame the conventional Victorian opinions. Both of the poems, *Mariana*, and *The Lady of Shalott* have in their approach questioned the Victorian behaviours and in some contexts have boosted them. Moreover, this paper has exemplified how the two poems symbolized the status of women in the Victorian society as being tagged as other moreover, have reflected how the woman has strayed from the right feminine virtue of their organization. Tennyson's subjective view shares a common interest about the female status for instance his two poems, *The Lady of Shalott* and *Mariana*. In both cases, the woman he displayed is characterized as dishonored Victorian women. In his negative view that had a bias to the gender roles that the Victorian society developed, he depicted women to have slipped into guilt by confronting the Victorian principles of femininity.

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مأزق النساء: قراءة نسوية في قصائد مختارة من الشعر الفيكتوري

ضياء رمضان علوان *

ملخص

البحث يسلط الضوء على محنة المرأة خلال العصر الفيكتوري (الملكة فيكتوريا). الاهتمام الموضوعي لهذه الدراسة يلقي بالضوء على محنة المرأة المتمثلة بالتمييز والظلم والفصل العنصري. النظرية النسوية طبقت في تحليل النصوص المختارة للدراسة. الدراسة هنا تقتصر على شاعرين رئيسيين من العصر الفيكتوري وهما الفريد لورد تينيسون وروبرت بروننغ في قصائدهم "دوقتي الأخيرة" و "سيدة شالوت" و "ماريانا". الدراسة تبين كيف قد تم إزاحة إنسانية المرأة و إضعافها و تقليل قيمتها الى كائن قليل القيمة او نوع من العبودية قد افترضت عليهن وحيث كلما حاولت المرأة ان تعبر حدود و احكام الجنس يتم فرض العقوبة التي تصل الى الابدانة.

الكلمات الدالة: محنة المرأة، الانوثة، تينسن، براوننغ، حدود الجنس.

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