

The Representation of the Victorian Masculinity and Femininity in George Gissing's *The Whirlpool* ■■■■

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Abstract

To evaluate male authors' portrayal of the feminine is certainly a widespread issue for gender-based criticism. Similarly, the representation of male characters in fiction is open to quite a lot of different interpretations. Though Gissing's misogyny is unequivocal in most of his depictions of female characters, his male characters also seem to be modern day patriarchs who are easily hurt and depressed. Harvey Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* (1897) clings to his books to escape from Alma Frothingham's feminine nervousness, nevertheless, he feels invaded by this strong and independent woman. Although Harvey Rolfe seemingly acts as the representative of a modern day patriarch, and believes in sexual equality, and independence, he confesses his dislike for women in general, trying to avoid being with them as much as he can. However, he experiences the same dilemma as many male figures do: he is not only victimized but also fascinated by Alma Frothingham's femininity. The aim of this paper is to analyse the Victorian masculinity and femininity by emphasizing Cixous' concept of binary oppositions through the main characters Harvey Rolfe and his wife Alma Frothingham by means of the contradictory image of woman as both the object of delight and the destroyer of masculine sexuality, and in what ways Rolfe frees himself from the female characters and copes with alienation and isolation, and how Alma captures her husband by her feminine skills.

Keywords

George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, Harvey Rolfe, Alma Frothingham, Masculinity, Femininity, Binary Oppositions

For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell

A. L. Tennyson, "Merlin and Vivien"

Idylls of the King.

Man for the field and woman for the hearth;

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the heart;

Man to command and woman to obey.

A. L. Tennyson, *The Princess.*

The above quotations describe man and woman in terms of binary oppositions which attribute all the negative qualities to women and the positive to men as Helene Cixous regards as the stereotypical Western idea about the sexes: "Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother, Head/Heart,... Logos/Pathos" all suggest that the woman is passive and is to abide by the norms of the patriarchal system to be able to survive whilst the active and the rational man is the authority to judge and make up the final decision (Cixous 1986, 560). To illustrate this binary opposition, Virginia Woolf, in her *A Room of One's Own*, attempts to explain the reasons why Western literature is dominated by male authors. To Woolf, the basic reason for that domination and monopolism is that women do not have the principal and social opportunities that men are provided with: "in the first place, it is necessary to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room was out of the question... since her pin money depended on the good will of her father... such material difficulties were formidable; but much worse were the immaterial... Write if you choose..." (Woolf 2000, 60-61). From the very beginning, the female character Alma Frothingham in *The Whirlpool* has the same wish: to have a room of her own: "Alma fretted at the restriction; she wished to have a room of her own in a lodging-house..." (Gissing 1998, 36).

Clearly it is to be admitted that women were undervalued as literary and social agents not only in the Victorian age, but also in many other periods and spaces. But it was most poignantly revealed at the time because of the proliferation of women writers. In one of his letters to Charlotte Brontë, a critic Robert Southey states that: "literature cannot be the business of woman's life and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity" (quoted in Gaskell 1992, 105). Charlotte Brontë, like other Victorian women, felt the pressure of being a woman and a novelist in the Victorian Age. By the same token, Alma Frothingham tries hard and does everything for the sake of her career, she does not hesitate even to lie to her husband; thus causes not only domestic misery but also the murder and two year imprisonment of one of the male characters Carnaby, who finds Alma and Redgrave together, mistakes for her his wife Sybil, and kills the man in a heat.

The 1880s and 1890s, in which the issues of sexology, love, and suffrage were heated-debates, male novelists dealt with such similar issues, creating male characters who were aware of the new definitions of masculinity and the power of women. Thus, the author now has the twofold attitude, the first one refers to the increasing power of women through liberation and emancipation by the female novelists; the other refers to the male characters who rediscover their potentials, created by the male novelists. Hence, concentration on female representation is extended and elaborated with the emphasis on male characterization as well (Federico 1991, 14). According to O’Gorman, “masculinities, which have already attracted the attention of other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and classics grew as a topic of interest in the 1990s and there is every sign that this subject will further enrich understandings of gender in the Victorian period...” (O’Gorman 2002, 8).

Whilst dealing with feminine and masculine experiences, firstly, feminism, femaleness, and femininity should be clarified. In this respect, Toril Moi offers a distinction between these terms. In one of her interviews, Moi states that she finds “feminism as a political, indeed revolutionary movement, subversive and marginal to the dominant order and feminism is about the need to reconceptualize power, understand it differently, and see the creative potential in power” (Moi 1990, 94-109). On the other hand, according to Moi, “femaleness refers to a matter of biology and femininity is a set of culturally defined characteristics, and feminine and masculine represent social constraints patterns of sexuality and behaviours imposed by cultural and social norms” (Moi 1985, 117-122). Within this frame, the opposition between masculinity and femininity is the result of the sociological meaning which is attributed to men and women.

However, “although the masculine experience is cultural, social, and historical-there is no universal masculinity, but rather a varying masculine experience of each succeeding social epoch in Western civilization it is inextricably connected with work, property, and power” (Federico 1991, 21). The Victorian masculinity, like Victorian femininity, derives from anxiety, fear, confusion, contradiction and insecurity of the people of different social status, towards the issues of sexuality and gender. Since the issue of sexuality is a taboo, most people do not know how to treat the subject without being against the grain. The title of the novel, the whirlpool, in which most characters live, is a recurrent controlling metaphor which suggests a kind of displacement, difficulty, confusion and alienation, all of which are related to relationships between men and women, and money.

It is also noteworthy that most Victorian male authors support women’s efforts for equality, including even Gissing, who is considered to be a misogynist. Gissing wrote in a letter: “I am convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the misery of life is due to the ignorance and childishness of women. In other words, women’s education was important if only to give men peace” (Federico 1991, 25). In *The Whirlpool*, Harvey Rolfe, the protagonist, who is employed to comment on the women and men, marriage, children and parental issues through his male perspective, is always apt to escape from most of the women he is in relation with, and avoids participating in any activity or speech related to women, including his wife Alma. He just prefers to “meditate on Woman” as he feels his masculine identity might be under

a threat (Gissing 1998, 198). Harvey also confesses that “all women puzzled, and often disconcerted, him; with Sibyl he could never talk freely, knowing not whether to dislike or to admire her” (Gissing 1998, 17).

Nevertheless, though Harvey Rolfe is the symbol of masculinity, determined by the social norms, he is also the symbol of a liberal husband and an affectionate father. The novel opens with the description of the protagonist Harvey Rolfe. He is not only an ordinary man but also a man who clings to his books to resist his wife Alma and other women’s emotional identity crises, and hysteria to feel free from the presence of New Women: “... Harvey had no purpose in life... Obviously he read a good deal... he had traits of the reserved, even of the unsociable, man: a slight awkwardness in bearing, a mute shyness with strangers, a hesitancy in ordinary talk, and occasional bluntness of assertion or contradiction...” (Gissing 1998, 1).

Harvey Rolfe is described as a person who is always complaining about his personality: ignorance and moral cowardice are the key words to introduce him: “I have no opinion. My profound ignorance of everything keeps me in a state of perpetual scepticism. It has its advantages... I take refuge once more, in my fathomless ignorance” (Gissing 1998, 8, 9).

Harvey Rolfe feels not only invaded but also stupified by independent-minded women, especially his wife, and he immediately surrenders: “Rolfe gives in to what he feels are his wife’s neurotic suggestions, pacifying her desires and enduring her emotional swings from self-assertion to submission to self-mortification, with almost stoical patience, craving above all a peaceful household” (Federico 1991, 104). However, If his ideas and feelings are considered, Harvey can be described as a liberal male protagonist, who believes in the value of sexual equality, marital independence, and women’s career. On this issue, he tells Alma that: “I should never dream of putting obstacles in your way. Do understand and believe me. I don’t want to shape you to any model of my own” (Gissing 1998, 65). Within this frame, it is essential to mention what Rolfe offers Alma before they get married: “I want you to be your true self, and live life you are meant for” (Gissing 1998, 65). He adds, “my life may take all sorts of forms; when I ask you to share it, I ask you to share liberty, not restraint” (Gissing 1998, 64).

Although the women are not femme fatales and vampirish females in *The Whirlpool*, their femininity and feminine nervousness disturb and sometimes spoil masculinity. In such an atmosphere, the protagonist Harvey Rolfe is portrayed in a very ambivalent manner: does he struggle with or surrender to such a charming and destructive femininity materialized in Alma’s beauty? As an example of a new woman, Alma, who tries to subvert the conventions of Victorian norms, confuses her husband. It is quite clear that Rolfe is baffled and captured by Alma’s beauty: “His cheek was not far from hers; the faint perfume floated all about him; he could imagine it the natural fragrance of her hair, of her breath” (Gissing 1998, 68). Moreover, “... Her features suggested neither force of intellect or originality of character: but they had beauty, and something more. She stood a fascination, an allurements, to his masculine sense” (Gissing 1998, 16). Although he dislikes this temptation, he has “yielded to Alma’s fascination” (Gissing 1998, 56), and, “... he had damaged himself in

the girl's eyes..." (Gissing 1998, 18). This attraction towards Alma makes him feel that his masculinity is enslaved due to the mysterious power of her: "all his manhood was subdued by her scornful witchery" (Gissing 1998, 55).

In this respect, it is apparent that the contradictory image of woman as both the object of delight and the destroyer of male sexuality is detected in *The Whirlpool*. Clearly, there is little or no change with regard to the situation of women: "since the apple of Eden... woman has always remained man's enigma, his temptation, his hell and his paradise, his dream and his nightmare, his honey and his gall, his rage and his felicity" (Federico 1991, 107). *The Whirlpool* is, in fact, "about men and women trying to remake themselves, to balance the emotional life and the rational, the private and the public, the ideal old world and the changing new world" (Federico 1991, 119). In the novel, it is explicit that the only way for a man to survive, Gissing implies, is what Harvey Rolfe has always tried to do: "to stay clear of females and subdue male sexual instincts, a strategy that has its own alienating and destructive side effects for men... and the whole novel comes across as a miserable warning against feminism... and modern marriage, all of which threaten masculine peace, dignity, and authority" (Federico 1991, 120).

As for Alma, she resembles one of the female characters Sybil in that she is able to capture her husband Harvey quite easily by her feminine abilities he is never aware of. Even the marriage proposal shows her feminine skill in that Harvey acts as if he were enchanted by this enigmatic woman :

The inconceivable had come to pass. By a word and a look Harvey had made real what he was always telling himself could never be more than a dream, and a dream of unutterable folly... For a man of sensitive honour there could be no trilling in such a matter as this with a girl in Alma Frothingham's position... He had told Alma that he loved her... hoped passionately to hear from her lips the echoed syllable. It was merely the proof of madness. A shake of the head might cure him; but from that way to sanity all his blood shrank... If he meant to ask Alma to marry him, and of course he did, an indispensable preliminary was to make known the crude facts of his worldly position (Gissing 1998, 62).

In the light of these observations, it should be pointed out that the masculine and the feminine opposition is one of the major themes of *The Whirlpool*. However, this duality or confusion, related to feminine inconsistency "may be an unconscious appropriation of men's own latent hysteria and social/sexual phobias onto women... who, appropriately enough seem nervous, vain, sexually abnormal, and hysterical; [while] nature, simplicity, rationality, and sanity are masculine attributes..." (Federico 1991, 106).

Alma is a violinist for drawing-room performances, but not skillful enough for concert performances. Nonetheless, she wishes to be a concert performer to satisfy her need for love, praise and applause as a woman and a violinist. What Alma lives for is just approval, and admiration, thus, neglecting her traditional roles in patriarchal point of view. Her main objective in life is to live out: "she would keep it up through life, and breathe her last,

amid perfumes, declaring that she had lived herself out” (Gissing 1998, 21). Her artistic ambitions are above everything: “She is really indifferent to everything but the prospect of emancipation...” (Gissing 1998, 36). Nevertheless, Rolfe is a simple man who wishes to turn his ordinary love relationship or courtship into a passionate romance whilst Alma is a mediocre violinist who wishes to be regarded as the best, but both of them are committed to self-deception.

Alma wants to have her autonomy to achieve her goal and not to be dependent on her husband. Her being restless, assertive, insistent and obstinate makes her husband live in isolation from her. Though she does not do something really wrong: her follies, her creating troubles without any reason, her desires, her living only for the sake of others’ admiration and her passion for being a virtuoso despite being a middling violinist, all ruin her husband’s both social and private life. Although she wishes to have a high social status, and a luxurious life, her aim is not fulfilled at all. For Harvey Rolfe, however, happiness is so simple: his books and living in a countryside with his wife Alma, who deliberately brings her husband to a life, the whirlpool of London, for which he is unfitted. This life style only causes much work, less money, more debts, and financial problems, and less peace on the part of Harvey.

Alma’s excessive nervousness concerning the news of her recital is particularly revealed when she is searching for the headlines of the newspapers: “... she looked eagerly for the report of her recital, and found... barely a dozen lines, which spoke of her as ‘a lady of some artistic promise’, said that much allowance must be made for her natural nervousness... Nervous! Why, the one marvellous thing was her absolute conquest of nervousness...” (Gissing 1998, 175).

After the disaster of her father’s death, she becomes much more attached to her ambitions: “yet were not these woes and disasters the beginning of a new life for *her*! In prosperity, what would she ever have become? Nothing less than being thrown out into the world could have given her the impulse needed to realise a high ambition... another great violinist! ’ How sincerely, how inspiringly, it was said! ” (Gissing 1998, 42).

While Harvey describes himself as “ a married man, imprisoned with wife and children” (Gissing 1998, 13), Alma Frothingham, is also torn between her “yearnings for public triumphs” (Gissing 1998, 69) as a violinist and the domestic wifely duties: “she would be a good woman, rule her little house, bring up her child, and have no will but her husband’s” (Gissing 1998, 229). She suffers from too much emotionalism which is even destructive and she eventually dies from an overdose of laudanum a remedy for “fashionable disorder of the nerves” (Gissing 1998, 169). The doctor tells Harvey that “he had made an unpleasant discovery... Mrs Rolfe was in the habit of taking a narcotic...” (Gissing 1998, 212). In this sense, “Alma Frothingham has been compared even with Emma Bovary. Alma has all the weak sensuality of Emma Bovary, but more brain” (Donnelly 1954, 179). Here, once more the binary oppositions contribute to the understanding that the woman is expected to be silent, passive and to obey the rules of the patriarchal system to be able to survive in the society. While the man says the final word the woman is doomed to perish or die. Alma’s

death confirms Cixous' idea that "either woman is passive, or she does not exist" (Cixous 1986, 561). Cixous suggests that in a male-dominated society women are not considered as individual entities yet... "Beautiful, but passive; hence desirable" is the archetype that the males consider to be an ideal woman (Cixous 1986, 562).

For the study is a descriptive one, such theoretical references as Luce Irigaray's concept of hysteria and Helene Cixous' mother concept are based on the concept of binary oppositions mentioned at the very beginning. Within this frame, for Alma is portrayed as a female character who is very much obsessed with herself and career only and her reactions, tensions and anxiety might be evaluated through one of the significant terms Irigaray uses for women that is the hysteria described as a "rebellious outlet for the domesticated women" (Humm 1989, 100). Irigaray uses this concept to describe women's acceptance and refusal of the organization of sexuality under patriarchy. Although a woman can be feminine, she might refuse femininity in patriarchal discourse. This hysteric voice represents the woman's language, created under the pressure of patriarchy. In Irigaray's words, "they envelop themselves in the needs/desires/fantasies of men. If a woman cannot express her relation to her mother or to other women she may become hysterical, but Irigaray sees hysteria as a culturally-induced symptom" (Irigaray 1995, 77).

Alma's hysteric voice, heard throughout the novel, exposes her power of imagination, and sexuality: "Alma had changed greatly, and was looking to new life in new conditions. His worst uneasiness arose from the hysteria which had so alarmingly declared itself this evening" (Gissing 1998, 246); and "her choking voice made Harvey look at her in apprehension, and the look stopped her just as she was growing hysterical" (Gissing 1998, 196). The term hysteria proves that difference between man and woman is not only physical but also mental. Being so ambitious and passionate, Alma's hysteria might be defined as her deviance from the socially accepted norms, in other words, the natural. As she is supposed to repress her imaginative power, and creativity (she is supported by her husband only to a certain extent), it is inevitable that all her feelings give rise to hysteria.

Being a very ambitious woman Alma neglects her child and she does not seem to embody positive maternal feelings represented in the form of a good mother. It is quite clear that Alma shows little serious interest in her first child; her second child lives only for two weeks: "the child, a lamentable little mortal with a voice scarce louder than a kitten's, held its life on the frailest tenure; there was doubt at first whether it could draw breath at all..." (Gissing 1998, 213). Thus, unfortunately, she is not able to find any outlet for one of the sacred feelings for a woman, either.

As for the above stated issue, it might be useful to refer to Cixous' mother concept: Cixous' mother figure is the "Good Mother: the omnipotent and generous dispenser of love, nourishment, and plenitude" (quoted in Moi 1985, 115). In the novel, none of the mother figures serves as the image of Good Mother, except for Mrs. Morton: "who conceived her duty as wife and mother after the old fashion, and was so fortunate as to find no obstacle in circumstance. She rose early; she slept early; and her day was full of manifold activity" (Gissing 1998, 180). However, interestingly enough, Harvey becomes a very

conscientious, an affectionate and a good father as opposed to a negligent mother Alma. Whenever his child is considered, Harvey becomes rough: “Harvey had never been so near the point of answering his wife in rough, masculine fashion” (Gissing 1998, 89). Before Harvey Rolfe experiences fatherhood he points out that: “people talk such sentimental rubbish about children... they are a burden, a hindrance, a perpetual source of worry and misery” (Gissing 1998, 7). Later on, he becomes aware of his tender feelings for his child, who is believed to bring a new hope and energy to the unhappy marriage:

Harvey liked to gaze long at the little face... how fresh and young... All his heart went forth in the desire to protect... The word ‘father’ however sweet to his ear, had at times given him a thrill of awe... All pleasures, aims, hopes that concerned himself alone, shrank to the idlest trifling when he realised the immense debt due from him to his son; no possible sacrifice could discharge it... (Gissing 1998, 79, 211).

Harvey’s anxiety about his little child is narrated in the following lines: “... separation from her child was borne by Alma with singular philosophy; it did not affect in the least her enjoyment of travel... Little Hugh saw less and less of his mother... and Harvey understood by now that Alma must not be expected to take much interest in the domestic side of things. It simply was not her forte” (Gissing 1998, 74-75).

On the other hand, Alma is ready to sacrifice all her belongings and even her husband for the sake of her career and fame. She is even ready to prostitute herself: she uses Mr. Redgrave, causes his death, and the imprisonment of Carnaby. She lives merely for the hope of success, putting the blame on her husband, whom she believes, is never able to appreciate her skills and motives: “I wanted to make use of Mr. Redgrave to use his influence with people in society, so that I could have a great success... . At that time I was mad to make my name known, and, though I loved you, I believe I could have left you rather than give up my ambition... . I was living only for the hope of a success. Do you believe me, Harvey? (Gissing 1998, 242).

Alma thinks of accepting Redgrave’s marriage proposal just for the sake of her artistic talent in which she has never lost faith “... Redgrave would have made her path smooth. ‘I promise you a great reputation in two or three years’ time. ’ And without disgrace, without shadow of suspicion, it would all be managed, he declared, so very easily. For what alternative had she rebuffed him? ” (Gissing 1998, 47). However, “Alma felt the double insult, to her worldly honour, to her womanhood. The man had not even made pretence of loving her...” (Gissing 1998, 47).

Confessing that he loved Alma, who “fell short of the ideal in wifehood” (Gissing 1998, 185), Harvey also regrets having allowed her to take her own course which he thinks did not work well at home and outside:

... I never claimed the right to dictate to you. We agreed that this was the way for rational husband and wife. It seemed to us that I had no more right to rule over you than you to lay down the law for me. Using your freedom, you chose to live the life of an artist—that is to say, you troubled yourself as little as possible about home

and family. I am not complaining—not a bit of it... Latterly I began to see that they didn't work well, and it appears that you agree with me... (Gissing 1998, 194).

In this respect, it is also useful to state that Harvey who “prided himself on leaving to Alma an entire responsibility, making her, in the ordinary phrase, mistress of her own fate, and waiting upon her decisions” (Gissing 1998, 93), realises and finds absurd that “... she could allow herself more freedom of movement than was permissible to single young women,... Mrs. Rolfe had such complete liberty and leisure seemed to them no subject for remark; being without cares, she enjoyed life...” (Gissing 1998, 103). Now that Harvey gains wisdom, he puts the blame on himself as he has supported her freedom too much, and their marriage, based on understanding, respect, and independence now gives its way to a very authoritarian marriage:

Marriage rarely means happiness, either for man or woman... In acting with masculine decision, with the old-fashioned authority of husbands, he had made himself doubly responsible for any misery that might come to Alma through the conditions of her life. It might be that, on the higher plane of reasoning, he was by no means justified; there might have been found a middle way, which, whilst guarding Alma from obvious dangers, still left her free to enjoy and to aspire. What he had done was very much like the clipping of wings (Gissing 1998, 210).

Gradually, Harvey happens to become a conscious and self-critical man to remake himself by trying to balance his emotional life with the rational, and being totally free “from peculiar force of Alma’s personality which had long ago subdued him...” (Gissing 1998, 123):

... Harvey felt that he was still more to blame for allowing his wife a freedom of which she threatened to make absurd use; and Alma, her feelings both as wife and mother sensibly perturbed, resented the imputation which seemed to have been thrown upon her conduct... he secretly wished her to become a mere domestic creature, to abandon hopes that were nothing better than a proof of vanity. This went to Alma’s heart, and rankled there... Of course, she was not a model of the home-keeping virtues; who expected an artist to be that? But Harvey denied this claim... (Gissing 1998, 133).

It is clear that cultural obstacles do not allow Alma to get any place in the patriarchal system or norms which determine her lifestyle. From the patriarchal perspective, Alma should have obeyed all the rules of this system without questioning. When she realises that she is not going to be able to survive despite all her efforts, she takes refuge in her fate: “Alma rebelled against the fate which made her life dishonourable. Fate—she declared—not the depravity of her own heart. From the dark day that saw her father’s ruin, she had been condemned to a struggle with circumstances... but destiny was adverse...” (Gissing 1998, 229).

At the end of the novel, Harvey discovers his selfhood, gains wisdom, and after Alma dies, “ironically, too, there is a turn of fortune from bad to improved, and Rolfe returns once

more to the simple life which his wife had rejected” (Donnelly 1954, 182-183). Thus, in the words of Cixous, man’s dream in which he considers womankind to be “absent, hence desirable, a dependent nonentity” comes true in a male-dominated order, where the women “sleep and... not wake... up” and, the inertia and at the same time passivity of womankind is a vital factor “that ensures the system’s functioning” (Cixous 1986, 564-565). Although Harvey seems to have accepted female subjectivity, through the end of the novel, he asserts his masculine subjectivity. Actually, the wall that he builds around his emotional life symbolises his strength to retreat from femininity even though it causes isolation. To Harvey, it has been “an act of unaccountable folly to marry a woman from whom one differed diametrically on subjects that lay at the root of life; and of children” (Gissing 1998, 11). On the other hand, “since the removal from Pinner, Rolfe had forgotten his anxieties with regard to money. Expenses were reduced... it was the change in Alma’s mode of life that brought about this fortunate result. With infinite satisfaction he dismissed from his mind the most hateful of all worries” (Gissing 1998, 216). He goes on to pour out his feelings: “... The crown of his feeble, futile career should, have been marriage with a woman worse than himself. One lesson, if one only, he had truly learnt from nature: it bade him forget all personal disquietude, in joy that he was not guilty of that crime of crimes, the begetting of children by a worthless mother” (Gissing 1998, 185).

To conclude, both Harvey Rolfe and his wife Alma Frothingham have their successes and failures in their social and private lives. However, Harvey is strong enough to overcome most of the problems they have faced throughout their marriage as he is always apt to run away from nervousness, and too much emotionalism of his wife as much as he can. In this sense, he asserts his masculinity to retreat from femininity. Struggling with the image of woman as both the object of delight and the destroyer of masculine sexuality, Rolfe tries hard to free himself from the female characters, yet, he has to cope with alienation and isolation as well. In this respect, it is certainly significant to question whether he is totally successful or not. However, Alma’s death at the end of the novel reflects not only the author’s but also the protagonist’s ambivalence about how to treat a new woman, an emancipated, and a passionate person like Alma. Her death confirms Cixous’ idea that “either woman is passive or does not exist” (Cixous 1986, 561). As is seen in the novel, as long as women’s education and liberation give peace to men, it is welcomed, otherwise, it is denied. Although Alma is a nontraditional liberal woman and an ambitious musician, she is not able to survive in this patriarchal system which attempts to reshape her personality and life according to its traditional norms and regulations. Firstly, she is let free by her husband, however, she misuses this freedom, and makes a lot of mistakes; as soon as her liberation irritates her husband, her freedom and any outlet for creativity are forbidden by the same man who thinks the method does not work well. Within this frame, one might agree that the only thing which is not ambivalent in the novel is the binary oppositions used for men and women: nervousness, vanity, sexual abnormality, hysteria, and many other negative qualities are feminine attributes; whilst nature, simplicity, rationality, sanity, and all the positive qualities are masculine attributes.

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Öz

Viktorya Dönemi Erkek ve Kadın Kavramlarının Gissing’in *The Whirlpool* Adlı Romanındaki Yansımaları

Toplumsal cinsiyet kuramı erkek yazarların kadını resmetme biçimlerini kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemektedir. Aynı şekilde, erkek karakterlerin temsili de pek çok farklı yoruma açıktır. Gissing’in kadın düşmanlığı birçok kadın karakterinin tasvirinde oldukça net olarak görülmekle beraber, erkek figürleri de kolaylıkla incinen ve bunalımlı modern zaman kahramanları gibidir. *The Whirlpool* (1897) adlı romandaki başkahraman Harvey Rolfe, karısı Alma Frothingham’ın kadını asabiyet ve gerilimlerinden kaçabilmek için kitaplarına sıkı sıkıya bağlanır, ancak aynı zamanda bu güçlü ve özgür kadın tarafından kuşatıldığını da hissetmektedir. Çağdaş bir erkek olarak cinsiyet eşitliğine ve özgürlüğüne inanmasına rağmen, Harvey Rolfe, kadınlardan genel olarak hoşlanmadığını ve onlardan mümkün olduğunca kaçtığını itiraf etmektedir. Bu nedenle, birçok erkek figürü ile aynı kaderi paylaşmaktadır: Alma Frothingham’ın kadınlığının hem kurbanı olmuş hem de etkisi altında kalmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Viktorya döneminde erkek ve kadın kavramlarını Harvey Rolfe ve Alma Frothingham karakterleri aracılığı ile Cixous’un ikili karşıtlar görüşünü vurgulayarak yansıtmak, kadının erkek cinselliğinde hem haz hem de tahrip unsuru olarak nasıl bir çelişki yarattığını, Harvey Rolfe’un kadın karakterlerden kendisini nasıl soyutladığını, yabancılaşma ve yalnızlıkla nasıl başa çıktığını ve Alma’nın kocasını kadını yetenekleriyle nasıl baştan çıkardığını değerlendirmektir.

Anahtar kelimeler

George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, Harvey Rolfe, Alma Frothingham, Erkek, Kadın, İkili Karşıtlıklar

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Yazar Hakkında

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