

The Impact of Feminism Movement on Murdoch's Novel *The Black Prince*

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Abstract:

*This paper tries to trace the feminists' movement influence on Murdoch's writings. So, the paper takes the burden of exploring the development of the feminists' trends on Murdoch's writing as well as in the British society. The paper aims to declare Murdoch's conflicts with social problems, and to show her acceptance or refusal to some norms. On other words, the paper aims to test Murdoch's perception of the feminists' ideas through tackling the British society. Additionally, the paper aims to investigate Murdoch's opinions towards feminism throughout developing her characters. To maintain these, the paper confines to Murdoch's novel *The Black Prince* on the discussion and analysis and as data resource. This paper works the analytical and descriptive methods to answer the questions raised. It concludes that Murdoch inherits some feminists ideas when she depicts her characters. Murdoch goes on to portray some women characters as strong as men or she gives them noticeable "power".*

Key words: Feminism, homosexual, gender role, women rights, free sexuality

1. Introduction

Jean Iris Murdoch was born in 1919. She studied humanities at Oxford University. She showed great political activeness then enrolled the Communist Party. She worked as a civil servant

and joined a refugee camp in Craze which gave her an influential experience. As a novelist, she wrote twenty six novels including *The Black Prince* (1973).

The novel, *The Black Prince*, begins when Bradley is about to leave London. Meantime, he receives a call from his friend Arnold Baffin so Bradley goes to Arnold house instead. On his way back, Bradley, accidentally, meets Arnold's daughter Julian, who lately he falls in love with her. Going on with these situations, Priscilla, Bradley's sister, commits suicide after leaving her husband and Christian, Bradley's ex-wife, arrives. Arnold reveals to Julian Bradley's lies about his fake age as a result she leaves him.

Later on, Bradley tells Rachel of Arnold's feelings for Christian. Several days later, Rachel phones Bradley, asking him to come to her home immediately. Bradley arrives to find Arnold is badly struck in the head. The police arrive and Bradley is accused of the murder.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Through her career, Murdoch worked within refugees environments and knew about how some people suffer. Since feminism comes to give people rights and stop their suffering, this paper examines how far Murdoch is touched by people's rights and to what extent she succeeds in handling related issues. Moreover, the paper explores what feminists' ideas do Murdoch's novel carry out through her designed characters.

1.2. Objectives of the study

This paper investigates the affections of feminists' trends on Murdoch's writings. Accordingly, its aims are to show Murdoch's stand with women situations and to declare how Murdoch as a modern educated woman opposes traditional beliefs and implicitly, to count society problems that she highlights in her novel.

1.3. Questions of the study

The paper examines the novel: (*The Black Prince*) by Iris Murdoch to find out if she is touched by feminists' ideas and how feminism movement affection is resulted on her novel *The Black Prince*. To quest these problems, the following questions are raised:

1. To what extent does Murdoch postulate women's power in her novels?
2. What women's rights does Murdoch prompt in her novels?

1.4. Hypotheses

The paper assumes the following hypotheses:

- 1- Murdoch introduces some views announcing women power.
- 2- Murdoch provides some points that proves women rights.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The general consideration on Murdoch's writing is about her morality. However, this paper initiates a new perception of Murdoch's novel *The Black Prince* in quest of new themes. It is so significant to notify the influence of feminism movement on educated people as Murdoch and its glimmer on Murdoch's works.

1.6. Methodology

This paper utilizes descriptive and analytical methods to examine questions under consideration. The analysis will be only on Murdoch's novel: (*The Black Prince*). Thus, data will be taken mainly from the novel mentioned. Since the analysis matter touches feminism movement, the feminism approach is in need to be included.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Makanje (2004) states that feminism is a unique movement which enhances women socially and politically. Thus, feminism aims to evaluate societies by accepting some behaviours and rejecting other ones. Here it worth calling for Doris Lessing's expression in her novel, *The Golden Notebook* (1962): "The Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution-they're nothing at all. The real revolution is, women against men". Doris insists that feminism movement comes to solidify women's awareness of their role in society and its literature (Marle, 2013, p: 47).

On the other hand, Mackinnon (1989) explains that according to the Marxists a society consists up as a result of people fulfilling their needs and the relations lead to that. Mackinnon, also, notes that men and women, according to their gender differences, set sort of social relations through which feminists introduce their theory. However, away of equality that feminism seeks out, Louise (2012) examines woman status as "female sex". He finds it is believed that women are weak, inferior, and have no enough intelligence as men. Furthermore, the attitudes towards their writing enhance those beliefs. Therefore, things which need mental skills as reading, writing, and thinking, are one considered as women tasks. Comparatively, Lois (2006) summaries the characteristics of female writing. He announces that the writing can be considered as a female writing when it appreciates strong woman, when it highlights sisterhood importance for women survival, and when it reveals the interaction of gender with race.

According to Marle (2013), female writers come to correct some wrong norms found, to change the depiction of women in men's writings, and to present new women images. Thus, comes the need to see what Murdoch does as a "female" "educated" writer in her novel *The Black Prince* with her neat women characters depicted.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Women Power

As Sonkamble (2011) questions "men" power and enhances the role of feminism movement to give "women" power that enable them to force patriarchal oppression against them. Additionally, Tyson (2006) appreciates feminists' novels that praise "strong" woman and declare the importance of "sisterhood" matter among women because it supports women power.

In her novel *The Black Prince*, Murdoch introduces women power in various ways She shows it in a sort of "body strength" or "body power" through Rachel's character. Rachel has enough power to quarrel with men, Arnold in this position. Rachel appears as strong woman when she speaks to Brand about her quarrel with Arnold :

I shall never forgive him. Be my witness now. I shall never forgive him. Never, never, never. Not if he were to kneel at my feet for twenty years. A woman does not forgive this ever. She won't save a man at the end. If he were drowning, I'd watch....
(p: 20).

This situation explains that Rachel is not as a traditional "weak" woman who is emotional and has great sympathy but a "strong" enough to face hard incidents.

Women strength is assured again by Murdoch throughout Arnold's speech concerning his estimation of Rachel and Christian. Though they practice different realm of daily life (Rachel is a house wife and Christian is a business woman) and deal with different experiences through their life long, they maintain "power or strength" that deserves praising. Arnold says: "... I hope that here too you can give some reassurance. Rachel is strong, too. They are really two marvelous women...." (p: 216).

Generally, it is known that men have more amount of muscles than women. As a result, they are physically stronger

than women. However, Murdoch postulates various incidents of women body strength as if she wants to affirm that though women have less muscles, still they are strong enough to manage hard life. This is obviously clear when Christian slaps Priscilla on the face to let her stop crying.

I went in and stood with my feet well apart, breathing. Christian entered.

'She's stopped,' I said. 'What did you do?'

'I slapped her.'

I said, 'I think I'm going to faint.' I sat down on the sofa and covered my face with my hand.

'Brad, dear, don't—'

'I hate violence,' I said.....(p: 190).

3.1.2. Women Intelligence

Women intelligence capacity is affirmed by (Tong, 2009). Additionally, he states that women education supports women's equality to men in everything. However, Knudsen (2012) reminds about the traditional belief that women are weaker, and less intelligent. For this reason, they are less capable than men.

If it is supposed that intelligence is credit for men's power, women should be named that they "have power" once they are intelligent as men. Sometimes, people try to estimate the interference the matter of education and its importance. However, Murdoch highlights that women have natural intelligence, in other words, they are intelligent by birth. So, they receive this kind of "power" naturally as men do. Meantime, Murdoch declares this through Christian's character who has no enough education but she is a successful business woman. Moreover, Christian has her own philosophy of some issues. Murdoch wants to say that people can manage life in a good way if they use their natural talents wisely. Bradley says about her: "How had a woman without education managed to do that to herself in a little town in the Middle West of America?..." (p: 69).

Christian announces her knowledge of people and the relationship between them. Also, she shows that she is capable of identifying her goals and how to reach them, and the most important, she becomes aware of her own intelligence. She says to Bradley:

....., Brad, you're living in a dream world..... Anyway, what's wrong with being rich? It's a quality, it's attractive. Rich people are nicer, they're less nervy. I'm quite a proposition. And I came to you. As it happened I met Arnold and we talked and he asked a lot of questions, he was interested. That makes people friends and we are friends. But we haven't started up a love affair. Why should we? We're too intelligent... (p: 137).

3.2. Women's rights d prompted

3.2.1. Women Oppressions

Smith's (1990) definition of feminism explains much about this movement. The definition tells much about oppressions that women receive from men or the social conventions. More importantly, the definition hits women's status in societies and how it needs to be improved. Accordingly, these improvements include work places, schooling, health institutions, homes and everywhere. Smith says:

Feminism is both an ideology and a reform movement seeking to improve the status of women. Feminists share a belief that women have been, and continue to be, oppressed because of their sex.

This is what Murdoch concludes through Rachel speech about the situation with her husband, Arnold. She expresses that Arnold blogs her from public life by keeping her just for "house works", everything at home is possessed by him, and he deprives her personality which force her to hate life and world as whole. Rachel says to Bradley:

Sleep! With my mind in this state! He has sent me to hell. He has taken my whole life from me. He has spoilt the world. I am as clever as he is. He has just blocked me off from

everything. I can't work, I can't think, I can't be, because of him. His stuff crawls over everything, he takes away all my things and turns them into his things. I've never been myself or lived my own life at all (p: 20).

Rachel goes on to show that she has received physical oppression. She says he hits her many times, and prevents her from her personal rights. What is the worst, Rachel states that this is the situation with most of her neighbours. The most important is that she mentions the "court". That means she knows about her rights, and that the government law deserves it for her. It comes as follows in *The Black Prince*:

I've always been afraid of him, that's what it comes to. All men despise all women really. All women fear all men really. Men are physically stronger, that's what it comes to, that what's behind it all. Of course they're bullies, they can end any argument. Ask any poor woman in the slums, she knows. He has given me a black eye, like any common brawler, any drunken husband like you hear of in the courts. He has hit me before, oh this isn't the first time by any means (p: 21).

3.2.2. Women Rights

For Hook (2000), the importance of feminism movement comes in that it makes some foundations for gaining equal rights. Additionally, Ronkainen (2014) treats feminism first-wave which introduces women's property rights, women oppression, contraction, and marriage. Generally, this wave accesses women public life equally to men.

Murdoch marks the idea that women are intelligent, they can own properties and they can deal with their own stuff as Christian who uses her intelligence to manage life. This is revealed when Francis tells Bradley about Christian's arrival. He says: "... She's a widow, he left her everything, she's back in London, back in your old place...." (p: 6). In the same novel, Murdoch reveals that feminism and women rights are not new things for Christian. Bradley recalls his early days with

Christian, at that time, she owns little money and accustoms to business since her father is a businessman: "...She even had a little money of her own. My mother was impressed..." (p: 67). When Christian comes back, she buys the upper flat, a thing they dream of for years. This emphasizes women right to buy and own.

On the other hand, De Beviour (1949) states that a woman can maintain any type of works as office work beside enduring her "homework" to support her financial state. Murdoch handles the idea of women works but she adds that a woman has to educate herself to pursue public work, otherwise, no one will employ her. This is cleared when Bradley tries to convince his sister, Priscilla. He says:

‘Priscilla, be realistic, who would employ you?’

‘I’ll have to.’

‘You’re a woman over fifty, with no education and no skill. You’re unemployable.’....(p: 62).

3.2.3. Free from Boundaries

Ann (2015) assures that one of the feminism movement's goals is to make some changes in societies beliefs. In other words, feminism comes to replace traditional beliefs with new ones.

On her side, Murdoch tests changes that undergo the British traditional norms in social life. Thus, comes to appear things as friendships between different sexes. People begin to enjoy these sorts of relationships feeling nothing but they are ones of their rights. This shows that people do breathe an air of feminism. In *The Black Prince*, Arnold says to Bradley: "Why shouldn't I talk to other women, we're not Victorians! I have to have friends and talk freely to them...." (p: 26). Additionally, Rachel beside confirming changes in society, she assures people's acceptance of such relations. Thus, people can practice them openly without feeling shame. Rachel emphasizes that women are not only free but, furthermore, they are able to criticize society. Rachel discusses this with Bradley:

‘But Rachel – this will be a secret –?’

‘No. Oh, everything’s changed so since even a little while ago. We can live in the open, there’s nothing to be secretive about. I feel free, I’ve been set free, like Julian’s balloon, I’m sailing up above the world and looking down at it at last, it’s like a mystical experience...(p: 112).

3.2.4. Free Sexuality

Murdoch proceeds to discuss deeply sexual matters in Britain as a modern country. She covers vast ranges of sexual issues. Firstly, she touches homosexuality. In her novel *The Black Prince*, Francis says to Bradley:

‘Have you never realized that you’re a repressed homosexual?’

‘Look,’ I said, ‘I’m grateful to you for your help with Priscilla. And don’t misunderstand me, I am a completely tolerant man. I have no objection to homosexuality. Let others do as they please. But I just happen to be a completely normal heterosexual—’.....

‘You’re just inventing this out of spite—’

‘Yes, I’m just inventing it. I am neurotic and I am homosexual and I’m bloody unhappy about it. (p: 124).

Secondly, Murdoch states that women can form any kind of relation with men. This can be confined to "friendship" or it can proceed on to reach "practicing sex". In the same novel, Rachel says to Bradley:

Nothing will change except the deep things. I’m Arnold’s wife forever. And you can go and write your book and be alone and whatever you want. But we’ll each have a resource, we’ll have each other, it will be an eternal bond, like a religious vow, it will save us, if only you will let me love you.’

‘But Rachel – this will be a secret –?’

‘No. Oh, everything’s changed so since even a little while ago. We can live in the open, there’s nothing to be secretive about. I feel free, I’ve been set free, (p: 112).

It is clear that the British society accepts this behaviour because Arnold does not find it strange to persuade a sort of relation between his friend Bradley and his legal wife, Rachel. Arnold says to Bradley:

Rachel cares for you very much, I know that. What there may have been, lately or at some stage, 'between you', I do not ask. I am not a jealous man and I know that Rachel has had, at various times and of course especially now, a good deal to put up with..... (p: 215).

Finally, concludes with the matter of "abortion rights". She highlights this right by mentioning that people begin to practice this kind of operations.

Bradley says:

..... And Roger, it appeared, was willing to pay half of the abortion bill, but demanded that the family should pay the other half. This piece of pure caddishness was my first introduction to my future brother-in-law. He was in fact reasonably well off. My father and I put up the money between us and Priscilla had her operation (p: 47).

Conclusion

The paper examined Iris Murdoch's novel *The Black Prince* to answer the questions posted: "To what extent does Murdoch postulate women's power in her novels?" and "What women's rights does Murdoch prompt in her novels?". The discussion and the analysis processed was resulted in that there are some situations which resemble feminists ideas on Murdoch's writings that proclaim her influence with the feminism movement. Meantime, Murdoch deals with her women character in a way that projects them as strong enough to deal with public life. All in all, she illustrates the capacity of the British society to adapt to new ideas.

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