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Gender Sensibility Negated in the Adaptation of *Harry Potter Series*

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Abstract:

“Translation is a process of mediation, which moves through ideology and identity”(Andone,1.). The cultural aspect of translation helps us to understand it in relation to other aspects of communication and so is adaptation.

The shift in the perception on adaptation from a ‘secondary reproductive activity’ to mainstream discourse allows the freedom of study on centre and periphery on how female stereotypes played part in marking down the process of translation as well as adaptation; it being a hub of gender inequality over its long history. It is said that history always recounts and only remembers the tale of success and nothing more. When it comes to translation, we can see that history has obliterated the ‘femina’, (the urban dictionary explains femina as an act of being feeble or weak) out of its process or made sure of relating women to negative identity. In the past centuries, translation was an only option for learned women to make their name marked in the pages of history. Yet, they were forced to accept the existed parameters which had put a mantle of inferiority over all women which got carried forward till waves of feminism, radical thinking and post modernism washed over the shore.

Key words: Adaptation, Feminism, Gender role, re-reading.

Gender refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex difference. It is a social or cultural category, influenced by stereotypes about ‘female’ and ‘male’ behaviour that exist in our attitudes and beliefs, which are culturally produced or constructed. A literary text is an arena of study as it is written, read and interpreted within cultures by men and women. We are aware of cultural stereotyping about gender, such as in the case of designating colours to signify sex difference in the western tradition, where “pink suggests softness and girlishness, and blue suggests boyishness” (Goodman, iv). Over the time, the imaginative ideas associated with these differences include a range of cultural and individualised ideas about gender. Examples of such preconceptions include attributing particular role to one gender such as in the case of the word ‘driver’, always supposed to be a male [perhaps under a popular notion that women drivers are in some way less able than ‘drivers’], or in the usage of certain phrases like “big boys don’t cry” [are women supposed to cry for them too?]. Gender can be seen in sexual stereotypes and in power relations between individuals and groups, attached to symbolic ideas such as colours, ideologies, images which involve our imaginations and interpretive skills in literature and adaptation.

Feminism is a vital, engaging and exiting perspective, to view various facet of life, to focus on the concept of equality and to reorganise society in areas of social relationship, thereby rooting on the development of opportunities for women's expression and self fulfilment in all realms of life without the constrains of gender expectations. One group of feminists seek an equal share of the opportunities to which men have access, some feminists are concerned with the development of alternative social systems and ways of existing in the world based on women centred principles and values, and outside of patriarchy, while some others believe that "separation from man is infeasible or unrealistic and that a woman centred perspective can be enacted in the current world despite the ongoing patriarchal persistence" (Foss,iii). These concepts are ways to focus on the female identity in the socio-political and cultural domain, usually overshadowed by popular literature and adaptation. Like an author of a work, the readers and the characters of texts are 'positioned' in a framework of spatial, temporal, ideological and emotional temperance, and are influenced by factors such as age, gender, race and class. "Just as the position of authors may influence their choice of subject matter and styles of writing, the position of a reader affects his/her interpretation" (Goodman, viii). The same is applicable to a translator, a director, a playwright and so on who adapt a literary piece of work into another form, for a target audience of same culture or different culture[s].

The notion of gender sensibility takes a toll at this point, where literature of popular culture has to be analysed from a female point of view than from the popular or common notion, and by a female. Some critics raise the question, whether it is necessary to be woman to analyse a work (of fiction, or art or so on) from a feminist point of view. The answer is no. *Men in Feminism* by Stephen Heath points out a theoretical possibility where, "if the male feminist can discover a position from which to speak, that neither elides the importance of feminism to his work, nor ignores the specificity of his gender, his voice may also find that it no longer exists as an abstraction" (Kauffman,159). Yet, Heath himself says in the introduction to the same essay that "men's relation to feminism...is an impossible one" (Kauffman, 158) where the reason is political. This impossibility may further be explained by what Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *Second Sex*, and quoted by Luise Von Flotow in her book, *Translation and Gender*:

Beauvoir suggests that a baby born with female reproductive organs does not simply grow up to be a woman. She has to turn herself into a woman, or more correctly, she is turned into a woman by the society she grows up in and in response to the expectations that society has of a woman. The final product "woman" is a result of education and conditioning, and differs accordingly to the dominant influences she is subject to in the culture, subculture, ethnic group, religious sect in which she grows. (5)

Writings by women and interpretations of those by women become essential in a society where 'men's work' acquire prime moment in the reading and studying of literature and cultural representations. Gender sensibility acts as a new pair of glass over popular fiction and adaptation that would, to quote Adrienne Rich, be a "re-vision- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical frame-is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival" (Felman,5).

The literary canon which is the body of writings that are generally reorganised as great by male authority; from Greek drama to Chaucer, to Shakespeare, to Victorian writing and Romantic writing and more, were decided of their worth by taste and values of individuals holding power positions along with its aesthetic worth. Most of the works are focused exclusively on men's writings, which were positioned as the norm, representative of all 'great writing'.

Resurrection of study of female contribution in popular culture, especially literature was a walk away from such prefixed focal points and the 'literary worth' was subjected to re evaluation by refocusing on gender and other elements in literary works by female writers. In the field of literature, feminist thought has been very influential in reforming gendering of social life and popular culture, yet the position and acceptance of women authors has traditionally been marginal.

On the other hand, children's literature also becomes an easy prey of gender inequality, where, "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (Robbins,50). The dichotomy materialised in the appearance and presentation of cartoon characters such as in Popeye the Sailor Man and his lover Olive Oyl, the Princes and Princesses of old fables, the Queens and 'beautiful' maidens of Arthurian legends, the image of Barbie Doll (and its world

wide acceptance) grows its way to literature such as in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, *The Little Prince* by Antonio de Saint Exupary, *The Little Wizard Stories of Oz* by Frank Baum, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, and persists with the modern literature for children such as the *Harry Potter* novel series and the *Percy Jackson* series.

Harry Potter series by J K Rowling is by far one of the most successful children's novels along with J R R Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* series and C S Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* series. The *Harry Potter* series has become one of the most read works over the world, with its translations over seventy four languages and numerous adaptations to regional dialects for its seven parts. All the seven parts were adapted into a series of eight Hollywood movies, remade to more than 20 languages. Such an acceptance alone is proof to the intensity of attraction the literary work hold over children and adults all over the world.

Novels of *Harry Potter* series have attracted readers from all over the world, not just as children's book but as novels depicting various facts of social life. The novels talk about the life of a young wizard named Harry James Potter, resident of number four, Private Drive; an orphan who lives with his aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon Dudley and with his disgusting cousin. The plot is set in twenty-first century England where the 'wizarding' world is well hidden from the 'muggle' world and only those who are proficient in the art of charms and enchantments can get access to the world of magic. The novel is bildungsroman in nature with politico-historical and cultural meanings implied between the lines. The novels always depict the hero Harry Potter, the invincible sorcerer Albus Percival Woolfric Brian Dumbledore and the villain Tom Marvolo Riddle alias Lord Voldemort in high regard. The novels are but also the stories of the most intelligent witch of her age Hermione Granger, the most able sorcerer and dueller Minerva McGonagall and a devoted follower of Voldemort, Bellatrix Lestrange. Being a woman, J K Rowling has tried hard to bring in gender equality in her novels but, being a social animal, she has succumbed to the notion of social patriarchy. Yet, it is in movie series that we see the clutches of male dominance loom in to hush the female presence in the name of freedom to adaptation, more than the novels.

"The study of film adaptation has long been impeded by the lack of a rigorous methodology that enables the examination of adaptation as cultural objects in their own rights, distinct from the materials they adapt" (Venuti, 25). This lack of methodology is mainly due to conceptual and institutional factors. Though Venuti points out that a film is not in direct comparison to its literary original but a version of it in interpretation, some film adaptations mimic the source text, failing to imbibe and recreate the inherent identity. He says, "the interpretation is over determined by the cultural situation and historical moment in which the adaptation is produced, so that...the adaptation intervenes in a specific conjuncture of social relations and developments, regardless of whether filmmaker intends to intervene in political struggles or to take sides in social divisions" (Venuti,26) or gender discriminations on screen. Three types of adaptations are usually seen in the case of movies: borrowing, intersection and fidelity of transformation. "Borrowing makes more or less extensive use of the material, idea or form a prior work...in a vast and airy way" (Zatlin, 154). Intersection while makes an adaptation of the original, leaving the source text unassimilated, fidelity of transformation retains the 'skeletal story' but works towards "original tone, values, imagery and rhythm" (Zatlin,155) in it.

The shift in the perception on adaptation from a 'secondary reproductive activity' to mainstream discourse allows the freedom of study on centre and periphery on how female stereotypes played part in marking down the process of adaptation, it being a hub of gender inequality over its long history. History which remembers only the tale of success and nothing else can be noticed to have obliterated the 'femina', out of its process and made sure of relating women to negative identity. Adaptations, either inherently or by force, accepted existed parameters which had put a mantle of inferiority over all women. Feminist theory reveals the need for viewing adaptation as a production and not reproduction, where language which is the means of creating meaning is used in order to reveal feminine identity, which otherwise was hushed or distorted by the 'existed parameters and male authority'.

Some critics classify *Harry Potter* adaptations as sexist, feminist, boys' novels and novels in which girls can find their ideals. But how much is this true? There are numerous instances where women are portrayed negatively. Though the most brilliant student and witch, Hermione often shows fear contrary to the male characters and the boys (Ron and Harry) have to rescue her from situations.

Girls are represented as anti-intellectual or pseudo-intellectual, mostly interested in magic of lower order as taught in divination classes. Hermione's knowledge in the novels is most important for the growth of the text and it contributes to Harry's adventures, but in the movies, many of the scenes that depict her innate brilliance is just erased so as to portray the heroic image for Harry. She is only a vehicle for the hero to win.

Women are usually described as possessing motherly characteristics, like Prof McGonagall who is smart but not wise enough like Dumbledore. Every female character of the novels has male counterparts who are always brighter, wiser and powerful than the witches.

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, we find Mrs Weasley, though a strict wife and mother, getting afraid when the family members stayed late than the usual time. Also, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Mrs Weasley is troubled by a boggart (a matter less enchantment which takes form of our worst mental fear and the enchantment could be broken by the spell "riddikulus") and unable to expel it devoid of her mastery in witchcraft and wizardry and it is Harry who dispels the boggart. She asks him not to tell this to other family members because she is afraid that they might think she has gone weak. Indeed, these pictures of Mrs Weasley make readers think that she is not good at her art. Only in the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* that we could see a powerful witch out of her that too because she had to save her daughter Ginny Weasley's life from the spells of Bellatrix Lestrange.

The author attempts to represent strong and independent female characters through the change of roles (change of roles was one of the demands of existential feminism), but the adaptations feature females in secondary positions of power and authority and reproduces some of the cultural stereotypes for both male and female.

Aunt Petunia is a character whose vanity and self importance along with that of her husband ruins Harry's childhood and life at Privet Four. But, the novels describe her to its end as one who showed immense love though undetected by anyone including Harry, to Harry on various occasions. The parting scene between Petunia and Harry in chapter three of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* states this further:

She stopped and looked back. For a moment Harry had the strangest feeling that she wanted to say something to him: she gave him an odd, tremulous look and seemed to teeter on the edge of speech, but then, with a little jerk of her hand, she bustled out of the room after her husband and son (Rowling,41).



When the scene was adapted to in the first part of *Deathly Hallows* movie, it was cut short to the above shot, without any gesture, movement or dialogue. The mother that Petunia was and the role of Harry's protector which she affirmed the moment Harry was left at their door steps seventeen years back was crushed to nothingness in a sip of time in the movie, where the director continued with Petunia's usual image of heartless arrogant woman, when the author gave the character actual power in the novel.

The character of Lilly Potter, Harry's mother and Petunia's sister has more in the book than in the movies. Lilly becomes a clear influence in the life of James Potter and Severus Snape, two lifelong enemies yet united for a single cause in the novel. So is the character of Ariana, Dumbledore's sister, Loona Lovegood, Ginny Weasley, even the negative character of Rita Skeeter, who all play major role in driving the plot to its height. Yet, the movie adaptations didn't value their importance, as written by the author. Of course, all these characters do come in the movie and play their part, but not the way the author portrayed, and clearly not in the manner of the power they actually hold.

The negation of gender sensibility in the adaptation of Harry Potter series of novel calls for a redefinition on the idea of equivalence, fidelity and invisibility of adaptations, where theories and meanings need to be used to reverse the effects of male social and cultural dominations. The feminist translation theory recognizes that “gender matters; whether of an author, translator, director, character or pronoun, gender is a legitimate concern” (Ehshelman,3). A feminist adaptation would therefore focus to study how gender has been translated in already published works, along with how adaptations try to describe the ‘relation of feminism’ in their works. Many of male directors or the ones who write screenplays are suspicious to changing norms, and state that gender plays no role in adaptation. David Ehshelman points out this to have risen from their fear, due to the fact that even a slight acknowledgement of another possible adoption of a perspective in adaptation would conform to the idea that a large percentage of adaptations till date were ‘led astray’ which in turn resulted in producing tainted or male centred adaptations of varying degrees.

The idea of womanhood, based on biological facts, defined by society and culture brought out dissimilarities of identity which were reflected through the standards of beauty, sexuality and gender roles. Art and literature are the major propagators of the dual identity among the society, as these mediums are used often to meet vested interests. Marcelin Maleine talks in her article how E S Deborrah Frable points out that “gender, social, ethnic, sexual and class identities are fluid, multidimensional, personalised social construction that reflect the individual’s current context and socio-historical cohort, and goes beyond social constructions as a representation of personal aspects of self” (Marcelin, par.6).

Adaptations by women pay more attention to keep up a lookout for legible framework that would bear any unintended, unrecognized and un-amenable folio that was or is based on social norms dominated by male society. They also address the fate of women writers in adaptation in view of finding out whether women are just as unfairly treated in adaptation as in real life. The alterations done in adaptation of Harry Potter novels to diminish prominence of its female characters is proof of inability of target audience to expect theoretical frameworks such as gender and feminism.

With the advent of feminism and interdisciplinary theoretical approaches; “women are becoming more expressive, about how they wish to define themselves, where, the process of self-assertion coincides with the formation of a woman’s identity” (Marcelin, par.44). This brings to the transitional stage, where, women’s image in adaptation and translation, translated by women, takes up the toll as “she defines herself and what she bases her sense of self upon” (Marcelin, par. 45) as it will ultimately serve as the foundation for ‘her’ life in the reel and the real world.

Adrienne Rich, the American lesbian feminist poet and philosopher argues that women’s experience, history, culture and values are distinct from the dominant patriarchal, heterosexual culture and Rich terms the latter as ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ because of the social power of heterosexuality and its visible devices of romance and rape. She says that, it would require a courageous grasp of the politics and economics as well as the cultural propaganda of heterosexuality to carry out beyond individual cases to undo the power man wield over women, which exploits and form illegitimate control over women. Rich also points out the identity crisis the society has put women in, and the need to come out of the barrier and assert own identity.

Focus on the need for change of female image remains an effective academic tool for bringing about feminist awareness in readers. Many so-called great literary works image women only as items in male fantasy, or in ways that confirm or inculcate their social subordination, such as in the case of Harry Potter novels, or as pointed out by Adrienne Rich. Image study has also tended to assume that woman-authored texts would present alternative images to those in works by men. The second strand of feminist criticism, the study of women writers grew directly from the search for undistorted, realer, more "positive" images of women than those in men's texts. Adaptations of literary texts needs to be re analysed on the basis of how the female image has been put to use in it, whether it be a movie, play or any other mode of adaptation. Though the world believes a novel or movie to end when they see, ‘the end’, it isn’t the end in reality. Rather, it is just the beginning; the beginning to assert what was denied, to reveal what was suppressed, and to create what was destroyed between the lines.

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