

## Woman's Empowerment Through Self-Expression in Literature: A Study of Selected Short Stories

تمكين المرأة في الأدب عن طريق التعبير الذاتي: دراسة لقصص قصيرة مختارة

Faten Adi, University of Jordan, Jordan.

تاريخ التسليم: (2016/11/09)، تاريخ القبول: (2017/05/26)

### Abstract :

### ملخص :

This study deals with the international legal responsibilities resulted from the Israeli blockade on Gaza Strip. Israel announced that the blockade is necessary to limit Palestinian rocket attacks that may threaten the Hebrew State. The research problem appears in the continuation of the Israeli blockade on Gaza Strip since it is contrary to the rules of International law.

The researcher suggests some recommendations to reduce the suffering of Gaza inhabitants like: resuming the peace process which will lead to a Palestinian State, the SC should issue a resolution which ends the blockade, and the SC should also assign the Palestine State to the reconstruction of Gaza Strip, and allow the entry of humanitarian aids.

**Key words:** IHL: International Humanitarian Law

SC : Security Council

GA: General Assembly

UNOCHA: The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إظهار دور الأدب في تمكين المرأة واستعادة صوتها المقمع. كما تسعى إلى الكشف عن طبيعة العلاقات بين الجنسين. وعلى الرغم من استبعاد النساء من المجال الاجتماعي العام، فإن أصواتهن المقاومة ظهرت بقوة للعلن من خلال صناعة الأدب و سرد قصصهن على وجه الخصوص، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على أهمية كتابة ورواية القصص كوسيلة تجابه من خلالها المرأة ضد صور الرجل النمطية لها. بالإضافة إلى ذلك حاول الكتاب الذكور أيديهم في كتابة قصص عن النساء، إلا أن هن فقط من يمكنهن التحدث والكتابة بمصادقية عن تجاربهن. ولذلك، فإن استخدام النساء للأدب كأداة للتمكين مكنهن من التعبير عن تجاربهن الحياتية وإعادة اكتساب مكانة في المجتمع.

استخدمت الدراسة الحالية المنهج الوصفي التحليلي في تناولها لقصص قصيرة مختارة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تمكين المرأة، التعبير الذاتي، العلاقات بين الجنسين.

**Introduction:**

Women have started to express themselves and to engage in male's sphere through art and literature. Aphra Behn, for example, is one of the early female authors who used her pen as a tool both to earn money and to verbalize her ideas. In the nineteenth century, because women were not allowed to write fiction, they wrote under male pseudonyms or pennames whereby the Brontë sisters and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) are a case in point. In this context, Virginia Woolf demonstrates that, "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman," and in order to unveil their true identities and to unleash the cloth of silence, women have strived to find a discourse and a canon of their own. Consequently, a resistant female literature comes into being by breaking men's monopoly over the literary tradition. Female writers no longer hide, disguise, or apologize for their existence, but they have excelled at the job of mastering the novel. They nullify man's claims that women have no creativity and no intelligence. For instance, if Horace Walpole and Edgar Allan Poe are acclaimed to be the precursors of the gothic novel, their female counterparts Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, and Mary Shelly among others cannot be overlooked regarding the foundation of this genre.

In addition, it is Virginia Woolf who pleaded for female financial independence and privacy in the production of literature in *A Room of One's Own*. Without money, women will remain dependent on men; and without privacy, interruptions will hinder their artistic creativity. Thus, economic freedom creates a private space, so that artistic creativity. In other words, earning money and having a space of her own open for woman new horizons where she can thrive intellectually and become liberated to write, to publish, and to speak up her concerns. Moreover, Alice Walker in "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" discusses the plight of her African-American ancestors whose artistic skills and creativity have been neglected and silenced because of slavery, poverty, artistic suppression, and various life hardships such as the case with Phillis Wheatley.

After a long and a thorny march, women have succeeded in leaving traces and fingers prints in every domain. They have sought for self-definition and self-discovery through different means such as handicrafts, art, and literature. Female writers use art not only as a counter discourse to patriarchy, but also as a space for manifesting the self. From the shell of the ideal and the submissive woman emanates the "new woman," a woman with agency and will who uses her mind and body as a site of contestation and empowerment. And believing that the mind is sexless, female authors depart from the male tide of writing fiction and design a female literature which is innovative both thematically and stylistically. Kate Chopin, in her novel *The Awakening*, for example, breaks the norm of creating the archetypal pious, chaste, and docile wife to that of a rebellious and a strong-minded female heroine.

Worth mentioning, African-American women writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison make the novel a hybrid genre by ingesting multi-styles and sub-genres. They write about female characters that are triply oppressed by sex, race, and class. Morrison and Walker try to recuperate silenced voices and to see the truth from the lenses of the oppressed. Taking for example Walker's character Celie in *The Color Purple*, she writes letters to God and later to her sister as a mean of expressing the pain in her life. Likewise, writing for Celie becomes an act of survival; it is in letters that Celie endures and survives; she finds her voice and makes it heard. In depth, the female's act of writing becomes a conscious act of resistance and of independence; it is a site of

transgression by defying both male discourse and voicing the voiceless. Indeed, by repositioning and moving from the fringe to the center, women writers are no longer identified by men. Instead, they are self-defined and self-contained in creating their own modes of writing in a way which estranges men. Accordingly, though female characters in this study share somehow identical experiences of victimization, they use writing and telling stories as means of self-expression, communication, a therapy to get rid of daily pressures, and as a medium to expose the wrongdoings caused to them. Above all, through self-expression and self-representation, they attain empowerment and resist conformity to male's modes of expression and domination. A woman starts to develop an assertive female "I" ensuring her existence and endurance, and at the same time creating her own identity through writing a new version of history.

### **I-Defining a Woman:**

In "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways: Out/ Forays," Hélène Cixous, the French feminist, questions "Where is she?" (Cixous, 1989, p.101). Cixous finds that throughout the history of Western thought, a woman has been positioned on the edge of negativity and passivity. She is set as man's foil or counterpart as it is illustrated in this list of hierarchies: "Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Intelligible/Palpable, and Logos/pathos" (Cixous, 1989, pp.101-102). It can be noticed that the man always occupies the centre while the woman is pushed to the margin. Particularly, the relationship between men and women is one of master-slave domination. To be a woman both in fiction and reality, the female subject is **othered, domesticated**, and rendered into a **second class citizen**. Eva Figes contends that, **"women have been largely man-made"** (cited in. Belsey and Moore, 1989, pp. 3-4). Ülkü Ü. Bates et. al, as well argue that, "Language is inherently a symbolic system . . . [It] has always expressed cultural biases, whatever they are, sexism is only one of them" (Bates, et. al, 20005, pp.24-5) In fact, language is imbued with ideological and subjective views in which it serves the interests of people in a position of power. The discourse of patriarchy, therefore, is among the roots of women's oppression where their bodies, personalities, and social roles have been shaped and constructed. To this vein, Simon de Beauvoir theorizes that, **"one is not born, but rather becomes a woman"** (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330). This signifies that **women's identities and bodies are socio-cultural constructions rather than biological facts** in which social codes and sexist language have served the interests of men.

Since man is the producer of knowledge, a woman is destined and assigned to play certain gender roles which are prescribed by society and fortified by **conventions**. Like on a stage, a woman is given a screenplay and is conditioned to accept and to perform it without any dissent. She is a doll or a marionette who exists only to be acted upon both literary and sexually. To put it in different words, men sarcastically think that a woman's mighty duty is to render herself agreeable to her master/husband and to idolize her children. Adrienne Rich demonstrates that, "woman has been luxury for man, and has served as the painter's model and the poet's muse, but also as comforter, nurse, cook, bearer of his seed" (Rich, 1972, p.19). In brief,

patriarchy traps women in matrimonial duties and in the “**Cult of true Womanhood**” which is encapsulated into four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter, 1966, p. 152). In doing so, male-dominated societies seek to make a woman acquiesces and succumbs to society's orders and expectations.

**The ideology of the separate spheres** has propagated the view that a woman's sole vocation is essentially domestic and family-centered while man's responsibilities lay in the public world of work and politics. This dichotomy is best summed up in Alfred Tennyson's lines: “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” (Tennyson, “The Princess,” 1962, p. 188). The female subject is enforced to fulfill mother/wife duties which have deprived her potential to be an autonomous human being. Hence, social conventions, the by-product of culture, not only confine women in institutions like marriage, domesticity, and motherhood, but they also deny them every opportunity to be equal to men and to express themselves. As a matter of fact, women have been robbed of their identities and true selves.

## **II- Women's Place in the Literary Canon:**

Zooming in on the literary canon, Cixous maintains that, “Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason . . . It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition” (1976, p.879). **The literary canon was overwhelmingly male-dominated.** The French feminist, philosopher, psycholinguist, and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray shares Cixous claim arguing that, “[Men's] history constitutes the locus of [women's] exile. . . [Their] discourse imprison[s] [them] in enclosures . . . Their words, the gag upon [Their] lips” (Irigaray, 1980, p.74). Naming Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957), for example, he attributes the development of the novel to Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding and excludes women from its making, thus denies them their own creative talents. The birth of the novel is associated with the above-mentioned names not because women do not write, but they have not a legacy for several reasons. This is the stand taken by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* where she examines the conditions which prevent women from writing fiction.

Virginia Woolf relates women's exclusion from the making of literature to numerous factors to name a few: suppression, restrictive social conventions, the lack of privacy and education, the lack of financial independence and encouragement. For Woolf, women are skilled in producing art of the quality of Shakespeare if they are given the same rights as men. For example, a woman with Shakespeare's genius is denied all the opportunities to establish her artistry, thereby she disappears and her gift remains unexpressed. She says:

any woman born with a great gift in the sixteen century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside . . . a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and

hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (Woolf, 2000, p. 51)

Added to this, **women in male-authored texts have been generally misrepresented and stereotyped** through symbolic constructs and mythologized fantasies which are manifested in five main images: venerated Madonnas, fearsome females, sex objects, earth mothers, and invisible women (Bates, et. al, 2005, p. 25).

More important, male literary discourse considers a woman **“a muse but cannot be an active creator of art herself”** (Bates, et. al, 2005, p. 93). She is man's source of artistic inspiration and a passive reader of his fiction. This suggests that a woman is thought to be unintelligent, brainless, and incapable of intellectual activity. Also, she is considered mentally and physically castrated and only useful to be a lady of pleasure. Effectively, she has not only been excluded from participating in the public sphere, but also denied the right of self-representation and to be an artist or creator herself. A woman silenced and muffled on the basis that she cannot represent herself makes her seem like **a “blank page”** to be written upon whereby the novelist D.H. Lawrence claims that woman is “the unutterable which man must forever continue to try to utter” (cited in. Belsey and Moore, 1989, p. 52).

### **III- Women's Empowerment through Writing and Telling Stories:**

Since most fiction has been untrue to women's lives and experiences, feminist activists as well as artists have reacted vehemently **to dismantle and to subvert male biased reasoning**. Women become able to develop **agency** not only to critique patriarchy, but also to refashion their own theories, criticism, and canon. Interestingly, **language and writing become women's “antilogos weapon”** (Cixous, 1989, p. 880) in their struggle for patriarchal decolonization. The Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi describes the importance of writing in the following words, “writing is like killing, because it takes a lot of courage, the same courage as when you kill, because you are killing ideas, you are killing injustices, you are killing systems that oppress you. Sometimes it is better to kill the outside world and not kill yourself” (cited in. Parmer, 2013, p. 149). In this respect, language is both a tool of oppression and a potential mean for challenging and subverting that oppression.

French feminists share to some degree El Saadawi's concern of how women can inscribe themselves in writing and voicing their concerns using a language of their own rather than being the subjects of male discourse. In doing so, they **resist immasculation with phallogocentric discourse** especially when using language differently; it can create a different reality. Thus, Cixous argues **“writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought”** (Cixous, 1976, p. 879). **Like the Bakhtinian Carnavalesque, the feminine writing attempts to deconstruct and to emasculate male dominance.** In her manifesto “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous purposefully urges women to break with what she calls “an arid millennial ground” and “to blow up the Law” (Cixous, 1976, pp. 875-887). **An alternative female discourse would help women regain their silenced voices,**

recuperate their robbed bodies, and bring meaning to their sexuality. She insists that, "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have driven away as violently as from their bodies . . . Woman must put her self into the text-as into the world and into history- by her own movement" (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). Once developing a resistant gaze and invading the language of the adversary "men's grammar," women turn all authorities and social indoctrinations upside down. Effectively, **the liberation of suppressed energies and muted voices come through the inversion of Freud's "anatomy is destiny" into "anatomy is textuality"** (Showalter, 1981, p 187) **and the disruption of the "white fathers" logos.** (Showalter, 1981, p 183).

Elaine Showalter sees the specific characteristics of women's writing not related to their bodies as French feminists believe, but rather arising out of their social and cultural experiences. In her book *A Literature of their Own*, Elaine Showalter demonstrates that women's writing undergoes three major stages: first the "phase of imitation" (1840-1880), then the "phase of protest" (1880-1920), and at last the "phase of self-discovery" (1920 to the present). The aforementioned stages correspond with the "feminine," the "feminist," and the "female," respectively. Indeed, **female authors have shifted from the stage of mimesis and protest or re-vision to "gynocritics" or "self-discovery."** The latter ushers the advent of the female writing which celebrates the study of women's experiences, self-definition, self-awareness, and self- representation (Showalter, 1977, p. 13). In effect, women authors make their stories audible through the use of a female counter discourse and stressing the role of writing and telling stories as significant means of self-assertion and empowerment.

Literature becomes women's armor to expose and to write back to men's wrong deeds inflicted upon them. **The infinite circle of oppression draws both Arab and Western women authors- the modern-day griots- to recover the muted voices and to retell their life stories.** By giving women characters a voice, they become able to verbalize and to express the many obstacles looming in their way of self-fulfillment. **The power to narrate and to tell one's story lies at the core of feminism to counter both androcentric and Orientalist misrepresentations and to affirm that a woman is capable to re-write her own narrative.** Besides, other authors emphasize the importance of **writing as a site of self-definition and self-expression.** Even though women have shared victimization, their experiences are heterogeneous and more diverse as Adrienne Rich asserts that, "there is another story to be told" (Rich, 1972, p. 25). The works studied in this study revolve around the fact that **being a woman; one always finds herself at odds with society's conventions (the social self) and duty to oneself (the individual self).** On the one hand, this dilemma usually ends with a breakdown or conformity to social obligations; on the other hand, characters like Jane in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall Paper" withstand countless hindrances in her way toward self-realization and self-determination.

Ahdaf Soueif's short story "The Wedding of Zeina" is a social commentary and a critique of conservative traditions which are deeply entrenched in patriarchal societies' culture. The frame narrative is a re-memory where Dada Zeina retells her story to Aisha the eight years old girl in the nannies club. Zeina is traded into a hellish marriage while she is still fifteen years old and "knew nothing of marriage" (Soueif, nd, p.85). She is transferred from the authority of her father to that of her husband. The girl has no say in choosing her husband whom he is chosen by Zeina's family according to the custom of arranged marriages. More important, in such societies where traditions are deeply rooted, women help perpetuate traditions forcing Zeina to look beautiful and to behave as a grown woman in order to "please her man" (Soueif, nd, p.88). Indeed, the marriage turns to be a rape scene whilst Zeina is sobbing her lost innocence, her husband (a butcher), and his relatives are celebrating the family's honor. Nevertheless Zeina wrestles and struggles during her wedding night, at the end she succumbs and she is tamed by her husband. She says, "I fought him every time for a month, but in the end he mastered me" (Soueif, nd, 92).

On one level, Dada Zeina recounts her personal story to the eight years old girl as a way to expose the society's restrictive constraints and suffocating traditions. The stronghold of what Jaques Lacan call "the law of the father" forces Dada to yield to her husband's will. Ironically enough, when the girl asked Dada if she hates him, she "laughs" responding "No, of course not. He was a strong man, bless him" (Soueif, nd, p.92). The story of her submissiveness is an attempt to enlighten future generations to break the cycle of patriarchal oppression and abuse. Although she fails to change her situation, she attempts to raise the consciousness of the need to change patriarchal attitudes whose reformation requires not only time, but also the awareness of all society's segments. On another level, the act of telling stories is a therapeutic and a healing medium through which Dada can expose her pain and anxieties. Also, it is an act of self-determination to tell her life story and no longer accept to be hushed and subdued or represented by a man.

Similarly, Alifa Rifaat's short story "Bahiyya's Eyes" proceeds on two levels. On the one hand, it exposes different issues of women's submission and repression under patriarchy. On the other hand, Bahiyya's retelling of her story or re-memory is a strategy to break the silence, to condemn, and to critique patriarchal injustices. Like Dada Ziena, Bahiyya recounts her story to debunk the world of patriarchy at the same time to resist its dominance. Both characters retell their stories to future generations because men will not listen to this kind of narrative which they indict of being emotional. In this sense, Karen Payne in her book *Between Ourselves: Letters between Mothers and Daughters 1750-1982* demonstrates that "Many people . . . voiced the popular notion that talk among women is full of trivialities." (Payne, 1983, p.5). Indeed, such preconceived assumption is not totally true because women's speech is an embedded discourse. Payne adds, ". . . mothers and daughters inspire each other to take



risks and strive for fulfillment” (Payne, 1983, p. 5). Women tell stories to younger generations so as to teach them different lessons.

Bahiyya asks, “what’s the point, daughter, of going on talking” (Rifaat, np, nd). After Bahiyya loses her sight, she repossesses insight and awareness of her tragic life. Bahhiya’s blindness originates not from “the flies and the dirt” (Rifaat, np, nd) as the doctor believes. Instead, she knows better that her ill sight comes from the well of tears she has wept all her life due to the wrongs which have done to her. She states, “It all comes from the tears I shed since my mother first bore me and they held me up by the leg and found I was a girl” (Rifaat, np, nd). In patriarchal societies especially in the Arab ones, having a baby girl is a curse or a shame wherein the girl experiences all kinds of victimization whereas the boy is elevated to be the heir and the successor of the law of the father. This is the kind of life Bahiyya undergoes through her life as she has been domesticated and mutilated confessing that, “there’s no joy for a girl in growing up, it’s just one disaster after another till you end up an old woman who’s good for nothing” (Rifaat, np, nd).

A young girl, Bahiyya has been exploited and mistreated by her family male members and even by women who help to reinforce patriarchal traditions. For instance, she has been circumcised by women and married to Dahshan who has been her father’s choice, not Hamdan whom she loves and expects to have a happier life with. Bahiyya has not a say or the will to refuse what has been decided for wherein she argues that, “I didn’t dare say I wanted to marry Hamdan or even to look up at my father. I was an ignorant girl and who was I to say I wanted this man and not that one? He’d have cut my throat for me” (Rifaat, np, nd). By submitting to what she calls destiny, Bahiyya to some extent accepts to be ruled by men because she thinks that, “a woman without a man was like a fish out of water” (Rifaat, np, nd).

Though Bahiyya has worn the costume of submissiveness passively and becomes unable to shed it off, she awakens lately. She decides to unmask and to disclose society’s male chauvinist constraints through recounting authentically her story to her daughter. For Bahiyya talking is a kind of relief and above all an act of survival. She tells her daughter “sorry, daughter, if I’ve not stopped talking from the moment you arrived . . . I sometimes find no one to talk so I find myself chatting away to my chickens just in case I forget how to talk?” (Rifaat, np, nd). Through talking, Bahiyya finds an outlet through which to communicate or to vent her pain at the same time to protest against the restrictive conventions of society. Consequently, Bahiyya’s decision to remove the cloth gag of silence brings to mind Kate Chopin’s character Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* who proclaims that, “it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain dupe to illusions all one’s life” (Chopin, 2008, p. 294).

Moreover, there are two dialogues in the story; one between the mother and her daughter and the other one between the author and the reader aiming to prevent the repetition of the suffering of women with future generations. In a carnivalesque fashion, Bahiyya indirectly disrupts patriarchal stronghold by passing the story of her



victimhood and subjugation. Indeed, her narration is an act of rebellion and speaking back to male dominance. Similarly, it is a message to all victimized women that social constructions can be subverted and changed. Accordingly, Bahiyya's long silence turns into a discourse of empowerment and an act of solidarity with other women to avoid repeating what she has experienced. She said, "Daughter, I'm not crying now because . . . Lord created me a woman .. It's just that I'm sad about my life and my youth that have come and gone without my knowing how to live them really and truly as a woman" (Rifaat, np, nd). Thus, one can notice that despite the fact that Bahiyya has lost her beingness and she regrets not living as a woman, the act of storytelling helps her to narrate herself and to protest against societal traditions.

Furthermore, what frightens a man is a woman holding a pen and writing down her experiences. In other words, if a woman gets illuminated, she may destabilize man's being. For a woman, telling stories and writing have various functions. **Writing functions as a therapy, a means for healing pain, and revealing secrets.** Jane in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" writes to express her anxieties and needs that her husband, John, does ignore and fail to understand. She says, "... this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind" (Bauer, 1998, p. 41). To recover from a Postpartum Psychosis (a psychological nervous depression happens to women after delivering a baby), she has been put in a mansion which is used to be a nursery.

John who is supposed to be a physician, instead of alleviating Jane's worries and comprehending her condition, he imprisons her in a mystifying confined place. Albeit Jane feels something wired about the house, John believes that she is over imagining, sentimentalizing, and fantasizing. She says "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (Bauer, 1998, p. 41). Also, Jane considers John partially responsible for not getting her health improved because he sarcastically thinks that she is not really sick. In effect, throughout the story, Jane desperately repeats the questions "what is one to do? Or what can one do?" (Bauer Gilman, 1998, p. 41-42) since she is well aware that neither her husband nor her brother (a physician as well) do know how she suffers. She testifies "John is a physician, and perhaps that . . . is one reason I do not get well faster . . . If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression- a slight hysterical tendency- what is one to do?" (Bauer, 1998, pp. 41-42).

For John rest and physical comfort are the best solutions to improve a nervous depression. He chooses the upstairs room because it is airy and sunny and it is doing her good. At the beginning, Jane does not like it with "windows barred" (Bauer, 1998, p.43) and its confusing yellow wallpaper. In addition, she has been forbidden any physical or intellectual activity. As a result, this rest-cure debilitates her psyche and only writing and work would do her good. From Jane's perspective, she is the only person who knows how she can get better as her health condition is not something physical, but psychological. She argues that, "I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to

write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me . . . But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way – it is such a relief!”(Bauer, 1998, pp. 46-49). Since John dislikes seeing Jane writing and even his sister thinks that, “it is the writing which made [her] sick,” (Bauer, 1998, p.47) she writes secretly. Likewise, she starts hiding her fears and secrets because her ideas are deemed “silly fancies” (Bauer, 1998, p. 49) and of little significance.

Jane's life changes when she realizes that there is a woman entrapped behind the wallpaper and she is trying to get out. Presumably, the enslaved woman whom Jane sees behind the wall is her double or alter ego. Jane feels herself like that woman; she is struggling to break free from the shackles which suffocate her. She says “I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself” (Bauer, 1998, p. 56). She wants to get out of the cocoon by herself in order to assert herself and being-ness. In doing so she feels, “It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!” (Bauer, 1998, p. 58) Interestingly enough, the triumph of the entrapped woman stands for Jane's own emancipation. Out of the old Jane emanates a new self in which she demonstrates firmly and decisively, “‘I've got out at last,’ said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!’ Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!” (Bauer, 1998, p. 58). Accordingly, Gilman's story is a testimony written by a woman about a woman who has been struggling to smash all restrictions which stand as a hurdle and a barrier in her way of self-definition and self-expression.

Each story then has its own flavor whether it is a defeat or a breakthrough. While I am re-interpreting and re-examining these stories, I become part of the process of narrating. Indeed, I become aware of what it is to be a woman and how to keep one's voice and soul alive. In addition, once I read that “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (McNichol, 1992, p. 35), I understand that Mrs. Dalloway has things done for her and now she is willing to buy the flowers herself. These small acts of self-reliance are among women's strategies to re-position and re-locate themselves in androcentric societies.

### **Conclusion:**

Throughout their long struggle, feminist activists and authors strive to elucidate that gender is linguistically and culturally constructed. Still, feminists do not stop there; they empower women to write back and to speak up the unspeakable. In addition, they work to awaken them from their long sleep so as to be able to break the chains of patriarchy. Hence, despite the fixed positions a woman is forced to assume, in the process of her resurrection she challenges and transcends all the walls of patriarchy. And since gender is not predetermined, but inscribed by men and culture at large, many misconceptions

can be altered asserting that “the subaltern can speak” (Gayatri Spivak’s statement) despite centuries of muteness and males’ deliberate deafness.

By transgressing society’s constraints and speaking up as subjects instead of mute objects, women no longer accept being man’s dolls. Instead, they subvert male hegemony through pursuing a female writing career and having a mind and a discourse of their own. This study finds out that literature is a space where the female subject can blossom intellectually and unveil her true identity. The characters under study narrate their selves through writing and storytelling. In doing so, they describe their true identities and pass indirect messages of how to revolt against patriarchal standards. In addition, writing and storytelling function as a means of self-expression, communication, claim for rights and equality, and as a therapy to get rid of daily pressures. More important, these characters use writing and storytelling not only as a strategy for survival, but also as a mean of empowerment and effecting social change.

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