

Gender Analysis of Two Tales, Auntie Roach and Little Red Riding Hood (Sample from East and West)

Roghayeh Norouzi¹ and Mohammad Homayoun Sepehr²

¹Roghayeh Norouzi ,PhD student of sociology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

²Mohammad Homayoun Sepehr, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

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Abstract:

Comparative literature has a brief history in Iran, whereas this method can open a window as vast as the world to us, which enables us to identify thoughts, notions and beliefs of other nations. This analysis tries to study the content of two old and distant tales, Auntie Roach and little red riding hood, based on view points and notions of feminism and patriarchy. The major question in this study is that if there is a difference between western and eastern woman's sphere and place (especially in tales) and which one has a relative better condition?

The purpose of this research is a comparative analogy between two tales which come from different cultures. The main aim of the research is to recognize and compare the gender roles in the mentioned stories.

Key words:

Tale, comparative analogy, gender, gender stereotypes.

Introduction

Storytelling and narration have a long history, but among all stories, the ones that are being written for young addressees or children are of great importance and that's because the author of such stories should be so competent that can understand the fragility and sensitivity of childhood and is capable of giving in stories that serve nurturing and efflorescence of children's talents and capabilities instead of repressing and swerving their thoughts and desires.

Research background:

Comparative literature in Iran

The background of comparative literature in Iran dates back to establishment of comparative literature's chair in Tehran university (by Fatemeh Sayyah 1902 moscow_1947 Tehran)which is called literature evaluation by a group of people. She started her scientific work in the university in 1938. She left 35 articles, speeches and translations. Sobhani points out that the wise lady did some precious researches about Ferdousi. (42) Golbon in his book, "criticism of literature evaluation", mentions two of her

articles named “European scientists’ criticism in case of Ferdousi” and “Considering Ferdousi and Shahnameh”. She was the only professor of literature evaluation in foreign languages in the university. When she passed away, the then head of Tehran university ordered the cancellation of the classes of this lesson... (Roben che,2006,30)

After her short life, other people including JavadHadidi(1932_2002), one of the members of scientific board of French literature department of Mashhad university and a constant member of the academy of Persian literature and AbdolhasanNajafi (1308), current manager of comparative literature department of the academy of Persian literature continued her way. Among all Iranian researchers, MojtabaMinavi, AbdolhoseinZarrinkoub, khosroFarshidverd, Hasan Honarmand and Mohammad Ali EslamiNadoushan referred to comparative literature in their written work, but due to lack of an official organ or scientific council to gather all the researchers of this major and work for the major’s improvement and development, there has never been a constructive relationship between them.

Zarrinkoub, in the first volume of book review about comparative literature says: In fact, comparative literature includes a research on relationship and communication among different nations’ literature. A researcher’s job who is working in this major is like skulking around a nation’s language border to inspect all the literary and intellectual exchange at the border between the nation and other near and distant nations. It’s clear that the result of the research suits the degree of accuracy and watchfulness that the researcher made use of in the research.

Thus, we may be able to say that in comparative literature, the critic or researcher doesn’t consider the literature itself. It’s more the research about the quality of influence and reflection of one nation’s literature in another’s. In other words,

what is considered by researcher is how a nation changes and devises the literature of another nation after reception and adoption. Hence, considering reception and adoption and reproduction and penetration, and when it’s claimed that a nation’s poet or author received and reproduced some literature or themes of another nation’s author or poet, it actually depends on the point that how the author or poet collated the themes or literature and how they qualified them? (Zarrinkoub,1994,808).

Farshidverd in the second volume of the book about literature and book review, describes comparative literature as a branch of book review that explains the literary relationship between different societies and how one’s literature reflects another (Farshidverd 1994, 808)

EslamiNadoushan in his book “World showing crystal ball” about comparative literature says: “widespread communication with other countries and growing curiosity of the modern human embodied a new subject in literature world, that is evaluating national literature according to other nations’ literature. Nowadays, it’s hard to comprehend national literature, due to the thorough communication with the world. Unless people obtain more or less awareness of some masterpieces of universal literature. Acquainting with a network connecting universal literature and thoughts can open our eyes to our own literature. (EslamiNadoushan 1995, 266)

A brief look at this background shows that in Iran, this major has never been like an independent university department, there is no scientific council or technical magazine published in this case. In other words, these three major conditions (university department, scientific council and technical magazine) that are in charge of introduction and support the permanency, improvement and development of each major, are not provided for comparative literature in Iran. As a result, the attempt of the

small number of researchers of this major wasn't successful and comparative literature, despite having a strong support of Persian culture and literature, still doesn't have its place in academic atmosphere.

Auntie Roach story is an Iranian myth that is rooted in Iranians' public literature and it's inherited generation by generation. The story or at least a more familiar narrative of it is related to Gajar era and it coincided with tobacco's import to Iran. That's because in the current narrative, smoking a crystal hobble bubble was the sign of welfare and nobility among women. On the other hand a chador made of onion skin shows that the main narrative of the story is related to the time before Islam in Iran.

Mr. Mouse works and lives in governor's palace. "Hanna Naserzadeh" concludes from this fact that the event took place during Feudal reign and the mentioned governor was in charge of the location of the story which was a city near Hamedan under the order of the major governor (if it's considered to be in Gajar era, he lived in Tehran).

The scene that Auntie Roach falls in to water and asks the horse rider to fetch Mr. Mouse shows that this children book is composed like Masnavi, because it was supposed to be used in school houses.

An illustrated and written version of this story has been published along with some stories of "Salim Javaheri" and "Four dervishes", but the exact date of publication is not clear. "Noushin Nafisi" also introduced the story in two books published in 1896 and 1903. In this pamphlet, some scenes of the story are illustrated as well.

The story's heroin was wearing a crispy pair of trousers and a black chador. She was also wearing a long veil that reached her knees and there were two holes in it for her eyes. One of the book's pictures shows a butchery with hung

sheep with thick rump and the other one shows a bakery with some dough spread on the counter. Any way in Gajar era, Auntie Roach story has been published along with other stories like "Auntie Frog" and "Shangul and Mangul".

Summary of Auntie Roach story

Auntie Roach is a slim and coquettish girl who is ignored by her father. Her father complains that he can't afford her life anymore and that she must find a husband for herself. He tells her to visit "Mash Ramezun" who has a glorious harem in Hamedan, because he likes slim and delicate women. The next day, Auntie Roach with her heart broken and wearing heavy makeup, sets off for Hamedan.

One her way, some men including a butcher, grocer and draper propose to her. The first question that she asks them is how they hit her when they argue and each suitor mentions some brutal and rough ways of punishment that were common at the time and it makes Auntie Roach refuse them to survive.

Finally, she falls for Mr. Mouse, because not only he doesn't agree with punishment, but he molly coddles her and told her he would draw kohl in her eyes with his narrow and soft tail when they argue.

Eventually, they get married, but their happiness isn't long lasting and finishes very soon, because Auntie Roach falls in water and gets sick and her husband wants to prepare some broth for her, but while he was whisking it, he falls in to the pot and dies. Auntie Roach wears black and mourns for her husband ever after.

Story analysis

At the first sight, it should be considered if the story is suitable for children or adults. Isn't it word of several women's heart who are tired of

staying in their father's home and are terrified of getting married?

The first question that Auntie Roach asks her suitors makes you think, because she has no doubts in being hit in argument and she just wants to know if she survives or not or in case she survives, how serious will the injuries be.

The question seems simple, but shows the tense condition of housewives and violence domination that got usual and common in public opinion.

What makes you think is that none of the men in the story made effort to satisfy Auntie Roach even dishonestly and they announce their punishment way so confidently baffles the readers of story.

Another sign for violence against women at home is that they tell her if she doesn't accept the condition, it's her loss, because there are plenty more women who are seeking a husband (someone to make their living) with all their heart and soul even at price of being punished.

Auntie Roach is a girl of our own country, our own land and is rooted in our beliefs and imagination.

A girl that is treated as a dependent in her father's home and is considered useless and in suitors' eyes looks like a woman that beside all her fragility, deserves violence and cruelty.

However, fragile and feminine rebellion is observable throughout the story. Firstly, Auntie Roach doesn't stay at her father's home after his ultimatum. She neither cries nor grieves. She only packs her stuff and sets off. Although she is aware of all the dangers on her way, she goes bravely, asks bravely and chooses consciously.

A choice which expresses an Iranian woman's desire for a good life and living with her husband

and family and it also shows that she isn't aggressive and isn't seeking fight.

The men in the story are so cold-hearted. A bunch of tough and patriarchal men who annoy Auntie Roach and make no attempt for her satisfaction and happiness, even her father.

The only desirable man in the story is Mr. Mouse. He is a sort of man with feelings and emotions and is full of kindness, but there isn't a good end for him in the story.

He expiates his humanity and eventually loses his life for love and conscious.

It seems that this part of story tends to let the reader know that a man should be cruel like a typical man and not a family man. Because it ends in death. It tries to tell men that violence is a need for survival.

A man who is kind to women is compared to a mouse. Mice are weak and timid animals. In this story kind and sympathetic men are compared to mice, and more importantly, Auntie Roach is the only woman in the story who is a cockroach. A wonderful simile that makes you think. Why cockroach?

Cockroach is a disgusting insect that when is seen by people, it will definitely be stamped under their feet or will have to hide in a hole with people screaming and now this beautiful and charming girl is a woman in the society who is treated like a cockroach. If she passes the allies or streets or if she goes to bazaar, she'll be disgraced and all her feelings will be smashed under the feet of the patriarchal society's culture.

With a deeper look at the way men in the story propose to Auntie Roach, a question comes across your mind that weather these men are real suitors or some whimsical men that when they come across a beautiful woman, they are allowed to go on her way and ask her for reasons of being

out of home and then immediately, without any further knowledge, propose to her.

This example tries to tell the addressee that if you are a woman, you have to stay at home. There's no safe place for you out there. If you don't obey and forget about being a woman (senior gender), you'll be treated harshly.

The end of the story is so tragic, it may be because women can't imagine a happy future for themselves, even the ones that married their favorite men and have happy lives.

Eventually, Auntie Roach becomes a widow. She wears black and is mournful in her husband's loss for all her life.

This part of the story expresses a resilient and cruel thought that commands a widow to mourn for her late husband for the rest of her life. But what about men?

This story is big mirror that shows women's condition in Gajar era (the time story happened).

A mirror which shows that a woman in Gajar era was treated as a useless person and in her husband house was a dependent person and punished regularly.

Regarding the sort of punishment that the men mentioned in the story and Auntie Roach's horror, it's easy to guess that women in the era may have lost their lives by their husbands' cruelty.

The story of widows wearing black and mourning for their late husband is another tragic story. Because it's not only rooted in our culture, especially our ancestors' customs and traditions, it's also seen in Arabian countries, India, Pakistan and some African countries. Even in some cultures there are some brutal customs, like burning widows or burying them alive with their dead husbands (sometimes, several women were buried alive, due to polygamy)

Why these things happened? Where did these actions and weird thoughts in human beliefs come from?

How did this viewpoint that prevents women from living after their husband's death or at least doesn't allow them to remarry come from and how did it become dominant and common in women's social life.

It seems like this thought goes back to financial aspect of family life. A man who is responsible for one or more families (wife and children), with the time passing by, gives himself this permission to keep the ownership of his wife or wives, even after his own death.

If women worked, or at least could make their own livings, would these prejudices and traditional and wrong beliefs have the chance to show off??

Let's return to Auntie Roach story. If Auntie Roach had a job (for instance, sewing or cooking etc) and could help her old father, would he throw her out?

Of course not. Her father might not have let her marry then.

An extract of little red riding hood tale

Little red riding hood is one of the well-known children stories that shows Freud's ideas very well and meanwhile, it discusses the conflict between men and women in another way that differs from Oedipus myths or myth of creation. The story's script is as follows:

Once upon a time in old days, there was a little, beautiful and kind girl. She was so lovable, but her grandma loved her much more than others and she wanted her granddaughter to have every beautiful thing she likes.

Once, grandma bought a small red velvet hood for her granddaughter. The little girl liked it so much that she wore it all the time and that's why

she was called red riding hood by people. Once, her mother told her, “my little girl, today you should take this piece of cake and bottle of drink for your grandma, because she is ill and she’d better eat them. You should set off before it gets warmer and you must be careful not to stop on the way or go out of the road. Because if you fall down, you may break the bottle. Then your grandma won’t get the drink. When you get to grandma’s house, don’t forget to say hello and before saying hello, don’t be nosy and peep through the house.

Red hood promised her mum to go straight to her grandma’s and not to stop anywhere. Then she set off. Grandma lived half a mile further from the village, on the other side of the forest. When she entered the forest, a cunning wolf that lived in the forest, saw her.

Red hood didn’t know what a cunning and villainous animal he is.

Story analysis:

It’s easy to comprehend most of the symbols in the story; the red velvet hood is symbol of women’s monthly period and the little girl that we are talking about in the story, has just reached puberty and confronted sexuality. Her mother’s command about not straying from straight way or getting out of the road or breaking the bottle of drink are clearly some commands against sexual dangers and losing virginity. Appetite or sexual desire of the wolf is stimulated when he sees the girl and he does his best to deceive her and offered her to look at beautiful flowers and birds and look around carefully.

Red hood opened her eyes and followed the suggestion to the depth of the forest. Going to the jungle accompanies with a wonderful self-deception, “if I take a bunch of flowers for grandma, she’ll be delighted. So going to the forest is a right thing to do.

But she is punished harshly, because of deviation from the straight route of chastity, and the cunning wolf disguises himself as her grandma and swallows little innocent red hood. When his appetite is fulfilled, he falls asleep.

So far, the main content of the story is nothing more than a simple moral principle and that’s avoiding the dangers of sexual relationship. But the complete script of the story is not such easy to explain, because it introduced the nature of sexual relationship and men’s role in them as deviant. In this story, male gender is illustrated as a cunning and villainous animal and sexual relationship is considered as such a savage and brutal action that men swallow women during that. Women who love men and enjoy sexual relationship, won’t agree with this idea, because deep hatred and opposition against male gender and sexual relationship is expressed in the story. At the end of the story this hatred and extreme prejudice against men is expressed even more obvious. In Babylonian myth of creation, women’s priority over men is only because of their power to bear a child or their fertility and in this story the wolf is mocked, because he tried to imitate women’s pregnancy and carried a living creature in his belly, but red hood tortured him with putting some stones which is the symbol of coldness and sterility in his belly and causes his death. Wolf’s punishment matches the importance and tensivity of his guilt, because he tried to disguise himself as a pregnant woman, so he is killed with stone which is the symbol of sterility and infertility.

The main characters of the story consist of three consequent generations of women that pursue the conflict and opposition of men and women (the hunter at the end of the story symbolizes a common father and wasn’t considered of great importance in the story.

However, against Oedipus's myth, in the story, women defeat men and express their hatred towards men very clearly (Fromm 2006, 262)

Materials and Methods

- 1) Another study by the research content includes:
 1. Context of Auntie Roach story
 2. Context of little red riding hood story
 3. Analysis of Auntie Roach tale's location and time (in East)
 4. Analysis of little red riding hood tale's location and time (in West)
 5. Analysis of Auntie Roach tale's elements and character
 6. Analysis of little red riding hood tale's elements and character
 7. Finding elements and concept of gender stereotype
- 2- Use of library method research:
 - a) Use of disquisition resources for auntie roach tale
 - b) Use of disquisition resources for little red riding hood tale
 - c) Use of linguistic methods and mythology of two tale

Result and Discussion

Comparative analogy of the two stories, "Auntie Roach" and "Little red riding hood" that one of them expresses the situation and condition of eastern women and the other one shows her western parallel, gives us this understanding:

Auntie Roach is a victim of her dependency and red riding hood is a victim of her distraction.

Iranian Auntie Roach and her western parallel who both suffered from the same pain (gender inequality), but Auntie Roach was thrown out of home and heartbroken is searching for a husband, house and family, however red hood is the apple of her parents' eyes, she is a victim of

violence and unsafely which threatens women and girls outside home.

In both stories, there are two kinds of men; cunning one and innocent and honest one. But their difference is that from Iranian point of view, a kind man is considered as a mouse, however, in the western sample it's completely different and it's the violent and cruel man who is regarded as an animal. On the contrary, the hunter who has the role of red hood and grandma's saver has a positive and manly face.

In neither of the stories women are safe outside their homes. They may be subject to sexual harassment and harm from men. With the difference that in red hood story it's more like a brutal action.

Considering the content of both stories, we can conclude that both women are similar in one case and that is their vulnerability in the society jungle, but there is a difference between them, as well. Red riding hood entered the jungle with her own desire and more or less, enjoyed the happiness and privilege of adolescence rebellion, although she pays for it, but Auntie Roach's entrance to the jungle of society was compulsive. The contrastive point of women in the stories is Auntie Roach's oppression and constraint in the mandatory trip.

The other contrastive point between the stories is the number of male and female characters. Auntie Roach is the only woman in the story, with no mother or sisters. Actually, she may have both sister and mother, but their existence in the story is so invisible (in public idea) that is not seen or they may not have anything to say. Whereas, there are five male characters in the story that just one of them regards a woman as a human treated her like a person. But in little red riding hood is completely vice versa. She has neither father nor grandfather. Three women appear in the story with no men. Women who are kind together and back each other up.

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