

RESISTANCE AND REBELLION: FEMINISM AND ANTI- FEMINISM IN THE ACADEMY

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Abstract: The academia has always been predominantly a male territory but with the feminist movement of 1960s the culture of the university saw defining changes. The feminist revolution outside had a significant bearing on the world of the academics. The induction of courses like Women's Studies, Sexuality Studies and Feminist Studies changed the nature of the University as a male space. How easy or difficult was it for women to survive in such places since the alliance between intellectualism and masculinity was considered unquestionable? In this paper I attempt to study the changing nature of the academia as a masculine space through the selected novels of David Lodge — *Changing Places* and *Nice Work*. I shall do this by analyzing the representation of women characters in his work and their interaction with the world of texts. By virtue of weaving a discussion around the various types of women that flock Lodge's canvas, I shall bring forth how women in the university who defied cultural notions and stereotypes of 'feminine grace and beauty' challenged the pedagogical practices within the classroom and reshaped the spaces inside the academic institutions. The latter part of the paper takes up the questions of masculine anxiety about women's intellect. It discusses the issues of women's body in conversation with the rigour of academic life.

Keywords: Feminism, Literature, Sexual revolution, University Novel

Introduction: Philosophers have had a cynical attitude towards women acquiring education for it was considered 'unnatural' for a woman to exercise the rigour of intellect. Women were constructed as objects of desire, sweet companions to men for them to bear children and satiate their urges. However in the nineteenth century, these approaches were questioned and challenged when women started demanding a change in their political and social positions. This discourse was inaugurated by Mary Wollstonecraft, who in her seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* stated the fundamental right of women to procure education. Wollstonecraft opined that it is due to the lack of education that women are at a disadvantage in the society and thus oppressed and treated as a second class citizen. She rejected the idea of exotic female and the mystics of female sex (Wollstonecraft 1996). In a similar vein Virginia Woolf, who in *A Room of One's Own* vehemently stated the importance of equal opportunity, space and liberty for women, argues that it is due to the lack of opportunities that women have not been able to produce the kind of work that men have come forth with (Woolf 2002). With such discourses and ideas being propelled many women were drawn to the 'male territory' of educational institutions. The foray was not an easy one since there was resistance both from men and women. Such women were seen as a challenge to the normal order of society and the longstanding social and political institutions. Their 'revolting' tendencies demanded to be curbed and arrested. These women were constructed in devious manners and portrayed as a potential threat. About such women, Margaret Ophlant writes, "faithfulness is bondage in her eyes.

She is to be free to change her own companion if she discovers another one fit to be loved also another and no doubt another" (Ledger, 1997). This putative alliance between women seeking education and women wanting free 'animalistic sex' was rampant. The new woman of the nineteenth century became the target of deplorable and disparaging images published by the popular press of the times. It was obsessed with vulgarizing the images of women who questioned what was seen as established and unquestionable. This modern woman who was seen dancing and smoking aroused a peculiar fear in the people. People associated her with the decline in the values of a traditional British society and family. It was seen as a disaster to the natural harmony between the relationship of men and women. The images of these women flooded the world of fiction and nonfiction. Both men and women started writing about women. The 'New Woman' was a controversial figure with unconventional tendencies and approach towards life; she was attractive, bold and strong as compared to the earlier portraits of 'suffering sisters' (Melman, 1998). In the writings by men, such women were portrayed more attractive than intelligent in order to emphasize and keep the relevance of the notions of 'feminine grace' alive. The woman who had made her entry into the society and into the university became the subject of the genre of literature called Campus Novels or University Novels. Writers started constructing portrayals of such women and how their entry into the academia brought forth issues of patriarchy, gender bias, sexism and other cultural stereotypes associated with the women in the society

Academic Women and Feminist Consciousness:

The image of women as sweet, docile and softheaded took a serious dent after the revolution of the 1960s. Academic women defied all such stereotypes once they entered the enclosed space of a university. Inside the university where the alliance between masculinity and intellectualism was set and established women had to carve a space for themselves. The academy conceived as a male community based on oppressive and competitive models was at odds with what is perceived as feminine attributes of 'nursing' and 'nurturing'. The women in the University Novel appear either as professors or as the wives of professors. Finding a novel entirely devoted to a female professor, "who juggles teaching and research, husband and children — the basic dilemma of the modern professional woman has always been difficult". (Showalter, 2005) In novels where the female professor is the protagonist, she is always single like Ms. Robyn Penrose in *Nice Work*. Mary Eagleton says that such women came from middle classes and had an easy access to the world of education. For them University became a place where they could experiment with social conventions and defy the very rules that were there to govern and 'control' them (Eagleton, 2005). Robyn Penrose, the central character of *Nice Work* fits very well into this description since she is introduced to us as a daughter of an historian who had an opportunity to conduct research at Oxford University:

She was born in Melbourne, nearly thirty ago, but left the country to accompany her parents to England....her father was a young academic historian, and had a scholarship to pursue post- doctoral research into nineteenth century European diplomacy at Oxford....he took a post at the university on the south coast of England, where he has been ever since, now occupying a personal chair.....Robyn had a comfortable childhood, growing up in pleasant unostentatious house with a view of the sea. She attended an excellent direct grammar school where she was the head girl and captain of games and left with four A grades at A level...she later chose to apply at Sussex rather than Oxford, because new universities were considered innovative and exciting places to study at. (*Nice Work*, 11)

Feminists inside the academy altered and transformed the approach towards teaching canons. They refurbished what was taught, how it was taught and set new agendas for analysis, thus radically transforming the world of texts and their reception. A host of disciplines was affected by feminist literary enquiry including sociology, linguistics, philosophy, history, religious studies, anthropology, literature, cultural studies, political science and law. Many more subjects that had not earlier been conceived as

distinct disciplines were introduced in the university. Sexuality studies, Queer Studies etc became subjects to be taught at the university (Robbins, 1966). Such interventions changed the nature and pedagogical practices within the classroom. David Lodge through Robyn Penrose gives us a glimpse into how teaching was transformed. Penrose is a young faculty member who has finished her post doctoral research and has already published two books. After a generous reception of her book *The Industrious Muse: Narrativity and Contradiction in the Industrial Novel* she is offered another contract by her publisher to write a book on *Domestic Angels and Unfortunate Females: Women as Sign and Commodity in Victorian Fiction*. Robyn is a passionate teacher who takes her teaching very seriously. She is invested in teaching the novels from a feminist perspective and developing new methods of understanding the issues of patriarchy and male gaze in the Victorian novels. Robyn uses Feminist theories to critically understand Industrial novels of the Victorian era. She concludes that the industries are a mark of phallogocentric symbols; a symbol of a towering male who destroys a passive landscape, that of a woman's body. She examines how for women novelist the figure of an industry arouses a complex fascination owing to how the industry can be read as a symbol of a male who is like an alien but at the same time exhibiting sheer power. In her study of Industry Novels she comes to the conclusion that:

Industrial capitalism is basically phallogocentric....the most commonplace metonymic index of industry—the factory chimney is also metaphorically a phallic symbol. The characteristic imagery of the industrial landscape or townscape in nineteenth century literature –tall chimneys...the railway train rushing irresistibly through the passive countryside - all this is with male sexuality of a dominating and destructive kind. (*Nice Work*, 640)

Robyn's feminist inclinations are not just a part of her academic life but also her personal life as well. She belongs to a group of friends that 'converted to radical feminism' while they were in their college. She has no interest in domestic work and does not pretend to have any proclivity towards household work. She never cleans the house and announces that 'she likes it dirty'. She does not wear 'feminine dresses' but rather dresses in loose clothes made of natural fiber that does not accentuate her figure and body parts. She has a strong gaze and looks men in the eye and does not hesitate in debating and discussing issues that might otherwise be uncomfortable for some people. She always puts across her opinions vehemently even when they sound rebellious and bold. During her college days she was always busy with her classes and political activities while her then boyfriend Charles would

take care of the flat. She dictated terms in the relationship and decided the future course as well. When it came to the sexual relationship, it was Robyn who dominated:

Robyn was lying naked, face down on the bed, wriggled over towards the centre of the mattress. Charles who was also naked knelt astride her legs and poured aromatic oil from The Body Shop on her shoulders and down her spine. Lying on the centre of the mattress, assuming the position of the master, while as Charles is in a position of slave who is kneeling besides her...they are into non-penetrative sex these days because Robyn has renounced the pill on health grounds. (*Nice Work*, 653)

To her new boyfriend Victor Vilcox, Robyn is an image of a goddess. He equals her with the image of a goddess on an oil painting that he had seen when he was at school. He pictured her "in the pose of the goddess-tall, white limbed, indignant, setting her dogs on the intruder. There was no place for a lover or a husband-the goddess needed a male protector that is how he thought of Robyn Penrose". (*Nice Work*, 764) Victor Vilcox is enamored by Robyn's courage and grit. To him she is someone who exudes confidence and emanates feelings of self sufficiency and independence. He likes her but at the same time he feels deeply uncomfortable because of his perception about how women should behave. Victor is not accustomed to all these attributes in a woman since he believes that a woman needs a man to complete her. When he proposes Robyn, she rejects it at once. At a later point when he meets her again and tells him about his wife and wishes her by saying that one day she will also meet a man who deserves to marry her. Robyn instantly retorts, "I don't need a man to complete me" (*Nice Work*, 894) For Robyn Penrose, marriage is bondage and a source of endless distress. She expresses her sympathy for housewives who have to devote their lives to their house and children. She is a critique of the institution of marriage and does not deem it to be a socially relevant institution. For her, marriage gives men the authority over the body of a woman She exemplifies the kind of woman that Mona Caird makes the subject of her essay *Marriage*, which is a testament to the aversion of modern women towards such societal alliances. She writes "marriage is a post reformation phenomenon dealing from the age of Luther when commerce, competition, the great bourgeois class, and that remarkable thing called 'Respectability' also began to arise." (Caird, 1897). For Robyn such values that marriage propagates to uphold are irrelevant since she believes in independence of women and their rights to choose as they want to live. She is a strong willed woman who neither finds it significant to have a husband nor his possessions.

Desire Zapp in *Changing Places* is another character who brings forth the questions of women's autonomy and choice. She is married to Morris Zapp but wants to divorce him after she discovers a sudden pregnancy. She feels suffocated in the relationship and believes that women can do very well without having men in their lives. In her marriage, she feels chocked and feels as if her entire existence has been reduced to being her husband's extension. In her short affair with Philip Swallow, a professor she is the one who dominates the relationship. She uses abusive language which Swallow thinks is the prerogative of men. She doesn't abstain from using coarse expressions. She finds the women's movement quite fascinating and becomes an active participant. Her engagement with feminists equips her with the essential armour to questions things that are taken for granted. Her character is symbolic of women's resistance and urge to break free from the shackles of the society. She suggests that her boyfriend should give up the job and take care of the house while she can go and earn. This statement shows that the women were conscious that they can lead different lives and not the ones prescribed by the society.

Mary Makepace in *Changing Places* is a student with feminist inclinations. She is deeply influenced by feminist theories and uses that as a prism to understand the world around her. When Hillary Swallow shows her husband's letter to Mary she stirs her imagination and gives an interesting explanation. "Philip's obsessive concern to protect Amanda's innocence indicates that he is in love with her and that his affair with Melanie is a substitute gratification for the incestuous desire." (*Changing Places*, 129) Mary seems to awaken Hillary's feminist consciousness and under her influence Hillary writes a letter to Philip Swallow expressing her annoyance in clear terms as follows:

You see Philip, I decided not to wait any longer for the central heating, but to have put in immediately on the HP. It was the first thing I did after receiving your letter about Melanie...I suppose that sounds funny, but it was quite logical. I thought to myself, here I am, slaving away, running a house and family single-handed for the sake of my husband's career and children's education, and I m not even warm when I m doing it. If he can't wait for sex till he comes home, why should I wait for central heating...send some money home soon. (*Changing Places*, 129)

This section through the female characters of David Lodge's novels tried to bring forth the impact of feminism and feminist consciousness on the women outside and inside the university. The entry of feminist professors in the institution not only 'robbed' university of the maleness that was its essential characteristic but also impacted the society

in terms of the ideals that such women expounded. The activism of these women and the resistance was not only confined to the reinterpretation of the texts but also to transforming the ideas that women in the society had about themselves. The larger goal was to transform the society through the university.

Women and Body: *A woman's sexual potency proclaims also woman's problematic placement within the body social, economic, politic and symbolic. While her body, the locus of patrilineal preservation, will be contracted out to male authority to serve as the carrier of legitimate sons and of the order those sons perpetuate, it will always remain a potential source of disruption and disintegration in the community.*

Education is supposed to emancipate women, to set them free from the male gaze and from the clutches of oppressive society. It is believed to bring about the much desired freedom from obsession with the female body, but does this education come easily to all women who wish to acquire it. The strict alliance between masculinity and intellectualism comes in way of women and reinforces the connection of female body with naturalized capacities like reproduction and body as a sexual object. (Price, Shildrick, 1999). Through various women characters Lodge touches on the very critical issue of gender bias inside the university and how vulnerable women students are exploited and reduced to their bodies. The male dominance inside the university renders the knowledge of such women invisible and redundant and sets the focus instead on their sexuality. Also what is imperative to mention here is the functioning of the education system that charges heavy tuition fees that some students find difficult to pay and thus it becomes easy for sexual exploiters to take advantage of women students.

Marion Russell in *Nice Work* is a student of Robyn Penrose who does not get a university grant and has to support herself at the university with different jobs. She does not meet the deadlines set for submission and requests professor Robyn to give her extension. When she is granted extension she thanks her and promises to do better in the semester because she has a better job and can sponsor her studies easily. On Robyn's asking about the nature of the job, Russell says,

Well some sort of modelling.....Marion Russell drops her eyes and blushes slightly; 'well it is sort of an underwear modelling'. Robyn has a vivid mental image of the girl before her, now so pleasantly and comfortably dressed, sheathed in latex and nylon, the full fetishist ensemble of brassiere, knickers, suspender belts and stockings with which the lingerie industry seeks to truss the female body, and having to parade at some fashion show in front of leering men and hard faced women from department stores. Waves of compassion and outrage fuse with delayed

feeling of self pity for her own plight...she feels a choking sensation in her chest.....rises and clasps the astonished Marion in her arms. (*Nice Work*, 632)

Marion's case explains the difficulties that are faced by women in the academic world. This is an example of victimization and exploitation of women, which they fall into because of the demands of the education system in terms of financial requirements. There are other cases of exploitation of girl students in *Nice Work*. Tracey, the undergraduate daughter of Shirley, Wilcox's secretary is encouraged by her mother to pose nude for a magazine, and keeps boasting about her pictures in underwear. Shirley takes parental pride in her daughter's achievements and even defends her saying that women should expose their bodies if they are good looking. This attitude of hers is a reflection of how women's function in society is defined to be the delight of the male eye and more so how constant reinforcing through TV, and other media makes women internalize such ideas. As Shirley says, "I don't see any harm in it....people think nothing of it nowadays, topless sort of thing....if you have got a beautiful body why, why not make the most of it" (*Nice Work*, 606)

Brian Evethrop shares Shirley's opinion in such matters and says that a calendar depicting "*birds with boobs*", would be good for the company and the sales would go up. He even proposes that Shirley's daughter should pose naked for their calendar but his suggestions are encountered with great bitterness and objection from Robyn, who finds the thought of it most offensive to her feministic side: "Do I understand that you are proposing to advertise your products with a calendar that degrades women"..., to which Evethrop replies, "it won't degrade them, but my dear..... celebrate them." (*Nice Work*: 606) Evethrop doesn't find it problematic but instead says that it would be good for the model and her career if they give her some space in their calendar. He says that it will be an easy path for her to earn money and live on her own. He is amazed with what Robyn suggests about having nude men pose for the calendar, because he finds it quite natural to take delight in women's bodies. As he says:

What about the women who work in the offices where these calendars are stuck up? ...why should they have to look at naked women all the time? ...Couldn't you dedicate few months to naked men? Perhaps you would like to pose yourself....I am afraid you have got it wrong my darling...women aren't like that....they are not interested in the pictures of naked men. (*Nice Work*, 606)

Here is an example of typical male who cannot value women as mere persons or people but instead thinks of them as objects of pleasure and sexual gratification who have no sexual needs and presumes them to be asexual. The sensuousness that such images of

women's body offers finds its audience even in educated men, through the characters of Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow in *Changing Places*. Their interest in the female body leads them to unexpected sexual encounters with each other's wives. They don't only change places but they change wives too. Zapp's interest leads him to Soho when he visits London, and Swallow finds himself in one of the world's great centre of strip industry, namely South Strand in Esseph, Euphoria. Another character in *Changing Places* is Melanie Bryd, daughter of Morris Zapp who develops a sexual relationship with Swallow, while he is teaching at Zapp's place in Euphoria. The obsession with the female body is not confined to certain types of men but it is all pervasive. Even literary scholars, who are expected to be cognizant of oppressive gaze over a female body also adopt similar designs to lure female students. Morris Zapp leers at the models in the *Play Boy* magazine and even passes one to the young Bernadette in the house where he is putting up.

The male characters in these novels have a certain tendency to fancy rape and inflict violence on their female counterparts. Phillip Swallow in *Changing Places* makes out with Mary Makepeace but after the act he realizes that he did something wrong. He writes a letter to his wife asking her to join him so that they can have intercourse and he gets over the pangs of the guilt. His writing promptly to Hillary goes on to show that he thought of Hillary as some kind of a pleasure object that he can use whenever he wishes.

In *Nice Work*, Victor Wilcox has a similar fantasy about Robyn when he gets annoyed with her because she interfered in his business deal. The only way he can think of takings revenge is by raping her. He fantasies of her as,

Sprawled on the rug in front of her gas fire, her bathrobe cast aside to reveal that indeed she was wearing nothing underneath it, yes, that was sweet revenge on the silly stuck up cow for making him Brian Everthrop's butt and interrupting his meeting with damn fool questions and telling tales on the shop floor and nearly destroying six months' patient coaxing of the foundry back to efficiency –yes, that was good, to have her there on the floor amid incredible litter of books and dirty coffee mugs and wineglasses and album sleeves and copies of *Spare Rib* and *Marxism Today*, stark naked, thrashing and writhing underneath him like the actress in the TV films, moaning with pleasure in spite of herself as he thrust and thrust and thrust. (*Nice Work*, 714)

This objectification of women both in terms of making them a commodity to earn profit and also in

terms of reducing them to their bodies when their intellect is hard to deal with is an evidence of how women are ultimately reduced to their bodies. Be it women who want to be the poster girls or be it women who defy such choices, the focus on the bodies of women seems to be a central thematic concern in the novels of David Lodge. Through such issues Lodge brings forth the questions of gender and sexism in the University and the society.

Conclusion: The University Novels of David Lodge are a narrative about the inner world of a university. These are social documents of their times wherein reality and fiction converge to produce a narrative about the effects of changing British society on the world of academics. The characters of Lodge's novels give us a glimpse into the closed world of academia and what goes inside its four walls. Through the study of various characters I have tried to emphasize two points; one about the changing nature of the university with the introduction of the feminist theory and second about the vulnerabilities of women inside the university. The university changed when subjects like women's studies were introduced. The introduction of such subjects had a bearing on pedagogical practices and raised various questions about knowledge production. The second facet that comes to our attention through these novels is the vulnerability that women students had to incur in their desire to be part of the social institution. Sexual exploitation of female students by the male staff is also an indicator of how education that is supposed to break the chains of oppression did exactly the opposite for some students who desired to go ahead. Through characters like Robyn, Lodge is able to show us the changing face of the academy and world of interpretation. Her insistence on the feminist interpretation of the text testifies to the fact that the world of the university was influenced by the feminist movement of sixties. This goes on to show that the influence of the movement was not only outside but extended within the world of university as well. Lodge gives us an insight into how the coming of feminism changed the social fabric in terms of how women thought and how they took on new social roles. He chronicles the changes in post war British University by using certain realistic elements in his texts. The rebellious women of the academy and outside of the academy are portrayed as strong, argumentative, intellectualized and also emotionless. It is evident that through characters like Desiree and Robyn who have strong feminist inclinations and awareness of their position in the axis of power we get a picture of the women who are conscious of their position and their rights.

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