

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Edson and her Texts

Edson was born on July 4, 1961 in Washington, D.C. She became interested in drama as a child, and in her high school she performed in several drama productions. In 1979 she began her college career at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. In 1983 she received her bachelor's degree in history. She spent a year in Rome, living in a Dominican convent. She then held a series of jobs, including selling hot dogs out of a cart. In the mid-1980s she worked as a unit clerk in the AIDS/oncology unit of a Washington, D.C. hospital, which provided her with the origins of the subject matter of *Wit*. In 1992 she completed her M.A. in literature from Georgetown University. While at Georgetown, she began volunteering through her church as an English as a Second Language tutor. She became interested in teaching, and eventually became a kindergarten teacher. During this time, she also wrote *Wit* and began to send it around to theaters. In 1993 the play garnered attention when it won the Drama League's annual prize for an unproduced play. In 1995 the South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California, agreed to stage a production of the play. The South Coast Repertory production was very well received, winning six Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle awards. *Wit* moved to the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, and then off-Broadway. That production won New York Drama Critics Circle, Drama Desk, Drama League, and Outer Critics Circle awards. Today Edson is a kindergarten teacher in Atlanta, Georgia.

Producing an "unfriendly" play proved to be a considerable challenge. Edson searched for four years before finding a theater company that would produce it. The play finally premiered at the South Coast Repertory in 1995 in Costa Mesa, California. In 1997 it continued its run at the Long Wharf Theater in New Haven, Connecticut,

under the direction of Edson's childhood friend Derek Anson Jones. In 1998 the play made its off-Broadway debut in the M.C.C. Theatre, where Kathleen Chalfont played Vivian Bearing. Chalfont remained in the role when the play moved to Union Square Theatre in 1999. Judith Light replaced Chalfont in the fall of 1999.

Edson was awarded with the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1999. The play has since received numerous other awards, including the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Lucille Lortel Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, the Oppenheimer Award, and the Drama Desk Award. Hundreds of productions have been staged, in national and international theaters, in dozens of languages. An HBO production of the play, directed by Mike Nichols and featuring Emma Thompson as the main character, won an Emmy Award in 2001 for Outstanding Made for Television Movie of the year. Nichols also received an Emmy for directing, and in 2002 the television production of *Wit* won a prestigious Peabody Award.

Major Dramatic Works

Edson's reputation as a playwright rests on *Wit*, her only dramatic work to date. The play opens with Vivian Bearing, a fifty-year-old English professor specializing in the poetry of John Donne, addressing the audience about her experiences as a cancer patient. In her hospital room, Vivian is dressed in a hospital gown and baseball cap, which hides her hair loss from her aggressive chemotherapy treatments. She flashes back to her teaching days, when she was a very hard-nosed professor with tight-fisted control over her classroom, which proves a stark contrast to her current role as a helpless and frustrated patient. Her doctors see her as little more than a research project, as they try experimental treatments on her that take a toll not only physically but also emotionally. As Vivian's body and mind deteriorate, she begins to come to terms with her impending death with the help of a supportive nurse, Susie, who seems to be the only one who views her as a fellow human being. She also attempts to reach out to one of her young doctors, a research fellow named Jason Posner, a former

student of hers; however, she realizes that, like her, he prefers research and scholarly pursuits rather than humanity. As Vivian nears death, Susie lays out her options; after reflection, Vivian chooses a DNR (do not resuscitate) order. When Vivian's heart stops, Jason orders resuscitation, only to have his order countermanded by Susie. Humiliated, he collapses in front of his colleagues. Meanwhile, Vivian rises from her bed, takes off her hat, hospital bracelet, and gown. Naked, she reaches for the light.

Edson's teaching career progressed along with the success of her play. Despite her newfound fame as a playwright, she continued teaching elementary school in Washington, D.C.—English as a second language for five years and first grade for one year—until she moved to Atlanta in 1998 and began teaching kindergarten. Fully dedicated to teaching elementary school in her adopted town of Atlanta, Edson does not intend to write another play. She lives with her partner, Linda Merrill, and their two sons, Timmy and Pete.

Wit proved to be a great popular and critical success. Several critics have viewed the play as an academic drama, as it focuses on the life of academia and Vivian's love of her work. Reviewers have noted the parallel between the depiction of academia and medicine, as Vivian realizes that she has emphasized cold intellectuality and reason over humanity and personal contact. Commentators have evaluated the integral role of John Donne's verse to the drama, particularly his famous sonnet “Death Be Not Proud.” In fact, the importance of language in general is a significant topic of critical discussion. *Wit* has also been analyzed as a medical drama, and is commended as a compassionate and candid depiction of a dying patient struggling to maintain her independence and dignity while facing her own mortality. A few critics have discussed the role of spirituality in the play; in fact, Edson has identified the theme of redemption as a central one. However, some have questioned the implications of using cancer as a vehicle for Vivian's redemption. Regarded as a

compelling, poignant, and rewarding play, *Wit* deftly explores issues of dignity, mortality, redemption, and humanity.

Perhaps no female playwright of America received so much critical responses from the critics that Edson received. She is one of the prominent playwrights of America though she has written only one play *Wit*. Her only masterpiece has drawn significant critical responses from numerous critics. Her play also won numerous awards and ample accolade not only in America but also in other parts of the world. Basically, her play is examined from the perspective of Marxism. Besides this, postmodern critics also have shown their ample attention in her play. Moreover, new historical critics also forwarded their critical responses in her play *Wit*. This play is also viewed from the perspective of religious humanity. Beyond all these she is also equally paid attention by numerous feminist critics.

Chad Wriglesworth discloses the theological undercurrent of the play. The transformation of Vivian Bearing after her death into a mysterious being is tantamount to the Christ. Her rebirth is compared with Christ. He puts forward:

When read in a theological context, the repetition of the sacred names is more than a response of awe, even terror. It is a fitting response, for as the play develops, Vivian transforms from an autonomous and isolated woman into a figure of mysterious, even sacred depths (7).

Not only this, Vivian has given the religious touch to the play by selecting the names from theological context. Commenting on the same issue he again forwards, “despite the lack of compassion which dominates this play, there is also a nagging theological depth that will not go away” (7).

Many critics observed her play as an epitome of metaphysical conceits. Edson’s major character herself is a professor of Donne. Many language games are

employed in the play to give it a new critical touch. Commenting on the same issue Keaveney puts:

Metaphysical poetry often characterized by the yoking violently desperate elements; the resulting discordance was meant to create meaning and insight. Bearing uses her intelligence, wit and love of John Donne, and occasionally Shakespeare, to cope with what is, ultimately, terminal metastatic ovarian cancer. Although the drama is, in many ways, an uncompromisingly serious look at death, it also shows how language and humor can help deal with tragedy, even that our impending death. (40)

As Donne was the scholar of wit, irony and metaphysical conceit, so is her major character. She is the professor of Donne. The language and other literary devices of the literature are amply used in the play.

Her play also received a significant critical reception from the new critics. There are many examples of medical obfuscation, something most people experience when they must have contact with the medical establishment. More surprising is the play's presentation of the obfuscation that can occur with poetry such as Donne's. After all, 'To anatomize' a poem down to its punctuation was similar in some responses to the way a medical researcher studies the anatomy of a human being. As critic Les Gutman notes:

Falling in love with words at her father's knee as a young girl, Vivian seems to have maintained a monogamous relationship with literature. Her scholarship was her consuming and unrelenting passion, blinding her to other concerns and even to the underlying sense of humanity it

should be teaching. Where another person might have a friend hold her hand for comfort, Vivian's poems are her only friends. (42)

It is entirely surprising that Vivian has chosen to focus on Donne. Because the metaphysical poets were concerned with the mind and puzzles that the world presents to the mind, they would often use highly sophisticated vocabulary. There are many examples of how language and humor combine to help Vivian, and us, deal with her situation.

Edson also received significant critical responses from feminist critics. E. Klaver in a journal named "A Mind-Body-Flesh Problem: The Cause of Margaret Edson's *Wit*" examines Edson's work from a feminist perspective. Depiction of Bearing as a tool for the research work for the male counterparts is aptly responded to by him. He writes:

Vivian is a woman who has not only lost her personal 'bearings', but she is also bearing mortality among us-performing and carrying the burden of the unknown for the sake of others. This is yet another irony. She becomes an object of the medical research. (7)

In this criticism Klaver states that a female body is used for a medical research. Even after her death she does not receive a decent burial rather she is meant for commoditization. The notion of patriarchy always tried to dominate her. She becomes the research objects in the hospital for Kelekian and Jason. They consider her as their research tool for their professional advancement. Klaver states:

Her doctors can only see Vivian as a vessel for the cancer that is killing her. The very devotion to her studies that has left her without family or friends also makes her an ideal candidate for experimental chemotherapy for there are no friends or relatives to object to her

painful treatment. The irony is not lost on Vivian. Where once she taught bodies of text, her own body has become the text Kelekian and Posner study, prompting her to note that “*they read me like a book.*” (24)

Her body is supposed to be a text by most of the critics and haggled by them. She is kept in the hospital for improving the professional skills of the doctors. She does not receive any proper treatment rather she is given more torture in the name of treatment. Cunningham puts forward:

Vivian is matter-a-body-text that will provide new possibilities for interpreting cancer and nothing more. The social implications of this play are relentless. In the Wits darkest moments Vivian exists as something to be used and disposed of, ironically, as she observes, bearing nothing. She is a thing among things. Just the specimenjar, just the dust jacket, just the white piece of paper that bears the little black marks. (45)

Another critic Vanhoutte explores the linguistic ingenuity of Edson in her play. He writes that her play is “armed with linguistic prowess” (25). He further writes, “she keeps relationships and texts at a safe distance, using her wit as a linguistic shield from authentic social and textual engagement” (27). Another critic Ashford attempts to view her text from linguistic perspective and claims, “it is a linguistic play, a web of poetic surfaces. It is a metaphysical conceit, its wit”, says she (29). She analyzes her flair of language. All new critical tools have been used by her in the play. “Vivian returns to the library and the labor of poetic scansion, believing the answer to the mystery resides somewhere in Donne’s wordplay and wit” (31).

Similarly, Madeline M. Keaveney, commenting on the issue of the language states that:

The capacity of language to inform and to obfuscate: the use of language to create humor that helps us cope; and finally, the use of language to provide emotional comfort and connection. Through the language in *Wit*, we gain insight into the worlds of medicine and literature and, ultimately, what it means to be human. (40).

The language ingenuity of Edison is highly appreciated by Keaveney. Her use of language, according to her provides different avenues for her and many other critics. He again forwards that although the drama is, in many ways, an uncompromisingly serious look at death, it also shows how language and humor can help deal with tragedy, even that our impending death. Some other radical feminist consider the rebirth of Vivian as an asserted form of feminism. Vivian gets a new identity and recognition in the society.

The new being of Vivian as all powerful dismantles the patriarchal norms and values of the society. Marxist critics see this play from the approach of commodification. Vivian's body is commodified even after her death. She became the example of research work. Klaver writes, "she becomes an object of the medical research". (7)

In short, Edson's literary creativity occupies a good position in American literature. His literary prowess is amply evaluated by many critics. Despite all these critical surgery on Edson's *Wit*, the feminist critics have not yet showed their interest. Therefore, my proposed title seeks to reveal how Edson has asserted the femininity in her play *Wit*. She has received a high place in the hierarchy of American playwright.

Radical Feminism

This thesis encompasses feminist theory for the analysis of Edson's text *Wit*. Different kinds of feminist theories will be discussed in the second chapter. But mainly radical feminism will be discussed. Vivian Bearing, the major character is radical in the sense that she has subverted all the traditional role models of the females and asserted the position of females in the society. Radical feminism states that the defining feature of women's oppression is the society's sexist and capitalist hierarchy. The movement believes that only the eradication of our patriarchy society will give women true equality. The radical identifies that the only way to rid society of patriarchy is to attack the causes of the problems and also to address the fundamental components of society that support them. Bryson puts forward that the radical feminists ideology is, "A male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and equality, and that as long as the system and its values are in place, and society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way" (21). The feminist identified other oppression that is apparent in a patriarchal society. The oppression is also based on gender identity, race, and social class, perceived attractiveness, sexual orientation and ability. The radical theory of patriarchy recognizes the key element is a relationship of dominance and exploits others for their own benefit. The use of this oppression is a social system that includes other methods that are incorporated to suppress women and non-dominate men.

Edson has depicted her major character as an assertive character which the hitherto society despises. Vivian Bearing dismantles all the traditional role models of the femininity which is worthy of interpretation. She does not confirm the conventional approaches to represent her major character in her play.

This thesis aims at explicating Edson's play *Wit* from the perspective of feminism. Her major character Vivian Bearing is presented as an assertive character in the play. She not only dismantles the conventional role models of female set by the patriarchy but also vies to make her position in the society. The projection of the female self is worthy for interpretation. Her literary prowess is acknowledgeable. She also candidly talks about the sexual matters which the society considers immoral in the part of females. She is given all the attributes that a female self is supposed to be devoid of. She is the scholar of John Donne, a prominent poet of the seventeenth century, a philosopher and also a radical member of society who denies confirming the traditional gender roles of the society. This project therefore provides a broader vantage point to view the play *Wit* from new perspective. Edson's projection of her female character in an assertive role dismantling all the walls erected by the patriarchy epitomizes her with blurred gender roles.

Edson's projection of female character with the realization of self and her embodiment as a Godlike figure at the end heading towards the light redeems and renews the concept of female gender. The transformation of Vivian's self and her volitional self-emptying subverts the ethics of patriarchy and also confers her new self in society. Though, in the beginning she is found being a play thing, a research object at the hand of the male counterparts, later in the play she goes on subverting one after another roles of the females. She makes a distinct position in the society. She vies for the lost position in the society. Edson later proves that females are not meant for domination and suppression, rather they are also highly valued part of the society. The traditional notion of the female gender comes at the stake with projection of Vivian in different role models.

CHAPTER II: AN OVERVIEW OF FEMINISM

Feminism

Feminism is a distinctive approach to literature inaugurated in the late 1960s. It is a political movement struggled for social, legal and cultural freedom as well as equality for women. Feminist thinkers regard feminism different from the mainstreams- as innovative, inventive and rebellious. Feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce to undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. The basic view of feminism is that western civilization is pervasively patriarchal, male centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic social, legal and artistic. As stated by M.H. Abrams it is:

From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophic writing to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as an other, or kind of non-man, by her lack of identifying male organ, of male power . Women themselves are taught in the process of being socialized, to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology. (235)

Because of which women are conditioned to derogate their own sex to cooperate in their own subordination, feminism views that the issues like masculine and feminine are the cultural constructs. As stated by Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman ... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ... which is described as feminine” (993).

Though feminist criticism was inaugurated in the 1960s, behind it, however, lies two centuries of struggle for woman’s rights, marked by such books as Mary

Wollstone Craft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and the American Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Besides these, an important precursor in feminist criticism was Virginia Woolf who wrote, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and other essays on women authors and their cultural economic and educational disabilities within "Patriarchal" society that hindered women from their creative possibilities. A much more radical critical mode was launched in France by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which criticizes the cultural identification of women as merely the "object" or "other". She views that men treat themselves as "subject" who is assumed to represent humanity as death in the great collective myths of women in the work of male writers.

Similarly, E. Porter defines feminism as a perspective that seeks to "eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex" (Beasley 27). Elaine Showalter, an American literary critic and founder of Gyno critics, has identified three historical phases of women's literary development: the "feminine phase" (1840-80), the "feminist phase" (1880-1920), and "female phase" (1920-present). She further identifies four models of difference: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural. Mary Ellaman's *Thinking About Women* (1968) discussed the derogatory stereotypes of women in literature written by men.

Since 1969, there has been an explosion of feminist writings. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), which was the first major book of feminist criticism, rocketed the fame of feminist criticism. Millet, here, represents western social arrangements and institutions as covert ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of man and the subordination of women. The collaboration of two feminists Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar accelerated the fame of feminism. Their

influential work, *The Mad Women in the Attic* (1974), talks about the “images” created by male in their work. Likewise, the French critics practise “écriture feminine”, as a tool to uphold the power of psychological category of the femininity. Similarly, Julia Kristeva denounces the oppressive nature of “male language”. She also opposes phallo-centrism with the images derived from women’s corporeal experiences.

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinated position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. Women have been made inferiors and the oppression has been compounded by men’s belief that women are inferior by nature. The abstract notion of ‘equality’ receives lip-service, but demand for real equality will usually be resisted. The saying ‘Tota Mulier in Utero’ (Women is nothing but a womb) sums up this attitude. That’s why, women writers started to subvert such attitude with their writings. They identify why the women are created and manipulated, and also vehemently criticize the male gaze over women literature.

Kinds of Feminism

Feminism is not a simple or unified philosophy. Many different women (and men) call themselves feminists, and the beliefs of these groups of people vary quite a bit. Here's a quick primer on some of the different kinds of feminism mentioned by Bryson.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is characterized by an individualistic emphasis on equality. According to this philosophy, society itself does not need a major overhaul, but rather laws need to be changed and opportunities have to be opened up to allow women to become equal in society. To a liberal feminist, evidence of progress is seen largely by

the numbers of women in positions previously occupied by men, especially powerful positions. In the United States and much of the Western world, liberal feminism is the most mainstream form of feminism (42).

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism (sometimes known as Marxist feminism) is different from liberal feminism in that it emphasizes that true equality will *not* be achieved without major overhauls within society-- particularly economic overhauls. Socialist feminists argue that there are fundamental inequalities built in to a capitalist society because power and capital are distributed unevenly. Thus, it's not enough for women to individually work to rise to powerful positions in society; rather, power needs to be redistributed throughout society. Liberal feminists focus on individual empowerment, while socialist feminists focus on collective change and empowerment (112).

Marxist Feminism

Marx showed how the working class is exploited for profit by capitalists, who gain wealth by paying workers a bare minimum of the value they produce. Marxist feminists view the capitalist drive for profits as responsible for women's second-class status and other forms of oppression such as racism and homophobia. Prejudice and privilege also aid the ruling class by inhibiting workers from organizing together. Women workers are exploited at a higher level than males, with women of color suffering the highest degree of exploitation because of gender and race discrimination. Women are also a source of unpaid domestic labor—an arrangement that allows the world's capitalists to save trillions of dollars every year (123).

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is similar to socialist feminism in that it emphasizes the need for dramatic social change in order to achieve genuine equality for women (and

sometimes these two philosophies are grouped together). Radical feminists believe that society is extremely patriarchal, and until patriarchy is transformed on all levels, the system will remain unjust. A minority of radical feminists are *separatist feminists*, who believe that men and women need to maintain separate institutions and relationships. Radical feminism is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, social dominance of women by men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power primarily by gender, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men. Radical feminists tend to be more militant in their approach (radical as "getting to the root"). Radical feminism opposes existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists tend to be skeptical of political action within the current system, and instead support cultural change that undermines patriarchy and associated hierarchical structures. Radical feminism opposes patriarchy, not men. To equate radical feminism to man-hating is to assume that patriarchy and men are inseparable, philosophically and politically.

Judith Fetterley on her essay "On the politics of literature" (1978) writes, "Literature is political" (561). She avers that it is painful to have to insist on this fact, but the necessity of such insistence indicates the dimensions of the problem. Fetterley, here, seeks to expose enactment of the drama of men's power over women. "Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else" (562), she supports her argument. The pretense the literature speaks universal truths, and it is apolitical terrorize her. Therefore, she ventures to unveil the political stature deliberately diffused in literature. She proclaims, "literature is male. Our literature neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate. It insists on its universality at the same time that it defines that universality in specifically male terms" (561).

Such a view of power and politics is completely new to political theory which has never seen the power gap between men and women as central, and which has been unable to see that political power relations may be involved in private life and in literature. With the possible exception of the United States Feminist political theory has not yet won its place at the forefront of academic or political debate. Nevertheless, it continues to flourish, it provides above all a self-consciousness about feminist issues and a knowledge of how these have been misunderstood, manipulated and marginalized in the past that is vital if feminist gains are to be defined and feminist issues kept on political agenda. Though the fortunes of feminism have waxed and waned many times in the past, women broke years of silence to discover the shared nature of problem in the late 1790s. They began to develop systematically a self-conscious theory with the realization that women should struggle together to achieve their own liberation. They come up with the slogan that, "the personal is political" and the a new theory and strategy for women's liberation could only be based on women's experiences, not on abstract speculation.

Emergence of feminist critics in the western countries remapped and retheorized the male dominated critical terrain. In America, modern feminist criticism began with Mary Ellaman's deft and witty discussion in *Thinking about Women* (1968), about the derogatory stereotypes of women in literature written by men, and also about the alternative and subversive points of view in what some writings by man, and also about the alternative and subversive points of view in what some writings by women. Even more influential was Kate Millet's polemical and hard-hitting *Sexual Political* (1970). By "politics" Millet refers to the mechanisms that express and enforce the relations of power in society; she represents, "Western social arrangements and institutions as covert was of manipulating power so as to establish

and perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women” (Abrams, 238). Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* argues that:

In all known societies the relationship between the sexes have been based on power, and that they are therefore political. This power takes the forms of male domination over women in all areas of life; sexual domination is so universal, so ubiquitous and so complete that it appears ‘natural’ and hence become invisible so that it is perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides it most fundamental concept of power. (25).

To oversimplify, she is arguing that the relations between men and women are power relations: that man tends to have the power and that sexuality enforces their power. She articulates, “the principle of patriarchy appear to be twofold: Male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate young” (25).

Millet’s *Sexual Politics* marked an important stage in ‘Political’ feminist writing on literature. She used the term ‘Patriarchy’ to describe the cause of women’s oppression. Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women. Millet and other feminist have attacked social scientist who treat the culturally learned female characteristics (passivity, docile, submissive, weak, etc.) as natural. She recognizes that women as much as men perpetuate these attitudes in women’s magazines and family ideology. Sex roles as perpetuated in society are in her view repressive. The acting out of the roles in the unequal relation of domination and subordination is what Millet calls ‘Sexual Politics’. Her emphasis is political in the sense that she aims at raising women’s political awareness. She conducts a political struggle to raise consciousness among the oppressor and oppressed.

Such drama of power abounds in our literature too. Males are presented as “subject” and usurp the power position but women are depicted as powerless creatures. Judith Fetterley writes, “powerlessness is the subject and powerlessness the experience” (562). Females are represented as powerless objects and given no prestigious position. They are shown in literature as they are to be to suit the male ideology. Literary stereotypes of women as stated by feminist critics are the enactment of the drama of men’s power over women. Fetterley admits:

Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity. They are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one . . . since they have no faith in the validity of their own perceptions and experiences. (567).

Accordingly, Gilbert and Gubar, in their work *The Mad Women in the Attic*, discredits the male tendency of creating images about women. They express their utter dissatisfaction regarding such tendency. They write:

Before the women writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy . . . she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, this is, those mythic masks male artist have fastened over her human face . . . a woman writer must examine, assimilate and transcend the extreme images of “angel” and “monster” which male authors have granted for her. (596)

Depiction of women either as “angel” or as “monster” dominates women figure.

Literature proliferates the idea that those eternal feminine virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness are angelic qualities. In other words “the arts of pleasing men are not only

angelic characteristics in more worldly terms, they are the proper acts of lady
 “(Gilbert and Gubar 600). A woman of right feeling should devote to the good of
 others. Similarly, John Ruskin affirmed that the women’s “power is for rule, not for
 battle, and her intellects is not for inventions or creation, but for sweet orderings of
 domesticity”(23). Important here is to understand the male’s politics. They never
 wanted women to come at fore with their ideas and voice. So, they constructed a
 narrow territory for women and limit them.

If any women endeavors to cross this limit, male tag her as “monster” and
 portray her as socially and morally misfit. Male anxieties about female autonomy
 enshrined women in domesticity. Thus, male writers traditionally praise the simplicity
 of dove, but they invariably castigate her creativity. Being threatened by her
 aggressiveness, “male literature” depicts her as “monstrous” and “snaky sorceress”
 (*The Mad Women in the Attic*, 604). Throughout the male literature, a women is
 portrayed as a “Sweet heroine inside the house” and “a vicious bitch outside” (604).
 We find such monsters have long inhabited male texts. Male scorn of female
 creativity affected the self-images of women writers, negatively reinforcing messages
 of submissiveness conveyed by their angelic sisters. “ A woman is the shape of
 monster” and “ a monster in the shape of women”, this is what Adrienne Rich also
 observes in the male literature.

The collaboration of Gilbert and Gubar studies the male pejorative view about
 women. They find “female monster” populating the works of male since long. The
 first book of Spencer’s *The Fairie Queene* introduce, a female monster who serves as
 a prototype of the entire line. *Error* is “half women, half serpent, most loathsome,
 filthie, foule, and full of disdain” (605). Descending from Patristic misogynist like
 Tertullian and St. Augustine through Renaissance and Restoration literature- through

Sidney's *Cecropia*, Shakespeare's *lady Macbeth*, Milton's *Sin-* the female expose the male constructed images about women as in Johnson's famous observation that "a woman preacher was like dog standing on its hind legs" or Horace Walpole's remarks that Mary Wollstonecraft was "a hyena in Petticoats" (Walpole qtd. In Gilbert and Gubar, 606). Such projection of female figures in male literature is the study what political feminism does.

A much more radical criticism launched by Adrienne Rich in her essay "Notes Towards a Politics of Location" (1980), argues about the scope of political feminism. She clearly asserts:

. . . the common oppression of women, the gathering movement of women around the globe, the hidden history of women's resistance and bounding, the failure of all previous politics to recognize the universal shadow of patriarchy, the belief that women now, in a time of rising consciousness and global emergency, may join across all national and cultural boundaries to create a society free of domination, in which sexuality, politics, work, intimacy, thinking itself will be transformed.
(637)

Rich insists on creating a society without domination, subjugation and marginalization. She, similarly, argues that when women come up with a single voice there will be decline in patriarchal power. She does not see patriarchy as an unchanging and monolithic structure of oppression, but allows for the possibility that patriarchal power may be challenged and feminist victories won.

Now comes Valerie Bryson with her radical view about feminism. She asserts that the radical feminist label has been applied in recent years to a confusingly diverse range of theories. She states, "far from constituting a coherent body of political

thought, it is the site for far-ranging disagreements at all levels of theory and practice” (181). She defines feminist theory and its purpose as:

It is essentially a theory of, by and for women; as such, it is based firmly in women’s won experiences and perceptions and sees no need to compromise with existing political perspectives and agendas. . . . it sees the oppression of women as most fundamental and universal form of domination, and its aim is to understand and end this . . . women as a group have interest opposed to those men; these interests unite them in common sisterhood that transcends the division of class of race, and means that women should struggle together to achieve their liberation. (181)

Bryson realizes that male power is not confined to the public worlds of politics and paid employment, but it extends into a private life. This means that traditional concepts of power and politics are challenged and extended to such personal areas of life as the family and sexuality; both of which are seen as instrument of patriarchal domination.

Bryson also talks about how the power shifted to patriarchy from the very beginning. She argues that the original shift to patriarchy was simply consequence of men’s greater strength, stemming from women’s weakness during pregnancy, child birth and location: it is above all men’s ability to rape that enables them to dominate women. She again claims that it was the discovery of the male role in reproduction that was critical and first let men to seek control women. She quotes Rich who states:

A crucial moment in human consciousness arrives when man discover that it is the himself, not the moon or the spring rains or the sprits of the dead, who impregnates the women: that the child she carries and

gives birth to is his child, who can make him immortal. (Rich qtd. In Bryson, 187)

Yet others see the development of patriarchy as rooted in the early development of hunting by men, which both gave them new source of power and led to the development of a value system based on violent conquest. Therefore, there is no consensus among feminist about the causes or origin of patriarchy.

However, some argue that what is important is to identify and understand the structure and institutions that maintain patriarchy today in order that these may be overthrown. It is not unjust laws or economic systems that are responsible for women's oppression but "MEN", that men as a group have interest opposed to those of women and that is therefore against the power of men that of battle must be fought. Women are desired always in submissive and docile objects so that they (male) can overpower women. So, that Bryson states, "the enemy is male power in all its manifestations, but this power is seen to be socially constructed that her than embodied in all biological males" (189). She even declares that women in radically different societies or situation frequently have experiences in common involving sexual exploitation, lack of reproduction freedom an marginalization or exclusion from 'male-streme' economic, social, political and intellectual life: these experiences may reflect the systematic exercise of power of men over woman.

Women's powerlessness, victimization, lack of resources and marginalization constitute women's timeless history. Far from being unchanging, patriarchal values takes a number of different forms which are the product of patriarchal takes a number of different forms which are the product of particular historical situations. Bryson quotes Cocks to justify this argument. She writes that there has been a decline in traditional patriarchal power within the family; she claims that this has been

accompanied by a rise in what she calls phallic power, this is, sexual domination and exploitation. Millet's theory, therefore, saw the importance of woman struggles in the past and argues that these had made "monumental progress and provided the basis for future change" (Sexual politics, 64). Such views do not see patriarchy as an unchanging and monolithic structure of oppression, but allow for the possibility that patriarchal power may be challenged and feminist victories won.

Bryson, therefore, proclaims that the basic principles of the radical feminist approach are women-centered understanding of the world. From this perspective, a central shared experience is domination by men. This domination is experienced not only in the public worlds of politics and employments, but also in the family and personal relationship. She writes:

Power and politics are therefore redefined, and seen to pervade the whole life. The tasks of radical feminist theory is therefore both to expose this domination and to analyze how it is maintained in order that it may be successfully challenged.(193)

In short, political feminism seeks to expose the power politics of male and vehemently criticize the "image" created in male literature. Also, they raise their voice against oppression, victimization and marginalization

Similarly, E. Porter defines feminism as a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequality, and injustices women suffer because of their sex (Beasley, 27). Other feminists have argued that mainstream thought is simply a part of three ongoing processes: excluding, marginalizing and trivializing women and their accounts of social and political life. Women are trying to attack male writing as well as they are seeking redefinition of their identity in their writing.

The major interest of feminist critics has been to reconstitute all the ways that deal with literature so as to do justice to female point of view, concerns and values. Many feminist critics have decried the literature written by man for its depiction of women as marginal, docile and subservient to man's interest and emotional needs and fear. Such feminist studies have served to raise the status of many female authors hitherto more or less scanted by scholars and critics and to bring into purview other authors who have been largely overlooked as subjects for serious consideration. Pondering over the purpose of feminist study M.H Abrams states:

The often-asserted goal of feminist critics has been to enlarge and reorder the literary canon that have come to be considered "major" and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history criticism, scholarship, and teaching. (273)

Therefore, the often-asserted goal of feminist critics have been to enlarge and reorder the literary canon that have come to be considered "major" and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history, criticism, scholarship and teaching. They, being to develop systematically a self-conscious theory.

In addition to this, women broke year of the silence to discover the shared nature of problems. They thought that women should struggle together to achieve their own liberation. Many radical feminist ponder over that the basis of women's oppression lies not in social organization or physical domination, but in a male control of culture, religion, language, and knowledge that limits the ways in which we can think and cause patriarchal assumption to be internalized by women as well as by men. Feminist have challenged the claims of philosophy and political theory to embody reason and universality, arguing that these are based on a male paradigm that ignores or devalues experiences and ways of thinking associated with women, so that

objectivity in fact means the subjective perception of men. Masculinity is associated with quality such as light, reason, and activities whereas femininity recalls passivity and emotion.

One of the accomplishments of feminist scholarship of the past twenty years is its demonstration of the constructed character of gender. While feminist theories may disagree about just then is most theorist agree in rejecting the view that gendered traits are essential aspects of being a biological male or biological female and treat gender difference as a socially constructed mode of organizing society and culture. Helen E. Longino writes:

Masculinity is taken to consist in aggressiveness, independence a.k.a dominance, emotional control or lack of affect, intensively to the felling of others, self-confidence, taciturnity. Femininity is taken to consist in submissiveness and dependence, gentleness and nurturance, sensitivity to others, lack of emotional control, lack of self confidence and excessive chattiness. (24)

Feminist work consisting the traditional understanding of gender has been of several kinds: one sort examines the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of gender thinking on western cultures; another sort engages in cross cultural study. Feminist researchers have developed several types of argument to invalidate the supposition that gender is a set of correlated natural kinds and to support the notion of the constructed character of gender. Longino again writes, “Women in almost every culture are subordinated to men and are responsible for domestic life” (25). Another critic Genevieve Tly Lloyd views that the reason of female race is controlled and they are linked with emotion and subjection. She writes:

The male is more complete, more dominant than female, closer to casual activity, for the female is incomplete and in subjection and belongs to the category of the passive rather than the active. So too with the two ingredients which constitute our life principle, the rational and the irrational: the rational which belongs to mind and reason is of the masculine gender, the irrational, the province of sense, is of the female. (Lloyd qtd. in *feminist in Academy*, 28)

As Lloyd goes on to demonstrate this separation of reason and feeling is implicitly and often explicitly linked with a division between the realm of public action, which is the site of development of a full, rational, autonomous self consciousness and a realm of domesticity identified with the feminine.

Every woman living in a male-dominated culture lives with the awareness that, merely by virtue of being a woman, she risks sexual victimization. Longino expresses her anger as, “whether repressed or available to consciousness, however, we experience our worlds through a lens shaped by asymmetric vulnerability. Women’s subjectivity is conditioned by, among other things, the vulnerability of our bodies, a vulnerability identified by our culture with who we are”? (32)

Women have been subjected to the gaze of psychologies since the earliest days of the discipline, one hundred years ago. At moments when women stepped out of “their place” or an eruption of feminism threatened the social order, male intellectual and social critics of the day felt impelled to decide the question of “women’s nature” (Jeanne Marecek, 103). Woman’s nature was taken to be separate from the human nature (i.e. man’s nature), implying that, whatever they were women were not fully human. Marecek again avers, “orthodox psychology has not hesitated to render its judgment of women’s nature” (103). In the late nineteenth century questions of

women's nature were addressed in terms of mental capacity. Efforts to assess these capacities were carried out with reference not to skill and abilities but rather to various lobes, areas, physical dimensions of women's brains.

Mary Poovey, another prominent feminist, argues that the stereotypes and attitudes formulated in writing by men that reinforced the devaluation of women's lives, such those, depicting women as angels or where must be reevaluated. In her work "The Differences of Women's Studies: The Example of Literary Criticism" she writes"

Despite the claims that the terms man mankind were representative of all human beings, that is, early proponents of women's studies argued that the knowledge commonly assumed to describe and analyze "man" did not equally apply to women, because what counted as knowledge was actually limited to the activities generally preformed by men. Thus, history usually concerned itself with wars, politics or wage labor, not with domestic relations, philanthropy or housework; ...because man had written almost all of the "great" works on "universal" themes – like war, works on "universal" themes like war, heroism, and territorial expansion, while women writers had confident themselves to "inferior" subjects like marriage and domesticity. (135)

Women's subordination was no longer based on physical necessity; the only thing preventing women from seeing themselves as subject in their own right was the artificial idea of womanhood engendered by society, which still saw women as secondary objects, acquiring meaning only in relation to men. If women were to be free, they must therefore be freed from this prevailing idea, and persuaded to take responsibility for their own lives, rather than accepting the security of dependence or

the bad faith represented by conformity to the feminine idea. The aim of Beauvior was, therefore, to reveal the artificial nature of womanhood, Beauvior argued that women could lead independent, rationally ordered and autonomous lives once they were freed from artificially restricting myths and cultural assumption. She here implies that only by denying her femaleness that a woman can achieve humanity, and devalues traditionally female qualities such as nurturing.

When the women's movement developed in France after 1986, Beauvior was an active participant and convert to the idea of female solidarity she called herself a feminist and organized the campaigns to legalize abortion ; she defended the need for separate women's organization free from the threat of male domination, and stressed on sisterhood and the value of female friendship. Her proposed theory saw women as independent, fulfilled and liberated beings. "For individual pioneers things might be hard, but this was only to be expected at a time when "The free woman is just being born" (*The Second Sex*, 723). And she believed that changes in education, culture and morality were all working in women's favor. She writes, "What is certain is that hitherto women's possibilities have been supposed and lost to humanity, and that it is high time she be permitted to take her chances in her own interest and in the interest of all". (724)

It showed that women could make choices, they could reject their traditional roles and they could apparently, find happiness and fulfillment in so doing; as such, it was a symbol of the possibility, despite everything, of living one's life the way one wants to for oneself, free from conventions and prejudices.

Modern liberal feminists assume that women are individual possessors of reason, that as such they are entitled to full human rights, and that they should therefore be free to choose in equal competition with men. The second wave of

feminism which erupted in 1960s protested against the failure of society to deliver the promises of independence and self expression to women.

Present day feminists think that women's problems are shared and they could only be ended by collective political action. A new theory and strategy for women's liberation could only be based on women's shared experience, not on abstracted speculation. The New York Red stockings Manifesto of 1969 quotes Margans as:

Women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are considered inferior beings whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives....we identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination...all men receive economic, sexual and psychological benefits from male supremacy. (598)

A central message of this must be that it is not unjust laws of economic systems that are responsible for women's oppression but men, that men as a group have interests opposed to those of women and that it is therefore against the power of men that the battle must be fought.

In conclusion, feminist theories try to view literature in different light. It basically searches to unveil suppression of females, identity of females, and also vies for the upliftment of the female gender.

Radical Feminism in *Wit*

Basically, feminist theory is used to analyze the Margaret Edson's text *Wit*. In the play, Edson has shown the plight of females explicitly. Her character has to undergo difficult situations for being female which shows that female domination is prevalent in the society. This theory is applied to unveil how females in the society are dominated by patriarchal norms and how females are able to subvert the traditional

role models of the females. Edson, in the later part, has shown her character assertive which will be analyzed with the help of radical feminism. Textual analysis shows how Edson has projected her female characters in her play. Vivian dismantles all the role models that are attached to her just for being the female. She has snatched all the societal powers at her own hand and makes her social standing highly demanding. She does not comply with the biased societal norms and values rather questions the domination. Her denouncement of the clothes, and bracelets and her moving towards the light are some of the major instances of radicalism. Her reincarnation as a powerful being is the result of her radicalism. She despises all the injustices that the conventional society has been forcefully bounded them to follow.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION OF FEMINISM IN *WIT*

Texture of Asserted Feminity: Feminist Reading of Margaret Edson

Edson has asserted feminity in her Pulitzer Prize winner play *Wit*. In this chapter the researcher will use theories of different feminist critics to unveil how females are suppressed in the text economically, academically, socially and politically. How they are thwarted from being in the central position and how they are always pushed in the margin. Beyond this, on the second part how females female characters in the play, despite experiencing various injustices and dominations in society, have dedicated their life to create their self in the society. How they are able to forsake all the clutches of male chauvinism, how they are able to dismantle the walls erected by the patriarchy to dominate them and how they have asserted their position in society? Patriarchic values never desired females to come at the centre rather desired to follow all the codes and the conducts of patriarchy. History is the proof that females are desired as an appendage, as a partner for their sexual dance and nothing more than that. Intellectual being of the females is nipped in the bud. Society always saw them as secondary being. Feminists have done a lot for the empowerment of the females. As a result, feminists of the present days are successful to receive power position i.e. equality in the society.

Synopsis of the Plot

Edson's play *Wit* begins with the main character, Vivian Bearing entering an empty stage, pushing an IV pole. She is dressed in two hospital gowns and a baseball hat. She is presented as a destitute character in the play. However, this dejected character later turns to be very powerful dismantling all the patriarchal norms and values. Edson later projects Vivian as a powerful character unlike the one who fits all

the traditional gender roles devised by patriarchy. She is a professor and economically and intellectually she is equal to males.

She can face all the challenges of patriarchal values. She does not aspire any traditional gender roles of the society. However, males in the society do not like her in that role. They act like cancer to dominate her. Cancer devastates not only her intellectual role but also her being in the society. She has to undergo a very torturing treatment process in the hospital where the male doctors mutilate her body and consider her body as a laboratory for their research. They do know that she will die because of cancer but they keep on investigating her body. She is bound to die because of cancer. Her being comes at stake and it is wiped out from the society. But, Edson gives another birth to Vivian in which she moves towards the light and forsakes her bracelets and dress which symbolically implies that she dismantles all the societal norms and values with all powerful and assertive roles.

Nexus between Text and Theory

Edson has presented her character having intellectual and economic power in the society which most of the females in the society lack. She has dominating power in the society. She does not fit in the traditional role models of the females which is the main thrust of the radical feminism. Initially, Edson has depicted her major character confirming all the traditional gender roles which is analyzed by the traditional feminist theories. But later she dismantles one after another patriarchal values and rules which are analyzed by radical approach of feminism. Radical feminism shows females assertive and powerful gaining different roles in the society.

Because of cancer, who is now on death bed. Cancer not only tortures her physically but also psychologically. It has omitted the meaning of her life.

Commenting on the same issue Todorov writes:

Vivian's torment is not limited to physical pain. She observes that she has become merely an object to be examined, justifying the indifferent treatment she receives from the hospital staff. Only Nurse Monahan provides comfort when the pain becomes unbearable. Nurse Monahan also provides an emotional anchor when Vivian acknowledges the fact that she is really going to die. With Monahan's guidance, Vivian signs a "do not resuscitate" order. She is also prompted to re-examine her life, ultimately judging that it falls well short of what she dreamed and wanted. (34)

Vivian's body becomes an object of observation for most of the doctors. Since long, female body has been considered as an object for the society. They are manipulated physically. Sometimes, it has become a sex object for the males and other times they are considered as a commodity for observation and evaluation. They never receive proper attention and prestige in the society. Their male counterparts never allow them to live a prestigious life in the society.

In the same fashion, patriarchal society does not give her a chance to live peacefully. Despite her last wishes to die peacefully without any torture of medications, Kelekian and his other members of hospital enforce her to undergo a harsh procedure. Discussing on the same issue Wallace writes:

The next morning, Vivian's body succumbs to the rigors of Kelekian's regimes and she undergoes cardiac arrest. Despite Vivian's earlier request to die peacefully, Posner calls for a resuscitation team, claiming that he needs her to live so he can continue to study her. A small scuffle follows as Monahan blocks him from the body, reminding him of Vivian's final wishes. (2)

The torture of cancer which Margaret epitomizes as a patriarchy and the incessant pain and hassles that doctors and other hospital staffs give her make her life unlivable even at the death bed. For their research and observation, they do not allow her die peacefully. Her final wishes do not get materialized Klaver avers:

Her doctors can only see Vivian as a vessel for the cancer that is killing her. The very devotion to her studies that has left her without family or friends also makes her an ideal candidate for experimental chemotherapy for there are no friends or relatives to object to her painful treatment. The irony is not lost on Vivian. Where once she taught bodies of text, her own body has become the text Kelekian and Posner study, prompting her to note that “*they read me like a book.*”
(18)

Vivian who has nobody of her own has become the test material for the doctors and other staffs of the hospital. They undergo a painful treatment. The society never objects the doctors for Vivian being mutilated. It is because she is a doll at the hand of society and they are free to do whatever they like in the society. A notable thing in the play is that those who examine her body from the perspective of observation are all males. Their psyche of domination and suppression thwarted them to achieve a power position in the society. Moreover, their slave mentality hampered them from being in mainstream. The feeble and frail body of Bearing becomes the laboratory for the male characters of the play. They do not consider her condition. Rather than showing their compassion and sympathy they march ahead to manipulate her.

Female Suppression in *Wit*

Margaret Edson’s shows how females are suppressed and dominated by the patriarchal society in the first part of the play. The principal character Bearing is not

considered as a social persona by her male characters. From the very opening of the play Bearing is depicted as a very miserable and pathetic character. In the introduction notes of Vivian Bearing Edson writes:

Vivian Bearing Walks on the empty stage pushing her IV pole. She is fifty, tall, and very thin, barefoot, and completely bald. She wears two hospital gowns- a baseball cap, and a hospital ID bracelet. The house lights are at half strength. (5)

Derogatory presentation of the central female character having cancerous elements in her body shades negative light towards females. Even the house lights are not in proper condition. The lights in the hospital imply the condition of the whole female race. She is 'barefoot' and completely bald because of cancer. Describing her pathetic condition Wriglesworth avers, "Although Vivian is terribly funny, she is no laughing matter. Clothed with two hospital gowns, one to cover her front and other to conceal her backside, she hobbles around with an IV pole" (6). She is caught by cancer, the disease which is not cured completely.

This symbolic presentation of cancer as a male domination has many other meanings. Firstly, it has no complete cure as the domination of female is not cured despite having many feminist movements. Secondly, cancer spreads in her whole body and damages the 'human' (if they are considered as human) organs. As spoken by Kelekian, a male character and a doctor, "The tumor is spreading very quickly, and the treatment is very aggressive. So far, so good? (10)". Thirdly, it is a very painful disease and the patient wishes for death if it reaches to highest level as Vivian speaks: "Oh, God, it is so painful. So painful. So much pain. So much pain. [...] Yes, I'm in goddamn pain. (Furious) I have a fever of 101 spiking to 104. And I have bone metastases in my pelvis and both femurs" (71). Edson symbolically discloses the fact

that because of male domination it has become very difficult for the females to live as Vivian is undergoing. Besides this, their existence comes at stake and she desires for nihilism.

Vivian is highly tortured by cancer. She speaks, "I'll never forget the time I found out I had a cancer" (7). The time when she realizes that she has a cancer she is devastated. She later understands the dominating tendency of patriarchy which snips all the happiness and liberty of her life. She now feels the clutches of male dominated society which she feels is tough to unwind. Because of cancer she has to forsake her position in the society. She says, "It is not my intention to give away the plot; but I think I die at the end" (6). Despite having intention females are marginalized from the society. The power position in the society is taken by males and females are subordinated. She does not receive any reverence from the male characters of the play. She is forced to leave her position, "I am disinclined to poetry" (6). Teaching poetry was her job but now she relinquishes it because of cancer.

Similarly, in the name of treatment male characters in the play heavily exploit her. They undertake one test after another test. The tests have numerous side effects that have thwarted her living. As Kelekian speaks, "This treatment is the strongest thing we have to offer you. And, as research, it will take significant contribution to our knowledge" (11). Since long, females' body has become the observation sites for the males. They not only exploit them psychologically, economically, socially but also physically. They are sexually exploited during their youth and in their old age they become the thing for medical experimentation as Vivian Bearing. She has to undergo many tests which give very much torture to her. Kelekian again states, "The first week of each cycle you'll be hospitalized for chemotherapy; the next week you may feel a little tired; the next two weeks will be fine, relatively. This cycle will repeat

eight times, as I said before” (11). Not only this, after these eight cycles she has to undergo again many other tests. Because of many other tests her existence becomes very much cumbersome. This shows the cycles of female domination. In one way or other, females in the society are being dominated by males. She becomes a play thing in the hands of doctors. With her bodily experimentation, the doctors in the hospital try to consolidate their knowledge. They try to make their existence at the cost of females’ existence.

The curing process has various side effects. Kelakian puts forward, “The antineoplastic will inevitably affect some healthy cells, including those lining the gastrointestinal tract from the lips to the anus, and the hair follicles. We will of course be relying on your resolve to withstand some of the more pernicious side effects” (9). The phrase ‘from the lips to the anus’ symbolically express that the existence of female is nipped from top to the bottom. The females have to withstand many pernicious side effects of the male chauvinism. They have to forsake their existence i.e. ‘healthy cells’. In the name of treatment their existence has been put at stake. Vivian herself speaks about the pernicious effects of the cancer, “I have cancer, insidious cancer, with pernicious side effects-no, the *treatment* has pernicious side effects” (12). The treatment, which the male doctors use as their study program, has many side effects and even hampers her living.

In addition to this, females in the patriarchal society are considered as objects. They are not given the prestigious position in the society. They are isolated from the society as different objects. As Vivian puts, “In isolation, I am isolated. For once I can use a term literally. The chemotherapeutic agents eradicating my cancer have also eradicated my immune system. In my present condition, every living thing is a health

hazard to me” (47). She symbolically tells that the male suppression has not only snipped their existence but also their identity in the society.

Not only this, male society even questions the ability of females. Despite having artistic genius to teach Donne’s poetry, she is questioned.

E.M.: Please sit down. Your essay on Holy Sonnet Six, Miss Bearing, is a melodrama, with a veneer of scholarship unworthy of you-to say nothing of Donne. Do it again.

VIVIAN: I, ah...

E.M.: You must begin with a text, Miss Bearing, not with a feeling. You have entirely missed the point of the poem, because, I must tell you, you have used an edition of the text that is in authentically punctuated. In the Gardner edition- (13).

Her ability of teaching is not given proper value. Though she is a very excellent professor of Donne she is not given proper heed by the patriarchal ideology. She is a professor of Donne who is specialized in Holy Sonnets of Donne as stated by Vivian herself, “I am a professor of seventeenth century poetry, specializing in Holy Sonnet of Donne” (5). However, E.M., an epitome of patriarchal society, does not consider her as an intellectual. She is not thought as an equal counterpart of the male rather their biased mentality, their domineering ideology always tries to thwart her to come in the power position. E. M. still moves ahead with his domineering tendency:

E.M.: You take this too lightly, Miss Bearing. This is Metaphysical Poetry, not The Modern Novel. The standards of scholarship and critical reading which one would apply to any other text are simply insufficient. The effort must be total for the results to be meaningful. Do you think the

punctuation of the last line of this sonnet is merely an insignificant detail (14).

She is considered as mindless character by E.M. Since patriarchy does not consider females as a genius character of the society, how can E.M. be an exception, He is also replete with the patriarchal ideology. His notion towards females can not transcend the walls erected by the patriarchy.

Bearing calls the treatment process a nefarious business because of its pernicious impact on females. She states:

VIVIAN: Wasn't that... Grand? At times, this obsessively detailed examination, this scrutiny seems to me to be a nefarious business. On the other hand, what is the alternative? Ignorance? Ignorance may be ... bliss; but it is not a very noble goal.

So I play my part.

I receive chemotherapy, throw up, am subjected to countless indignities, feel better, go home. Eight cycles. Eight neat little strophes. Oh, there have been the usual variations, subplots, red earrings: heptaotoxity, neuropathy.

In the course of examination, she is given torture by the doctors. So, she calls it a nefarious business. But she aspires to throw all them.

Another Character Jason regards Vivian a body of text to research. The body of female is just an object to further their profession. In the words of Vanhoutte:

Vivian is matter-a-body-text that will provide new possibilities for interpreting cancer and nothing more. The social implications of this play are relentless. In the Wits darkest moments Vivian exists as something to be used and disposed of, ironically, as she observes,

bearing nothing. She is a thing among things. Just the specimenjar, just the dust jacket, just the white piece of paper that bears the little black marks. (45)

Vivian becomes the thing without being at the hand of male doctors. They regard her just as something to advance their profession.

Vivian Bearing as an Assertive Character

Though in the initial part Bearing is given the submissive traits, Edson's character Vivian Bearing becomes an assertive character. The tasks which are not supposed to perform by a lady are done by her. From the beginning she is depicted as an assertive character. Even the male characters admire her in the play. She is a scholar of Donne's Holy Sonnets, which explores mortality in greater depth than any other body of work in the English language. Referring to Kelekean, another critic E Klaver states, "he credits her with sharpening his intellectual prowess, enabling him to think in purely rational terms about his cancer research, but it also enables him to view Vivian purely as a body with no individual characteristics" (24). Vivian herself says, "I am a professor of seventeenth century poetry, specializing in the holy sonnets of John Donne" (5). In the society where females are considered as brainless, imposture beast, submissive, docile and meek, Vivian has all humanly characters. She is intellectual, and denies to fit in the stereotypes devised by the patriarchy.

Vivian: I know all about life and death. I am, after all, a scholar of Donne's

Holy Sonnets, which explore mortality in greater depth than any other body of work in the English language.

And I know for a fact that I am tough. A demanding professor.

Uncompromising. Never one to turn from a challenge. That's why I

chose, while a student of the great E. M. Ashford, to study Donne. (12)

Edson's projection of Vivian as an intellectual character subverts the notion of patriarchy. Patriarchal society always portrayed them as a mindless creature unable to do good things. However, Vivian is a scholar of Donne, a very intellectual and difficult poet of seventeenth century. Not only this, she is "uncompromising". She does not consider herself as a meek character in the society as most of the females do. She is ready to encounter any types of challenges of the society. She never tries to turn away from the challenges. She asserts her individuality. She is presented as a demanding professor. On the other hand, male ideology is suspicious about her ability. Kelekian doubts on her. In one conversation with Vivian Kelekian asks:

KELEKIAN: You must be very tough. Do you think you can be very tough?

VIVIAN: You needn't worry.

KELEKIAN: Good. Excellent.

Its historical fact that females are mindless creatures, imposture beast in the eyes of males. Even Donne depicted females in the very negative light. However, Edson's character is an excellent professor of Donne.

E. M. who used derogatory remarks in the beginning, understands the flair of Bearing. He states, "Vivian. You're a bright young woman. Use your intelligence. Don't go back to the library. Go out. Enjoy yourself with your friends" (15). She is depicted as an uncompromising character, rather epitome of patriarchy, E.M. changes his notion towards females. She gets a power position in the society later. Describing her panache, her ability bearing puts forward:

VIVIAN: I am thanked in the preface: "Miss Vivian Bearing for her able assistance. "

My dissertation, "Ejaculations in Seventeenth Century Manuscripts and Printed Editions of the Holy Sonnets: A Comparison," was revised for

publication in the journal of English Texts, a very prestigious venue for a first appearance. (18)

Her literary prowess is now acknowledged by patriarchy. She also candidly talks about the sexual matters which the society considers immoral in the part of females. Her dissertation is about “Ejaculation” in Donne’s poetry. Moreover, her dissertation has become the prestigious venue. Considering her as a prestigious character, Jason, another character in the play asserts, “Excellent. Okay. We know you are an academic” (22).

Jason Furthers:

JASON: (*Trying to be casual*) Professor Bearing was very highly regarded on campuses. It looked very good on my transcript that I had taken her course. They even asked me about it in my interview for med school-(he feels the mass and does a double take.) Jesus! (Tense silence. He is amazed and fascinated.) (31)

Patriarchal society later understands the ability of Bearing, who is projected as a symbol of whole female race. Firstly, denied to acknowledge her flair but later they understand her ability. Bearing herself says, “one thing can be said for an eight-month course of cancer treatment: it is highly educational. I am learning to suffer” (31).

Moreover, Edson asserts feminity by featuring Bearing highly intellectual and learned woman which patriarchy considers them unable for. Vivian says:

VIVIAN: Here in lies the paradox. John Donne would revel in it. I would revel in it, if he wrote a poem about it. My students would flounder in it, because paradox is too difficult to understand. Think of it as a puzzle, I would tell them, an intellectual game. If they were here, if I were lecturing: How would perplex them! I could work my students into a

frenzy. Every ambiguity, every shifting awareness. I could draw so much from the poems.

I could be so powerful.(48)

Her assertion 'I could be so powerful', speaks many things about Bearing. She is a highly learned woman, a scholar of poetry which is considered to be the business of males. Where the students "flounder", she teaches well there. She, as asserted by herself, knows very many things about Donne than any other scholars. To express her ingenuity, she expresses:

VIVIAN: To the scholar, to the mind comprehensibly trained in the subtleties of seventeenth century vocabulary, versification, and theological, history, geographical, political and mythological allusions, Donne's wit is...a way to see how good you really are.

After twenty years, I can say with confidence, no one is quite as good as I. (20)

Females are supposed to have no knowledge of politics, science, theology, metaphysics and history but Edson's character does possess all these virtues. She has ample knowledge of all these things. She has all the qualities to counter any types of domination. She proclaims that no one is as good as her in the matter of these things. The aged long domination of females is countered by the assertive presentation of Bearing. She understands all the disciplines of the world which are supposed not to be the female's business.

Vivian creates her position in the society. She has all types of skills and knowledge that is necessary for the dignity of life. She claims she is an important person in the whole discipline. She does not endure any types of domination from the males. Her brain, according to her, has significant importance for all. She avers, "If I

actually did barf my brains out, it would be a great loss to my discipline. Of course, not a few of my colleagues would be relieved. To say nothing to my students” (32).

Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles

Miss Bearing leaves no stone unturned to assert femininity. She is not only a learned and intellectual woman but also a philosophical woman. During the conversation with males she presents her philosophical stance. Bearing speaks, “Now it’s the time for verbal swordplay, for unlikely flights of imagination and wildly shifting perspectives, for metaphysical conceit, for wit. And nothing would be worse than a detailed scholarly analysis. Erudition. Interpretation. Complication. Now it’s a time for simplicity. Now is a time for, dare I say it, kindness” (69). She shows all the instances of intelligence which helps to dismantle the stereotypical role model of the female race.

Bearing is also a highly acclaimed writer. She has a good position in the society. What Edson wants to show here is the subversion of the walls of patriarchy. Bearing is not limited in the role model set by the patriarchy. Patriarchal society demands females to be limited within the stereotypes set by them. However, Bearing dismantles all the stereotypes set by the patriarchy. She speaks:

VIVIAN: Sharp and sudden. Then it would go away. Or I would be tired.

Exhausted. I was working on a major project, the article on John Donne for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of English Literature*. It was a great honor. But I had a very strict deadlines. (28)

Edson denies to give the traditional role of female to her character. Her principal character is endowed with all humanly characters that the conventional females lack. She is shown with full intellect working on the project of a dictionary.

At the end of the play Edson portrays Vivian differently. She is described as shedding of the clothes and being naked. Her being naked and shedding all her clothes shows her rejection of all societal norms and values that hindered the progression of the female race. The potentiality of females is never acknowledged by the male society. They are always thwarted to come at the center. As Edson writes:

She walks away from the scene, towards a little light. She is now attentive and eager moving slowly towards the light. She takes off her cap and lets it drop. She slips off her bracelets. She loosens the ties and the top gown slides to the floor, she lets the second gown fall. The instant she is naked, and beautiful, reaching for the light. (85)

Vivian's moving towards the light indicates the slow movement of the females in the society. Though the society does not allow to come at the centre and to forsake the societal norms and values, she does so very symbolically and tries to assert her role in the society. She rejects "bracelets", "gown", "cap" etc which are considered as the objects to dominate the females. She lets the societal norms to break and vie to struggle against all the biased laws and norms. Her being of nakedness indicates the utter rejection of the societal norms and values of the society. Commenting on the same issue, Tillich writes:

This new being is only new in the sense that it is a renewal of the old which has been corrupted, distorted, split and almost destroyed. Vivian is the new being. By moving towards a "little Light" she pursues something she does not seek to possess or master in the name of professional advancement. In doing so she experiences a greater knowledge, the knowledge of being accepted by something larger than a professional academy. She responds with openness and radical

vulnerability thus, her nakedness. Like the light that breaks onto the stage as a small navigational guide in moments of despair, a wave of light breaks into our darkness. (16)

Tillich means to say that she becomes radical because of the dominating and repressive tendency of the male society. She has now got a new identity in the society. Previously, her self was distorted, damaged and split but now she has distinct role and identity in the society. Discussing on the same topic of the assertion of Feminity another critic Ledbetter avers:

By accepting kindness, Vivian awakens to a new possibility of being in the world. Although Wit does not offer a clear or verifiable moment of religious conversion, the audience is fully aware that Vivian Bearing is no longer who she once was. Something about her is radically different. In her brokenness, she is stronger, in her emptiness she is beautiful. (24)

Ledbetter expresses the perspicacious change of Vivian, her new being in the world devoid of any suppression. She has now a different identity in the society. She is strong in the society with new spirit. In addition to this, there is no explanation as to why this happens. The deceased Vivian, whose body is being haggled over by researchers and nurses, simply gets up from her bed and walks towards a light emerging from the edge of the stage. Tillich again states:

This new being is only new in the sense that it is a renewal of the old which has been corrupted, distorted, split and almost destroyed. Vivian is the new being. By moving towards a "little Light" she pursues something she does not seek to possess or master in the name of professional advancement. In doing so she experiences a greater

knowledge, the knowledge of being accepted by something larger than a professional academy. She responds with openness and radical vulnerability thus, her nakedness. Like the light that breaks onto the stage as a small navigational guide in moments of despair, a wave of light breaks into our darkness. (16)

The new being of Vivian Bearing is reversal of the stereotypical role model of the females. She has appeared in the new form with her assertive role in the society.

In conclusion, Edson has depicted a female character for her Pulitzer Prize winning play who subverts the hitherto role models of the females. Vivian, the dominant character of the play dismantles one after other walls of patriarchy that vie to dominate females in the society. She rather accepts death but does not confirm the patriarchal values and systems. She despises the traditional concepts of feminism and becomes a radical figure in the society.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

Margaret Edson concluded her Pulitzer winner play with the theme of assertion of female gender. The resurrection of Vivian Bearing and her moving towards the light symbolically tells the assertion of female gender. She denies to fit in the stereotypes that the hitherto society imposes on the whole female race. Edson has conferred a power position to Vivian and she actively participates in all the societal activities. She is a professor though in the beginning, she is physically and intellectually dominated by the patriarchy. She shows powerful stance at the end. She dismantles the aged long images of females that are submissive, meek and docile.

Vivian creates her position in the society. She has all types of skills and knowledge that are necessary for the dignity of life. She claims she is an important person in the whole discipline. She does not endure any types of domination from the males. Her brain, according to her, has significant importance for all. Edson's projection of Vivian as an intellectual character subverts the notion of patriarchy. Patriarchal society always portrayed them as a mindless creature unable to do good things. However, Vivian is a scholar of Donne, a very intellectual and difficult poet of seventeenth century. Not only this, she is "uncompromising". She does not consider herself as a meek character in the society as most of the females do. She is ready to encounter any types of challenges of the society. She never tries to turn away from the challenges. She asserts her individuality. She is presented as a demanding professor.

As a female Vivian's body becomes an object of observation for most of the doctors. Since long, female body has been considered as an object for the society. They are manipulated physically. Sometimes, it has become sex object for the males and other times they were considered as a commodity for observation and evaluation.

They never receive proper attention and prestige in the society. Their male counterparts never allow them to live a prestigious life in the society. In the society where females are considered as brainless, imposture beast, submissive, docile and meek, Vivian has all humanly characters. She is intellectual, and denies to fit in the stereotypes devised by the patriarchy. Patriarchy is startled by her activities.

Bearing's literary prowess which is not acknowledged by the patriarchy in the beginning is now revered by the society. She also candidly talks about the sexual matters which the society considers immoral in the part of females. Her dissertation is about the "Ejaculation" in Donne's poetry. Moreover, her dissertation has become the prestigious venue. Females are supposed to have no knowledge of politics, science, theology, metaphysics and history but Edson's character does possess all these virtues. She has ample knowledge of all these things. She has all the qualities to counter any types of domination. She proclaims that no one is as good as her in the matter of these things. The aged long domination of females is countered by the assertive presentation of Bearing. She understands all the disciplines of the world which are supposed not to be the female's business.

Vivian Bearing is also a highly acclaimed writer. She has a good position in the society. What Edson wants to show here is the subversion of the walls of patriarchy. Bearing is not limited in the role model set by the patriarchy. Patriarchal society demands females to be limited within the stereotypes set by them. However, Bearing dismantles all the stereotypes set by the patriarchy. Vivian's moving towards the light indicates the slow movement of the females in the society. Though the society does not allow to come at the centre and to forsake the societal norms and values, she does so very symbolically and tries to assert her role in the society. She rejects "bracelets", "gown", "cap" etc which are considered as the objects to dominate

the females. She lets the societal norms to break and vie to struggle against all the biased laws and norms. Her being of nakedness indicates the utter rejection of the societal norms and values of the society. Those biased norms and values which only exalt the patriarchal values and norms are utterly denounced by Bearing and she has asserted the female gender.

To wrap up, Edson has forwarded Vivian Bearing as an assertive character to dismantle the stereotypes that hitherto society has taken for granted for all the female race to dominate and subordinate them from all the aspects of society. Bearing is projected as an intellectual and assertive character that helped to establish a new era in the history of literature.

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