

## Revisiting Feminist Strategies in Poetry: Gender, Genre, and Power Relation

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### Abstract

*The patriarchal gender division of private-public dichotomy assigned to particular gender for different roles and sphere is generally viewed as an “ancient” practice in the West. However, this “ancient” gender conception that can be traced from its Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian roots can frequently be pertinently visible in modern Western world as exemplified in the notion of “Woman’s place” and; it becomes the dominant gender discourse. Consequently, this discourse continually creates hierarchical and unequal power relation that marginalizes women in accessing education and their full participation in public spheres. This limited accessibility to education (including language and literacy) also shapes the roles and status of women as writers in Western critical and literary tradition. Writing as a profession is traditionally men’s domain; therefore, the production and contribution of women writers have less privilege and space in the Western canon. Women writers from time to time have to struggle to reclaim their rights and place in it. This research attempts to re-examine how this (re)production of the binary opposition of private-public sphere operates in language and literature of the Western critical literary tradition by scrutinizing the selected poems by the selected women writers in this research. Furthermore, this research also studies and locates how women writers employ particular strategies in gendering and degendering their writings as both aesthetic and ideological expressions. In conclusion, this research argues that women writings are not “deficient” and “inferior” to their male counterpart; and instead their status and difference as writers are the result of patriarchal dominance and power relation that historically have subordinated and denied them equal public access to education, language, literacy, and literary production.*

**Keywords:** private-public spheres; poetry; women writers; ideologies

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## Introduction: Gender and the (Re)production of Private-Public Spheres

*“Ain’t I a woman?”* (Sojourner Truth)

Many scholars of the “Western” worlds have formulated and defined “woman’s place” and located its position in society all the way from the Greeks of the Period of Antiquity to the feminists of today. Under the Greek perspective, woman is only valued for her reproductive and domestic function to produce and rear future citizens of the State; thus, she is placed at the home as the nurturer of her children in the family and in charge of domesticities. It is indeed a very important role yet deemed as “inferior” sphere. Recall that Plato banned “family” from his ideal society in *The Republic* as he deemed it dangerous for the unity of his ideal city, although in *The Laws*, he argued that “family” was a necessary unit for his second-best city. On the other hand, Aristotle did not reject “family” altogether in *Politics*; however, he privileged the *polis*, the public (political) sphere, over the *oikos* (household)—the private (nonpolitical) sphere—which he considered an inferior institution because it had “less capacities for reason and goodness” (Elshtain, 1982, p. 65).

The Western traditional notion of “family” and the “woman’s place” as a polarity of public-private spheres, political-nonpolitical domains, natural-cultural aspects, biological-social aspects, still generally dominates cultural and philosophical traditions and gender discourse. However, this domination has faced various challenges such as seen in the development of feminist thoughts that aims to rediscover, redefine, rethink, reconstruct, and redo gender construction, theories, approaches, and practices. One of the key modern scholars in challenging this sexist notion is the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir.

*But first we must ask: what is a woman? ‘Tota mulier in utero,’ says one, ‘woman is a womb.’ But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognizing*

*the fact that females exist in the human species, today as always they make up about one-half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened really known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a Platonic essence, a product of the philosophical imagination? Is a rustling petticoat enough to bring down to earth? Although some women try zealously to incarnate this essence, it is hardly patentable* (de Beauvoir, 1956, p. 13).

Critically de Beauvoir questioned as human beings, women and men were constructed differently by the society that marginalized women. She also challenged such sexist patriarchal gender perspective and uncovered the weak ground of its conception. Although this traditional gender construct is weak and groundless, it is still forcefully implemented to relegate women to their private sphere and limit their participation in the public sphere.

The subordination of women in their private sphere is closely tied to their gender-specific roles and their feminine ‘qualities’ as a woman and her respective duties as daughter, wife, and mother that also limits their access to public privileges such as education and literacy. The early humanists such as Louise Vives and Thomas Moore argued for the importance of female education, but even they confined women to their private roles. Louise Vives, author of the influencing treatise *Instruction of a Christian Woman* articulated clearly that the goals of all instructions for a woman were “to make her a virtuous and wise wife, not a competitor in her husband’s public world” (Krontiris, 1997, p. 6). Only selected number of women from wealthy families could enjoy the privilege to be educated; however, their education would still have to be conducted inside their private sphere. They were home-tutored and the language of their instructions was vernacular language, not Latin or Greek that were considered to be

“superior” language for the education of the “superior” mind and gender, their male counterpart.

One of the intelligent women educated at home under the supervision of her brother, father, and husband was Thomas Moore’s daughter. She was also well versed in writing but had to obey her father’s rule (the so-called ‘the most liberal early humanist’) for not publishing her works for public readership.

*Content with the profit and the pleasure of your conscience, in your modesty do not seek for the praise of the public, nor value it overmuch even if you receive it, but because of the great love you bear us, you regard us – your husband and myself – as a sufficiently large circle of readers for all that you write* (Krontiris, 199, p. 6).

Her father’s disapproval limits her talent as a writer to be only designated for private readership in her own circle of family for writing was not a respectable profession for women of respectable families. Writing in private sphere became the early channel for women to express themselves. Many of these writings were in the form of epistolary and confessional genre such as letters, diaries, autobiographies, and memoirs. When both groups of gender wrote these epistolary and confessional genres, their writings were already targeted for specific readership: private circle for women writers and public consumption for the men. Moreover, one would be seen as inferior to the other that affirmed the superiority of men in writing profession. Therefore, it is evidently clear that the absence and underrepresentation of women writers in the Western literary scene are the results of this unequal power relation as a consequence of the private-public divide that is historically gender-specific.

From the aforementioned discussion, it is clearly seen that the division of the private and public sphere also dictates literary production in its relation to gender. Therefore, literature is not about aesthetic only but also political and ideological. Moreover, even the basic strategy of writing and the way to narrate the story itself is already ideological as expressed by Susan Lanser in “Toward a Feminist

Narratology” (1986). Accordingly, literature can become the arena of power struggles in its relation to diverse social categories including race, ethnicity, class, gender, age group, and many more.

In Western literary tradition, women writers had attempted to appropriate, negotiate, and even challenge the patriarchal discourse and its literary divide of private and public sphere. In the early production of novel as a literary genre in the 18th and 19th century, many women writers employed the epistolary aspects such as the key role of letters in building their aesthetic unity as well as the political and writing strategy to assert their roles and their female characters’ voice in the public sphere without violating their “proper sphere.” Such attempts can extensively be seen in the works of Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters. In the 20th and 21st century, many women writers also employ and (re)produce this public and private divide in their writings for many different reasons. One of the reasons is to trace their literary heritage and to pay homage to their female predecessor in their struggle to pave the way to gain both aesthetic and political access in literature. The other reason in (re)producing this private-public divide is also to challenge the (re)production of this ancient gender divide in many different aspects of our modern lives.

Finally, this (re)production of the private and public divide from both sides (patriarchal discourse and women writer) in literature and literary production exemplifies how literature can serve as both the vehicle of domination and liberation. Thus, literature still becomes the site of ongoing power struggles to embody the embedded connection of aesthetics and ideology. In this context, therefore, feminist literary criticism is very crucial to be applied because it is both a political and literary revolution that struggles to fight the marginalization of women in society and to gain equal rights in both private and public domains.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the (re)production of the gender separation of private-public spheres operate in language and

literature of the Western critical literary tradition as seen in the selected poems by Anglo-American Women Writers?

2. What are particular strategies employed by women writers in gendering and degendering their writings and how do they structure those strategies as both aesthetic and ideological expressions to challenge the patriarchal dominance as seen in the selected poems by Anglo-American Women Writers?

## Methodology

This research is conducted through a thorough library study by employing extensive close reading to critically scrutinize both primary and secondary data. The approach applied in this research is feminist literary criticism by combining several relevant feminist perspectives. It addresses various diverse concerns of gender issues and women problems and marginalization; therefore, the selected approach(es) are plural and not singular. Accordingly, the selected approaches and perspectives are not only catered to literary and aesthetic aspects but also with conscious ideological and social orientations. By doing so, those selected relevant approaches and perspectives help the researcher critically analyze the engendered power imbalances and to focus on the absence of women from the dominant discourse as well as to highlight meaningful opportunities and spaces opened by the possible existence of women's discourse(s).

## Results and Discussion

### ***Patriarchal Gender Construction of Private-Public Dichotomy***

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminists developed the term 'patriarchy' to refer to the systematic nature of men's power (Schaum & Flanagan, 1998, p.1). Moreover, patriarchy has also been defined as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which through hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Hartmann, 1981, p. 14-15). One of the patriarchal systematic strategies to maintain

the privilege of men and the subordination of women is by creating private-public binary opposition that divides the world "into masculine and feminine spheres, and justifying this on the grounds of (natural) sex difference." It is indeed "an ancient strategy of the male oppressor" (Cameron, 1990, p. 11). This dichotomy of gender sphere is hierarchical and always for male privilege. The gender division of labour and sphere has evolved from time to time. However, whenever women are allowed to participate in public sphere such as in the labour market and become the breadwinner for their family; they are still expected to perform their domestic functions at home in their private sphere. Meanwhile, the society would not expect men to fulfill both roles in their case.

Although today's life experience has shown that technologies both early and modern have been able to complicate, blur, and merge the private-public divide and provide fluidity to shift from one sphere to the other simultaneously, but the dichotomy is still constantly (re)produced from time to time in relation to the gender-specific domain. The early one is exemplified in the case of photography (and later by the video) that enables the creation of family photo album to display the family private sphere to the public consumption where women generally are in charge of family's archives.

*Family photography, the family album and home video are powerful ways in which these rituals are captured and framed so as to offer families an audience, a kind of private/public gaze that surveys and monitors the parameters and success of the performance* (Chambers, 2001, p. 29).

Meanwhile, the recent one is the social media phenomenon that provides people of different walks of life and genders to publicly display their private lives on the internet; and gender is still crucial in differentiating this private-public display contexts.

### ***Private-Public Divide in Relation to Gender and Genre***

The gender separation of private-public sphere does not only result in the different

gender roles and functions but also dictates what and how women and men may participate in education, literacy and linguistic access, writing profession and literary scene.

*Latin had become a male, public language, which existed only within the academic institutions. Women could only learn vernaculars and for centuries were denied access to the world of formal, public communication (including literature). As Ong notes, until the nineteenth century learning Latin meant entrance into the male educated elite. Latin had become a 'sex-linked language, a kind of badge of masculine identity' (Cameron, 1990, p. 42).*

Consequently, women also received their literacy and knowledge through vernacular education. Accordingly, literary genres commonly associated with women (the novel in particular) were those that took root from the production of private vernacular writing (letters/diaries) and had little or nothing from classical sources and models. Therefore, "Genre is a socio-historical as well as a formal entity. transformations in genre must be considered in relation to social changes" (Todorov, 1984, p. 80).

The limited space and genre for women to write, however, did not prevent them to produce writings that became the vehicle to articulate their voice and life stories and histories such as expressed by Woolf in her tribute to Dorothy Osborne.

*Had she been born in 1827, Dorothy Osborne would have written novels; had she been born in 1527, she would never have written at all. But she was born in 1627, and at that date though writing books was ridiculous for a woman there was nothing unseemingly in writing a letter. And so by degrees the silence is broken ... (Virginia Woolf).*

Letter writing would also contribute to the development of novel in the West and the early form of novel is epistolary novel. When women were finally allowed to participate in novel writing (although firstly many would have to use male pseudo-name for public approval), the epistolary aspect was still

maintained as seen in the novels of Jane Austen and other English women writers of her time. Women as writers to produce public texts indeed had just started quite late and had to endure hierarchical and discriminatory reception and acclaim.

*(In) the gender inscriptions in the mass culture debate ... woman is positioned as a reader of inferior literature — subjective, emotional and passive —while man ... emerges as a writer of genuine, authentic literature —objective, ironic, and in control of his aesthetic means (Huyssen, 1986, p. 46).*

Women were formerly known as the consumers of the so-called "less-valued" literary products. Novel as a genre provides women with the necessary tool and space to voice their stories and life experience in their domestic sphere and marginalization. Their silence was finally publicly broken.

### ***Gender and Poetry***

In literary tradition, the perspectives of "gender" and "genderless" are applied not equally. Christiane Rochefort, for example, laments the view how "man's book is a book. A woman's book is a woman's book" (1981, p. 183). This unequal concept of gender and writing production is also apparent in the conception of genre. In its tradition and conception, literary genre is not genderless. To illustrate, in Japanese literary history, during the Heian period in Japan (794-1185), poetry writing was men's prerogative; this exclusive literary genre privilege was also conducted in Chinese language, the official language of religion and government at the time. Meanwhile, in the tenth century, vernacular prose, particularly literary diaries, belonged to women to the extent that the leading male poet of the day, Ki no Tsurayuki, pretended to be a woman in order to write a literary diary in Japanese—reversal of the George Eliot phenomenon in English literary tradition (Wurzbach, 1969; Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). In 16th century England, dramatists and poets were men and Elizabethan literature was undoubtedly exclusively also masculine, while women were portrayed as silent and

uneducated as imagined by Woolf in her search for Shakespeare's literary sisters.

Poetry as one of the traditional genre trinity in Western literary tradition is also clearly gendered. There were women like Sappho and her fellow women who were dedicated to writing poetry on a Greek island 600 years before the birth of Christ, but their works and existence were silenced for a long period. Poetic tradition becomes the arena of political and intellectual struggle where woman poets' marginal status and the exclusion of women poets from the canon of tradition can clearly be seen. Even until recently in the 20th century, the conception that 'the poet is male' still dominates the literary discourse. Poetry is still viewed as a privileged metalanguage in Western patriarchal culture; and women are traditionally denied this privilege because patriarchal discourse views women are not intellectually capable of producing this "most concentrated form of symbolic language – poetry" (Kaplan, 1990, p. 68). Interestingly, in terms of literary genre production and reproduction, W. H. Auden views it in gender and sex relation:

*The poet is the father who begets the poem which the language bears. At first sight this would seem to give the poet too little to do and the language too much, till one remembers that, as the husband, it is he, not the language, who is responsible for the success of their marriage... (in Cameron, 1990, p. 15).*

In Auden's perspective, it is clearly seen that the man/male becomes the key agent in the re/production of poetry; and the woman/female is merely a passive vessel.

Today, people regardless of gender and sexual orientation, social class and ethnic groups produce poems; their poetry writing may also articulate their lives and experience as members of the marginalized and oppressed groups. Rich as a feminist writer and scholar also sees the crucial role of poetry in representing the voice of women and their life experiences: "Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relation to

everything in the universe ... Think of the deprivation of women living for centuries without a poetry that spoke of women together, of women alone, of women as anything but the fantasies of men".

Various women from various backgrounds write poems about the right to speak and write to articulate their voices. Thus, in Rich's view "The desire to write imaginative poetry was and is a demand for access to parity within the law and myth-making groups in society." The poems selected as the object of the study in this research also display how poetry and poetry writing become the strategies of storytelling, transcending gender towards a woman's tradition (and herstories).

### ***Revisiting Feminist Strategies in the Selected Poem by the Anglo-American Women writers***

This part addresses the research focus on how the selected poems by Anglo-American women writers in this research become the voices that articulate and represent the lives of women who are traditionally marginalized by the patriarchal societies and also only become the object of the gaze and fantasies of male writers in the past. The selected poems are Kristine Batey's "Lot's Wife," Edna St. Vincent Millay's "An Ancient Gesture," Dorothy Parker's "Penelope," and Æmilia Lanyer's "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women."

All the poems articulate the lives of women in patriarchal societies. These poems articulate the feminist strategies to talk back and write back to challenge the patriarchal discourse on gender and writing to rewrite history through herstories and not as traditionally conveyed as men's fantasies in male literary tradition.

Kristine Batey might be a lesser known American poet, but her poem "Lot's Wife" articulates a very powerful statement about the private life of a biblical figure who is publicly known as Lot's wife who disobeyed God's command and at the end turned into a pillar of salt.

The poem is written in free verse form without any regular rhyme and rhythm and takes her public name as the title of the poem. Batey's poem can be viewed as a revisiting, rewriting, and talking back strategy to challenge the traditional portrayal of this biblical woman as the disobedient and materialistic wife. The title of the poem and the way this biblical woman is known already suggests a patriarchal notion of naming and identities. She is unnamed and simply known as the wife of Lot; therefore, her identity is attached to her marital status and her husband's name.

The first early lines of the poem already display the binary opposition of public-private spheres. Lot, the husband occupies the public domain representing the nation: "While Lot, the conscience of a nation, struggles with the Lord, she struggles with the housework." Meanwhile, the wife is assigned into the private sphere performing domesticity. Her gender roles are not only doing all the domestic chores but also performing her feminine stereotypical duties as the nurtures to take care of her children.

Despite this public-private domain divide, the poem interestingly employs similar diction to the roles that both husband and wife perform "struggles;" thus, the text assigns equal status on both tasks and dismisses the notion of superior and inferior rank for both the doers and their tasks. Therefore, although the wife is explicitly placed in the domestic domain, the diction "struggles" attempts to prevent the woman/wife from being relegated to a secondary role. This "feminist" diction clearly bears linguistic and ideological strategies to challenge the patriarchal discourse on gender and power relation. Traditionally, patriarchal discourse linguistically and ideologically privileges man's public domain and status and in turn, demeans woman's private domain and domestic duties as inferior rank and unimportant chores.

In addition to the feminist strategy of designating equal status of both public and private domain in relation to gender and power interplay, there is also another feminist strategy in reversing the stereotypical active-

passive binary opposition. Lot represents "the conscience" that is related to inner feeling and inward activities and more physically passive; such trait is usually stereotypically attached to women. Meanwhile, Lot's wife is more physically active performing all her domestic chores and nurturing duties. When her husband told her about God's judgment to destroy their city, her reaction is not the stereotypical hysteric woman; instead, she "calmly begins to pack." Other stereotypical feminine traits of women (such as tears, gentleness, and nurturing qualities) are also employed but more of positive undertones to portray her empathy and love toward her children and neighbors and even the animals that she has lovingly tended all their life.

Other feminine images are also employed to portray her solidarity to the female bond ("She smiles blindly to the woman who held her hand at childbed") and human bond ("On the breast of the hill, she chooses to be human, and turns, in farewell--- and never regrets the sacrifice") she emphatically has for others. The image of two women holding each other at childbed represents a strong female bond in facing the female reproductive role and process (childbearing) together and to support one another. She remembers the kindness of her fellow female neighbor and thinks about her neighbor's safety and welfare.

Beside childbearing, "breast" is also another female and feminine image to portray the nurturing, loving, and empathetic traits that she has for humankind; she chooses to be human and to be one of them and among them. Instead of viewing her end as a pillar of salt as a punishment, the text refers to it as "sacrifice" for her fellow humankind. By intimately portraying the day-to-day experience of Lot's wife, the poem at the same time also gives her a voice to articulate her mind and her heart. Through her stories, she is no longer muted and silenced woman who is judged as a disobedient and materialistic woman in the biblical stories that deserves severe punishment and forever will only be remembered for her worldly desire and archetypal pillar of salt; instead, her side of the stories is highlighted and her being human is emphasized and not simply as just Lot's wife.

In this manner, language and literature (poetry) in this case becomes the site to challenge the patriarchal gender discourse both aesthetically and ideologically. This discussion of archetypal biblical female figures is also continued in the next analysis of Lanyer's "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women".

Similar to Batey's "Lot's Wife," Aemilia Lanyer's "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women" also takes an archetypal biblical female figure as a strategy of revisiting and writing back to give voice to Eve who is traditionally portrayed as a *femme fatale* who tempts her partner into a sinful act that eventually brings "everlasting fall" to humankind. Lanyer is one of the first English women who wrote poetry during the Elizabethan Renaissance period. Her work and reputation in predominantly male and masculine literary circle are indeed very striking and she is often considered as one of the earliest English feminists because her work also expresses women's lives in the domineering patriarchal society.

Lanyer's sympathetic portrayal of Eve is also often compared and contrasted to Milton's depiction of Eve as a cunning woman in his poetry volume *Paradise Lost*. Although Lanyer's work was actually published first when Milton just started his volume in 1667, it is evidently clear that the traditional patriarchal stereotype of Eve is more widely known and accepted in both literary and cultural contexts because it is sprung from more established religious powerful discourse.

Her selected work in this research is a part of a single poetry volume entitled *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* or *Hail God King of the Jews* published in 1611. This volume begins with some minor poems written and dedicated to some famous and influential women in Lanyer's life and "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women" is one of them. This poem is written in regular stanza of six, eight, and twelve lines with the regular "ab" end rhyme. The striking contrast between Lanyer's portrayal of Eve and the traditional patriarchal portrayal of Eve as a "cunning seductress who is also stupid and vain" (such as in Milton's *Paradise Lost*) is clearly seen in addressing Eve as "Our mother Eve" tenderly. The female bond is clearly seen in the diction "Our mother" in claiming Eve as

mother figure for womenkind. Not only depicted as a foremother of women, but Eve is also portrayed as possessing good and kindhearted nature, it is indeed a far cry from being a stupid, vain, and cunning seductress of the traditional patriarchal archetypal rendition of Eve.

Moreover, in this poem, Eve is also closely related to the one who longs for knowledge and when she is promised to acquire it she wants to share it with her partner; thus, she does not want to be the sole bearer of the knowledge. It is such intention that she has in mind, and not attempting to tempt her partner into a sinful betrayal of God's order. In relation to the empowerment of women and biblical female figure, different from Batey's "Lot's Wife" that attempts to give voice and articulate her stories, Lanyer's poem in doing so also put the blame mostly on Eve's partner, Adam: "But surely Adam cannot be excused ... If Eve did err, it was for knowledge' sake... Not Eve, whose fault was only too much love ... Which made her give this present to her dear, Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame". Sharing the gift of knowledge with Adam is her only intention. After the fall, both are stripped off from their privilege as the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden, yet it is always Eve who has to bear the burden as the sinful one and is also punished in her labour of reproducing offspring. This painful reproductive labor is then passed on to all womenkind according to the discourse. Eve is no longer connected to the bearer of knowledge but only as a cunning temptress who brings calamity to humankind.

In closing lines, this poem attempts to return this ownership of knowledge to Eve and refers to men as Adam's boastful male descendants who stole the knowledge from Eve's hand. Lanyer's poem does not employ many particular female or feminine traits as in Batey's poem except Eve's gentle, kind, and loving qualities. There is also no reversal of gender roles and spheres, but the intention to restore Eve's reputation is evidently most important. By revisiting and rewriting the life of this biblical archetypal woman, the poem articulates her stories from her eyes, and Eve's reputation as a *femme fatale* is challenged. As a result, she is portrayed as a kind, gentle, and loving partner and foremother who wants to



share the gift of knowledge for noble and human reasons, particularly for women, and the title signifies the aim of "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women".

The next analysis also discusses another archetypal female figure in the form of revisiting and writing back but not from Judeo-Christian-Islamic source and instead it takes the Greco-Roman texts as the source of Penelope's portrayal, the wife of the Greek Odysseus or the Roman Ulysses cycle.

"An Ancient Gesture" is written by the American poet, St. Vincent Millay. As a poet, her works receive various acceptances from scholars and fellow writers. Male writers consider her as a sentimental poet who lacks artistic depth; meanwhile, feminist scholars resurrect her forgotten works and defend Millay's reputation as one of the great lyric poets of the 20th century in American literary tradition. Millay is also the first woman who receives Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Her selected poem in this research is posthumously published and can be found in her recent edition of collected poems of 1981 and 1991.

This poem is in two stanzas that start with the same line in each stanza. It is also written through the first person point of view where the narrator "I" reflects her life experience by alluding to the experience of Penelope, the wife of the famous Greek warrior Odysseus (or Ulysses in Roman mythology) who led the Greeks in the Trojan war and their return home in his journey (odyssey).

The gender identities and sphere are clearly set in this poem. The narrator (the "I") is a woman as seen in the word "my apron", "weaving," and also "your husband." The private sphere is seen through the apron that the speaker wears that also indicates the stereotypical gender role and sphere where the speaker performs her gender domestic/household duties in the kitchen even in the absence of the husband who had gone for a long time performing his duties outside their household.

Meanwhile, the activity of weaving is attached to both the speaker and Penelope as well. Weaving has become an archetypal

feminine symbol for women in Western literary tradition. It symbolizes both containment and tool of liberation, passivity and at the same time also becomes the tool to articulate their voice in the domestic sphere.

Images of the weaving women are abundant in Western literature such as seen in the Greek mythology in the way Penelope weaving while patiently waiting for the return of her husband, or the famous Celtic Arthurian stories of the Lady of Shallot who spends her time weaving in her tower while watching all happenings outside her castle through a mirror for she is cursed and condemned for never seeing outside world directly through her eyes, or the Native American legend of the spider women who weave to articulate her tribal histories through their woven storytelling baskets.

In the case of Penelope, her act of weaving is intricately related to both her familial gender roles and feminine strategies to liberate herself from patriarchal pressures. In the mythology, Penelope's husband, Odysseus/Ulysses, struggles in waging the Trojan war and continuing his odyssey to return home fighting sea monsters, nymphs, siren and other supernatural beings. Meanwhile, Penelope has to stay at home waiting for his return and raising their only son Telemachus, and at the same time, also struggles to negotiate with her male pursuers to be their wife.

Weaving becomes one of Penelope's strategies to delay this marriage proposal; she tells them that she has to finish weaving first to make a funeral shroud for her father-in-law before agreeing to marry one of her suitors. This excuse is socially and culturally accepted because she performs her familial gender duty as a filial and dutiful daughter-in-law. This act together with her patience in waiting for her husband (until presumed dead), and caring for her child, also establish her as a virtuous woman in performing all her familial duties and gender roles as a good wife, mother, and daughter in law. In performing all those duties and roles in the absence of the husband, Penelope has to struggle in her own way in the assigned limited gender spheres yet she still maintains to do it all without violating the

gender roles and spheres. Thus, weaving as a feminine symbol in Penelope's case can be viewed as a subtle feminist strategy to refuse to be contained in yet another domination of another man (to be the wife of her suitors) without transgressing the patriarchal values and norms.

With the long absence of her husband (and also presumably dead), she is socially and culturally viewed as "free to be possessed," therefore, is eligible to be transferred from her husband's paternal family to another man's paternal family. Her identities and existence depend upon her husband and his paternal family. Through this kind of weaving as feminine imagery, the speaker of the poem links her common "destiny" with Penelope's.

Another archetypal symbol presented in this poem is "tears" and the act of crying. Interestingly, this act of crying is not only presented as exclusively a feminine trait but also attached it to both woman and man; thus, tears and the act of crying are not merely feminine but also masculine. However, the poem also redefines tears and the act of crying for both feminine and masculine traits and in the process of redefining it, the poem employs the gender sphere as a marker, therefore, at the end, also re/genders it.

By comparing and contrasting tears and the act of crying performed by the speaker, Penelope, and Ulysses/Odysseus in their assigned sphere, the poem redefines its feminine and masculine traits and values by privileging the feminine one over the masculine act. The poem views the women's tears and act of crying in their domestic/private sphere as a genuine act to articulate their helplessness and hopelessness in living without the presence of their husbands in the oppressive patriarchal society, meanwhile, Odysseus/Ulysses' tears and the act of crying in front of his public audience is viewed as a mere spectacle and tactic to gain sympathy and public approval.

Thus, on one hand, the poem also implicitly suggests and conjures images of the women cry their silent tears alone in silence inside the home without the presence of others, therefore, highlighting their struggles,

unhappiness, and suffering. On the other hand, Odysseus/Ulysses' tears and act of crying in the presence of his audience and followers would be followed by public cheering applause and articulated gratitude for his sacrifices and well-performed duties to establish him as the national hero of the Greek. This poem and its focus and privileging discourse for the woman characters over the man then becomes a crucial aesthetical and ideological space to give voice to these women and their stories that have been silenced and not recognized in the public sphere that has always privileged their male members as the heroes. The next analysis also takes the poem concerning the life of Penelope and her husband written by Dorothy Parker.

Dorothy Parker is an American writer who is famously known for her wits and ironic styles. Dorothy Parker's "Penelope" is a simple and short poem with a humorous style but conveys a powerful challenge to the patriarchal discourse of gender roles and spheres.

The poem consists of ten lines in two stanzas and it takes Penelope's name as the title. It is written in first person point of view with Penelope as the speaker/narrator or the "I". It starts with the depiction of the world outside with the sun, open sky, the sea and all the grandeur of the natural world.

The character "He" is Odysseus/Ulysses amidst his great journey or odyssey conquering all the great challenges. The next stanza then portrays the casual domestic activities of Penelope the "I" in her domestic private sphere, the home. Weaving as a feminine archetypal symbol is also employed here to depict Penelope's act of weaving "snip my thread" and also her other domestic household chores of brewing tea and bleaching the linen for the bed. The poem then ends simply with the establishment of her husband as a brave hero.

The poem's flow of thought and stanza organization/division serves as a border between the public open space in the first stanza to depict Odysseus/Ulysses' journey and adventure to the contained domestic private sphere and world inhabited by

Penelope in the second stanza. However, the diction/choice of words that are used to portray these different masculine and feminine activities are in the form of reversal, that is, weak verb and day-to-day diction and casual everyday terms, (such as pathway, footsteps, ride, and cut)) for masculine deeds in the public sphere, meanwhile, the strong verbs and strong nouns are used to suggest the hardships of the feminine deeds in the domestic private sphere (such as rock, rise, heed). It is not only humor presented in the poem but more of irony and sarcasm as seen in the last line ("They will call him brave") that suddenly and abruptly cuts the idyllic domestic activities of Penelope in the home.

This irony/sarcasm strategically mocks Odysseus/Ulysses' reputation as a brave warrior and hero by juxtaposing it with laidback and causal domestic activities of Penelope. This revisiting and rewriting strategy of the poem at the same time gives the side of Penelope's life and her story no matter how at the end, it is her husband who gets the recognition publicly.

## Conclusion

All the four poems selected here written by women writers of the Anglo American tradition as seen in Kristine Batey's "Lot's Wife," Lanyer's "Eve's Apology in the Defense of Women," Millay's "Ancient Gesture," and Parker's "Penelope" highlight the life and experience of women who have been the important figures in the Western literary tradition. By revisiting these archetypal women from Greco Roman and Biblical sources, these women writers also rewrite their stories and experience from women's perspectives that challenge the patriarchal rendition of these women.

The act of these revisiting and rewriting is also conducted in the particular genre, that is poetry, that used to be the exclusive and privileged male genre, which traditionally bars women to express their experience in this genre. There are various strategies employed in these selected poems that attempt to challenge the patriarchal discourse on gender roles and spheres.

Some of the strategies present among others are the reversal of public and private spheres, gender stereotypes, and linguistic aspects in both aesthetic and ideological levels. These strategies are crucial and employed as an arena of power struggles that articulates the voice and stories of women who traditionally have been marginalized and silenced in the patriarchal societies.

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