

Riding's poetry in the Theory of Gynocriticism

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Abstract- *Laura Riding Jackson is one of the influential poets of the early twentieth century in America. As a matter of fact, it is for her poetry, however, that Riding is best known, and her poems reflect her commitment to write with truth. In the other words, she knows poetry a process of a degree of awareness to recognize the capacity to know selfhood. Further, her accuracy as a writer lies in her extreme seriousness about the act of writing poems, with no attention to the outside. Nevertheless, the critics know her poems as a game, not something valuable to consider. Therefore, in the heart of traditional poetic language of masculinity, she continues her way of 'female phase' of Showalter, toward poetic history. Showalter's gynocriticism is a framework for women in which a woman can judge a woman's literature womanly. Present research is looking at Laura Riding Jackson's some poems through Showalter's cultural view of 'female phase' of her gynocriticism.*

Keywords- *Gynocriticism; Female Phase; Masculinity; Selfhood; Traditional Culture*

1. INTRODUCTION

Laura Riding Jackson was born in 1901 in New York City, and she dies in 1991 in Florida. Approximately, she publishes her volumes of poetry, some short poems and equally some long ones, in 1930s. She appreciates poems in a way that her life and her art of telling poems are the same. Perhaps she can put her real feeling inside of every word, phrase, or sentence in the lines of her poems. Sometimes her philosophy in poems represents a kind of self-discovery. As a matter of fact, she knows poetry a process of a degree of awareness to recognize the capacity to know selfhood. In addition, her poems reflect her commitment to write with truth.

For her, art of writing poems is beyond every philosophy or religion. At any rate, "Neither science, philosophy, nor religion could offer so complete a conception of reality or express it so perfect" [16]. Nevertheless, she is searching truth through her poetry.

Some critics know her as modernist, however, "In the new Rothenberg and Joris anthology, Poems for the Millennium, she now has one poem and her poetics is referred to as antimodernist" [11]. But Riding discusses against empiricism; "empiricism is that as a model of knowledge, it precludes all other models of knowledge and so, necessarily, of truth" [9]. Although, she does not know herself as a modernist, she uses the form of modernist poetry. However, she believes

that "modern poetry comes with the pace of civilization, and intellectual history...contemporary poetry, which confesses no programme ... it does not profess a literary cause" [10]. Furthermore, Jon Cook continues that for her "poetry is the high polish of civilization...poetry consequently is made into a constantly expanding institution, embodying form period to period all the rapidly developing specialized form of knowledge, enlarging itself by broadening the definition of poetry to include

psychology and applied theories of music and painting, physical science and so on" [10].

On the contrary, she continues with Robert Graves writing histories and then stories rather than poetry. No critic or poets distinguishes or cares the worth of Riding's poetry, "Only in recent years, critics begun to recognize the true worth of Riding's works" [16]. However, "She had eventually realized that there was a further obstacle to truth, one that could not easily be avoided" [16]. Seeking truth is something she permanently considers, in fact, seeking self in the world of truth, she means. Therefore, she leaves writing poetry, while she wants to continue her living. Further, the society of her time, presses on her in a way that she cannot continue singly, and in isolation, or maybe she finds that, achieving truth is impossible.

Permanently, women have influenced on the literature of their time, however, they impress on the early twentieth century period. As a result, the researcher is going to demonstrate such an impression in Laura Riding Jackson's poems and how she as a poetic character has changed the content of traditional poetry, although she accepts the modernist form. Therefore, in the heart of traditional poetic language of masculinity, she continues her way of 'female phase' of Showalter, toward poetic history.

Generally, present research is focusing on Laura Riding Jackson's poems through which she states her feeling, truth, and philosophy. Further, there are some questions that this research is looking for finding the answers, based on Showalter's theory of gynocriticism: What does Riding seek in her poetic world? Is she actually seeking self? What does she want to demonstrate? Is there any pressure on her life as a poet? What are the ideas of the critics of the time, about her poetry? How can a researcher recognize the cultural change of the time and the difference with recent years?

Apparently, there are very many critics and writers to write about Laura Riding Jackson's poetry. Jerome McGann, in

his essay; Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Literal Truth, elaborates historically, the relation of language and truth, and how these two are not separable. McGann understands Riding's poetry as "a continuation of modernism in which constructivism emphasizes on the words,"[9] and thus she is as a pioneer of the experimental poetry of the first decades of the 20th century.

Additionally, Heuving considers Riding's view to construct a new poetics in relation to comparable responsibility to critics; she also finds in Riding's poetry especially feminist principles and practices and links her, on these grounds, to Gertrude Stein.

Barbara Henning argues in her essay; Mrs. Jackson is Riding my Thought, that, what the spiritual function of language in her poems is, and how poems can transfer the real spiritual poetics in human existence.

Moreover, Ella Zohar Ophir's essay; The Laura Riding Question: Modernism, Poetry, and Truth, she discusses about her poems and life and how they are interactive that separation of them is impossible.

William Carlos Williams and sometimes Stevens consider poetry as an autonomous art, while Riding asks them how this achievement can be possible.

Some writers know Riding as a modernist, like Victor M. Cassidy. Because, her poetic diction resembles rhetoric of modernists. Cassidy believes in Riding Jackson, as a poet whose life and poetry are inseparable. And by working with Robert Graves, she could understand a great deal.

Charles Bernstein in his essay: Riding's Reason, elaborates her poetry as a means of reflecting more deeply on the inherent conflicts between truth telling and poetry, no one has ever done in North America or Europe in poetry.

Peter S. Temes' the Code of Silence: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Refusal to Speak, is about her leaving poetry. Although, poetry becomes for her, a 'self-contradictory' field of linguistic expression, she leaves it. He tries to discuss about the reason why she has left poetry.

Jo-Ann Wallace writes the essay: Laura Riding and the Politics of Decanonization. She elaborates in her essay two folds; the first one is why critics neglect Laura Riding as a major woman poet. Secondly, Riding represents the case of a writer who has been effectively decanonized because of her insistence upon being the ultimate referent of her own work and because of her refusal to cede either interpretive or descriptive authority over her work.

Michael A. Masopust's essay: Laura Riding's Quarrel with Poetry, is arguing about her leaving poetry and there is nothing particularly surprising about a poet abandoning poetry. In reality Laura Riding has quit poetry because she becomes indifference toward it.

Through the, 1970s, the most leading critic is Elaine Showalter. She argues in her essay, Toward a Feminist Poetics: "Feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct varieties. The first type is concern with woman as reader- with the woman as the consumer of male... the second type of feminist criticism is concerned with woman as writer- with woman as the producer of textual meaning,

with the history, themes, genres and structure of literature by women" (148) [5]. It seems, it is a new perspective, Showalter explains as a literary phenomenon, in which women are divided as readers and writers. For, women readers are the ones who imitate the current scale of men, while women writers are different to bring new idea of their own. In the world that male writers have written in their magazines, like Westminster Review, Silly Novels by Lady Novelists, challenges of women writers begin.

Showalter notices, ultimately, in her book A Literature of Their Own (1977), which its name is given from Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, the notion of "three historical phases of female writing: the feminine phase (1840-1880), the feminist phase (1880-1920), and female phase (1970-present)" [4]. In the first phase, women have written the stories base on men's opinion, like George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte. "While the feminine novelist was portrayed as vain, publicity-seeking, and self-assertive,"[8] male critics humiliated their novels. This period includes novelists "like Austen, Mrs. Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, The Bronte, and ..." (A Literature of Their Own, 1977, p.18)[8]. In the second phase, women has written base on reviewing the harsh men actions and women against the whole women. However, women writers are subculture of men world. "By subculture we mean simply a habit of living... of a minority group which is self-consciously distinct from the dominant activities, expectations, and values of a society"[8]. As a matter of fact, women are going to be conscious, to begin understanding themselves. Therefore, "for women, as for other subcultures, literature became a symbol of achievement"[8]. Little by little, males fear from female writers, because they will become more powerful, and being powerful means more dominant. In this era, there are novelists like "Marry Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, and Florence Marryat"[8].

In the third phase "female writers reject both 'feminine' phase and secondary or minor position of female characters that dominated the 'feminist' phase"[4]. Showalter concentrates on females' information and understanding that must be developed in art, especially in literature. Because she believes that "female writers were deliberately excluded from the literary canon by male professors who first established the canon itself"[4]. In the other words, she is searching a new world for women essentially focuses on women experiences, even if, they are accepted by male or not. In addition, this is a "phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity"[8]. When the First World War begins, men have gone to fight and women writers find a new space and new situation in which they can go to have a self-exploration. Consequently, "the fiction of Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf created a deliberate female aesthetic, which transformed the feminine code of self-sacrifice into an annihilation of the narrative self, and applied the cultural analysis of the feminists to words, sentences, and structures of language in the novel"[8].

Moreover, female exploration is a kind of self-discovery, that Showalter called it gynocriticism: "through gynocriticism, Showalter exposes the false cultural assumptions and characteristics of women as depicted in canonical literature" (Bressler, 2007, p.176)[4]. As a matter of fact, male worlds especially critics are involved in their masculine view, in which women are not allowed to be. Showalter herself argues in her essay; "what I mean here by 'male critical theory' is a concept of creativity, literary history, or literary interpretation based entirely on male experience and put forward as universal"[5].

In fact, gynocriticism is a framework for women in which a woman can judge a woman's literature, womanly. Furthermore, "unlike traditional literary criticism, gynocriticism focused on the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women"[6]. Showalter's vision about the last phase, female phase, concentrates on four models; the biological model, the linguistic model, the psychological model, and the cultural model. To elaborate the models, the first one is based on the body of a woman and how this body is demonstrated in a womanly text, personally or generally. The second model depends on the female discourse, or the variety of man or woman language usage. The psychoanalytic model is the third one, in which, a woman's psyche influenced the written text, and how it is different from a male written text. Continuously, the last one is the cultural model that searching in the dominant society, and how it, in fact, constructs the women world in the superior male constructional world, although women are looking for finding their desires in the society, by challenging, arguing, and investigating.

Even someone stresses repression, or expression, no matter, both are gynocriticism. Centrally, both are focusing on cultural point that Showalter means considering "women's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur" [5]. In fact, the women ways are important, "the ways in which women conceptualize their bodies and their sexual and reproductive functions are intricately linked to their cultural environments"[5]. Obviously, bodies, language, and psyche, all influence on cultural assumption in women culture which is constructed in male culture, simultaneously, in accompany with the other sciences that influence the women as well as the men culture. Showalter mentions: "Hypotheses of women's culture have been developed over the last decade primarily by anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians in order to get away from masculine systems, hierarchies, and values and to get at the primary and self-defined nature of female cultural experience" (Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness, 1981, p. 321) [8].

Generally, the female experiences focus on the society they live. As a result, it can be domestic and at the same time universal for the other women around the world. But there are different forms of analysis in women's text to explore the cultural view, therefore, text is the first and the most important concrete instrument in which this research

is following. Here, Laura Riding Jackson's poems are the text present research is going to explore according to Showalter's perspective; cultural points of the time that is not separated from her language.

2. RIDING'S POETRY IN THE THEORY OF GYNOCRITICISM

It is for her poetry, however, that Riding is best known, and her poems reflect her commitment to write with truth. As a matter of fact, she knows poetry a process of a degree of awareness to recognize the capacity to know selfhood. Further, her accuracy as a writer lies in her extreme seriousness about the act of writing poems, with no attention to the outside. Nevertheless, the critics know her poems as a game and not something valuable to consider. According to Laura (Riding) Jackson, when she still believed in poetry and wrote it, poetry is not to create 'art' but to discover "an advanced degree of self"[15]. Biographically, she was born to a family with so much deprivation, therefore, at the beginning of her life, prevention begins: "Born Laura Reichenenthal to a poor Jewish working-class family in Brooklyn, Riding suffered from familial tensions, emotional deprivation and feelings of inferiority about her low social class"[11].

In fact, she suffers from her life in the condition, no one cares about her, and neither her family nor society pays attention to her will and her poetry. At early years, she believes in poetry because she writes everything base on the truth of her life. As Bernstein describes her poetry in a way that, "no North American or European poet of this century [20th century] has created a body of work that reflects more deeply on the inherent conflicts between truth telling and the inevitable artifice of poetry than Laura (Riding) Jackson" (1999, p.255) [12]. Further, Henning believes that her language can reveal her experience about the people, and their behavior toward women, especially women writers; "Riding's project as I understand it is to uplift her reader's word-experience, to undo the lying word and arrive at a primal experience with language, as an act of continually uncovering"[2]. But for her, it is not enough, as a result, she leaves writing poetry. After 1930s, eventually, there are some more reasons why she has become silent, however, her poetry is the demonstration of her world's sphere; "she had once believed poetry a moral force, offering through the properly resonant combination of sound and meaning a link among individuals"[17]. Additionally, Henning reveals her desire as "each poem she considered a part of her self-becoming, her 'diary of identity': A poem is an advanced degree of self"[2].

Culturally, she criticizes the patriarchal society as a place for preventing her to continue writing poems. "However, the renunciation was in many ways typical of both her poetics and her philosophy, which were characterized by a profound resistance to the social and the historical and an equally profound drive toward the absolute and the universal"[13]. In reality, she was under the family's as well as society's pressure. "In 1916 she argued bitterly with

her father: she was not going to become Rosa Luxemburg, but a poet. She would spring free of the ghetto on the wings of 'pure' language" [11]. Her father was a Jewish immigrant from Austria and her mother was a New York born daughter of German immigrants. They really, were rebellions of the time. In opposition to them, she wants to be just a poet and to tell experiences by her philosophy. Ultimately, language for her is a realm of understanding, while Dadaists look for destruction of language, she responds them; "while the Dadaists were working at destroying and overthrowing Western logic, she hammered with her words, lightly, heavily, believing that there was a humane woman-logic in the roots of language" [2]. In fact, Laura Riding Jackson knows masculine morality in their society as an absolute point, although she assaults it in her poems; "the poems clearly criticize and sometimes directly assault the patriarchal social in situations that a woman artist of her day was forced to deal with" [17]. Intentionally, her poems, are the representation of her deprivation to return from her idea to speak as a poet. On the other hand, Riding, absolutely, is in the third phase, Showalter elaborates in her gynocriticism: "through gynocriticism, Showalter exposes the false cultural assumptions and characteristics of women as depicted in canonical literature [4]. In fact, it is false 'cultural assumptions' in masculine world. Showalter describes historically, there are three phases in women's writing, in which the researcher puts Jackson in the third phase because she has a new imagination; "Jackson committed herself to a public identity as a speaking woman but then retreated from the commitment because her speech-- her poems, taken together--began to seem like a 'mistold confidence,' a set of deeply held beliefs endangered, perhaps even distorted, by the objectifying consequences of articulation" [17]. Undoubtedly, Riding is seeking a 'confidence' internally, in spite, her critics want to 'erase' it, for they cannot accept her way of speaking.

*So I began those mistold confidences
Which now read like profanity of self
To my internal eye
And which my critic hand erases
As the story grows too difficult to speak of
In the way the world speaks. (The Poems, 1980,
p. 263) [14]*

Perhaps, the patriarchal society of the time do not tolerate such a stupidity from a woman to have a feeling of confidence that depicts her "profanity of self", actually, this is very painful for her "In the way the world speaks." In another poem, Riding notes that people do not notice her as she exists, however, she loves them mostly, 'the citizens' are 'unloyal';

*Love me not less, next to myself
Most unloyal of the citizens,
...
For by such looseness
I argue you with my tight conscience
And take you for so long, an empty term,
An irony of dearness.*

...
*Bold and shy speed and recession,
Climax and suspension. [15]*

Although she knows this 'looseness'; because this 'looseness' is nothing but 'An irony'; "An irony of dearness". Consequently, she speaks through passage of time, even if there is a 'recession', even if the society has no attention her experience in the dominant male world. Apparently, Riding in some of her poems demonstrates the social limitation at the time she lives. In her another poem: The Poet's Corner, she pictures the condition, the earth is immortal for having poetry; "And the earth is bedecked with immortality", however, there is an internal battle, in which males fight with others, especially females, while lustily speaking; "Here is a battle with no bravery/ But if the coward's tongue has gone/ Swording his own lusty lung". Riding believes that if they want to fight, let's do it. It may make them happy, in spite, they cannot understand that this is 'traitorous' talking. Her language is a representation of the time thought about female activity, here, it is in her poetry. "However, by turning the question poetry's social function into a more general examination of how we are to understand the relation of language and truth" [12]. Her language shows her suffrage from the society she lives in. That is the question, why male society laughs at women's world, and humiliates them. At any rate, she looks for a new identity, even if the male world cannot comprehend it. In this poem; The Poet's Corner, she pictures a poetic world in which poetry is immortal. No man or woman can prevent this immortality because poems can go everywhere beyond borders. Even graves cannot deprive this situation.

*Riding in "With the Face", mentions:
With the face goes a mirror
As with the mind a world.
Likeness tells the doubting eye
That strangeness is not strange.
At an early hour and knowledge
Identity not yet familiar
Looks back upon itself from later,
And seems itself.*

In reality, this is the time that everything is ordinary, but her identity has changed, in a way, she cannot distinguish herself in a mirror. It seems there is another person in the mirror, in spite, it is herself. Then she continues:
To-day seems now.

*With reality-to-be goes time.
With the mind goes a world.
With the heart goes a weather.
With the face goes a mirror,
As with the body a fear.*

The repetition of the structures is the representation of repetition of her life as she fears from looking in a mirror and she cannot find herself.

The other poem; 'Beyond', she explains her 'pain':
*Pain is impossible to describe
Pain is the impossibility of describing
Describing what is impossible to*

*Which must be a thing beyond description
Beyond description not to be known
Beyond knowing but not mystery
Not mystery but pain not plain
But pain beyond but here beyond [18]*

Obviously, the repetition of the words, like Gertrude Stein's repetitions may represents her idea, more precisely, her pain of being in such a condition. Here, language helps her to elaborate this 'mystery' that is 'not mystery'. As a matter of fact, "The standard of humanity becomes maleness, in order to increase his confidence in the universality of maleness," [2] it is necessary to take the confidence high. However, women always obey this situation and tolerate this pain; "Riding knows that selves are constructed in language between encounters with each other, but at the border, women often smile, submit and compromise instead of meeting as two" [2].

At last, she renounces poetry, perhaps she cannot find her searching truth in it. Nevertheless, she knows at the beginning, "poetry then is a transcendent of the individual who is writing the poem, poetry is a process that reveals or recognizes a beginning, an origin that causes all humans to become defined by the commonality of awareness, of being, of selfhood" (Adams, 1990, p.38) [1]. Although Riding continues her writing, she could not find things she wants, for, truth from different perspective is different, and patriarchal society does not pay attention her endurance of suffering the situation.

Laura Riding Jackson's *The Wind Suffers*, is a poem that resembles her suffrage more than her other poems;

*The wind suffers of blowing,
The sea suffers of water,
And fire suffers of burning,
And I of a living name.*

Everything comes from her suffrage, because she suffers from being. Therefore, the wind is not the wind, the sea is not the sea, the fire is not the fire, and finally she is not herself. She continues;

*As stone suffers of stoniness,
As light of its shiningness,
As birds of their wingedness,
So I of my whoness.*

On the other hand, she creates new expressions and words by adding –ness at the end of nouns, in a way, that she is in a strait of life pressure. In addition, she suffers from 'whoness' because she has lost her identity, and now she suffers from being human. Therefore, why? Maybe she cannot find self-identity in masculine world. And how she can release from this suffrage, from the world of contradictory;

*And what the cure of all this?
What the not and not suffering?
What the better and later of this?
What the more me of me?*

Here, Riding implies the painful world that is the source of her anguish.

*How for the pain-world to be
More world and no pain?*

*How for the old rain to fall
More wet and more dry? [18]*

Although, she is searching a self-discovery through the poem, she finds nothing but self-contradictory. Poems usually have words with more meaning to which, understanding them needs awareness about the condition as well as language. But whether it is possible to receive a truth in poems is a matter of doubt. "It is only through language that the human world is revealed and acquires meaning. That is the truth of language" [19]. Moreover, language is something that differs in difficult condition from other time. Consequently, her language reveals a painful pressure from outside, from society.

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Laura Riding Jackson is an independent poet in early twentieth century that searches a new life and elaborates a new poetry, in a new world, thematically. As a matter of fact, she is in the Showalter's third phase, historically, at the same time, she belongs to the type of woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structure of literature by a woman. Actually, she follows understanding poetry base on her philosophy and finding truth. On the other hand, she criticizes the patriarchal society as a place for preventing her to continue writing poems as a woman writer.

Permanently, women have influenced on the literature of their time, however, they impress on the early twentieth century period. As a result, the researcher has demonstrated such an impression in Laura Riding Jackson's poems and how she as a poetic character has changed the content of traditional poetry. However, in the heart of traditional poetic language of masculinity, she continues her way of Showalter's 'female phase', toward poetic history, in which through her poetic language masculine society judges her.

In other language, she seeks self-discovery in her poems while she emphasizes on finding truth, the outside pressure makes her to leave telling poems. Additionally, the critics know her a humiliated poet that focuses on self. However, she tries to depict her complex situation during the cultural change at that time.

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