

PERCEPTIONS OF FEMINISM IN BRIDGET JONES' DIARY

BRIDGET JONES'UN GÜNLÜĞÜNDE FEMİNİZM ALGILARI

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ABSTRACT

Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* can be considered a juxtaposition of feminism. The main character of Bridget Jones embodies both feminist ideals and anti-feminist, traditional perspectives. She is, at the same time, the autonomous, independent female who does not need a man, and also the traditional female who wants to be rescued by her knight on a white horse. As the main character attempts to navigate these two distinctly different ideals, she feels immense pressure from her environment (namely, her mother and friends) to find a man and "settle down". While she consciously understands that her worth should not be determined by her relationship status, the novel chronicles her attempts to find a suitable man to marry and father her children. The purpose of this research paper is thus to analyze both aspects of the character of Bridget Jones using the second and third wave perspectives of feminism. Analysis of the text through these two lenses presents the case of a modern young woman who is often confused by the conventional narrative of needing a rich man to marry which is held in her contemporary post-feminist world and which states that women can be independent and should not rely on any men.

Keywords: Post-Modern Feminism, Contemporary Western Woman, British Femininity

ÖZET

Helen Fielding'in *Bridget Jones'un Günlüğü* kitabı, feminizm ve anti-feminist gelenekselliğin yan yana sunulması olarak düşünülebilir. Ana karakter Bridget Jones, hem feminist idealleri hem de anti-feminist, geleneksel bakış açısına sahiptir. Aynı anda hem bir erkeğe ihtiyacı olmayan özerk, bağımsız bir kadın hem de beyaz atlı prensi tarafından kurtarılmak isteyen geleneksel bir kadındır. Ana karakter bu iki farklı idealde yolunu bulmaya çalışırken bir yandan da çevresinden (annesi ve arkadaşları) bir adam bulup "evlenip barklanması" için büyük bir baskı hisseder. Kendi değerinin ilişki durumuyla belirlenmemesi gerektiğinin bilincine varırken, romanda evlenme ve çocuklarının babası olması için uygun birini bulma girişimleri anlatılıyor. Dolayısıyla bu araştırmanın amacı, feminizmin ikinci ve üçüncü dalga perspektiflerini kullanarak Bridget Jones karakterinin her iki yönünü de analiz etmektir. Metnin bu iki bakış açısıyla incelenmesi, kadınların bağımsız olabileceğini ve herhangi bir erkeğe güvenmemeleri gerektiğini ifade eden çağdaş post-feminist dünyada zengin bir erkekle evlenmeye ihtiyaçları olduğunu belirten geleneksel anlatı yüzünden kafası karışık, genç ve modern bir kadının durumunu sunar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Post-Modern Feminizm, Çağdaş Batı Kadını, İngiliz Kadınlığı

1. INTRODUCTION

Bridget Jones's Diary is a narrative with an individualized perspective regarding community, treasure, biography, the opposite sex, and, in particular, Bridget Jones herself. It is composed in a diary format, displaying these ideas firsthand from Bridget's perspective. The diary encompasses an innovative deliverance technique about what Bridget "Will" and "Will Not" do in the upcoming year. She makes these decisions so as to place herself into the "popular cultural society." The principal figure of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* is Bridget Jones, a thirty-something year old woman who has had a hard time living up to her perception of what feminism is even though she finds herself compelled by the idea of being a feminist. She feels forced into marrying a handsome rich man and having the same conventional life as her mother or married friends have. "These women consume domestic good and socially expected domestic behaviors in order to achieve the 'home, family, maternity, warmth, hearth' associated with domesticity" (Smith,2005: 674).

Sarah Gamble states that this novel reflects "a post-feminist ideology in the sense that [it] locates [its] action in a world in which feminism is no longer an acknowledged presence" (Fielding,1996:69). Exposing why Bridget Jones is not a real feminist using the definitions of first or second wave feminism, one who knows the history of feminist actions can assume that Bridget lives simply and does not comprehend that there was once a world in which woman were not independent. She is not supposed to try "to make any particular point regarding female access to independence" (Gamble,2006: 69). She has already had the opportunities which pre-feminists worked so hard to acquire.

If the text is examined from the perspective of third wave feminism, Bridget's behaviors can be shown as supportive. Bridget Jones has the characteristics of a long-established man: smoking, drinking, and swearing are typical ventures, labeled "masculine" or "manly" in traditional society. By gaining autonomy through

earning money and living alone in a flat, Bridget undertakes these characteristically masculine features. As well, seeking a sexual partner and her emotional episodes give her a more manly image. Thus, she fulfills both second wave and third wave feminist ideals by behaving as a man would and utilizing her sexuality. Nonetheless, Bridget is still bewildered about being a feminist since she does not actually recognize what being a feminist means:

“In Fielding's novel, therefore, ‘post feminism’ does not represent an increasingly sophisticated, confident, version of feminism. Instead, it evokes the politics of the backlash. Second-wave feminism may have given women more choices—as Natasha Walter says, they can now earn their own money, buy their own drinks, live in their own flats—but it has not altered a romantic ideology which accords them value only through reference to men. Therefore, Bridget Jones and her friends are confused, not liberated, by the choices that are presented to them. In an attempt to counteract that confusion, they ultimately spend as much, if not more, time obsessing about beauty practices, diet, and lifestyle as their predecessors” (Gamble,2006:65).

She exploits her figure to charm the man she likes [lurves] and rejoices in the status of being an *independent woman* who can disguise herself as she desires. Even though she celebrates her sexuality, individuality, and independency like a third wave feminist, she considers herself a “loser” and feels lonely, making her a victim of modern society.

2. PERCEPTION OF FEMINISM

Bridget can be considered a slave of her sexuality and her beliefs that she will undermine herself if she does not have sex with a *proper* man. To this end, she determines that in the New Year, she will not “fall for alcoholics, workaholics, commitment-phobes, people with girlfriends or wives, misogynists, megalomaniacs, chauvinists, emotional fuckwits or freeloaders, perverts” (Fielding,1996:2). She endeavors to gain emotional control over the opposite sex because she has more serious problems to deal with. “It seems to me that Fielding's statement reflects the “one step forward, one step back” logic of post feminism, implying that, as we are now on the far side of feminism, we no longer have any serious issues to contend with” (Gamble,2006: 66). The determination she has given her a feminist approach since she “will not” be dependent on men *emotionally* or *bodily* anymore. Another New Year resolution is that she will not “sulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as a woman of substance, complete without boyfriend, as the best way to obtain a boyfriend” (Gamble,2006:67). Once again, Bridget shows determination about an affiliation she will have in the next year. Before having a connection, she tries to temper her expectations about “having a boyfriend”. This feminist determination will lead to her finding the perfect boyfriend.

Although Bridget cannot complete all of the resolutions, she sets for herself, she does have autonomy over her life. She uses her sexuality as she pleases, and describes herself as “Sex Goddess.” “Yesssss! Yesssss! Daniel Cleaver wants my phone no. Am marvelous. Am irresistible Sex Goddess. Hurrah!” (Fielding,1996:26). She does not want to continue her life being single. Bridget Jones is oppressed by her mother and the people around her (society) because of her femininity, which means if a woman is 30 or over, she should get married as soon as possible in order not to feel incomplete and be on her own in the world. The oppression of her mother and people around her make her believe that she should have an orderly life and find a husband who can financially support her, of course, beyond having a physical relationship.

Bridget thinks of herself as a feminist but she does not tend to pursue feminist ideologies. On the grounds of this, she exploits nuisances to adhere to being a feminist. She is constantly in a dilemma and becomes very exasperated with married people, like her mother Pam or her friend Una Alconbury, and what they try to inflict on her. When one of her married friends asks “why aren’t you married, yet, Bridget?” she silently responds “Because I don’t want to end up like you, you fat, boring, Sloane milch cow...” (Fielding,1996:40). Thus, she accelerates her plan to find a sensible man for the position of husband and father to her future children. “Bridget associates with married life—order, security, and everlasting love” (Smith,2005: 683). Being a single woman is counted as failure for married couples. Bridget feels that pressure on her and even though she does not appreciate a life only based on marriage, love, children, and husband, she is looking forward to that kind of life since she thinks, or is forced to think, she is a failure as a woman in society without it. Formerly, women were considered unsuccessful if they were unable to be a virtuous offspring, mothers, or wives. Contrarily, she has her own perceptions as to what constitutes an effective woman and convinces herself that “...there is a whole generation of single girls like me with their

own incomes and homes who have lots of fun and don't need to wash anyone else's socks" (Fielding,1996:42).

However, as her mother continually puts pressure on Bridget about matrimony and life, Pam realizes that she is not happy with her established entity, either. From the beginning of the novel, the reader notices that Bridget is distressed with her mother. When Bridget's father alludes to complications within their marriage, Smith indicates that "unfulfilled with her life as a homemaker, Bridget's mother has a late-in-life feminist awakening; upon returning from her trip to Albufeira with Una Alconbury and Audrey Coles, she begins to demand payment for doing the housework and claims that 'she'd wasted her life being [a] slave' (Fielding,1996:42)" (Smith,2005:691).

The fact that Bridget wears short skirts and other sexy clothes is the first conflicting facet of her beliefs. She promises herself not to fall in love with anyone who is not qualified to be a "good boyfriend", yet she loses her self-control with Daniel's flirty messages and disregards all her feminist commitments. Bridget wants to be so attractive that Daniel Cleaver, whom she obsesses over, will ask her out. "So much for Rene Denfeld's contention that feminism is part of the very air the modern woman breathes" (Gamble,2006: 64), while Sharon gives a feminist speech in Café Rouge, Jude and Bridget "sink out their coats" because "after all, there is nothing so unattractive to a man as strident feminism" (Fielding,1996:20). Gamble deduces that Bridget "simply finds the whole issue embarrassing" (Fielding,1996:64). When Daniel Cleaver cancels the date with Bridget, she was in the midst of preparing herself for the night. "My back hurts, my head aches and my legs are bright red and covered in lumps of wax. Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, (...) know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices" (Fielding,1996:59). She gets stuck on the idea that she should prepare herself for the man in case of any action. She knows that this manner does not fulfill the feminist ideals. However, to justify her preparation for this date, she accepts that she is "a child of *Cosmopolitan*" (Fielding,1996:20). After Daniel cancels the date, Bridget makes a feminist point; "One must not live one's life through men but must be complete in oneself as a woman of substance" (Fielding,1996:31). Despite it all, she still has difficulty being a feminist and feeling complete without a man's presence so she becomes desperate and believes that she is not alluring enough.

Fielding characterizes Bridget as a workaholic who is keen on her job. When she goes to her parents' house for New Year, she joins Una's New Year's Day Turkey Curry Buffet. The oppression of the people whom she knows makes her feel ashamed of her "singleton" life. Everybody around her has a man. Una asks, "How is your love-life, anyway?" (Fielding,1996:11). And then Geoffrey says "So, you *still* haven't got a feller!" (Fielding,1996:11). She is under pressure from the people around her yet she does not seem willing to marry and is keen on her career. As a feminist, she is waiting for Mr. Right, who can love her as she is, for whom she can do anything. She is already moderately successful –enough to live on her own – and she already has an independent life. The only thing missing is Mr. Right, but he is not available for a career girl. "Having a career is all well and good, but not if it is at the expense of finding Mr. Right. All warning implicitly that the heady days of youth, glamour and social freedom are all too soon replaced by the lengthy twilight of terminal single status" (Wheleman,2000:136). As Una says, some things cannot be or should not be delayed. "Bridget! What are we going to do with you! You career girls! I don't know! Can't put it off forever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock." (Fielding,1996:11). Time is running out biologically.

Bridget is a "victim feminist" in the narrative. As maintained by "conservative post-feminist" Christina Hoff Sommers, there are two types of feminists: "equity feminists (power feminists) and gender feminists (victim feminist)" (Heywood,1997:3). Sommers clarifies these terms by defining "equity feminists as those who 'stay within the bounds of traditional scholarship and join in its enterprise,' [and] gender feminists as those who 'seek to transform scholarship to make it women-centered'" (Heywood,1997:3). Bridget feels under tremendous pressure from her mother and from society. She forces herself to be in a relationship when she goes to her parents' home and attends Una and Geoffrey's New Year's Day Turkey Curry Buffet. These types of events are torturous because Bridget feels awkward and isolated around married people and couples. Her mother and Una put pressure on Bridget to marry Mr. Darcy or anyone else who is wealthy and striking at these encounters.

Bridget cannot pursue her new resolution determinations because of her singleton life and obsession with Daniel Cleaver. Even though she begins to follow a regime from the beginning of the New Year, she does not expend much effort on this. On occasion that she gets depressed, she consumes junk food with a bottle of wine. Junk food and tasteless food she cooks at home emblemize her loneliness and single life. "Fielding characterizes Singletons by the food that they eat; though they prefer the taste of mom's home cooking, they

are forced to eat packaged foods due to their presumed lack of culinary skills” (Smith,2005:684). Her unbalanced nutritional habits and weight indicate identity confusion related to feminism. As illustrated in the novel, one can assume that the passion she experiences for Daniel Clever plays with her feminist identity. After all the unfavorable affairs he brings about, Bridget starts a relationship with Daniel and is half-blinded about his actual character. He is a womanizer, yet still Bridget says: “Daniel is still being so gorgeous. How could everyone be so wrong about him?” (Fielding,1996:131).

Contrastingly, as narrative precedes, Bridget realizes Daniel’s unfaithfulness and breaks off their relationship. Enter Mark Darcy, Bridget’s “the man on the white horse”. Bridget is fond of old movies such as *Pride and Prejudice*, and the male character in *Pride and Prejudice* is relevant to the male character in *Bridget Jones’ Diary*. “Mark Darcy is as Austenesque a hero as any woman could desire—rich, handsome, and intelligent, with a seemingly limitless capacity for sorting out Bridget’s chaotic life—and the novel ends with Bridget’s grateful surrender to his masterful charms” (Gamble,2006:65). Both of their names are “Mr. Darcy”. Elizabeth, the feminist female character of *Pride and Prejudice*, does not much resemble Bridget herself in the name of feminism. However, they are surrounded by a society which forces them to marry. Bridget tries to get rid herself of this constraint: however, she typically wishes to have her own family, thus she is not really sure about what she wants. “Fielding depicts Bridget as internalizing this equation, and throughout the novel, Bridget attempting to overcome this stereotype of single people and, in turn, the feelings of solitude that accompany that state through the preparation of home-cooked meals” (Smith,2005:684).

3. CONCLUSION

Bridget Jones’s Diary by Helen Fielding does show a modern woman’s life today. Even though Bridget is an independent woman in *economic* terms, she is dependent on men *emotionally*. This is the dilemma of third wave feminism: women in this wave are not thinking critically about social change, but only individual empowerment. Bridget is the image of this kind of “feminist” woman who cares only for her appearance, make-up, and sex life. Even she is in a terrible relationship, she regards Mark Darcy as sexy with his protective mannerisms. For example, when Bridget’s mother is wanted by the police as she is involved in a crime, Mark Darcy immediately steps in to help Bridget overcome the problem. “He started to pace around the room firing questions like a top barrister. (...) It was pretty damn sexy; I can tell you”. (Fielding,1996:274) Mark Darcy becomes Bridget’s *savoir*, he saved her TV carriers by arranging an interview with Elena Rossini and then helped her mother not go to jail.

Bridget Jones’s Diary contends with the issues of loneliness, incompleteness without men, and the appearance of woman. The narration concludes without solving the emotional problem of the character, Bridget Jones; “(...) Helen Fielding evokes all the problems of the post-feminist generation without proposing a solution (...)” (Gamble,2006:67). Bridget gains a “good boyfriend” yet loses her so-called independence by binding herself to another man emotionally. At the end of the book, it is seen that the last thing Bridget talks about is the affair. “He took the champagne glass out my hand, kissed me, and said; “Right Bridget Jones, “I’m going to give you pardon for,” picked me up into the bedroom” (Fielding,1996:307).

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