

# Linguistic Silence and the Alienation of Female Characters in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*

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*This article intends to demonstrate how female characters in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl* are deprived of full means of communication and expression. The connection with the concern with alienation in these two novels is that it is in the representation of female language that they show how characters—female characters and by extension women in general—are alienated from and marginalized by the masculine voices of the novels' narrators and focalizers. It is noticeable that the narrative style of *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*, although very innovative and experimental, still allocates almost no space to female voices and language, with the major exception of Molly Bloom's interior monologue. With the benefit of more recent perspectives, Molly's narrative can be read as deriving in some ways (the lack of punctuation being one major indication) from the semiotic and subverting the established discipline of language use (the symbolic), thus, as an example of *écriture féminine*.*

Keywords: English literature / Joyce, James / Iranian literature / Hedayat, Sadeq / women characters / *écriture féminine* / feminist literary criticism

Apart from the terminating interior monologue of Molly Bloom in *Ulysses*, women characters in both *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl* are rendered silent or are involved in very few conversations.<sup>1</sup> In other words, female characters are most of the time linguistically alienated from the narratives of the story. With that one exception, they are given very few occasions to speak and almost no voices in which to represent or express themselves; they appear in a few or no conversations and they

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have no independent narration of their own. Meanwhile, female characters in both *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl* are very much spoken of, and reported about by the male protagonists and other characters. Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* and Kristeva's distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic in language are applicable to analyses of female characters' silence in these two novels. These two theorists' ideas are mentioned briefly and in so far as they inform the silenced voices of these female characters, and as in regard to their speaking share in the novels, not in regard to the act of writing or the writers of these two novels. For this reason, theoretical explanation of *écriture féminine* and the semiotic-symbolic binary are not provided in enormous details. The connection with these novels' concern with alienation is that it is in the representation of female language that these two novels show how characters – female characters and by extension women in general – are alienated from and marginalized by the masculine voices of these novels' narrators and focalizers.

In this article a brief sketch of the feminist study of linguistic silence is presented. These ideas have mostly developed decades after the writing of these novels but they provide tools with which the critic can understand what texts of any age do with their female voices and silences. Thus, the focus will be to examine the linguistic alienation of the two main female characters in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*, Molly Bloom and the ethereal/harlot-like girl, as well as to investigate the language of some more minor female characters, such as the old woman selling milk to Stephen and Mulligan in the opening chapter of *Ulysses*, Gerty McDowell and Stephen's sister, Dilly, in the same novel and the old nanny in *The Blind Owl*.

Before moving to the theoretical discussion about the linguistic alienation of the female characters in these two novels, a brief introduction to James Joyce and Sadeq Hedayat, as two prominent modernist authors, will shape a more tangible context for this article. Although in regard to length and significance *The Blind Owl* is only a novella, about 100 pages, in comparison with *Ulysses*, there are certain similar modernist features in these two novels, and yet the context against which modernism is shaped in Ireland and Iran are essentially different. As a result, the socio-political societies represented in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*, as well as character representations, are accordingly distinct.

Modernist writing is "noted for its experimentation, its complexity, its formalism and for its attempt to create a 'tradition of the new'" (Childs 15), which are among the outstanding modernist characteristics available in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*. Joyce's *magnum opus* is

famous for its modernist features, and Sadeq Hedayat's fiction is evidently modernist in style through-and-through, and avant-garde in its daring complications of language, content and structure that were both highly experimental and ground-breaking in terms of Iranian literary conventions at that time.

The modernist novel's subversive and destabilizing narrative techniques and nonconformist formal construction, and its radically unconventional treatment of the concepts of time and consciousness are distinguishing factors of both Joyce's *Ulysses* and Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*. These characteristics of modernist fiction are reflected in and through the novels' presentation of the main characters' consciousnesses. It is noticeable that in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl* the narrative style, although presented in very innovative and experimental modernist examples, such as using stream of consciousness and interior monologues which actually allow space for subversive treatment of characters such as Molly Bloom or the heroine of *The Blind Owl*; still these two novels allocate almost no space for female voices and speech; with the major exception of Molly Bloom's interior monologue. The modernist novel is usually inward-looking and often – as in Joyce's and Hedayat's work – aims to present a self-conscious individual's flux and flow of consciousness, including its fleeting and almost unconscious drifts, digressions and seeming unconnectedness. In this way, alienation, as one of the themes of modern life, reverberates in the innovative narrative techniques of modernist fiction. The innovative and mostly inward-looking narrative techniques focus on individuals' consciousness, often more so than on their actions; as found, for example, in Joyce's modern *Odyssey*, which emphasizes one day of Dublin life, where nothing special happens in action, but the audience gets involved with the consciousness of the characters and their senses of alienation and fragmentation. *The Blind Owl*, on the other hand, is not set in an urban location, rather in an isolated and unfriendly environment, as defined by the protagonist of the novella, The City of Rey. Here again, the audience is involved with the inner thoughts of the characters, and that the heroine is not even heard properly in such an estranged situation.

Just to elaborate on the conceptual similarities and differences between these two novels, it is valuable to note that Joyce and Hedayat are aware of their own experiences of their settings and reflect modernism differently in their novels accordingly. There are distinct local elements to be found in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*, and dissimilarities between the Irish and Iranian experiences and responses toward the experience of the modern. For instance, one difference may be seen

in Joyce's explicit dissatisfaction with the economic problems prevalent in the colonial semi-modern Dublin, while Hedayat's novel makes few observations about economics but is, rather, filled with a sense of doomed isolation and depicts a lack of communication and human contact in society. These writers are conscious of the fact that the modern life experienced in their individual environments has something characteristic about it. Thus, it seems that Joyce tries to capture a flavor of Dublin's distinct modern ways of living while Hedayat attempts to reflect a not necessarily industrialized Iran's life in the City of Rey. Although Joyce and Hedayat venture to capture a local experience of encountering modern life, which has its own flavor, in terms of the forces underlying the modern societies they depict, their modernism is not necessarily very different from that of other places.

Joyce's modernism shows itself in the innovative and avant-garde literary styles and forms in his fiction. Besides, his fiction is distinctive in its representation of various issues of the individuals like their senses of exile and alienation, in the Dublin of the early twentieth century. On the other hand, in Hedayat's well-known literary production *The Blind Owl* Katouzian observes that the modernist characteristics dwell in its techniques and framework, as well as in its western or even universal subject matter (13). Although Hedayat was very well-read in ancient and classical Persian literature, he was a cosmopolitan intellectual who was influenced by the so-called Western literature too. Katouzian indicates that "there may be 'affinities' with Nerval, Rilke, Poe and many others; there are occasionally resemblances of ideas and expression" (12). Marta Simidchieva similarly finds that Hedayat's work is "closely aligned with European avant-garde literature of the early twentieth century" (20).

One of the factors commonly found in Hedayat's work is the idea of alienation and a related focus on isolated characters, fragmented minds, and consciousness. Hora Yavari has remarked on these elements, presenting a psychoanalytical interpretation of Hedayat's novels which singles out the modernist elements that have been discussed in the preceding paragraphs and she notes that

in *The Blind Owl*, arguably for the first time in the history of modern Persian literature, we see the unconscious sphere of the psyche as being *structurally* produced in a literary text. Hedayat embraces fragmentation, self-division, and self-alienation in *The Blind Owl*, all of which are characteristic experiences of his age, pushes them to a new extreme in Persian culture, and turns the account of his self-encounter into a mirror in which the split-in-two Iranian self of the period looks and recognizes himself. (52–53)

Thus Hedayat's notable position in Persian literature arises from the fact that he was the first Persian writer to give voice to the unconscious of an individual and to present it through a narrative technique that replicated a direct access into a character's mind. Hedayat's nonconformity in his literature as in his career reflects his general political and social dissatisfaction and rebelliousness (Jahanbegloo 140). However, and still, what he depicts as female characters in this novel remains a cliché representation of harlot/angel binary.

Among the modernist elements that connect the fictions of Joyce and Hedayat are the recurrence of alienated and exilic figures along with the themes of isolation, pessimism, and loss of belief in conventional values and social norms. These two authors' reactions to the oppressions prevalent in their countries, whether they stemmed from tradition, a colonizer or a despotic ruler's tyranny, were to reflect this sense of alienation through characters in more or less modernized societies. The social changes that resulted from the arrival of modern forces and changes (modernization), by destabilizing many traditional certainties in political and social issues, reinforced this sense of individuals' alienation. Therefore, Joyce and Hedayat's preoccupation with the fragmented mind of their characters, their isolation, and alienation can be seen to have accrued from what was actually going on in their countries: Ireland and Iran. Psychological, social, and political alienation can be found in *Ulysses*, *The Blind Owl*, and in the works of the other early modernist writers, internationally. However, these two novels represent characters who are unattached to their social surroundings, and are in some ways living on the margins of their societies, and they show trends of normlessness, isolation, and alienation within the communities that they describe. Female characters' narrative share in these two novels, an extreme case of alienated characters in Joyce's and Hedayat's societies owning no distinct voice from the outset, will be the subject of the analysis in this article.

### **Linguistic alienation and silence: A feminist approach**

Cameron starts her argument in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* with the claim that "the idea that language is abused by the powerful to conceal or distort the truth appears throughout the Western intellectual tradition" (6). According to feminist theories of language and linguistic silence, there are at least two relevant theories that could refer to and explain the linguistic alienation of the female characters in *Ulysses* and

*The Blind Owl*. According to Cameron, one group has “suggested that ‘femininity’ means in a sense being outside language or marginal to it. This might explain the alienation of many women from prevailing forms of (rational, unified) discourse” (14).

In opposition to this group, other theorists believe that our language, just like many other things in our life, “has become so fragmented that we cannot talk in these abstract terms (‘language’, ‘women’, ‘femininity’); we need a less global, less Utopian feminist account of language” (14). Within the first group’s ideas, the controlling or dominant power over language seems to be the male, leaving women alienated from it. Silence is thus an outcome of this gendered linguistic alienation. This notion is often applicable to the female characters in these novels’ setting of the very male-dominated colonial Ireland and Iran; in both of these geo-political and cultural settings we may uncontroversially claim that communicational means, including language itself, were appropriated by the dominant male voice.

Three major feminist theories about language allow us to provide theoretical explanations for what caused the women characters in the Joyce’s and Hedayat’s novels to be/render muted. Cameron summarizes these theories as follows:

Radical feminist linguistic theories hold that language determines (or in a weaker formulation, places significant constraints on) our thought and perception, and thus on our reality. A second theme is that men control language as they control other resources within a patriarchal society. Men determine how language is used and what it means; and consequently language enshrines a male and misogynist view of the world. Thirdly, radical theorists assume that women are placed at a disadvantage as language-users. They may use the “male” language, thus falsifying their experience and perceptions. This is “alienation.” Or they may try to express themselves more authentically, in which case, they will soon encounter a lack of suitable linguistic resources, and fall silent. (130)

Probably all of these, and certainly the last of these three envisaged situations, would seem to be most relevant to the cases of Joyce and Hedayat’s female characters’ silence and linguistic alienation in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl*. Anyhow, however it is theorized, the fact is that these novels show their female characters being deprived of full means of communication and expression.

Kristeva and Cixous’s theories of female language are concerned with the subversive effects of feminine writing or language. This article refers to these two theorists only occasionally, and in so far as the voices of the female fictional characters are concerned in these two

texts. According to this, Kristeva makes a distinction between two different phases of language acquisition and meaning production, “semiotic” and “symbolic.” The semiotic, as Kristeva herself explains, is not as structured as the symbolic, that is related to the fatherly language; rather, it is “unnamable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently, maternally connoted to such an extent that it merits ‘not even the rank of syllable’” (Kristeva 133). Put differently, “the semiotic is a realm associated with the musical, the poetic, the rhythmic, and that which lacks structure and meaning” (Schippers 26–27) and it is associated with the subversive force. This is what we can observe in the utterances of Hedayat’s heroine and some other characters in *Ulysses*. Kristeva’s theory of distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic is based on Freud’s view of women as “castrated” and experiencing “absence” and “lack” in Lacan’s phraseology. In the same way, Cixous believes that writing and language are totally phallogocentric and thus,

until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural-hence political, typically masculine-economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously ... that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak-this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. (879)

Female characters in these two novels are deprived of the means of expressing themselves, it is speaking here rather than writing (to which Kristeva and Cixous refer to more often). Molly’s narrative can be read, with the benefit of these more recent perspectives, as coming in some ways (the lack of punctuation is one major indication of this) from the semiotic and subverting the established disciplines of language use (the symbolic), thus, as an example of *écriture féminine*. In other words, in texts like *Ulysses* we can claim “it is in modernist forms themselves that the repressed maternal feminine unconscious of Western culture actually emerges into representation” (Dekoven 179).

In the following analysis of the two novels’ female characters’ silence and linguistic alienation, these poststructuralist theories will be used to help explain the relations between silence and alienation, and why it should appear so especially as a feature of female, rather than male, characters. For these characters the silencing points to the inferiority or



marginality of the female in masculine dominated discourses, and that gendered alienation is encoded in the language and silences of females in these texts.

### **Molly Bloom's silent presence**

In *Ulysses*, there is a variety of female characters who appear in conversations, however few, and they have social and economic roles outside of the domestic setting, such as singing (Molly Bloom), a photography student (Milly Bloom), and a babysitter like Gerty MacDowell. Molly's interior monologue in bed, which comprises the final chapter of the novel, is a special case which requires a separate treatment. However, Molly is up until this point almost completely silent throughout the novel, except for the mention of her major means of public, professional and oral communication which is her singing. We learn that she is not in control of her vocalizations even here. The fact that she does not know the meaning of some words or the songs she performs, also signifies the point that she, and perhaps any female, is linguistically excluded from the male-dominated culture and entertainment industry in Dublin, even though she is the most essential contributor to that industry. Similarly, although she is the object of conversations of Bloom and Boylan, she is not present in any of the dialogues and conversations reported during the day.

Kiberd believes that Joyce's discontent with previous writing styles shows itself in Chapter 14, "Oxen of the Sun," that contains "pastiche" of many styles, which are there, at least in part, as Kiberd states, "in order to clear the way for a return to oral tradition with Molly Bloom. (This is one possible meaning of the massive full-stop at the close of the penultimate chapter.)" (xxxvi). Molly's murmuring-like, interior thoughts, which are not structured in a conventional novel writing tradition, consist of only eight full stops, with no other punctuation, jumping from one topic to another without any verbally indicated transitory words or phrases. Molly's language use is not similar to what was known as well-structured standard composition, but a less standardized, more fluid structure that displays the subversive form of *écriture féminine*. Molly's narrative and her language use, in addition to her identification as a singer, is a kind of "articulation, a rhythm, but one that precedes language" (McAfee 19). She allows her mind to ramble through various subjects and mixes and merges topics and sentences nonstop, in a fluid, true "stream" of consciousness. In one part



of this interior monologue Molly remembers going to confession and is again, as in the “metempsychosis” (77) instance, annoyed that people do not use simple and direct language, thinking that

I hate that confession when I used to go to Father Corrigan he touched me father and what harm if he did where and I said on the canal bank like a fool but whereabouts on your person my child on the leg behind high up was it yes rather high up was it where you sit down yes O Lord couldnt he say bottom right out and have done with it what has that got to do with it and did you whatever way he put it I forget no father and I always think of the real father what did he want to know for when I already confessed it to God he had a nice fat hand the palm moist<sup>2</sup> (875)

The whole chapter consists of these apparently structure-less flashbacks mixed with other thoughts in Molly’s mind and her language indicates the fluidity of her thoughts. This intriguing narrative style makes this chapter very attractive and complex as well. The text finally allows her a voice, of sorts, and in showing it as a silent voice in her mind only, implicitly acknowledges the irony that Molly’s truest utterances, her deepest confessions, can only be heard when she has no audience, no male confessor to overhear and re-formulate her expressions into a male discourse. The male dominance over language is not only emphasized in Molly’s memories of the confession scene, but also foreshadowed in Chapter 14, where Gerty thinks “there ought to be women priests that would understand without your telling out” (*Ulysses* 476).

The aloof position of Molly’s narrative, while she is thinking about the most private things in her mind and desires, creates a sense, in the novel, that she has been excluded from the reported events of the day, while at the same time she has been a significant part of the story for the whole day, being a constant presence in Bloom’s mind and in thus accompanying his wandering around Dublin. She is thus narratorially subsumed (in all the novel except her last chapter) to and within her husband’s voice, just as she and the other women are subsumed in what the novel depicts as an overwhelmingly male-driven culture, even when she is in her singing role. However, she has no say on and no control over the stories of her flirting and infidelities that pepper the entire novel. It is in her interior monologue only that Molly exposes her concerns about various things including, for example, her concern about Leopold Bloom’s secret correspondences with other women (873), and again it is just in this interior monologue that she reveals a motherly

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<sup>2</sup> There is no full stop in the original text.

lament that Milly sent her a postcard only while she wrote a letter for Bloom (898), and it is in this most private moment and thought process that she mourns for their dead son, Rudy (while she is thinking of Stephen Dedalus) (921).

Molly Bloom's narrative style is the last and perhaps the most radical of the novel's exploration and exposition of different styles and registers, and presents a very personalized and unique insight into the character expressing herself; it not only reveals her as a character who had up until now remained unexplored, but also emphasizes that she is an example of what Spivak refers to as the "subaltern" in a masculine world of conversations and communications. Both the content and the form of this extraordinary passage encodes the depth and complexity of a female experience of being alienated from the male-dominated world (or discursive fields) of Dublin as she experiences it; it reveals the extent to which she has been misread, misunderstood and misrepresented in a narrative that has hitherto been provided by Bloom and other male characters in the novel. The semiotic language and apparently unstructured narrative of Molly is subversive of all the symbolic language that represents her to her outer world, as to the readers. It places readers in the privileged position of hearing a voice that is otherwise always silenced.

In *Ulysses* there are other female characters who are shown to be underprivileged either linguistically, socially or educationally; for instance – as we have already seen – Stephen Dedalus's younger sister, Dilly Dedalus who, while her family is in great poverty, seeks French books to learn the language. There is also the case of an even more textually disempowered (silenced) female, Martha, Bloom's secret pen friend, with whom he corresponds only in writing and carries on a fantasy affair. The novel allows her no voice except in these letters, which are kept inaccessible to the readers, except for the last one received by Bloom. In this letter Martha asks for the meaning of a word, like Molly who had asked Bloom about the meaning of some words in her song. She writes to "Henry Flower" (Bloom's penname), "please tell me what is the real meaning of that word" (Joyce 95), implying again a linguistic incompetence among women, or at least that men and women have different vocabularies. Gerty McDowell, the lame girl who is babysitting on the shore, while Bloom is watching her from afar and masturbating, also does not have a decipherable verbal language for, as she is at some distance from him and reported only through Bloom's stream of consciousness, she is represented as speaking indistinct words, which cannot be heard clearly, and therefore cannot be reported.

In Chapter 13, “Nausicaa,” readers encounter Gerty MacDowell on the sea shore at Sandymount. Although it is possible that the entire episode or chapter is a complex of embedded free indirect reports (the narrator indirectly reporting what Bloom is indirectly thinking that Gerty is thinking), the first parts mostly appear to be a simple, though complex enough, presentation of third-person free indirect reporting of Gerty’s thoughts, which take the verbal form and style of the artless terms of badly-written romance magazine stories, articles and advertisements. These descriptive paragraphs are evidently an intermingling of the third-person narrator’s observations (noticeable with the exclamation “Leopold Bloom, for it is he” (Joyce 478), about halfway through the chapter) with an indirect report of the interior fantasy-monologue of Gerty (no one else would know or be interested in many of the minute and intimate details of her life that are inserted). These observations, up until Gerty is described as leaving the shore with her friends, are all presented in the characteristic language of magazine romances, which is clichéd, childish and commonplace in content, style and tone. Gerty is daydreaming and barely speaks a word, and, as Kiberd states, her interior monologue is mocked throughout the episode, because she seems to be talking to herself in a language which is not hers, but the language of the women’s magazines from which she reads about relationships and fashion.

Her mind has become so infected by the conventions of her favorite magazines that it is hard to tell when she is sincere in the expression of feeling and when she is simply impersonating the kind of woman she thinks she ought to be (Kiberd xli).

This mockery of magazine style language further denotes the fact that Gerty, as the third person narrator in this chapter also implies, has been deprived of a decent education, “had kind fate but willed her to be born a gentlewoman of high degree in her own right and had she only received the benefit of a good education” (Joyce 453). Thus, the language she is employing to express her emotions to herself does not belong to her at all, indicating that even the language of her thoughts is alien to her, and perhaps she is also, thus, alienated from her own inner life.

Gerty is textually and verbally, though not physically or socially, depicted as a lonely character among the chattering group of the young by the sea. As she daydreams she catches sight of Bloom in the distance, and weaves him into her fantasy of the aristocratic suitor in love with her.

Wonderful eyes they were, superbly expressive, but could you trust them? People were so queer. She could see at once by his dark eyes and his pale intellectual face that he was a foreigner ... Here was that of which she had so often dreamed. It was he who mattered and there was joy on her face because she wanted him because she felt instinctively that he was like no-one else. The very heart of the girl-*woman* went out to him, her dreamhusband, because she knew on the instant it was him. She was a womanly woman not like other flighty girls, unfeminine, he had known, those cyclists showing off what they hadn't got and she just yearned to know all, to forgive all if she could make him fall in love with her, make him forget the memory of the past. (Joyce 465)

Still in the style of a romance novella, she thus fantasizes that this older man (Gerty's friend Cissy disrespectfully calls him an "Uncle Peter") is "her dreamhusband." The use of such a style, which is commonly associated with "low," "cheap," and trivial reading material for the young and uneducated, associates Gerty's thoughts with these qualities – commonplace, unoriginal and, above all, uneducated.

This chapter also presents its main female character as an inarticulate, supremely physical being who is the object of the male gaze (of Bloom). Furthermore, she sees herself in these terms too, her own thoughts and actions concentrating upon her looks, her form, and her clothes, and Bloom's observations of her being limited to her body and sexual potential, as we learn in the second part of the chapter, that returns to an intermingling of third person narration and Bloom's interior monologue:

Tight boots? No. She's lame! O!

Mr Bloom watched her as she limped away. Poor girl! That's why she's left on the shelf and the others did a sprint. Thought something was wrong by the cut of her jib. Jilted beauty. A defect is ten times worse in a woman. But makes them polite. Glad I didn't know it when she was on show. Hot little devil all the same. Wouldn't mind. (Joyce 479)

For this female character, then, the novel gives her only the language of body, or other people's words. The novel, and both her and Bloom's fantasies, present her as a silent icon of woman-as-body, and woman as the object of male gaze.

In other parts of the novel and in particular in this same chapter, there are further examples of phrases and words which conform to the notion of Kristeva's semiotic and that could also be attributed to a feminine language, which is both alienated and alienating in the sense that it is pre-linguistic and does not present an equivalent or a one-to-one

meaning for each word. In other words, the semiotic is, metaphorically speaking, a developmental liminal space; it is the semiotic that occurs before the symbolic. The words in the semiotic, as briefly mentioned earlier, are (or are like) the “glossolalias, rhythms, and intonations of an infant who does not yet know how to use language or refer to objects” (McAfee 19). We see how this is reflected in the language of Gerty and two other girls, Cissy Caffrey and Edy Boardman, who are baby-sitting. Cissy is encouraging the baby to say papa – “Say papa, baby. Say pa pa pa pa pa pa pa” (464). The baby manages to say, “Haja ja ja haja” and “Habaa baaaahabaaa baaaa” (464). These female characters are shown as naturally communicating with infants, using a kind of semiotic, non-symbolic language. Thus, through their verbal language, and above all through the textual manipulation of their language in this novel, women are quite literally infantilized, as well as being almost wordless in the narration of *Ulysses*, for they are represented as almost entirely alienated from the language of men, and have no effective means of verbally communicating their own thoughts. They are alienated even from their own thinking processes by the necessary molding of their thoughts that occurs when having only the vocabulary of male-formed discourses to use for expression. The same limitations can also be phrased as freedom, however, for these female characters are presenting a language beyond the symbolic language through their silences or through not following the same language rules. That is, they might be subverting the patriarchal communicative language as they are alienated from its communication zone.

### **Silence of an ethereal girl**

The fact that the female character in *The Blind Owl* is not heard almost anytime during the story, or when she talks it is as if she speaks unconsciously in a dream (*BO* 96) is thus theoretically similar to the murmuring style of Molly’s interior monologue or to the verbal silencing of Gerty (and the other two girls on the beach, who are observed by Bloom but are not heard clearly). In fact, just like Gerty’s disturbingly clichéd reported thoughts, women in *The Blind Owl* (as in other writings of Hedayat such as “The Doll Behind the Curtain” and “Three Drops of Water,” “Laleh,” “Alaviyeh Khanoom”) are depicted in crudely-drawn stereotypical ways, as either an ethereal angel-like person, or a harlot type. In fact, it is very difficult to find any attempt at characterization in Hedayat’s female characters; they are more often

than not types rather than credible individuals. When it comes to the depiction of female characters, Hedayat's writings seem to be fixated with these two types. In this novel, the inability of the narrator to see or imagine women beyond these caricatures is part of the characterization of the narrator/protagonist: the story takes us into the mind of a very unwell person, someone who (among his other difficulties) can only perceive other humans as objects in his imagination, and for him the types of objects that women are can be either angels or whores. His ethereal girl, whom he calls an angel, not a human being, and his depiction of his cousin/wife as, apparently, the whore type (the text does not make clear whether she has been promiscuous or not), are the outstanding examples of this characterization. In these kinds of depictions, Hedayat/protagonist narrator seems to fall into the category of the male modernist misogynists, and despite the forceful presence of female characters in the novel he shows an obsession with femininity and a "reactive misogyny" (Dekoven 176). This kind of (mis)representation, as revealing as it might be, encodes in itself the alienated spot from which these female characters come.

The female characters in *The Blind Owl* do not have names, for reflecting the narrator's unwillingness or inability to see women as equally independent human subjects, they are not nameable; as the narrator himself says "I did not know what to call her" (21). Two of the three women characters, whether it is the ethereal girl or the cousin/wife (who are almost undistinguishable, with their similar eyes and wearing the same black dress), do not speak nor do we see them in any conversation in the novel, except once when we hear the wife, apparently to her lover/visitor, saying, "have you come? Take your scarf off." We are told that "her voice had a pleasant quality, as it had had in her childhood. It reminded me of the unconscious murmuring of someone who is dreaming. I myself had heard this voice in the past when I was in a deep sleep" (96). It is as if she is speaking in her dreams, not to a real person. Other than this example, the wife/harlot is reported only when she is spoken of. For example, it is the nanny who tells the protagonist that his wife is unwell or that she is pregnant or that she is preparing clothes for the baby who is going to be born (70); we hear nothing from her mouth. The protagonist states that the nanny complains about his wife and reports to him that

"Oh yes, my daughter" (she meant the bitch) "was saying this morning that I stole her nightdress during the night. I don't want to have to answer for anything connected with you two. Anyway, she began to bleed yesterday. ... I knew it was the baby. ... According to her, she got pregnant at the baths." (93)

On another occasion, his wife's brother reports what his sister has told him about the protagonist's illness and inheritance: "Mummy<sup>3</sup> says the doctor said you are going to die and it'll be a good riddance for us. How do people die?' I said, 'tell her I have been dead for a long time'" (94). The muteness of the protagonist's wife could signify her reluctance to speak, for which there is hardly a clue, or it could signify her alienation from the means of communication that is language. In other words, she is silent because she is not heard or cannot express herself with what is available as language; and mainly it also signifies that the narrator/protagonist is so entirely alienated from all those aspects of life that involve young women (desire, love, friendship, companionship, living and changing beauty) that he is unable to give them voices in his mind: in his mind desirable women are mere images, objects of his distorting perception but not humans with expressive and communicative capabilities. It is noticeable, in connection with this, that not only do these women (for they are two in his mind, if not in any reality that might exist outside of it) share silence, but that they also share a single appearance and beauty – and it is the same appearance and beauty as that which he sees and reproduces in an age-old series of replicated pencil-case paintings. They have no real time or beauty, just the timeless comfort of form and line, as he put it.

The character of the nanny in Hedayat's novel represents a very superstitiously religious, illiterate and shallow person, and whatever she says seems like nonsense to the protagonist. She is given by the narrator more space and voice than the other female characters, perhaps to reflect the speech of only the least educated or intelligent of the female characters in his life. For instance, he states that the nanny, who is nursing him too, would

talk about the miracles performed by the prophets. Her purpose in so doing was to entertain me but the only effect was to make me envy her the pettiness and stupidity of her ideas. Sometimes she retailed pieces of gossip... Sometimes she would fetch me home-made remedies from the neighbours or she would consult magicians and fortunetellers about my case. (70)

Although she may be doing nothing more than her nursing duties and what she does is limited by her age and knowledge, the narrator/protagonist looks down on her and her actions with contempt, degradation, and humiliation. Thus, if the nanny has some space and voice in the narration, it is perhaps to feed the contemptuous emotions of the

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<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the wife's brother calls his own older sister "Mummy."



narrator. "How had that woman, who was so utterly different from me, managed to occupy so large a zone of my life?" (66). On the other hand, the wife (who is smarter) shies away from him, either in coming near him, having a marital relationship with him, or taking care of him now he is very ill.

If the bitch my wife had shown any interest in me I should never have let Nanny come near me in her presence, because I felt that my wife had a wider range of ideas and a keener aesthetic sense than my nurse had. Or perhaps this bashfulness of mine was merely the result of my obsession. (69)

The wife is both absent (she is only present in the memories of the narrator) and silent, and keeps silent all through the story, and that could perhaps also be the result of her sense of alienation from the narrator's language with which he struggles to express his own, not someone else's, thoughts and emotions. The female characters' sense of social and linguistic alienation in Hedayat's novel can be decoded through their silence in the text.

### **An improbable but approachable comparison**

Female characters silence or women's linguistic alienation or linguistic marginalization at least prove to be a good case for comparing and contrasting the idea of alienated characters and alienating languages in *Ulysses* and *The Blind Owl* as was discussed in this article. It seems that all of these mentioned women characters are marginalized in the sense that their language and language use is mostly associated with the semiotic, thus, distant from the male standard language of their society, standing at a liminal space, between symbolic and semiotic. Modernism in Ireland and in Iran, in spite of many cultural, social, and geopolitical differences, showed some similarities in these literary works, precisely in the representations of female characters in these two literary work. That is, similarities were found firstly in their usage of non-standard language, where fragmented and broken communication further indicates socially alienated figures and characters who are allowed to express themselves in interior monologues and stream of consciousness, rather than through dialogue.

The major difference between female characters in these two novels is that, women in *The Blind Owl* are not represented in public communication, since, in fact, the setting does not include many public spaces at all. However, this statement is strictly accurate because women char-

acters are not shown in any active communicating situations. As mentioned before, it seems that there is a repetition, or at least a confusion between the characters in the novel; the wife, cousin, the ethereal girl, and in some parts, the young Hindu dancer who is introduced as the protagonist's mother, are all the same character. We hear very little from these characters in conversation except for what the nanny or the narrator reports from them. They are in many ways silent, while they have a great impact on the narrator's life and psychological state. The only voice audible is the nanny's, and she is introduced as an illiterate, superstitious, and shallow character. In this novel, too, like *Ulysses* language use and narrative style are used to encode the marginalization of women, in spite of the fact that they are definitely present in the course of the story. In other words, the story to a great extent belongs to them, even while they are absent from the narrating and speaking zones.

Besides, it seems that, specifically in *The Blind Owl's* case, women are kept silent – or rather, they are not provided with equal number of incidents to express themselves. This linguistic alienation and silence of women in both novels shows itself in the character of Molly: except for her final monologue, we cannot directly see her in actual interpersonal relations and conversations anywhere in the novel. Another female character whose speech is not directly represented is Gerty MacDowell. In her case she is talking in her mind or is reported by a third person narrator only; a third woman who is not allowed a voice in Joyce's novel is Bloom's secret correspondent lover, who is presented through writing only. The wife/cousin/beloved character of *The Blind Owl* is also shown in no conversation, just in very brief murmurings. There is no direct speech from this character apart from these murmurings, her utterances are always mediated by being reported through the mind or memories of the male protagonist.

This short article thus showed that in both novels women's language and language use were treated as marginalized cases and where their voices were mentioned they were frequently associated with the non-grammaticalized, semiotic phase of language (such as Molly's singing, using sounds whose meanings are not understood, and ungrammatical stream of consciousness, and like the murmurings of the beloved in Hedayat) rather than the symbolic which is associated with the disciplined and standard language use. It seems that all of these mentioned women characters are marginalized in the sense that their language and language use is mostly associated with the semiotic, thus, distant from the male standard language of their society, standing at a liminal space, between symbolic and semiotic. Thus, women's language and

voices in these two novels, one can claim, came from the liminal space between semiotic and symbolic. In these two novels, marginality, social alienation, and powerlessness of women characters are encoded in their silence and the language they express themselves with that is coming from the semiotic or is associated with *écriture féminine*.

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## Neslišnost jezika in odtujenost ženskih likov v romanih *Uliks* in *Slepa sova*

Ključne besede: angleška književnost / Joyce, James / iranska književnost / Hedayat, Sadeq / ženski liki / ženska pisava / feministična literarna veda

Razprava prikaže, kako so ženski liki v romanih *Uliks* in *Slepa sova* oropani sredstev za polno izražanje in sporočanje. Romana povezuje z odtujenostjo to, da z načinom reprezentiranja ženskega jezika pokažeta, kako pripovedovalci in fokalizatorji obeh romanov like – ženske like in ženske na splošno – odtujujejo od moških glasov in jih tako marginalizirajo. Opaziti je, da pripovedna sloga v *Uliksu* in *Slepi sovi* kljub svoji inovativnosti in eksperimentalnosti še vedno odmerjata zanemarljivo malo prostora ženskim glasovom in jeziku, z redko izjemo notranjega monologa Molly Bloom. V luči sodobnega razumevanja je mogoče Mollyjino pripoved brati, kot da na nek način izhaja iz »semiotičnega« (kar nakazuje predvsem odsotnost ločil), kot nekaj, kar subvertira ustaljeno disciplino jezikovne rabe (oz. »simboličnega«), in zato kot primer »ženske pisave«.

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