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Motherly Affection and the Question of Poverty: A Comparative Study of 'Lady Audley's Secret' and 'Someone Else's Child'

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ABSTRACT

This article considers Jalal Al-Ahmad and Elizabeth Braddon as writers whose fictions voiced attitudes towards poverty and motherhood. Two women, to get rid of poverty, have to get rid of their children in order to remarry. These two women consider remarriage as their only way to happiness and each one deems her child as an obstacle and gives up her motherly affection for her child. The study of this common subject in two different cultures is justifiable from the theory of comparative literature. Thus, aim of this paper is to examine these two English and Persian works from the theory of confluence so as to show the differences and similarities. The method of this paper is based on comparative literature of American School which regards confluence as point of investigation and does not deem direct influence of one author on another as a point of departure. That the two authors have used one similar subject is a condition for their study and comparison in this school.

Keywords: *Motherly Affection, Poverty, Lady Audley's Secret, 'Someone Else's Child'*

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1. Introduction

Two literary works with a similar theme is not a new phenomenon in literature. In all literatures of the world similar themes have occurred simultaneously without the two writers being aware of each other. It is possible that two authors may have had similar love experience in a novel or in a poem or in a drama. Many of the concepts are common to all cultures, such as greed condemnation, piracy condemnation, hypocrisy, and hatred. It is highly likely that culturally different writers have created vengeful and greedy characters that are very similar to each other. Aside from these general concepts, there are certain concepts that can be shared. For example, the issue of a human being metamorphosed into an animal has been seen in many literary works. Common archetypes among people in the history of human beings have invariably occurred in one way or another. This has made these patterns beyond the passing material time and has placed them beyond history of earth. Recovery of these common patterns, regardless of influences and cultural relationship is something in human nature and this discovery at times,

shows a fact which is beyond meaning and in its objectivity becomes meaningful in the form of art and literature. To find common archetype or themes in two writers requires consideration of the most apparent similarities of forms, themes, and verbal expressions in their works and the various factors that explain the origins of such resemblances within the respective cultural settings of their creators. The cultural environments, material and nonmaterial, which produced the two writers must be thoroughly investigated in order to delimit the common denominators, if any, which may exist in the early formation and later creativity of each artist, and which may account for an apparent comparison when in fact they have each separately arrived at similar artistic conclusions.

Initially it is necessary to determine the essential differences, both material and nonmaterial, which exist between these two distinctly remote cultures. Next, it is necessary to relate each of the artists under investigation to their own peculiar culture and to determine their work's relation to, and place within, the sum total of his community's conception and perception of the category of art to which their work



belongs. Once the similarities and differences are established, the researcher can then attempt to set the productions of the two artists over against one another and study them carefully, keeping in mind the sociolinguistic, artistic, and other cultural structural differences of the works under study. Only then, with extraneous elements eliminated, is a comparison possible.

Now Let us consider the writers: Braddon and Al-e Ahmad. Braddon was born in 1835, in London; Al-e Ahmad was born in 1923 in Tehran. Mary Elizabeth Braddon was privately educated; Al-e Ahmad went to Tehran University. Spiritually, Braddon developed into a conservative, according to modern Christian standards; Al-e-Ahmad joined the communist Tudeh Party along with his mentor Khalil Maleki shortly after World War II and became a liberal. Thus, the two writers had completely different cultural environments, both in relation to place and time, and in their responses to their own cultures. Two other differences are obvious: the political difference between London and Tehran, and the intellectual difference between the atmospheres of Tehran University the educational background of Braddon.

1.1 Introduction to Elizabeth Braddon and Jalal al-Ahmed

In this article, two authors and two works with similar themes are examined: Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Iranian writer Jalal al-Ahmed's 'Someone Else's Child'. Jalal Al-e-Ahmad (1923 –1969) was a prominent Iranian writer, thinker, and social and political critic (Karasipahi, 2008. P 177). He promoted the word *gharbzadegi* which has been on multiple times and multiple occasions translated in English as "westernstruck", "westoxification", and "Occidentosis" (Brumberg, 2001, p.65).

Braddon was a prolific writer, producing more than 80 novels with inventive plots. The most famous is *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), a novel which won her recognition and a fortune as a bestseller. It has remained in print since its publication and been dramatized and filmed several times. She created not only sensation fiction, but also was as an actress, a successful editor, and writer of poetry, plays, penny dreadfuls, ghost stories, realist novels, and historical fiction (East, 2012. p. 2).

1.2 Distinct Features of Al-e Ahmad

Al-e-Ahmad's style is colloquial in writing. In this regard, he is a follower of modern Persian writers comparable to Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh. Because the subjects of his works are usually cultural, social and political issues, symbolic representations and sarcastic expressions are regular patterns of his works. A distinct characteristic of his writings is his honest examination of subjects, regardless of possible reactions from political, social or religious powers.

Portraits of social types and the depiction of customs and everyday social situations are mostly contained in the selected short stories. These stories also convey Al-e Ahmad's unusual sensitivity to the plight of women in contemporary Iran (Arjomand, p. 233). From 1944 to 1969, everything that Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) wrote involved explicit or implicit criticism of the Pahlavi regime (p. 11).

Al-e-Ahmad joined the communist Tudeh Party along with his mentor Khalil Maleki shortly after World War II. They "were too independent for the party" and resigned in protest over the lack of democracy and the "nakedly pro-Soviet" support for Soviet demands for oil concession and occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan. They formed an alternative party the Socialist Society of the Iranian Masses in January 1948 but disbanded it a few days later when Radio Moscow attacked it, unwilling to publicly oppose "what they considered the world's most progressive nations." Nonetheless, the dissent of Al-e-Ahmad and Maleki marked "the end of the near hegemony of the party over intellectual life."

He later helped found the pro-Mossadegh Toilers Party, one of the component parties of the National Front, and then in 1952 a new party called the Third Force. Following the 1953 Iranian coup d'état Al-e-Ahmad was imprisoned for several years and "so completely lost faith in party politics" that he signed a letter of repentance published in an Iranian newspaper declaring that he had "resigned from the Third Force, and ... completely abandoned politics." However, he remained a part of the Third Force political group, attending its meetings, and continuing to follow the political mentorship of Khalil Maleki until their deaths in 1969. In 1963, visited Israel for two weeks, and in his account of his trip stated that the fusion of the religious and the secular he discerned in

Israel afforded a potential model for the state of Iran. Despite his relationship with the secular Third Force group, Al-e-Ahmad became more sympathetic to the need for religious leadership in the transformation of Iranian politics, especially after the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1963 (Wells, p. 113). Al-e-Ahmad rigorously supported Nima Yushij (father of modern Persian poetry) and had an important role in acceptance of Nima's revolutionary style.

1.3 Distinct Features of Elizabeth Braddon

Braddon wrote several works of supernatural fiction, including the pact with the devil story *Gerald, or the World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1891), and the ghost stories "The Cold Embrace", "Eveline's Visitant" and "At Chrighton Abbey". From the 1930s onwards, these stories were often anthologised in collections such as Montague Summers's *The Supernatural Omnibus* (1931) and *Fifty Years of Ghost Stories* (1935). Braddon's legacy is tied to the sensation fiction of the 1860s.

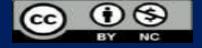
Lady Audley's Secret is particularly significant for helping to create the popular Victorian genre known as sensation fiction, which became extremely popular in the 1860s. Sensation fiction reworked some elements of Gothic novels and crime literature, focusing on revealing dark secrets and shocking, often criminal, behavior. Sensation fiction was especially marked by thrilling and complicated plots, mystery and gradually revealed secrets, which were concealed right in the heart of the domestic sphere of the Victorian family, which, in turn, was regarded as the sublime core of Victorian society. (Pykett, p. 4-5) Carnell asserts that sensation fiction powerfully "challenged the accepted order and questioned conventional morality, rather than accepting pre-ordained certainties" (154). The sensation novels included both traditional and unconventional women. The focus is mainly on the uncontrolled, unconventional, strong woman, who was often described as unwomanly, mad or dangerous.

2. Review of Literature

There are some works done on both works in English and Persian literature. I go through these works in both English and Persian literature. Salimi Kuchi, and Kahnemuyipour(2009) in their article entitled "Social infrastructure in Jalal Ahmad's 'Someone Else's Child'" argue 'Someone Else's Child' depicts very well homogeneity and conformity of the themes and structures that are discussed in the text

with coordinates, infrastructure, socio-cultural activists and requirements that happens in the outside world. Salim Kuchi, Ashrafi and Shafiee in "Study of stylistic translation of the short story 'Someone Else's Child'"(2013) intend to evaluate the nature and style and why it should be taken into account during the process of literary translation. With this in mind, they examine cognitive style of the translation of short story 'Someone Else's Child' of Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Tajbakhsh and Ghasempour in "Study of the story 'Someone Else's Child' of Jalal Al-e Ahmad on the basis of the "theory of ideology" of Althusser"(2014) study this short story from the perspective of Althusser. According to them in the story of 'Someone Else's Child' based on Althusser's theory the problems of woman are basically related to poverty. Eskandari and Dehghan in their article "Study the play "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen's short story 'Someone Else's Child' by Jalal Al-e Ahmad from the perspective of feminism"(2013) study comparatively Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* and the short story 'Someone Else's Child' of Al-Ahmad from feminist point of view. They argue that Ibsen depicts injustices committed against women in this play and believes that ethical rules that govern the lives of men and women are wrong. The writers hold that Al-Ahmad also create a real character, a real figure of a woman strangled in the environment of false values and outdated patriarchal society.

Jill Matus in "Disclosure as 'Cover-up': The Discourse of Madness in *Lady Audley's Secret*" argues for a work that deals with the question of madness, *Lady Audley's Secret* addresses the topic only at the end of the novel which in its terms of the mechanics, madness is the most histrionic of a series of outrageous disclosures. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert, Aeron Haynie in *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* bring together new essays from a variety of viewpoints that clarify both the wealth of Braddon's oeuvre and the variety of critical methods to it. Moqari examines in her article 'Representation of Mad Woman in *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon' the character of *Lady Audley's Secret*. She revisits this novel to discuss the role of poverty, dishonesty as a feminist act, *Lady Audley* as Other, transgressive conduct as an expression of insurgence, cruel patriarchy, and passivity as a punishment for lady Audely who has been an active woman.



3. Discussion

In both stories a woman in order to escape poverty should get rid of her child. The woman narrator in the Iranian short story leaves her child in the street to be supposedly taken by whoever sees it because she considers the child as a pain in the neck. Lady Audley leaves her child to her father to pretend she is single. Lady Audley likewise considers her child as a pain in the neck and an obstacle in her marriage. In both stories there is a separation. In lady Audley's Secret a physical separation exists while in the Iranian story a divorce exists. The women try to ameliorate their condition by remarriage. Poverty in both stories plays a major role. Indeed the word poverty is repeated time and again in Lady Audley's Secret. This theme can link these two writers together since they broach how poverty can destroy motherly affection. To what extent is a mother going to help her children. In fact money plays a major role in the lives of people and if they are financially secure they will be good mothers. To be good and respectful means to be in the money. Normally mothers love their children provided that they themselves are protected but when they are not protected financially, mothers cannot sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children.

Both have children from their previous husbands. Lady Audley has a son from her ex-husband and the woman narrator of "Someone Else's Child" has also a son. The women see themselves unable to raise their children and for this reason try to find a way to get rid of their children.

Both keep the kids away from themselves. Both Mrs. Audley and the narrator of 'Someone Else's Child' for achieving their goal of remarriage and live happily ever after get rid of their sons. The success of their remarriage will be guaranteed if they get rid of their children from their first marriage. In the shadow of their new married life forms have children. Having children means obstacles to living under the same roof again with a new husband.

3.1 Parental Complicity

In both stories the women of the stories get rid of their children with the help of their parents. In *Lady Audley's Secret* lady Audley gets rid of her child temporarily while in the story of Al-e Ahmad riddance is permanent. Thus in terms of emotion, lady Audley is stronger.

She does not get rid of her son forever while the narrator of 'Someone Else's Child' gets rid of her child permanently by leaving the child in the street. Both retaliate from their previous marriage. Their previous marriages are not successful. They think their first husbands are responsible for their present predicament. Thus they retaliate by bigamy and permanent riddance of the son respectively.

In the story of *Lady Audley's Secret* she says she confided the whole affair to her father:

"I confided to my father the whole secret of my peril. He was not very much shocked at what I had done, for poverty had perhaps blunted his sense of honor and principle. He was not very much shocked, but he was frightened, and he promised to do all in his power to assist me in my horrible emergency.(pp. 95-96)

In the story of 'Someone Else's Child' we read:

But my mother came to my rescue and consoled me. And she said some things to me which were right. I've just begun to live, so why should I pine so much for one child? I've got plenty of time to have three or four babies one after the other. But it's true he was my first-and I shouldn't have done this.(Al-e Ahmad, p. 162)

The narrator of the story of 'Someone Else's Child' gets help from her mother who is like the father of lady Audley whose sense of honor and principle had perhaps been blunted by poverty. It is interesting the parent of 'Someone Else's Child' narrator is a woman who is complicit with the whole idea of getting rid of the child. The narrator of 'Someone Else's Child' could, like lady Audley, have placed the child in the custody of her own parent and should have given food and money to her parent to support the child. But because the second husband is not rich, the narrator of 'Someone Else's Child' could not do that. This shows perhaps the severity of poverty that because of poverty a mother gets rid of her child very easily. Who is to blame in the story? The mother? The society? Who is responsible for this situation? The real father of the child?

3.2 Lack of Maternal Affection

When the young and enchanting Lucy Graham marries widower Sir Michael Audley, little is known of her past. Following the mysterious disappearance of his friend George Talboys, Sir Michael's nephew Robert begins to investigate his step-aunt, uncovering her secret double life of intrigue, madness and murder. Often hailed as one of the first feminist

protagonists, Lucy Graham inspires sympathy and derision simultaneously.

The narrator of 'Someone Else's Child' is an unkind woman who gets rid of her child to be the wife of a man who can support her. She does not even suffer from the twinge of conscience. She justifies herself in the following lines:

Well, what could I do? My husband wouldn't keep me and the child both—a child who was not his own'. The boy was my former husband's who had di-vorced me and never come to take him. If someone else were in my place, what would she do? Well, I had to live too. If this new husband divorces me what would I do? I had to get rid of the child. (Al-ahmad, 1968. P. 161)

The story of "Someone else's child" revolves around a woman who wants to marry again and has to get rid of her child. To get rid of her child, she leaves the child to be deliberately lost in the street. She does so because she believes there will be trouble for her new married life. She leaves the kid on the street to secure and cement her second marriage with her new husband who does not like the child.

In the story of "Someone else's child" separation is due to divorce from first husband "my previous husband had divorced me ..." (Ahmad, p. 174) in the story of the *Lady Audley's Secret* her first husband, George Talboys leaves behind his wife and son to earn income and wealth by going to Australia. There is no news from him for three and a half years. She is left alone along with her son exactly like the narrator of 'Someone Else's Child' who is left alone with her son. This tells a lot about the societies in which women live. Both live in a society that is male-dominated. Patriarchal society considers women inferior to men. Both women consider marriage as their progress and their only way to salvation and prosperity in male dominated societies, and they need to be successful in this way. Both Jalal Ahmad and Mary Elizabeth Braddon in their stories criticize the status quo.

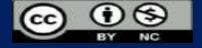
It is very interesting that the children in both stories are male not female. One might ask the right question as to 'why aren't the children female? There are a lot of possibilities for this question. One possibility is that it is reality and in reality such things have happened and writers have depicted these things in their stories and novels. Another possibility is that the choice of male children is quite intentional and the writers are critical of male dominated society. Since the society is

patriarchal perhaps women want to retaliate by getting rid of their male children who stand for their patriarchs. Both women retaliate and wreak revenge on their previous husbands by giving up their male children not female children. Since they consider their first husbands responsible for their present situation, they get rid of their children because they want to live their own individual lives. However not all critics will agree with what the women of the works did. For them their acts seem abnormal. This is evident from their titles. The word Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* brings to mind the English word 'Oddly'. This word means strange which is very much related to Lady Audley's character because she is a strange woman and acts strangely and abnormally to achieve her goals. The word 'Audley' is very accurate and suitable, because it represents a complex character and woman who, while married, marries another man and uses a new name, and she even fakes death and puts her name in widely circulated newspapers so that her ex-husband thinks she is dead. Another strange thing this woman does is that she tries to destroy her ex-husband George and his friend Robert.

The title 'the Someone else's child' for the story of Jalal Al- Ahmad is very suitable to the character of the woman of the story so much so that the woman of the story considers her own child someone else's child pretending that the child does not belong to her as well. Because this woman considers her own child as someone else's child, she leaves the child on the street so that she can live happily ever after.

Both women of the two works 'Someone Else's Child and "Lady Audley's Secret"' are depicted greedy and covetous who are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of material wealth, even they are willing to sacrifice their motherly affection and get rid of their children, since they think they are young and beautiful. In both stories women are told by others that they are young and should make much of their time by getting married on the part of Lady Audley and by get married again on the part of the narrator of 'Someone Else's Child':

As I grew older I was told that I was pretty—beautiful—lovely—bewitching. I heard all these things at first indifferently, but by-and-by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that in spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful in the world's great lottery than my companions. I had learnt that which in some indefinite manner or other every school-girl learns



sooner or later—I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended upon my marriage, and I concluded that if I was indeed prettier than my schoolfellows, I ought to marry better than any one of them. (vol. III p. 85-86)

The same happens to the woman narrator of the story of Jalal Al-Ahmad. Her friends tell her she is pretty, lovely, and bewitching. This makes her leave her child in the street to get married for the second time. After that she appeases herself by saying:

But, well enough. What's done is done, and now there's no more thinking about it. Myself, I wasn't out of my mind and just got up and did this thing. It was my husband who insisted. He was right too, he didn't want to see some other man's brat at his table. When I talked sense to myself, I knew he was right. (Al-l-Ahmad, 1968. p 162)

She does not suffer the twinge of consciousness as to getting rid of her son. She uses the word 'brat' for her own child. She goes through the description of getting rid of her child in close detail:

I strolled about for a while. Perhaps half an hour passed. There were fewer busses now. I came to the edge of the square and pulled out ten shahis from my pocket and gave them to my child. He stood there and just looked at me. He hadn't learned about taking money yet. I didn't know how to make him understand. At the other side of the square a pumpkin seed seller was shouting, and I pointed to him and said, "Take it-go buy something nice. I want to see if you know how to do it by yourself." (Al-l-Ahmad, 1968. p 166)

This is how the narrator of the story gets rid of the child by sending it to be lost in the society. Perhaps the child gets killed and is stolen by some criminals. We can't rule out these possibilities. The major difference between these two different women is that in 'Someone Else's Child' the narrator cruelly gets rid of the child which may seem as a shock to readers. There are cases in which women in reality leave their children on the streets on the grounds of poverty and disgrace due to illegal sex. The women of the two stories exact revenge on the patriarchal society and turn their patriarchal societies on their heads. However, we cannot forgive these women because of getting rid of their children this way. In this case, lady Audley is not that much blameworthy in comparison to the narrator of 'Some Else's Child' since it is highly likely that the child is killed or done away with in 'Someone Else's Child'. We don't know what happens to the child as the narrator does not care for

the child any longer. And it is not important to the narrator what happens to the child. She simply wants to get rid of it at any cost and the way she justifies herself is not acceptable to the reader. Thus the writer of the story of 'Someone Else's Child' makes use of first person narrator to let us not ordinarily accept what the narrator tells us as authoritative. This fallible or unreliable narrator's perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share.

The point of view in *Lady Audley's Secret* is not first person. It is third person. Thus what the third person tells is more reliable than a first person. Thus we might argue it is poverty which causes her to do what she did. Were she not poor, she would not do that. This is true when she is financially secure as in her second marriage she is normal and natural and everybody thinks she is an angel. She is even depicted as a woman of good character. She behaves properly when she has money and is financially secure.

Wherever she went she seemed to take joy and brightness with her. In the cottages of the poor her fair face shone like a sunbeam. She would sit for a quarter of an hour talking to some old woman, and apparently as pleased with the admiration of a toothless crone as if she had been listening to the compliments of a marquis; and when she tripped away, leaving nothing behind her (for her poor salary gave no scope to her benevolence), the old woman would burst out into senile raptures with her grace, beauty, and her kindness, such as she never bestowed upon the vicar's wife, who half fed and clothed her. For you see, Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that magic power of fascination, by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile. Everyone loved, admired, and praised her. The boy who opened the five-barred gate that stood in her pathway, ran home to his mother to tell of her pretty looks, and the sweet voice in which she thanked him for the little service. The verger at the church, who ushered her into the surgeon's pew; the vicar, who saw the soft blue eyes uplifted to his face as he preached his simple sermon; the porter from the railway station, who brought her sometimes a letter or a parcel, and who never looked for reward from her; her employer; his visitors; her pupils; the servants; everybody, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl that ever lived. (Braddon, 1862. p. 11-12)

Though the above words are ironic about her since she will be quite different from the above lines indicate I take them as honest as possible because she acted according to her heart and feeling. Let us suppose George Tallboys never returned to England. What would happen? She would be a nice person forever. However, no one will permit that a mother should get rid of her child just for the sake of poverty. Poverty can corrupt so can wealth. Many believe that mothers should sacrifice themselves for their children at all costs but the two stories believe this is not the case.

4. Conclusion

Poverty can affect motherly affection. Two poor mothers in their way to secure their own welfare abandon their children. Theirs is a desperate situation. The cultural, social and political issues are concerned in this situation. Both stories are feminist stories. They depict unruly women who turn patriarchy on its head. They retaliate. They kill. The difference is that in lady Audley's secret the woman is stronger and more powerful than the narrator in someone else's child. She is more aggressive, more unconventional and more antagonistic. Both writers believe that poverty can be ruinous. It can even ruin a mother. If poverty does so, thus we might not blame the two women of the two stories. Poverty has the power to change a good person to a bad one. Poverty can be dangerous and lead to destruction. This is the message of two culturally different writers who believe that if a person is financially secure, they may be good persons. It is poverty which causes them to do what they did. Were they not poor, they would not do that. This is a good justification. Likewise motherly affection is not something material is another right justification.

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