



Ideological Representation of Woman's Empowerment in Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl (2013)- A Critical Stylistic Study

A H Hamdoon,  

College of Tourism Sciences, University of Mosul, Mosul, Iraq

Article information

Article history:

Received 30/10/2024
Revised 2/12/2024
Accepted 25/6/2025

Keywords:

Stylistics
Women Empowerment,
Equivalence
Opposition

Correspondence:

Asan Hashem Hamdoon
asan.hashem@uomosul.edu.iq

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to analyze selected extracts from Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2013) (1) in a critical stylistic perspective. The novel portrays the life of Amy Dunne character, who disappears from her home because she feels about the collapse of her marital relationship. The writer describes Amy as an intelligent woman, financially capable, and has achieved many ambitions in her life. She is a famous children's stories writer. However, she makes her husband under control throughout negative actions, including lying and committing a murder. The aim of the study is to explore woman's empowerment as an ideology in such literary work and the social and the psychological impacts on the readers. The standard analytical system "Equating and contrasting" presented by Lesley Jeffries' approach (2010) (2) serves as a useful tool for examining the selected passages. It is based on a linguistic model of equivalence and opposition which facilitates the analysis of how their textual constructions are used to represent the sameness and oppositeness between Amy and her husband. The basic linguistic features that can be contribute to this analysis are linguistic triggers along with parallel structures. By comparing the way of describing Amy and her husband, the results uncover the ideological representation of woman's empowerment in the novel, both in positive and negative terms. This ideology affects social and the psychological perceptions of the readers.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69513/jnhf.v3.i2.a12> ©Authors, 2025, College of Education, Alnoor University.
This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

التمثيل الأيديولوجي لتمكين المرأة في رواية الزوجة المفقودة لغيليان فلين 2013- دراسة أسلوبية نقدية

أسن هاشم حمدون  

كلية العلوم السياحية، جامعة الموصل

يعد هذا البحث محاولة لتحليل مقتطفات مختارة من رواية *الزوجة المفقودة* لغيليان فلين (2013) بمنظور أسلوبية نقدي. تدور أحداث الرواية حول شخصية إيمي، التي تخفي من منزلها بسبب شعورها بانهبان علاقتها الزوجية. تصف الكاتبة إيمي بأنها امرأة ذكية وملتزمة مادياً حيث حققت العديد من الطموحات في حياتها وأصبحت كاتبة قصص أطفال مشهورة، إلا أنها تكسب ود زوجها من خلال أفعال سلبية، بما في ذلك الكذب وارتكاب جريمة القتل. هدفت الدراسة إلى بيان تمكين المرأة كأيدولوجية في هذا العمل الأدبي وتأثيراته الاجتماعية والنفسية على القراء. النظام التحليلي القياسي "المساواة والتضاد" أداة يقدمها منهج ليسلي جيفريز (2010). يمكن استخدام هذه الأداة في تحليل الفقرات المختارة. تعتمد هذه الأداة على النموذج اللغوي للتكافؤ والتضاد

Website: <http://jnh.alnoor.edu.iq>

Journal Email: jnh@alnoor.edu.iq

مجلة النور للدراسات الإنسانية

Al-Noor Journal for Humanities

وكيفية استخدام التراكيب النصية لتمثيل التشابه والاختلاف بين إيمي وزوجها. يمكن فحص التراكيب اللغوية الأساسية لإعطاء النتائج وباستخدام التراكيب المتوازية على هذا النحو. ومن خلال المقارنة والتباين بين طريقة وصف إيمي وزوجها، كشفت النتائج التمثيل الأيديولوجي لتمكين المرأة في الرواية بشكل إيجابي وأخر سلبي ولهما تأثيرهما الاجتماعي والنفسي على القراء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأسلوبية، الشخصية، التمكين، التكافؤ، التعارض

Introduction

The language is considered as a basic thing in life. Through it, desires, thoughts, and all basic daily activities can be conveyed (3). A lot of considerations have been given to the literary texts by critical linguists. They have attracted the attention of the scholars in the sense that they reveal how a culture perceives the world. Hence, the stylistic properties of their language have been regarded by the critical analysts. That is, most of the linguistic features of the vocabularies in dictionaries are mentioned. In the field of literary works, critical stylistic analyses have been dedicated. The interest is conducted to interpret the style of the language in terms of the messages they would like to convey and their forgotten makers (4).

This paper is an attempt to analyze selected passages from Gillian Flynn's 2013 (1) *Gone Girl*. It is based on the critical stylistic features of these passages. The examination of these language choices which are made in different contexts develops a critical reading ability and may uncover woman empowerment as an ideology. Mahbub (5) defines woman empowerment indicating that it refers to the ability of women to gain power and control over their lives. It involves raising woman's awareness, expanding choices, and increasing access to control the procedures of her life. This ability leads her to build herself-confidence. Then, the gender inequality and discrimination between men and women can be changed socially and individually.

The aim of this study is to show how woman's empowerment is being loaded through the description of Amy and her relationship with her husband Nick. However, having an interest in how Amy and Nick are described negatively or positively by Gillian Flynn, the linguistic forms of the selected passages would be focused on throughout the paper. Concerning the events of the novel, the language that is used to describe Amy reveals that she has money, skills, knowledge, and leisure time necessary. She has been positioned by the writer very highly in her society in terms of race and class. She is naturally good, fair, and violently like men. She fears the collapse of her marriage after discovering her husband's dishonest and treats her coldly. This attitude of him makes her follow evil plan to make him under her control. The story ends with the scene that reveals Amy with her husband while they are in their house thinking about their coming baby (6).

To have a better understanding of the ideology which is structured in the descriptions of both Amy and Nick, the analysis will focus on the form and function. Critical stylistics is being the ideal model. Furthermore,

this model is fundamentally an approach to ideologies in language. These ideologies are represented in the form of literary text, and critical stylistics has the right tools to uncover them. Hence, a critical stylistic study is conducted via selected passages from the novel to uncover the woman's empowerments as an ideology (3). Equating and contrasting is the tool that is used to such analysis.

2.1 Equating and Contrasting

Equating and contrasting is a tool that is used for linguistic analysis. Technically, it is part of an approach to social meanings, power, and ideology in language. It is a critical stylistic instrument which deals with texts and their makers (7). Pragmatically, the analysis is concerned with those elements which depend on extra-linguistic contextual information the readers' inference abilities (8). A wide range of analytical tools are featured by a linguistic model of equivalence and opposition. These tools are intended to analyze the literary language. Hence, the analysis represents the world through language. It deals with the stylistic forms and functions of the language under investigation. Importantly, critical stylistics structures and examines any possible ideologies in texts. (3).

This chosen tool is particularly effective tool to gain better understanding of how the writer compares Amy and Nick and implies women's empowerment whether in positive or negative terms. However, critical approach is designed to unearth ideologies in literary texts. Meanings can be interpreted in texts basically the same way and the used tool performs all kinds of text analysis (9). The texts construct different worlds for language users. Meanwhile, these texts also employ stylistic feature that can be considered either equivalent or contrasting. Moreover, ideologies are embedded in the language. If this perspective is adopted, the equivalence and opposition in linguistic serve to communicate and perpetuate ideologies in society (3). As far as equivalence is concerned, two lexical items may appear identical, but they are considered near-synonyms and may have different grammatical properties. They differ in connotations and formality levels. On the other hand, antonyms are easier to be identified. Large and small, for instance, are antonyms which share semantic content that is related to size, but they are different in extent. However, equating and contrasting are not always found in isolated words. In fact, multiple syntactic triggers are used creating equivalence and opposition in texts. Accordingly, an actual semantic relation between two activities defines the message being conveyed. Hence, unearthing opposition and equivalence in the selected passages

may require going beyond the wording. However, a linguistic model of opposition and equivalence depends on many lexical and syntactic triggers which can create these two notions (10).

2.1.1 Linguistic Triggers of Equivalence and Opposition

The following are some of potential linguistic triggers to be examined in the selected passages. The aim is to identify how woman's empowerment is conveyed as embedded ideology within the text.

1. Apposition Triggers: a grammatical construction in which two or more usually adjacent words, phrases or clauses are put next to each other. They are especially nouns or noun equivalents that have the same referent stand in the same syntactic relation to the rest of a sentence. They are placed beside each other in a sentence, so that one describes or defines the other. There are three types that help in the current study. First, the grammatical elements of parallelism can be represented throughout similar words, clauses, phrases, or sentence structure. They are considered as parallelism or elaborated idea, for example: "easy come, easy go". Second, intensive verbs describe and focus on the subject of the sentence. They are followed by a noun, noun phrase, adjective, or a prepositional phrase. They indicate that an action is performed vigorously, enthusiastically, forcefully or to an otherwise enlarged extent (11). Third, a figurative utterance of metaphorical equivalence directly compares a concept or person. This person or concept comes from one another in an unrelated domain. It facilitates literary idea and provides framework for reasoning about abstract concept, for example, "They both hold water" (12)

2. Opposition Triggers: they are a generalized correlation of the units or the forms of the language when a certain category or function is expressed. The opposition triggers must possess two types of features: the common features and the differential features. The common features serve as the basis for contrast, while the differential features express the function in question. One of the triggers is an explicit opposition. It is fully revealed or expressed opposition without vagueness, implication, or ambiguity. Parallelism trigger is achieved through the repetition of different structure, phrases, or words which have the same meaning. Further, concessive opposition is a word or a clause. It may be considered as concessive when they introduce or express a fact that make another fact surprisingly, for example (although they are rich). The replacive opposition refers to lexical items or linguistic constructions that have the opposite meaning. it follows the formula X rather than Y. There are also comparative

oppositions. They are linguistic expressions used in comparing two things or persons. It follows the formula less X than Y. In addition, transitional oppositions are expressions that follow the formula X tunes into Y. And finally, negated opposition are expressions that follow the formula X not Y.

3.1. Methodology

The previous discussion has provided clarification and subjective interpretation of the model employed. Hence, the tool of analysis has been adopted objectively. The current part presents the selected passages to be analyzed based on the aforementioned model. However, before delving into the data analysis, it is worth noting that the analysis follows a pattern. First, each passage will be discussed briefly, and a hypothetical context is designed according to what is used by the writer. After that, the passage will appear alongside the source from which it is taken. Finally, critical stylistic analysis of the selected passages will be taken place by using the tool equivalence and opposition.

3.1.1 Selected Passages

The following passages are intentionally selected. They reveal the negative and positive features of both Amy and Nick. "I have never been a nag. I have always been rather proud of my un-nagginess. So, it pisses me off, that Nick is forcing me to nag. I am willing to live with a certain amount of sloppiness, of laziness, of the lackadaisical life. I realize that I am more type-A than Nick, and I try to be careful not to inflect my neat-freaky, to-do-list nature on him. Nick is not the kind of guy who is going to think to vacuum or clean out the fridge. He truly doesn't see that kind of stuff, fine, really, But I do like a certain standard of living—I think it's fair to say the garbage shouldn't literally overflow, and the plates shouldn't sit in the sink for a week with smears of bean burrito dried on them. That's just being a good grown-up roommate. And Nick's not doing anything anymore, so I have to nag, and it pisses me off: you are turning me into I never have been and never wanted to be, a nag, because you are not living up to your end of a very basic compact. Don't do that, it's not okay to do. I know, I know, I know that losing a job is incredibly stressful, and particularly for a man, they say it can be like a death in the family, and especially for a man like Nick, who has always worked."

"But I worry. All the time. I know I'm already too old for my husband's tastes. Because I used to be his ideal, six years ago, and so I've heard his ruthless comments about women nearing forty: how pathetic she finds them, overdressed, out of bar, oblivious to their lack of appeal. He'd come back from a night out drinking, and I'd ask him how the bar was, whatever bar, and he'd so often say: "Totally inundated by Lost Causes," his code

for women my age. At the time, a girl barely in her thirties, I'd smirked along with him as if that would never happen to me. Now I am his Lost Cause, and he's trapped with me, and maybe that's why he's so angry." "Amy is just a nurturing, motherly type of woman. She loved being a wife. And I know she would have been a great mother. But Nick—you just knew Nick was wrong somehow. Cold and aloof and really calculating—you got the feeling that he was definitely aware of how much money Amy had.

3.1.2. Data Analysis

The comparison between Amy and Nick is apparent from the language being used, and the selection of the vocabularies may reflect the intended meaning of the writer. Equating and contrasting is an analytical tool to examine the way of the writer to make comparison between Amy and Nick. In the first passage, Amy is talking about her personality and how she is forced by her husband to be nag. The style of the utterance "Nick is forcing me to nag" implies that Amy doesn't complain before her marriage, but she starts to nag after the behaviour of her husband and the way of dealing with her as the trigger (forcing) is used. The style of the next utterance "I am willing to live with a certain amount of sloppiness, of laziness, of the lackadaisical life" reflects the oppositeness between the two characters. The selected vocabularies (sloppiness, laziness, and lackadaisical life) reflect the structural opposition specially when the structure (I am willing to live) is used. It implies that Amy lives with a sloppy and lazy person who makes her life without motive. It means that her husband adds nothing to her except the negative things. The use of the common features as the basis for contrast and reflect explicit opposition. Further, the use of the replace opposition in the style of the utterance "I realize that I am more type-A than Nick" and the selection of the factive trigger (realize) presuppose that Amy is proud of her position and how she lives in a perfect life unlike her husband who has nothing to do. It implies that Amy is characterized by competitiveness, drive, ambition, and urgency. She is often good at reaching her goals.

The style of the utterance "He truly doesn't see that kind of stuff, fine, really, But I do like a certain standard of living" reflects more contrast between the wife and her husband. The structural presupposition (a certain standard of living) recalls some facts mentioned in the preceded utterance such as the definite description (my neat-freaky) and (clean out the fridge) with the implicative verb (clean). Amy compares herself with Nick in the sense that he has no responsibility about the simplest standards in their home. It implies that Amy likes things in her home. She is extremely tidy and clean. She spends a lot of time cleaning unlike Nick who is careless about their home. The style of the next utterance provides more blame to

Nick "Nick's not doing anything anymore, so I have to nag, and it pisses me off". It gives justification to the naggingness of Amy. Hence, the writer intends to justify any negative behavior that can be done by Amy. It views Nick as a useless man in his home and has no benefits except the negative ones such as makes her wife as a nagging woman in the time that she has the total responsibility of the affairs of her home.

The next utterances "I know, I know, I know that losing a job is incredibly stressful, and particularly for a man, they say it can be like a death in the family, and especially for a man like Nick, who has always worked" reveals implicit equivalence between Amy and Nick. The selected vocabulary such as (know) gives justification for Nick to be useless since he has no job. It facilitates literary idea and provides framework for reasoning about abstract concept. The reflection of the economic problems is clear in Amy's home. They greatly influence the events and play a role in the lives of both Amy and Nick. Their marriage takes a sharp turn for the worse after losing their jobs. The empty subdivision they live in reflects the economic crash. Hence, these circumstances potentially connected to Amy's disappearance. In addition, the economic problems are shown to create additional stress and bring out the worst in people. So, Nick and Amy are empty with dissatisfaction. They lack their relationship and subjectivities.

The second selected passage reflects Nick's dishonesty which is the reason behind Amy's. In fact, both characters lie to each other and to the reader during the entire novel. Amy's disappearance is the most visible case of dishonesty with additional lies. Nick also lies to conceal secrets such as his affair. The style of the utterance (I'm already too old for my husband's tastes) implies the awareness of Amy about Nick's complains concerning her old age. The fictive trigger (already) suggests the fact of the following information in "too old for my husband tastes". Hence, he prefers the young woman and neglects his wife, Amy. The ideology of dishonesty is particularly striking and disturbing because marriage is often expected to be rooted in trust and intimacy, and yet we see that Amy and Nick lie to each other constantly. The use of the term (ruthless comments) in the utterance "I've heard his ruthless comments about women nearing forty: how pathetic he finds them, overdressed, out of bar, oblivious to their lack of appeal" means the awareness of Amy about how Nick wants to be surrounded by young girls in the time of her reaching the old age as she believes. This fact is insured throughout the following utterance "At the time, a girl barely in her thirties, I'd smirked along with him as if that would never happen to me". The implied contrasting image between the two characters under investigation can be felt throughout the utterance "Now

I am his Lost Cause, and he's trapped with me, and maybe that's why he's so angry". The behavior of Nick leads Amy to disappear and attract the attention of people to blame Nick as he forced her to follow devil plans. The use of the term (Lost Cause), a famous song which describes a ruthless man throughout its content, tells that Amy has lost her patience. She can't stop thinking about her husband and how she can save her marriage with him. The writer reflects her as an idol woman who wants to keep her husband near her at the time of committing different mistakes just to fulfill her desire concerning killing a man unfortunately.

The third selected passage reflects more contrast between Amy and Nick. The use of the terms "a nurturing, motherly type of woman" and "loved being a wife" reflect positive features of Amy. The vocabularies (nurturing and motherly) describe a woman who takes care of, feed and protect children. When these vocabularies followed by the phrase (type of woman) means that Amy is going to protect her children and provides tenderness to them. The use of the factive verb (loved) followed by (being a wife) describes the willingness of Amy to be a wife. She intends to make her relationship with her husband good and full of love. In addition, the use of the modal auxiliary verb (would) followed by the phrase (a great mother) reflects Amy's readiness to be good mother and focuses her attention towards her children. The oppositeness between these features of Amy and the features of her husband is explicit since the focal adverb (but) is used. The negative description of Nick is explicit throughout the selections of the vocabularies (wrong, cold, aloof, and calculating). The fictive verb (aware) which describes the impression of Nick towards Amy, tells that he is following the fortune of her wife as the utterance (how much money Amy had) is used. It reflects the fact that Nick has married his wife not to create a family but to save his condition and benefits from the money of his wife.

4.1. Conclusion

The selection of the vocabularies used to describe Amy and Nick implies Woman's Empowerment positively and negatively. It is an important ideology in the novel. Amy compares herself to her husband, Nick, and hints that her marriage to him doesn't increase her positivity in any way, but on the contrary, it increases the negative thoughts inside her. Nick's loss of his job makes him a lazy person who is unable to do anything, but rather relied on her for expenses. Hence, Amy is afraid for what will happen to her marriage to Nick, as she noticed that he does not pay any attention to her, and this is due to her advanced age. Nick begins to share some beliefs about the deceitfulness and cunning of women. However, the novel is itself a misogynistic text, since the writer portrays Amy in such a positive light in the time of describing her as an intelligent

woman and has wealth reflecting her as a successful woman in the society. The writer provides Amy doing things that women are stereotypically accused to be done, such as lying about having been raped. Nick knows how destructive bad parenting can be, he is determined not to leave Amy with sole control of their child and is trapped in his marriage as a result. Hence, the style of the selected positive vocabularies to describe Amy reflects positive and negative ideologies. In one hand, the positive side of Woman's Empowerment is achieved throughout the successful accomplishments of Amy to be intelligent and lovely woman in her society and has the ability to be independent. In the other hand, the negative side of the ideology under investigation is implied throughout the negative things which are made by Amy to make her husband under her control and makes him as an idol husband who is required to build successful family. Amy reaches this aim by deceiving others that her husband is guilty and careless about their home. He is described as a traitor man and seeks illegal relationships. These characteristics of Nick provide implied justifications to Amy to do the negative actions. Hence, the social and psychological impacts are clear since the crime is justified throughout the novel.

References

1. Flynn G. Gone girl. Good Readers Hachette UK. 2012. <https://www.routledge.com/Hallidays-Introduction-to-Functional-Gramma>
2. Jeffries L. Critical Stylistics: The Power of English. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. <https://www.academia.edu/3804763/Critical-Stylistics-the-Power-of-English>
3. Ohmayer A L. A Pragmatic Analysis of Flouting Gricean Maxims in Televised Conversational Interaction. NJHS. 2024; 2(3):226-257. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>
4. Sebeok Th. Style in Language. MIT Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology: New York, London. 1960
5. Mahub M. Women Empowerment; Theory, Practice, Process and Importance. 2021. <https://www.scribd.com/document/781088725/Women-Empowerment-Theory-Practice-Process-and-Importance>
6. Bain E. The Art of Persuasion: A Rhetorical Analysis of Amy Dunne's Narration in Gone Girl, Smooth Criminals. 2023;10: (1).
7. Nørgaard N, Busse B, & Montoro R. Key Terms in Stylistics. London: Continuum. 2010.
8. AL A L, & Ali K H. Pragmatic Traps in Arabic False Advertisements. NJHS. 2024;2(3)1-26. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> <https://doi.org/10.33043/DLR.10.1.28-35>
9. Burke M. The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics. Ed. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London. 2014.
10. Qadir IA. Equating and Contrasting in English Men and Women Proverbs: Critical Stylistic Analysis. South Asian Res J Arts, Language Liter. 2021;3(5):68-74. 10.36346/sarjall.2021.v03i05.002.
11. Halliday M A K, & Matthiessen C M. Halliday's introduction to functional grammar. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group. London. 2013.
12. Camp E. Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments. Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 2009;33(1):107-130. https://monoskop.org/images/archive/8/84/20141028191454%21Jakobson_Roman