

**Critical Analysis of Discourse in the Novel *Starless Nights* Based
on Norman Fairclough's Ideas**

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Introduction

Discourses have a two-way relationship with the society; On the one hand, the dominant powers of the society attempt to form discourses aligned with themselves, and on the other hand, the discourses shape society's thoughts in the process of their naturalization. Critical discourse analysis pays attention to the relationship between ideology and power in different structures of the society, especially cultural structures. The most prominent model in this approach is Norman Fairclough's, which deals with texts on three levels: first, the description of linguistic structures; second, the interpretation of the context and of discourse production; third, the explanation of the relationship between power and discourse in the text.

Method

This research is based on Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis and uses a descriptive-analytical method, relying on examples from the text.

Discussion

Every ideology feeds on assumptions and value systems in its structure that are individualized in a person or a group. One of the approaches of discourse analysis is to examine the relationship between power and the dominant and oppressed discourses.

Misogynist discourses are among the naturalized discourses in all societies. In Marzieh Nafari's novel, too, the dominant discourse places women in a lower position than men by the use of its power which is institutionalized in the structures of society, based on the attitude of absolute valuation and religious and traditional beliefs. Through this gender valuation, the dominant discourse deprives women of their authority over their destiny and makes them dependent on men. Afterwards, by naturalizing this ideology in all structures of the society, including the family, it tries to limit and control women. On the one hand, by posing critical questions, the adolescent narrator enters into a conversation with the dominant discourse and interacts with it, and on the other hand, she tries to change its inhibiting elements in favor of his own discourse.

The novel *Starless Nights*, written for adolescents, makes its readers think and ask questions in the face of this discourse. By the use of Fairclough's theory, the present research shows how anti-feminist elements are present everywhere in the society and in the hidden layers

of linguistic and social structures, and how an adolescent comes in contact with these elements.

The author reveals the opposition of the traditional and anti-traditional discourses in linguistic constructions, including words, pronouns and verbs that are ideologically charged, as well as in the statements of the characters belonging to these discourses. Also, the process of naming, which leads to the superiority of men and the inferiority of women in the traditional view, is one of the challenges raised in this novel. One of the elements of language that shows the ideological function of discourses is the naming process. The author uses this element in the title of the novel to express his desired goal. The beautiful paradox (starless nights), which is the name of the narrator and the central character of the story, refers to the traditional discourse on the removal of “stars” on the one hand, and on the other hand, it functions as a symbolic interpretation of the evolution and awareness of “stars” in reaching their rights that is associated with an image of a rainy and starless night.

Using the war-torn atmosphere of the society, the text reveals one of the important conflicts in the society: while showing the social efforts and various abilities of women, it also shows how women's role is limited to housekeeping and how this role has turned into one of the most common stereotypes in the traditional discourse governing the society in order to keep women away from social activities, and as a result, from independence. The fact that the narrator's father opposes and ridicules the activities of his wife and daughters outside the house shows to what extent the role of women in social activities is devalued by the dominant discourse of the society. In contrast, the novel

highlights the figures of Ms. Fahimi for breaking the traditional discourse and working in such role as the person in charge of the mosque cultural base and her ability in martial training.

The author also represents the reproduction of the traditional anti-feminist discourse and questions it from the narrator's perspective by using several intertextualities that are suitable for the audience's age. The allusion to the story of *Khaleh Souske* [a Persian folktale, literary meaning *Auntie Beetle*] is meant to show the historical lower position of Iranian women. Also, the author refers to the anime television series, *Don Chuck Monogatari* [which was broadcasted in Iran by the title *Brave Boy*] in an attempt to break the society's sexist view and derogatory view of women which induces weakness, incapacity and fragility. The narrator's references to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, which is a historical example of women's efforts to achieve their human freedom, emphasizes the need for women's independence and questions the objectification of women. She asks questions and makes her audience think. The author uses the story "The Ugly Duckling" to show the rejection of the narrator by her family due to the violation of anti-woman laws.

Finally, the narrator reaches maturity and self-awareness in her challenges against these beliefs and crosses the barrier. This text symbolically portrays the narrator's difference and rejection by the society while making her a representative of all women in her position. The novel shows the critical and questioning view of the adolescents in encountering the ideology ruling the society and at the same time, it implicitly shows its support for the anti-traditional discourse.

4. Results

The findings show that language constructions in the dominant discourse are conveyed with a harsh and degrading tone towards women. The author has used the war-torn atmosphere of the society, where anti-women attitudes have been more intense, for her novel, which can be generalized to the current society as well, and shows many obstacles in the transition from traditional discourses that consider the position of men to be higher than women. Since the ruling power strongly supports the anti-women discourse, the social structure, including the family, is at the service of this discourse, which causes domestic violence against women and their escape from home. The dominant and traditional discourse in the structures of the society is so extensive and powerful that even women have accepted obedience to men as a moral behavior in their belief system. Nevertheless, the novel does not intend to completely ignore the traditions and positive values of the society, rather it seeks to modify the traditional attitude by challenging the traditional discourse.

Keywords: Critical Approach, *Starless Nights*, Fairclough, Anti-woman discourse

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