

In Historiographical Pursuit of Foucault's Power/Knowledge Theory in Poetry: Mari Evans' "When in Rome" and Simin Behbahani's "The Teacher and the Student"

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Abstract

Enthusiasm in the field of comparative studies, concentrating on similarities, variations and influences enhanced in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the rise of Occidental interest in Oriental advancements. About a century later, Michael Foucault introduced his cutting-edge theory, in which he illustrated how the various discursive institutions in a society are related to the circulation of power/knowledge. Hayden White revolutionized the historical outlook towards narrating events by emphasizing on the relationship between the supremacy and the oppressed, while insisting on the disclosure of cause-effect relationships in historiographical analysis. It is the objective of this study to investigate and trace the key notion of "influence" as proposed by the French School of Comparative Literature in the selected pieces, "When in Rome" by Mari Evans and "The Teacher and the Student" by Simin Behbahani in order to reveal how the texts, under the influence of hyper-contextual links of causality which are present in socio-cultural discourses, lead and contribute to the circulation of power and knowledge. Findings will indicate how the comparison of distinct artistic works demonstrates similitude in the expression of views and intentions while relying on factors which are extrinsically appended to them.

Keywords: Discourse, Michael Foucault, Power/ Knowledge Circulation, Resistance, Hayden White

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1. Introduction

Mari Evans (1919-2017), the African-American poet, works in the oral African-American tradition and has exhibited her craft in a wide range of subjects with a unique expertise in the employment of the English language to display her commitment in enriching her cultural legacy. Her poetry is often characterized by going beyond resistance, being defiantly feminist and conspicuously dedicated to Black poetics. Within her lines, she adroitly conveys mood, contributes to tone and casts the die for a poetic voice which is dominantly feminine. "It must also be stated that her form is as much a part of her social milieu as her social concerns for Black people, the content of her poems"(Douglas 2008: 98). Like the other members of the Black Arts Movement, she feels the need to be the voice of the voiceless and to exhibit how the white supremacy has marginalized the Black minority by assuming power and having the upper hand in politics, social matters and cultural issues. Within the lines of her poetry, she has always devoted a soft, yet firm spot, for the Black woman and her predicament throughout ages.

One of her most anthologized poems, "When in Rome" appears in Evans' poetry collection *I Am a Black Woman* (1970). The poem is actually a one-sided conversation between a mistress and her maid and the poet artistically allows the omniscient reader to have access to the thoughts of the maidservant in response to her mistress. As stipulated about this particular poem, " Fanon's compartmental world which divides the settler from the colonized and separates the oppressor from the oppressed, or the master from the slave is given an interesting, though humorous variation by Evans' poetic portrayal of the differences between employer and servant" (Douglas 2008: 142-3). The circulation of power is quite evident as the lady of the house tries to display her benevolence while exposing her superiority and the maid strives to resist against the imposition of power as she makes mental responses to whatever is articulated on the behalf of the lady. The reader readily learns that there are some things about the world of the white supremacy that are of little or almost no value to the Black who possess their own system of values. Language and tone greatly aid the poet in illustrating the Black viewpoint in encountering the boastful display of hegemonic influence.

The other artist discussed in this article is Simin Behbahani (1927-2014), alias Khalili, the outstanding poet of modern Persian literature, celebrated for her poetry in "ghazal"-style. Undisputedly, she is an icon in contemporary poetry and is highly respected among the Iranian intelligentsia and literati as a brave and outspoken activist. She straightforwardly, challenges common thought and firmly expresses her abhorrence for any kind of oppression and violence. Tutored by a poet mother, she soon learned that poetry could be an influential method of expression, easily paving the way toward her ambition which was to become an educator. The most prevalent motif in her works is opposition to the violation of human rights and wrongful imposition. "Simin is a feminist who is aware of history and patriarchy (a kind of

oppression) and is fair in her judgments” (Dehbashi 2004:268).

“The Teacher and the Student” is a poem from Behbahani’s poetry collection, published in 2006. It relates a one-sided conversation between a fault-finding teacher and a helpless student. “The poem is actually a bi-partisan, paradoxical, binary imagery” (Asgari 2017: 1). The first section discloses the aggressive attitude of a teacher in confronting an allegedly lazy student and the second is a revelation of the same teacher who treats the student with sympathy once she has come to learn about the real, yet extraneous, reason why the student has failed to meet the requirements of the educational system.

As to the critical aspect, we have Michael Foucault, the French sociologist and critical thinker, who is best known for his progressive theory commenting on the relationship between power and knowledge. In his prominent work, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, he summarizes his views and questions the traditional outlook of dialectics in power and makes novel propositions about the relationship between knowledge and power within a society and the way in which both transfer. Foucault understands power, which only exists when it is put into action, as continually articulated knowledge so that it always endorses the dominance of power. Moreover, power is regarded as a concept which possesses a productive function, constituting and supporting an entire constructive network, running through any society. Arguably, all levels of the society share in the circulation of power through the production and the distribution of the most elementary cultural and social texts and no power or force can exist per se without being in relation with other forces (Foucault 1980: 93). Among all the factors which convene to shape the sociological position of individuals, power and its dialectical circulation and manifestation, which unquestionably result in constant conflicts, are of optimal significance. Noteworthy is the fact that the existence of power relations presupposes the existence of “dominance” and resistance”(90). Knowledge, in an intimate relationship with power, can be internally associated with it, since power creates and shapes new objects of knowledge and information, and information reciprocally legitimizes the effects of power.

In mid-twentieth century, Hayden White, the outstanding American historian, proposed novel outlooks in historical analysis, dramatically altering the study of historical investigation. In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (1973), White’s views, considering the definition of history, are clearly expressed. He firmly believes that the study of historical events should be carried out scientifically, that is based on evidence collection, while reporting it should rely on creativity (White 1973: 136-7), which renders the narration of historical events a scientific-artistic performance. Moreover, in his thorough article entitled, “The Burden of History”, he clearly states that the claim of autonomy should be severed from history since there are affinities and attachments which deem the understanding of historical phenomena such as the confrontation between the oppressor and the

oppressed as an event that requires the complete and observant study of cause-effect connections (113).

2. Objectives

Inarguably, the study of comparative literature is “the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature, on the one hand, and the other areas of knowledge and belief ... on the other (Remak 1971: 3). It is the objective of this paper to follow the principles stipulated by the comparatists of the French School and to analyze Evans and Behbahani's selected poems in order to discover the causal links, extrinsic to the texts, which activate the circulatory convection of power and to display how power and knowledge are dispersed within the text by unveiling the manner in which one pre-conditions the other. Power is productive, non-possessive and present in all social relationships, but the manner, extent and reasons why it is utilized, is the issue considered in the present work. It is also the intention of this research to display the intertwined relationship between power and knowledge and how they mutually reinforce one another in initializing confrontation in socio-cultural discourses. In turn, events are triggered possessing not only historical but also cultural significance which are meaningful to both Comparatists and New Historicists. The precise study of the intricacies in this relationship cannot be unveiled, unless, according to White, and as previously mentioned, the impact of cause-effect relationships within socio-cultural discourses is taken into consideration.

3. Significance of the Study

“Comparative literature is both the past and the future of the literary studies,” (Hutchinson 2018: 1). Thus, a bridge is constructed through which views, extracted from varied cultures, are interconnected. Moreover, evidence provided from literature can aid literary critics to elaborate on otherwise cultural-philosophical notions which may otherwise prove difficult to grasp. In this article, the two selected poems enhance the tangibility and effortless comprehension of suggested philosophical theories proposed by Foucault and White.

4. Literature Review

In the introduction of an anthology, Young (2020) presents readers with a collection of poems by African-American poets with the objective of illustrating that this type of poetry is more than a means of personal expression. Rather, it is a vehicle through which protest against the dominant power is manifested. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) displays how African-American women have developed a rich and comprehensive approach while providing a conclusive framework for Black feminist thinkers.

Lauri Scheyer (2015) emphasizes the notion that the study of African-American

poetry is significant since this genre is to be viewed as historical evidence of Black protest against dominant sovereignty rather than the free expression of a minority group. Moreover, Silvana Krisna and Liliek Soelistyo (2013) argue how Black power is revealed in selected poems by providing a definition and manifesting the manner in which the Black survive within societies subject to the dominion of the White Supremacy. Additionally, Kristin L. Matthews (2011) highlights the strength in Evans' poetry and argues why her work must be canonized due to the commitment she exposes to Black female consciousness.

Robert L. Douglas (2008) inquiries into the role and force that art has in the expression of Black values. The section on Evans' poetry greatly aids comprehension of the commitment the poet feels in revealing the power of the Black individual. In a revealing paper, Evelyn M. Simien (2004) stipulates that currently, Black feminist thought has experienced a certain awakening and developed an understanding that intersects the patterns of discrimination. This work traces the origins of Black feminist consciousness and tries to disclose the aims of the Black female author. Moreover, Stephen Henderson (1973) emphasizes the significance of studying Black culture prior to analysis of Black literary works while in an outstanding collection of papers, David Dorsey (1983) eulogizes Evans' style of composing poetry in his article and illustrates how the poetess is master of "Black aesthetic principles".

Asgari (2017) offers his own suppositions about relationships, the effect of power and its transformation when it is accompanied by knowledge. In a revealing article, Akbar Ganji (2006) eulogizes Behbahani for her clever and intricate choice of motifs. He emphasizes that the subjects covered by the poet accentuate her keen sense of observation. Meanwhile, in another article placed in the editorial section of *Hamshahri Newspaper* (2003), the columnist underscores the change that Behbahani procured in creating a utopian world in her works. In two separate articles published in *Washington Post*, an attempt is made to shed light on Behbahani's literary career and her thoughts about the significance of poetry. The first, by Nora Boustani (2006) and the second by Soraya Nadia McDonald (2014) reveal the intricacies and the finer techniques detected in the poet's works. In another article based on an interview conducted by Shiva Rahbaran, Harriet Staff (2011) introduces Behbahani as an iconoclast who has realized the value of good poetry and employed it to its extreme properties.

Henry Remak's article (1971) on the strengths and weaknesses of the French School and categorizations made by Manqoush (2014) provided valuable information needed to complete one critical aspect of this research. Teshome Aberra (2019) discusses his understanding of Foucault's power/ knowledge from his own perspective. The researcher attempts to elaborate on a three-step approach in order to collect practical evidence. Sandeep Sharma (2018) reviews Foucault's stance in gaining knowledge, which is the result of power struggles and not the property of a domineering class, institution or person. Accordingly, the purpose of studying power

circulation is to explore how it is in action in a society. Panneerselvam (2000) makes a review of the notion of power in all of Foucault's works and concludes that power is "dispersed", "indeterminate", "heterogeneous" and "constituting individuals' bodies and identities" (Panneerselvam 2000: 20). Paul Patton (1994) surveys the theory of power and argues that there exists a distinction between constructive and destructive power. Additionally, dominance and resistance, as terms related to power, are discussed.

Hayden White (1990) makes valuable contributions to historical analysis by furthering the notion of authority in literature and suggesting that historical discourse is a form of fiction to be classified and studied on the basis of structure and language use. His views about the recording of historical events and presenting them while considering the elements that contribute to cause-effect relationships are presented in his magnum opus (1973) and an elucidating article, "The Burden of History" (1966) makes suggestions about the role of the historian in recreating historical narrative. Mehdi Ghasemi (2014) offers a revisional article, summarizing White's views regarding his historiographical outlook.

5. Theoretical Framework

Since its origination, Comparative Studies as a young discipline, has undergone many changes, by its practitioners, both in principle and presenting a uniform outlook which can be defined and discussed within a framework. There are, currently, four main branches of which the French School tends to align with the suppositions made in this research. In essence, the followers of this school claim that comparative studies uproot and surface the latent cultural beliefs and social principles of various discourses, which are inherent in the literary texts of different languages, with the aim of identifying influences which are extrinsic to the context. Therefore, neither is "the text an individual, isolated object" (Allen 2000: 36) nor is it value-free, for "the poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture" (Kristeva 1980: 65). The connection between socio-cultural discourses, as suggested by the principles in comparative studies, is a solid one "since literature and culture are mutually constitutive and cannot be completely understood without analyzing the elements used in them" (Manquoush 2014:308). This accentuates the notion of collecting factual evidence from literary texts which are rather "a compilation of cultural textuality" (Allen 2000: 36). Therefore, an in-depth reading of literary texts, poetry included, shall reveal the extent to which literature can elaborate and explain occurrences and the network of causes and effects which link and highly influence them.

In an interview with Lucette Finas, published as an article entitled "The History of Sexuality" in his prominent work *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Foucault emphasizes that "Power is constructed and

functions on the basis of particular powers, myriad issues, myriad effects of power” (200) which is the gist of his proposition about his power/ knowledge theory. The significance of the issue lies in the fact that the circulation of power and knowledge is an inherent factor in people’s lives and affects all aspects of it, whether it is in the way of doing things, conducting social attitudes or establishing various relationships. When Foucault speaks about power, he is actually displaying the necessity to regard a vital concept that has a close bond with the notion of knowledge. The relationship between the two is reciprocal since knowledge can be considered as another aspect of power, and incidentally, it is power that should be regarded as the agent which has the potentiality to produce knowledge. Since the relationship between power and knowledge has always been of ultimate significance in social sciences, (Segev 2019: 240) in the bulk of Foucault’s works, there is a slash mark and not a hyphen between power and knowledge indicating the strong conviction that the two are not to be regarded as distinct entities and that they can be employed almost simultaneously due to their intimacy. Besides accentuating the bi-lateral connection, in the first volume of the History of Sexuality, entitled “*The Will to Know*” Foucault stipulates that knowledge must never be considered as something neutral as it is the determining agent in force relationships (1978). Moreover, in Foucault’s theory, members of the society are de-centralized agents who do not possess power but are intent on exercising it, since “Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (qtd. in Balan 2010: 55).

It should also be mentioned that power is not constrained in a particular place or a specific person but exists everywhere, with a source which emits its centrifugal force, while orienting relationships. According to Foucault in his outstanding work, *Power/Knowledge*,

There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject ... the rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed tactics which, become connected to one another. (Foucault 1980: 95)

In this sense, power, contrary to common belief, is not the means for exerting repression but a vehicle to generate the truth of associations. “As opposed to most Marxist thinkers, Foucault is concerned less with the oppressive aspect of power but more with the resistance of those the power is exerted upon” (Balan 2010: 55). In this alliance, power volleys among the agents involved, as they display the extent to which they benefit from knowledge. Furthermore, the prevalent discourse in the human society which presumes that power always tends to side with the strong and is continuously at work to oppress the weak is rejected, (qtd. in Balan 2010: 55) since arguably, power fluidly propagates throughout the society. It must be taken into consideration that there is no power that is exercised without a series of objectives,

resulting from the decisions that the subject makes. Undoubtedly, where there is power, there is resistance which is always an intrinsic element in power relations.

The circulatory relationship between power and knowledge cannot be investigated accurately unless the nature of this movement, with related cause-and-effect connections, influencing the occurrence of phenomena, is taken into consideration. In the study of historical events, as stated by Hayden White, in "The Burden of History", the narration of what took place, and then recording it, is of little value. What is noteworthy is the analysis of events in a manner that reveals links and discards the notion that history is an autonomous phenomenon (White 1966: 113). Rather, there are mutual links which render the understanding of historical events such as, the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, as involved agents, in debt to a perception that goes beyond a superficial explanation and delves into layers divulged only to the observant investigator who seeks for extraneous links located hyper-textually. If this be the case, then a scholarly reading of the selected poems shall exemplify and illustrate White's theoretical stance in considering a historical text, which he defines as, "a verbal structure that creates a narrative discourse by classifying the various structures and processes by placing and representing them in particular models" (White 1973: 233).

6. Methodology

The researchers in this project will endeavor to disclose how cause-and-effect relationships in cultural-socio-historical discourses, underlying a particular phenomenon or event, such as the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed can initiate the circulatory course that facilitates and justifies the relationship between power and knowledge. The historical and positivist approach of the French School facilitates deriving a logical conclusion by emphasizing the fact that literary narrations, much like historical events, do not exist in a vacuum. After all, according to Ferdinand Brunetière "we are defined only by comparing ourselves to others; and we do not know ourselves when we know only ourselves" (Brunetière 1974: 181). In other words, it is quite clear that the study of "influence", as a focal point in the French School stems out of making comparisons while relying on links of causality related to texts. If influences are significant then so are relationships, or "rapports", not only between literary texts of different origins but also between the agents inter-acting in the same environment. Analyzing various influences provides factual evidence and tends to disclose the cause-effect relationship which leads to a clear-cut elaboration on the circulatory movement of power within the socio-cultural discourses. Inarguably, findings shall demonstrate the essentiality of such considerations in imagery production since literary work is the doings of hyper-textual factors as much as creative imagination.

7. Research Questions

1. How is the theory of power/knowledge circulation traced in the selected poems with an emphasis on influences and relationships?
2. What is the significance of power/knowledge circulation in socio-cultural discourses in determining the role played by agents?
3. How can an analysis of cause-effect relationships explain “influence” to be the highlighted feature of the French School?
4. To what extent do elements in the two poems, elaborate on the shared similarities of intentions or intimacy of perspectives?
5. What role does silence have in the exhibition of resistance as an effective method of enhancing power transference?

8. Discussion

Regardless of whatever approach to literary works we advocate, the exquisite power of words is undeniable. Add to this fact, the expertise of an artist who is well aware of the manifold techniques of stringing words so as to mesmerize and awe the reader -- the outcome would be poetry that satisfies and amuses. Poetry simultaneously nudges senses into wakefulness by deconstructing and de-familiarizing and perhaps, in an innovative turn, it is employed to re-tell the history of individuals who are marginalized and have not been given the opportunity to voice their thoughts. The new outlook suggested in this research is to seek a novel way of reading poetry and to discover how throughout the terse and jagged stanzas, a gifted poet can open horizons and tread into the realm of critical- literary analysis.

8.1 “When in Rome”

The poem “When in Rome” appears in Evans’ second poetry collection, *I Am a Black Woman* (1970), in which Evans revives the social revolution made in the Black consciousness. The selected poem overtly challenges the traditional notions of power as repressive and negative forces and presents a more dynamic aspect of power that operates through the socio-cultural discourse via language. Power and knowledge, based on a mutual constitution and an inextricably linked correspondence, disseminate throughout the verses of the poem.

The title of the poem is the initial stance which exhibits the definition of power/knowledge according to the Foucauldian theory. In some editions, the title is written with an ellipsis which dispenses the continuation of the old saying: “when in Rome do as the Romans do”. The quote dates back to medieval times when St. Ambrose is reputed to have advised fellow-believers in fasting on the same days as was the custom in the city of Rome should they move from Milan where the people fasted on a different day. In this way, no suspicion or animosity would be aroused against the visitor who would naturally be considered an outsider, preventing further alienation. The superiority that a resident possesses is transferred to the visitor once adaptation takes place and the visitor tries to assimilate himself, hence the knowledge of an acceptable discourse is transferred from one to another and power follows en suite.

The poem begins,
 Mattie dear,
 the box is full
 take
 whatever you like
 to eat
 (an eggor soup
 ... therein't no meat).(Evans 2014: 56)

The poem is presented in the form of a dialogue between two speakers although the conversation is one-sided, for one verbally expresses her thoughts but the other keeps her thoughts to herself and, in the text, the reader becomes aware of this due to the appropriate use of punctuation. The parts that belong to the servant's expression or whispered retorts are enclosed in parentheses and indicate that the words merely pass through the servant's mind and are not openly articulated. The difference in the way the remarks of each character is presented, one aloud and verbal and the other in undertones and mental, contributes to the development of the relationship between the two speakers which is further emphasized by distinction in race and social status. Due to the positions they hold in a hegemonic stance, the statements of the mistress, which are presumably a reflection of her generosity, are stated in clear, perfect orders with imperative verbs, another clue to support her superior condition and knowledge of standard, English grammar. On the other hand, Mattie's responses in vernacular speech indicate her lack of knowledge and, probably, illiteracy. "This careful attention which Mari Evans gives to Black speech, its patterns, sounds, inflection and tenor illustrates what Stephen Henderson referred to as her uncanny ear for speech nuances" (Douglas 2008: 143).

From the beginning, with the way the mistress addresses the servant, in a condescending tone, it becomes evident that the two sides involved in the plot are not of equal social status and this by itself is reason enough to begin the transmission of power. Disregarding the hierarchical stance that social class offers to members of the society, of the inherent effects that constitute power, individual existence and identity are prominent. Both characters exercise power at certain times, and at specific points, their speech becomes functionary of power's intentions. The term "dear" is the way the mistress informs her maid of her superior position, for it would be quite inappropriate for an underhand to address the other of superior position with such terms of endearment. The expression is far from being an ejaculation indicating intimacy, rather it is used to display who has the upper-hand. The other indication which illustrates the superior-inferior relationship is the name "Mattie" which sounds like a nickname rather than someone's Christian name. One tends to address another by a nickname when they are confident of their higher social status.

With the declaration that the box is full and Mattie can take whatever she pleases, we learn of the monetary stature of the mistress, which implies she is wealthy, and obviously can afford to be generous and make a liberal offer to her servant. The box is sumptuously filled and ascertaining that those who are assigned duties receive sufficient nutrition, is one of the many tasks of an employer. By making an offer of food, the lady is letting her servant know that she is well aware of her responsibilities as the one who has domination. The maidservant takes a look into the box and notices among the unfamiliar items an egg and a can of soup which are known to her but she goes on to complain mentally about the offered food because she hardly thinks they are adequately nutritious for a laborer involved with manual strife.

The shift of power and knowledge is quite evident in these lines. Presumably, readers would tend to think that the wealthy employer holds the reins of power in her hands, both because of her opulence and her knowledge about the expectations that employees typically have. However, as we follow the initial lines of the poem, we become conscious of how there is a shift of power and knowledge toward the maid, complaining that her lady has no understanding of her nutritional needs. The lady's ignorance of the necessary victuals, for her laborer, disarms her of the assumed power primarily exhibited and moves it to Mattie's dominion. She is the one who has the knowledge that "meat" is what is supposed to be fed to people doing manual work and in need of energetic nourishment. The lack of a verbal response to the offer of the mistress is an evident indication of the maid's resistance to her supremacy. The poet continues,

there's endive there
and
cottage cheese
(whew! If I had some
black-eyed peas ...).(Evans 2014: 56)

The mistress, sure of her superior status, continues to display her generosity by offering her maid some of the choice items in her hoard so she lets the maid know that she can help herself to endives and cottage cheese, items that are uncommon to a person who belongs to the working class. The act of making an offering and the type of offered food situates the mistress in authority, and in this manner, power sits with the employer. On the other hand, the mental response of the maid circulates power in her own direction as she illustrates that she has more knowledge of the taste and necessary alimentation for a laborer. Endives and cottage cheese, though delectable, are not nutritious enough and the worker wishes for some black-eyed peas which are of high nutritional value and traditionally are thought to bring good luck.

there's sardines

on the shelves
and such
but
don't
get my anchovies
they cost
too much!
(me get the
anchovies indeed!
what she think, she got ---
a bird to feed?). (Evans 2014: 56)

The demonstration of benevolence continues as sardines are offered to the maid who is suddenly prohibited from helping herself to the anchovies, the most expensive item in storage. Two facts are revealed here; firstly the possession of anchovies is the presentation of wealth and possession of power and secondly, the lady of the house believes she has the power to determine what can be chosen and eaten and what cannot. Power does not reside on her side for too long as it shifts towards the servant who shows disdain for anchovies with an exasperated expletive "indeed".

There is insistence, on behalf of the mistress' ostentatious display of generosity, in the next part, as we read,

there's plenty in there
to fill you up
(yes'm. just the
sight's
enough!
Hope I live till I gets
I'm tired of eatin'
What they eats in Rome ...). (Evans 2014: 57)

The patroness urges the maid to feel free and to help herself with whatever there is because there is a profusion of provisions and with this exclamation she intends to brag about her affluence while sanctioning her place in the balance of power. The servant mocks the so-called abundance and disdainfully acknowledges that she is not influenced by the amount of food and the meager display merely spoils her appetite. Resistance, as an integral part of power circulation, is active as the readers observe no indication of relent on the part of the servant. Foucault describes this situation in *Subject and Power*,

A relationship of modification reaches its terms, its final moment (and the victory of one of the two adversaries) when stable mechanisms replace the free play of antagonistic reactions. Through such mechanisms one can direct, in a fairly constant manner and with reasonable certainty, the conduct of others. (Foucault 1980: 225)

The maidservant terminates the tug-of-war in the knowledge-power flux and makes a wish to return to her native land where she is free to eat what she wants to her desire. She is frustrated by her mistress' lack of knowledge and abuse of power and wishes to go home where she and her needs are recognized. As illustrated in the last part, and as Sara Mills claims, "Individuals are not just the objects of power, but they are the locus where power and the resistance to it are exerted" (Mills2003: 3). Resistance, which is to a great extent displayed on the maid's behalf, is an integral part of the power/knowledge nexus and cannot exist outside the domain of power.

Two points are noteworthy. Firstly, the overall sense of oppression and the effect it has on the circulation of power is quite an illuminating fact. The second highlight is the non-negligible role silence has in this transmission. As to the first point, the imposition of the white employer, according to Patricia Collins, can never be recognized as empowerment over the African-American woman, for to her "the sense of oppression which in some ways can be defined as power abuse, is a complicated issue since neither empowerment nor social justice can be achieved without some sense of what one is trying to change" (Collins 2000: xi). She goes on to support her view by arguing that "a group [or an individual] can gain power in such situations by dominating others, but this is not the type of empowerment that I found within Black women's thinking" (x). Black women are wonders when it comes to evading imposition and showing resistance in the most subtle and surreptitious manner. Judith Rollins asserts that the domestic workers she interviewed appear to have retained a "remarkable sense of self-worth" even when they were assigned mundane tasks. This is easily achieved because they can "skillfully deflect these psychological attacks on their personhood, their adulthood, their dignity, these attempts to lure them into accepting employers' definitions of them as inferior" (Rollins 1985: 212). To elaborate on the issue of silence, Marita Bonner, the eminent essayist, compares the silence of the Black woman to that observed in the statues of Buddha, motionless on the outside, but deeply pensive. This silence is the outward appearance of the resistance that the Black woman displays in reaction to imposition of power by the supremacy. The Black female laborer uses her silence as a weapon to defy the controlling framework arbitrarily imposed on her, no matter what role she plays, may it be that of a mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and mule of the world or sexually denigrated woman (Collins 2000: 99). The Black woman's power results in a self-constructed knowledge which emerges from the struggle to replace the controlling

images with the self-defined knowledge which is essentially an integral section of her existence and in this way she closes the border between power and knowledge showing how one induces and supports the other.

8.2 “The Teacher and the Student”

Simin Behbahani started composing poetry when only a handful of women poets in Iran dared to be the voice of minorities, among them women and children. With the occurrence of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), gradually the mainstream attitude towards women changed in the society and their presence in various fields and, in particular literature, was noticed and accepted. Forough Farrokhzad, and later Simin Behbahani, continued as avant-garde women in poetry and flaunted the flag that had been hoisted in the honor of literary women. They felt the need for transformation in socio-cultural issues, particularly those pertaining to women and minority groups. Behbahani, enticed by her mother's rebellious activities, preferred to bring about change by the way of making a weapon out of her pen. She entered an arena previously occupied by male literary men and intended to make a difference by advertently choosing to orient her poetry toward reflecting social upheavals and chaotic cultural non-conformities.

“The Teacher and the Student” appears in Behbahani's *Collection of Poetry* (2006). The poem is a one-sided conversation between two agents, a teacher and her student who are not of the same social class or position. This difference in stance initiates the dialectical transference of power. The poem begins, “I hailed, you girl/ Alas! What with all the promiscuity/Speak! The year nears its half/ Why do you still have no books?” (Behbahani 2006: 63). In any binary relationship between a teacher and a student, considering the hierarchical situation which is determined by the educational system, the teacher holds the reins of power in her hands and that is why she chooses to speak authoritatively. The teacher, allegedly the possessor of power and knowledge, criticizes the student for coming to class unprepared. The response to the teacher is mental and understood but not uttered. The teacher speaks instead of the student, “(Will buy? /When? /Very soon! / Alas ...)” (Behbahani 2006: 63).

The fact that the teacher voices the responses instead of the student shows the extent to which the teacher is certain of her authority and believes in her hierarchical position, actually making her presume that she has the right to speak for others. In confrontation with the student's silence, the teacher continues with her censure, accentuated by the use of exclamatory ejaculations to add feeling and tone to her retaliatory remarks. “You have not made use of you classmates' books/ Of that, I am well aware/Others are well ahead of you/ You are the one who is way behind” (Behbahani 2006: 64).

The situation is intensified when pervasive silence, an inherent part of resistance in opposition to supremacy, befalls the classroom and the heavy looks of the students lie on the subject of the teacher's reprimand, who feels guilty and ill at

ease. Her situation is described as thus,

The Lass looked down,
Ashamed of all the paucity,
Afraid to look in any eye,
She drove her tearful gaze
Towards the holes of her socks,
Beads of sweat adorned her face,
Her pale face became paler still,
A single teardrop
Moistened a page of her notebook. (Behbhani 2006: 64)

The narration reaches a critical point, at this stage, due to the effect of knowledge. Behbahani cleverly keeps the girl silent and prevents her from directly responding to the teacher who, upon sudden revelation, comes to an understanding. In an unexpected twist and contrary to the readers' expectations, the teacher realizes that the tears are the sign of broken pride and an untold story.

Divulged became the story
Of what the Lassie had been silent about
Of what books, do you speak,
When I have no bread to eat?
Of what use is the re-telling of my suffering
When there is no cure? (Behbhani2006: 64)

Power is diverted in favor of the student and oriented in her direction as the knowledge of truth dawns upon the teacher. The girl's emphasized silence, a sure sign of and an integral part of her resistance, aids the agent in power to discern the truth. In many developing and underdeveloped communities, statistics show that in poverty-stricken societies, the provision of nourishment has priority over other human needs, such as education. According to reports released by FAO in July 2022, the prevalence of undernourishment has steadily increased in recent years and reached the alarming level of 9.9 percent, placing almost eight hundred and twenty million people in immediate danger of food insecurity. In other words, as we speak, one out of seven people are suffering from malnutrition. Hygiene and health hold third place as anxiety over availability of fresh, drinkable water heightens and invariably, educational concerns stand in fourth level. Embarrassed because of quick judgment and perhaps thoughtlessness the teacher rebukes herself in disapproval,

I wished to tell her
To my humble pity, fie upon me
Fie upon me for such unkindness
I beg for forgiveness
You are not alone in this suffering

You have a teacher who knows pain
And perceives pain like yourself. (Behbhani 2006: 65)

Realization, in the form of knowledge, enhances the circulation of power and at this point in the narration, the lass gains power because invariably she is in the right. For the members in the society suffering from poverty and malnutrition, educational concerns are insignificant matters, unworthy of apprehensiveness. Sympathy, on the part of the solicitous teacher, exempts the poor student from any sort of retort and so, throughout the poem, we have silence on behalf of the latter agent involved, which is an illustrative sign that power has shifted in the girl's direction, while the teacher attempts to appease the student.

I wanted to kiss her on the cheeks and say
We are both born of pain and suffering
We both hang like leaves from the branches of life
Withered, for cold winds have oft blown on us.(Behbhani 2006: 64)

The prolonged silence of the lass and the sympathetic attitude of the teacher, ironically goad power in the direction of the student who is restricted from speech by the poet. The omniscient persona acts and speaks for both active agents of power and, in a clever turn, Behbahani places power into the hands of the teacher, who in an unexpected twist represents both sides involved in the external conflict, staged in the classroom. Although she is the one who holds authority, the teacher is fair in the distribution of power and knows very well that it is only right that she should speak for the girl by providing the opportunity of making mental responses. As the older and more experienced individual, she is the one who possesses jurisdiction. The persona continues,

I well knew that the position I held
Was one of advice and consultation,
A show of weakness and bewilderment
Would be unacceptable for the pupils
So, I clenched my teeth and held back unbroken sobs
While tears stung my eyes
But knowingly, I held them back. (Behbhani 2006: 65-66)

In this section of the poem, power moves, albeit internally and is represented in the form of an internal conflict, with apparent physical signs in the teacher. The hegemonic stance occupied by the teacher prohibits her from an ostensible show of power-shift and she satisfies herself with expressing the many physical indications of power circulation. The poem ends on a confessional note from the teacher who admits she cannot openly side or sympathize with the impoverished girl who is

socially alienated from the other pupils due to economic shortcomings. This reality has deprived her from enjoying equal rights that all children are liable to according to human rights, such as free education.

Internally, I burned with pain and disarray
But kept a face devoid of all expression
Smouldering from within, none knew
Of the turmoil inside me. (Behbhani 2006: 66)

The poem commences with a dialectical shift of power between two agents, one obviously in power over the other; however, as Foucault maintains, power never resides with one agent and the possession of knowledge empowers the agents involved to attain power by turns. In Behbhani's poem the knowledge of truth empowers the teacher to assume control but adroitly the poet also gives her the voice of the other participant and she keeps the circulation internal. Socio-cultural considerations do not allow the open confrontation of the agents, as in most societies and within the educational system, the master, presumably more informed than the pupils, holds the upper-hand. Knowledge of truth permits the more active agent, the teacher, to propagate her power in a closed circuit, while she has been endowed with the right to represent both the oppressed and the oppressor. Factors in the economic discourse not only ignited the dissemination of power in a circulatory course, but also maintained the convection throughout the narration.

9. Conclusion and Findings

Indisputably, the gist of any comparative study of literary works, according to the French School, is to discover how world views merge, clash or influence one another in order to reveal how the effect of economic-socio-cultural discourses, an external appendices, help to explain the contextual relationship between agents and the circulation of power and knowledge. Both selected poems divulge that the bulk of man's thoughts and behavior should be studied in the light of elaborative cause-effect relationships as Hayden White maintains. Furthermore, an intensive investigation reveals how, according to Foucault, power is fluid by nature and is constantly in a state of flux, and contrary to common thought, not necessarily residing with the agent who holds a higher stance in any hierarchical system. Comparatively, both poems realize Foucault's suggested theory about the reciprocity of power and knowledge and exemplify to what extent silence, whether advertently assumed or otherwise, is not to be considered devoid of value as a determining factor. In "When in Rome", the silence of the maidservant is a marked show of resistance which targets the base of power exchange and in "The Teacher and Student" silence, although internal and unilateral, is the catalyst which initiates power circulation and contributes to its convection. Both poems exemplify uniformly the theoretical equations suggested by Foucault and White although they are the craft of artists from distinct backgrounds.

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