
Into the Darkest Corner: A Literary Feminist Examination in the Light of Authoritative Intervention

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Abstract

This paper provides an investigation of Elizabeth Haynes' novel Into the Darkest Corner. The paper focuses on exploring the impact of 'authoritative intervention' in cases of intimate partner violence. In this regard, authoritative intervention is examined as a factor that affects the protagonist to counteract against her perpetrator. Research gaps do exist regarding the impact of authoritative intervention on abused women's decision to leave a violent relationship; hence the necessity of this research is stressed. The discussion and analysis are carried out from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective in order to examine the emotional awakening process that led the protagonist to develop a 'voice' and demand her freedom from her violent husband. The struggle of the protagonist to put an end to her abusive marriage in the light of the resistance factors that she has are the focal point of this paper. Authoritative intervention is to be highlighted amongst other resistance factors, a task that has not been addressed in the available literature on domestic violence in relation to feminist and psychoanalytic criticism up to date.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence; feminist psychoanalysis; authoritative assistance; voice and particularity

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Introduction

This paper examines the patterns of intimate partner abuse that the protagonist of Elizabeth Haynes' *Into the Darkest Corner* (2012) verbalized or 'voiced' in the light of feminist psychoanalysis. The main contribution is associated with the 'voiced' battle of the protagonist in the novel to terminate her destructive oppressive marriage, in the light of the various abuse patterns she experienced and the resistance factors¹ that this character had access to so that she could escape her challenging situation, especially that of authoritative intervention, a task that has not been tackled in the available research on intimate partner violence in relation to feminist and psychoanalytic criticism up to date. Thus, the literature covered in this paper involves the investigation of violence patterns (Walker, 2009; Washaly, 2018; Bates, 2019; Atiyat, 2020; Atiyat, 2021), feminist psychoanalytic views on oppression (Hirsch, 1989; Schanoes, 2014) and domestic violence against women (Allport, 2009), in addition to research addressing the effectiveness of authoritative intervention to assist women in violent intimate partner relationships (Madsen, 2000; Whykes and Welsh, 2009; Pâquet, 2018). Therefore, this paper is divided into six sections. The first section gives an abstract which is followed by the introduction of the article in the second section. The third section, however, explains the methodological approach followed in conducting this article. With regard to the fourth section, a review of the literature will be given. This review will also be examined in association with the protagonist's intimate partner violence experience that is addressed in section five. Finally, section six concludes the paper presented. In the following section, the paper discusses the methodological approach drawn upon to conduct this article.

Methodology

This research relies essentially on secondary data. The data taken into consideration is mainly from books and scholarly articles focusing on intimate partner violence patterns and the examination of factors affecting the continuation of intimate partner violence through the lens of feminist psychoanalysis. The literary work examined through the lens of feminist psychoanalysis is *Into the Darkest Corner* by Elizabeth Haynes. The choice of 'feminist psychoanalysis' as the theoretical context of examination and analysis in this article is because this approach serves to 'present the particularity of a psyche' in a manner that voices a woman's internalized struggle (Lanser, 1992: 14). In this regard, a woman's hidden feelings, emotions, fears and insecurities are not maintained in the secrecy of her stream of consciousness². Rather, they are dug out from the deepest ends of the character's psyche to meet the reader's attentive ears. As Huang (2004) puts it: 'In their writings, what sets them apart from the traditional realist novels is the fact that most of the action takes place in the mind of the major characters. They have employed the narrative technique called "stream of consciousness," in which random, unshaped thoughts, of the characters are quoted directly' (Huang, 2004: 14). In her more recent book *Creative Writing: A Workbook with Readings*, Anderson (2013), in line with Mason (2002), explains that feminist psychoanalysis reveals how 'writers tried to mimic psychological reality, capturing the crazy paving of the human mind' (Anderson, 2013: 122).

In the light of the cruciality of feminist psychoanalysis discussed above, it is of great importance for me to distinguish it from another critical approach which is mainstream, male-oriented psychoanalysis. Many feminist researchers have adopted a counterargument to critique mainstream, male-oriented psychoanalysis per se. This rejection of mainstream, male-oriented psychoanalysis continues to shape post-modern feminist criticism: 'Psychoanalysis has long had an ugly reputation amongst feminists, and this reputation is richly deserved, for Freud's account of femininity is condescending and narrow-minded. He privileges masculine sexuality—a girl's sexuality is masculine until she discovers that her clitoris is much smaller than a penis, contracts penis envy, and

¹ 'Feminist therapists, researchers, activists and scholars have long recognized that power differentials can have serious, sometimes fatal, consequences for women and children' (Webster and Dunn, 2005: 111)

² The term "stream of consciousness" was the phrase first used by the psychologist William James to describe the ceaseless, random flow of thoughts, ideas, memories, and fantasies in people's minds. Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf were ground-breaking practitioners of stream-of-consciousness in fiction' (Anderson, 2013).

evolves a secondary feminine sexuality' (Meyers, 2014: 62). Yet, post-modern feminist critics have not sufficed by the aforementioned reason to justify their rejection of Freud's gender-biased psychoanalytic views; since they maintain that he 'belittles women's anatomy—they are castrated. He besmirches women's character and intellect—they are jealous narcissistic, less exacting in matters of morality, and less creative than men' (Meyers, 2014: 62). Freud's psychoanalytic history 'has forged a lasting bond between psychoanalysis and traditional feminine norms, and it has made psychoanalysis complicit in the subordination of women, for Freud supplied some of the most damaging and pervasive imagery working in western culture to sustain unconscious prejudice against women along with woefully consistent, repressive treatment of women (Meyers, 2014: 62).

Thus; in reaction to Freud's suppressive views, postmodern feminist critics (Schanoes, 2014), like their predecessors of feminist critics (Hirsch, 1989), have called for a process of 'appropriation' through which Freud's views are to be changed drastically to befit the gendered, diverse needs of women. In the light of the feminist 'appropriation' stance, content psychoanalysis was carried out. Information underwent a process of reduction where the data in the form of texts was gathered and then categorized to address the two research questions specified earlier. Then, the two text groups were examined linguistically using content analysis in order to highlight words or statements that show support for the arguments made by the researcher (Septiadi, Andayani and Wardani, 2019) in relation to the types of intimate partner violence incidents that the protagonist experienced, and the effect that police intervention, as an assistance factor, had on the protagonist's ability to end her abusive marriage. The importance of my performing content feminist psychoanalysis, thus, lies in the fact that it is central to 'understanding the forces and underlying motivations of a literary character, an author, or a culture. The hope is that readers, after they have quietly shut their pages of work, will return to their everyday worlds with more understanding of their own natures and more understanding of and empathy for the nature of their fellow humans' (Gillespie, 2010: 111). After having explained the feminist psychoanalytic methodological approach, this article will be giving a review of the literature.

A Review of the Literature on Domestic Violence: Patterns and Evolution

Intimate partner violence research has become of noteworthy interest to literary scholars from the 1970s onwards (Walker, 2009; Washaly, 2018; Bates, 2019; Atiyat, 2020; Atiyat, 2021). Since the 1970s, many scholars (Dutton, 2006; Bates, 2019), and particularly feminist literary critics (Joan and McElhiney 1997; Good, 2003; Jackson, 2007; Finley, 2013; Atiyat, 2020), have endeavoured to investigate its multi-faceted forms, excluding same-sex intimate relationships (Jackson, 2007; Bates, 2019; Atiyat, 2020). Numerous factors were shed light onto as well (Jackson, 2007; Finley, 2013; Bates, 2019; Atiyat, 2020). These factors include the abused women's education levels, the abused women's access to assistance resources to which they can resort upon the occurrence violent perpetration, and the victimized woman's level of financial independence (Jackson, 2007; Finley, 2013; Bates, 2019; Atiyat, 2020) in addition to the identification and rejection of violence patterns that have for long been found acceptable and legitimized (Joan and McElhiney 1997; Atiyat, 2020).

Research on intimate partner violence has shed light onto the ideological changes that have taken place gradually since the 1970s regarding the acceptance of intimate partner violence practices, especially amongst court officials and police authorities, stressing that the rejection of intimate partner violence practices has been triggered by feminist intellectuals and is gradually and increasingly gaining the approval of decision-makers in the legal sector (Joan and McElhiney 1997; Pâquet, 2018). Sexism against women that shapes the work of police officials and renders women victims of "double oppression" has been stressed as a barrier against the protection of abused women not only in social studies (Dobash and Dobash, 1980), but also in literary studies (Whykes and Welsh, 2009, Pâquet, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2020).

In order to increase the efficiency of authoritative intervention in cases of intimate partner violence, researchers have proposed a number of solutions including seeking the

support of feminist representatives at court and addressing the particularities of women's experiences of abuse. Feminist scholars and researchers have highlighted the necessity to address the actual implementation process of counter-violence protective measures at the hands of experts in the fields of law and domestic violence (Kronotoris, 1992; Madsen, 2000; Baker, 2004; Postal, 2009; Whykes and Welsh, 2009; Pâquet, 2018; Joyia and Gull, 2017).

Representation by people of legal expertise renders the pleas of abused women for justice implementation and reclaiming their rights of greater weight and makes the redemption of these rights more possible. Another reason to be added to the absence of feminist experts which is highlighted to explain legal bias against abused women in literary studies has been categorized under the patriarchal bias of judges and juries who strongly support and justify the necessity of male domination and control over women (Baker, 2004).

In addition to the necessity of finding expert feminist legal representation to the process of defending abused women and helping them to reclaim their rights from their perpetrators, many researchers have also stressed the importance of taking abused women's gender-based particularities into consideration throughout the process of legal representation, in line with Joan and McElhiney (1997), rather than echoing the possible generalizability of their far from unified experiences (Showalter, 1981; Imran and Chen, 2019; Goldman, 1999; hooks, 2000; Atiyat, 2020). After having provided a review of the literature on the numerous patterns of intimate partner violence against women that have been addressed in English literature-related domestic violence studies, the factors that affect and shape intimate partner violence experiences, and the reasons behind the legally enforced oppression of abused women in intimate relationships, the struggle of the protagonist in Elizabeth Haynes' *Into the Darkest Corner* to liberate herself from her abusive husband will be explored in the following section in the light of her psychological status.

The Protagonist's Struggle to Liberate Herself in the Light of Police Assistance

The protagonist of Haynes' *Into the Darkest Corner* does not suffice by providing a surface description of her intimate partner's violence experience. By contrast, the reader is allowed to access her stream of consciousness, where the psychological impacts of Catherine's struggle against intimate partner violence are voiced. Voicing an abused woman's experience constitutes my central concern as a feminist researcher aiming at the exploration of the protagonist's 'particular' experience, and how this experience was impacted by the concrete assistance factors that enabled her to end her oppressive relationship. Her 'stream of consciousness'³, I would like to argue, is given a 'voice'⁴ that the reader can hear and appreciate when it is verbalized rather than muted by male-dominated ideologies of oppression. The importance of highlighting and investigating the emotional struggle of an oppressed character in fiction through unveiling the flow of emotions that she experiences as a result of the oppression she lives has captured the attention of not only mainstream male critics, but also feminist critics throughout modern and post-modern times (Huang, 2004; Achour, 2018). This aspect of analysis has been addressed as reflecting the particularity of the investigated character's experience. Addressing the particularity of the gendered emotional experience of an abused woman's character in fiction has distinguished feminist research from mainstream male-oriented research. This is because while male-oriented scholars have argued that the term 'stream of consciousness' was 'first used by the psychologist William James to

³ 'The "Stream of Consciousness" was first introduced by American psychologist William James in his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the unbroken flow of thought and awareness of the waking mind. In a literary context, the term is used to describe the narrative method where novelists describe the unspoken thoughts and feelings of their characters without resorting to objective description or the multifarious thoughts and feelings of a character without regard to logical argument' (Nawale, 2010).

⁴ 'Voice and the act of speaking are often understood to be an integral condition in the demonstration of women's empowerment... Women's ability to make choices and speak out is often considered in feminist literature as proof of women's agency and power' (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017: 62).

describe the ceaseless, random flow of thoughts, ideas, memories, and fantasies in the people's minds' (Huang, 2004: 14), modern and post-modern feminist critics have added that 'the very objective of "stream of consciousness" is to represent the gendered particularity of a psyche' (Lanser, 1992: 114). Thus, feminist critics have endeavoured to highlight the internal feelings of oppression that are experienced by women in literature as unique experiences; each shaped by circumstances that can neither be generalized nor overlooked.

In addition to her experiencing physical violence, verbal violence and financial control (Atiyat, 2020), Catherine struggled with emotional violence as well throughout her marital relationship: 'I sat motionless for a moment, waiting for something to happen. I don't know what I was expecting. Maybe I thought he was going to come back. Maybe he was going to come back and hit me, or throw something at me, or yell and swear' (Haynes, 2012: 154). The protagonist's internal feelings of 'anxiety' while anticipating the recurrence of violence are stressed here. This anxiety is pictured as flowing in Catherine's stream of consciousness, as being self-consuming hindering Catherine from living a peaceful and calm life. These destructive effects of anxiety on abused women's lives are explained more closely from a feminist perspective by Diane Castillo (2011): 'Each day that she walks out of her home with the "I am never safe" thought, she creates feelings of anxiety. The anxiety can be immobilizing, leading to daily functioning problems, such as avoiding work and relationships, and potentially creating a need to use drugs or alcohol to manage these intense feelings' (Castillo, 2011: 96). In line with Castillo (2011), Elizabeth Cook (2021) also addresses the psychological consequences of repetitive intimate partner violence from a feminist psychoanalytical perspective maintaining that as 'a result, unconscious cognitive defence mechanisms, such as dissociation, avoidance, and denial, are mobilised in response to a flood of anxiety and stress' (Cook, 2021).

The recurrent acts of physical, verbal and emotional abuse, patterns that have been addressed in the available literature on intimate partner violence from the 1970s onwards (Jackson, 2007; Bates, 2019; Atiyat, 2020), had left Catherine terrified of re-experiencing these patterns of violence. Being the source of abuse in her life, Lee's presence began to feel more of an intimidation source rather than a source of serenity and tranquillity. She even voices in her mind how she began to despise Lee's presence in her life, and how she started wishing he would be gone for ever; so that she would not have to go through the same, seemingly endless cycle of violence again and again: 'My happiness came and went like a ghostly breath. Throughout January I went from looking forward to Lee, to missing him, to looking forward to him going back to work again' (Haynes, 2012: 138). The recurrent diverse acts of violence that Catherine had experienced ultimately increased her anxiety and anticipation of potential abuse until she was rendered captive of a state of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Atiyat, 2020).

Catherine started feeling that Lee's presence in her life was intimidating rather than being peaceful, warming with love, and protective. He aroused feelings of anxiety and lack of security. He was manipulative with Catherine to the extent that he once rearranged the furniture in the house and made her suspect that a burglar had broken into the house: 'Hello? Lee? Although I knew he was working; he'd sent me some texts earlier. I wouldn't have put it past him to come home early to surprise me, though, so I was cautious going into the living room in case he was hiding in there and was going to jump out at me' (Haynes, 2012: 138). He put her under tremendous stress and triggered her anxiety which was a very effective pattern of emotional abuse at this point especially that there was supposed to be nobody in the house at that point in time but Catherine. Catherine was thus terrified and ironically called Lee for help; being a police officer himself. He, in turn, played innocent and sounded like he was genuinely concerned for her safety and well-being and seriously trying to help Catherine to sort out her mysterious riddle about whether a burglar had broken into the house or not.

Lee interacted with Catherine pretending like he was clueless about the status of the house which looked like someone had broken into it. He answered Catherine calmly saying:

‘Hey,’ ... ‘What’s up?’

‘I think someone’s been in my house,’

... ‘What?’

‘The backdoor’s open. My laptop’s gone’

‘Don’t touch anything, go and wait in the car, okay?’ (Haynes, 2012: 138).

Lee was manipulative to the extent that he was willing to do anything to have Catherine question her suspicions and fears of him and her doubts in him. He even used sexual intercourse to distance himself from any potential suspicions about him on her part, and to reassure her of his false kind and loving nature. Manipulation was a form of emotional abuse through which Lee was successful in casting doubt into Catherine’s mind pertaining to her decision to leave him. She announced her succumbing to his deceiving charm and acts of adoration saying: ‘He told me he loved me, his voice barely a whisper. I love him when he was like this, gentle, calm, happy’ (Haynes, 2012: 139). This sense of hesitation to leave a violent marriage and the reluctance to take counteraction against the perpetrator has been acknowledged and investigated by researchers since the 1970s, who have explored this phenomenon under ‘the cycle of violence’ (Walker, 2009). Walker (2009) maintains that in this cycle model, the violence occurs in slight actions of aggression initially, then escalates gradually until the abused woman starts thinking of taking counteraction against the perpetrator, or leaving the violent intimate relationship. Yet, it is at this point that the abuser might apologize and present acts of intimacy and adoration to render the victimized target in constant lack of certainty regarding her decision to leave. The apologies and the pleas of the perpetrator for her to stay and give chances to the relationship in hope that things might go well ‘this time’ are repeated every time, however, drowning the abused woman into a seemingly endless cycle of violence and aggression (Walker, 2009).

In Catherine’s case, she decided to put an end to her relationship with her abusive husband. Yet, the protagonist’s decision to desert her perpetrator was not an easy decision to make. Bearing in mind the particularity of Catherine’s experience, as the wife of an authoritative official in the police department, this placed an extra burden on Catherine while she was trying to walk away from Lee. This is because, as argued by Pâquet (2018), Lee, the police authoritative figure, was himself a strong supporter of male domination and the control of women through violence-based subordination practices. Thus, he acted like he was protective of Catherine, and pretended to be sincerely concerned for Catherine’s safety and wellbeing, just like any professional police officer must be upon reporting a case of aggression. In reality, however, he targeted her as his victim and manipulated her constantly; trying to make her feel scared, unsafe, and in need for his presumed protection because she is by no means capable of protecting herself. She came home one day to find the house a complete mess: ‘Hello? Lee? Although I knew he was working; he’d sent me some texts earlier. I wouldn’t have put it past him to come home early to surprise me, though, so I was cautious going into the living room in case he was hiding in there and was going to jump out at me’ (Haynes, 2012, 138). Being an authoritative figure himself, Lee was capable of ridiculing the serious fears that the protagonist experienced regarding the possibility of having had somebody break into her home while she was away in no time. He made her suspicions sound like she was merely being paranoid for no logical reason that could be justified. He made some changes in the furniture in the house and hid her laptop to make the setting feel like that of a crime scene: ‘It wasn’t messy the way you’d expect a burglarized house to look. It was only when I realized my laptop had gone, complete with the charger, that I looked across to the patio doors and saw that they were slightly open, the exterior of the lock damaged, as though someone had drilled through it’ (Haynes, 2012: 138). Catherine was anxious and terrified and called Lee for help, who, in turn, played innocent and sounded like he was really trying to help Catherine to sort out the mysterious riddle about whether a burglar had been in the house or not. Lee interacted with Catherine as though he were clueless about the status of the house. She also noticed that there was a lot of ‘handshaking’ and ‘laughing’ going on between Lee and his colleague, who had presumably come to help in a ‘serious’ crime scene. Yet, Lee was manipulative enough to make the whole situation sound trivial to his colleague, like it was no more than Catherine going through a state of paranoia.

Lee was willing to do anything to have Catherine question her fears of him, and to break her self-confidence in her ability to stay safe away from him. He manipulated her sense of stability and personal strength. He even used sexual intercourse to reassure her of his false kind and loving nature, and to give her the impression that being with him was the only status in which she could remain safe. He was successful in making use of her anxiety; casting doubt into Catherine's mind about her decision to leave him until she announced succumbing to his deceiving charm and acts of adoration saying: 'He told me he loved me, his voice barely a whisper. I love him when he was like this, gentle, calm, happy' (Haynes, 2012, 139).

The effectiveness of authoritative intervention in cases of gendered assault in literary studies is a controversial arena of research and investigation. While some researchers have proposed that authoritative intervention on the part of the police plays a positive role in the decrease of and protection against intimate partner violence (Mueller, 2010; Molinaro, 2016), others have objected to this stance arguing that police intervention might be of a debilitating impact on the severity and recurrence of violence (Madsen, 2000; Baker, 2004). In this regard, the reasons behind the negative impact of police intervention upon the occurrence of intimate partner violence or aggression have been far from unified. That is, some scholars and researchers have attributed the negative results of police intervention upon intimate partner violence to police officers' being strongly supportive of prevailing, biased, misogynist, and legally-enforced values of domination over women: 'And it was the oppressive legal machinery of the state' that was 'held responsible for women's subordination'. 'It has taken the whole power of the civil and canon law to hold woman in the subordinate position which it's said she willingly accepts' (Madsen, 2000: 39-40).

Other researchers and scholars, however, have stressed the idea that the lack of effectiveness of police intervention upon the occurrence of intimate partner violence or aggression is attributed to officials' lacking the required gendered skills and expertise needed when dealing with such potentially lethal instances of abuse as in the case of the different forms of intimate partner violence:

In the second wave of the women's movement, feminists criticized the legal system of male bias. In particular, they criticized the law of self-defence for assuming the experiences and perspectives of men. To counteract this male bias, in criminal trials involving battered women who killed their abusers, feminists advocated for the introduction of expert testimony on the battered woman syndrome in order to aid juries in understanding battered women's perspective. (Baker, 2004: 42)

The need for the intervention of feminist experts to represent and defend abused women arises from the idea that, in Baker's words, these feminist expert representatives are more familiar with the gendered particularities that abused women might have experienced or underwent, particularities which male experts might not recognize or even fail to think of:

While feminists sought to assist women to speak in their own voices in the courtroom, and to describe the variety and complexity of their experiences, they advocated for the use of expert testimony on battering because they believed that 'battered women's voices either would not be understood or were not strong enough to be heard alone in a courtroom. (Baker, 2004: 42)

In Catherine's case, she was not able to rely on the police for assistance upon experiencing intimate partner violence. This is mainly because Lee, her perpetrator who strongly supported misogynist values of oppression towards women like Catherine for instance, was a member of the police force himself. Therefore; being a close friend or a co-worker at the police department enabled him to acquire a greater degree of credibility among his fellow co-workers. Lee's position thus rendered authoritative intervention ineffective to Catherine. This is because his close connection to members of the police department enabled him to blind the police from noticing that he could bear a double personality. That is, he could be a kind good friend and a vicious, violent husband all at the same time. Consequently, Catherine had to resort to other assistance resources such as making friends. Studies on intimate partner violence in literature have confirmed the positive association between having friends and decreasing the severity and recurrence of intimate partner violence (Finley, 2013; Atiyat, 2020). In line with Finley (2013) and Atiyat (2020), researchers have stressed that having friends minimizes the perpetrator's ability to exercise and maintain full control over his abused victim. Lee was aware of the increasing chance that Catherine might escape his cycle of violence if she was able to make friends with people. Thus; he had to block this potential assistance resource. He had to ensure that she was his powerless pawn: 'You make me afraid, Lee. I don't want to be with you anymore ... You hitting me, for one. And you talking to Claire about me, and Sylvia. She thinks I'm going mad, Lee. It's not fair. She's my best friend and you've turned her against me' (Haynes, 2012: 169).

Not only did Lee abuse Catherine, but also he started spreading rumors about her amongst her potential violence support net, her friends. This was a control tactic that was skillfully employed by the perpetrator in order to ensure Catherine, being his target of abuse, would have nobody to turn to upon the occurrence of each violent attack. In order to escape his confrontation with Catherine on this control tactic, Lee resorts to sex one more time. He did not admit his assault and he never wanted to stop the cycle of violence in which Catherine was entrapped either: 'Come here,' he said softly, pulling into a hug. 'You don't need to be scared, Catherine. You shouldn't be scared. It's this crazy job. I'm not good at showing how I feel, I get stressed and angry and I forget who I'm talking to. I'm sorry if I scared you' (Haynes, 2012: 170). Lee's ironic apologetic reactions to keep Catherine stuck in a continuous cycle of violence are tactics of control and domination. Although seemingly illogical and reflecting contradiction, these tactics serve to keep the abused woman in constant doubt of whether the violent actions carried out by the perpetrator really 'count' as violent actions or not, and whether these actions must be walked away from due to their seriousness or not.

Another potential assistance resource that Catherine could have resorted to for help in order to escape Lee's well-knit cycle of violence was seeking the assistance of the Supreme Court, which according to the available research on intimate partner violence in literary studies has proven to maintain a rejecting stance of intimate violent relationships (Joan and McElhiney, 2016). However, the effectiveness of this assistance resource also remains questionable due to the possible intervention of court personnel in the process of interpreting and implementing the court's counter-violence verdicts: 'Supreme Court opinions have force, but that such force is mitigated by subsequent interpretation, by distinctions drawn, and sometimes even by direct abandonment' (Joan and McElhiney, 1997: 28).

As a result of the seemingly ineffective assistance resources that were available for Catherine to escape her violent marriage, she experiences a state of anxiety due to Lee's abusive actions which escalates to her developing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Early in the novel, the reader lives the recurrent, internalized, emotion-based anxiety and social distancing that Catherine experiences as a result of her oppressive intimate relationship even when she is surrounded by friends and neighbours who actually care about her and believe that her presence amongst them counts: 'I was miles away' (Haynes, 2012: 14), she thinks trying to reconnect with her present away from her painful experience. This mental journey is great and intense; a journey throughout which the protagonist was trying to bury years of torture and misery that she had gone through showing her brave, strong, sociable self to all of those around her. It is a journey that nobody knows of but Catherine herself, and she is thus solely capable of allowing the reader to know gradually about the complexity of her emotional experience through the revelation of her stream of consciousness. In line with Lanser (1992), Predelli and Halsaa, (2012), Schönfelder (2013) and Ahmadifar (2018) have also stressed the importance of the character's voice through her 'stream of consciousness'; as it gives the readers a distinctive voice of particularity, significance and inclusion⁵ rather than sameness⁶ (Predelli and Halsaa, 2012; Schönfelder, 2013). This is because the notion of 'common oppression' is 'a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality' (hooks, 2000: 44).

The discussion of the specific impact of PTSD, as a result of having been exposed to violence, on a fictional character's psychological status while exploring Catherine's voiced intimate partner relationship with Lee is an important angle of vision that highlights the notion of particularity in the context of post-modern feminist literary criticism. The cruciality of addressing this aspect of particularity has been acknowledged as scholars have stressed that more 'evidence is needed on the impact of mental health/PTSD/antisocial behaviour on the perpetration of and experiences of violence' (Heise and Fulu, 2014: 30). Thus, visualizing Catherine's thoughts and feelings within the particular contexts of the violence incidents waged against her by her abusive husband enables the readers to understand her responses to those incidents, especially in relation to PTSD, in a greater degree of clarity. Schönfelder (2013) stresses the cruciality of context to fictional analysis arguing that

literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and contextualized, fictionalized and historicized, as well as psychologized and metaphorized at the same time. Literary approaches to trauma, then, have the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other (Schönfelder, 2013: 29)

5 'The acknowledgement of domestic traumas like sexual abuse can cause similar symptoms to those caused by experiences of war was a seminal movement in trauma history, made official by the inclusion of PTSD as a psychiatric category in the DSM-III in 1980. Interestingly, the founding figures of literary and cultural trauma theory initially pursued a non-inclusive approach and focused almost exclusively on trauma in the context of the Holocaust (e.g. Caruth, Langer, Laub, Felman, Hartman, and LaCapra) – and used this specific type of trauma experience as the basis on which to establish their notions of the inherently traumatic nature of culture, history and post-modernity, and so forth' (Schönfelder, 2013: 44).

6 'Differences in women's backgrounds, experiences and interests, rather than their commonalities, were increasingly highlighted through what came to be labelled as 'identity politics', or group-based claims for 'political equality, inclusion, and appeals to justice' (Predelli and Halsaa, 2012: 128).

As discussed by Atiyat (2020), Catherine develops symptoms of anxiety, fear and insecurity due to her long-term exposure to intimate partner violence. These symptoms prevent her from socializing with friends, opening up to co-workers about her experience with Lee, and limit her ability to seek professional assistance from psychiatric specialists in order to prevent this psychological status from controlling and destroying her life. Atiyat (2020) explains ‘Catherine’s (PTSD) is pictured as “pernicious”; it is a parasite that breaks her up gradually until she begins to think of death. Hence, the appropriateness of the choice of the word to the seriousness of character’s particular condition is reinforced’ (Atiyat, 2020: 35). This psychological nightmare has been prolonged and reinforced by the inefficiency of authoritative assistance. Catherine voices her crippling psychological status even after having left Lee saying: ‘You say that. They might be just thoughts, but they’re still terrifying. It’s like living in a horror film’ (Haynes, 2012: 218). Catherine longs to rid her mind of the recurrent terrifying incidents she experienced because of Lee. Her journey towards liberation from her perpetrator, however, was not an easy, smooth process at all. It was hindered and complicated by her lack of ‘authoritative intervention’. It is true that she had Alistair as a friend and a doctor to help her eventually to walk away from both Lee and her deteriorating mental status. Yet, the proposition that authoritative intervention might have eased the process of her terminating the abusive cycle she was caught in remains a valid possibility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, available literature on intimate partner violence in literary studies has confirmed that violence against women in intimate relationships is a complex arena of study. The complexity of investigating intimate partner violence in literature arises from the variety of its patterns, and the different factors that influence the exercise of violence. Setting Elizabeth Haynes’ protagonist, Catherine, as a target of investigation in the context of intimate partner violence mirrors the multi-faceted nature of this phenomenon not only with regard to its patterns, but also with respect to the factors that influence the victim’s ability to end the recurrence of these violence patterns that the protagonist was caught amidst. The factor focused on in this article is authoritative intervention, the absence of which serves to prolong the experience of violence and oppression and increase its complexity. Yet, the absence of authoritative intervention could be compensated for through the employment of other resistance factors that the protagonist has access to.

The violence she endures from her husband has been a cyclic tool to keep her passive, submissive and controllable. Nevertheless, as the abuse goes on endlessly and the pressure is elevated on a daily basis, Catherine decides to take counteraction. She decides to develop a voice of her own and allow her mind to voice her rejection of her husband’s abuse. Literary studies, despite being limited in comparison to social and scientific research up to date, has asserted the cruciality of guaranteeing the availability of assistance resources in order to develop such a voice and counteract against intimate partner violence. With the guarantee of the needed resources, Catherine, as exemplified throughout this paper, plans and gradually reclaims her control over her whole life. Despite the absence of authoritative assistance, a crucial assistance resource, due to deeply rooted prevailing male-dominating values of oppression against women, she manages to reclaim her voice that she has been robbed of by the controlling power of her husband, the tyrant male, and overtly embrace her liberation from his domination over her. This liberation is crowned by success because of the protagonist’s ability to employ alternative assistance resources that compensated for the pressure and lack of power that the absence of authoritative intervention had forced her to experience.

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