Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal
IEEPJ
University of Hormozgan
Online ISSN: 2588 - 4395
Homepage: https://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

Comparative Study of the Image of Women in the Novels of Annie Ernaux and Zoya Pirzad: An Evolutionary Perspective

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Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 3 Sep. 2024
Received in revised form 15 Nov. 2024
Accepted 22 Dec. 2024
Published online 01 Jun. 2025

Keywords:
Woman, Equality,
Evolutionary Psychology,
Status of Women,
Dream,
Reality

ABSTRACT

Objective: Women's movements have significantly transformed societal structures, with literature serving as a powerful medium to reflect and critique these changes. This study examines the portrayal of women in the works of two distinct yet thematically aligned authors—French writer Annie Ernaux and Iranian novelist Zoya Pirzad—both of whom explore the struggles, constraints, and evolving identities of women in their respective societies.

Methods: Employing an analytical and descriptive approach, this study investigates the social and psychological dimensions of female protagonists in Ernaux's A Woman's Story and A Frozen Woman and Pirzad's Things We Left Unsaid. The narratives, often semi-autobiographical, function as mirrors of women lived realities, addressing themes of autonomy, societal expectations, and gender dynamics.

Results: The analysis highlights the significance of female representation in literature, contrasting the protagonists' experiences within French and Iranian cultural contexts. By examining evolutionary psychology and gender equality, the study reveals both parallels and divergences in how these authors depict women's struggles for self-definition amid patriarchal structures.

Conclusions: This comparative study not only enriches understanding of feminist literature across cultures but also emphasizes the universality of women's quest for identity and equality.

Cite this article: Azad Taheri, Z., Ashrafi, F. & Ashrafi, F. (2025). Comparative study of the image of women in the novels of Annie Ernaux and Zoya Pirzad: an evolutionary perspective. *Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal*, 7 (2), 1-23.

DOI: https//doi.org/ 10.22034/7.2.1

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Publisher: University of Hormozgan.

DOI: https// doi.org/ 10.22034/7.2.1

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[DOI: 10.22034/ieepj.2025.7.2.956]

Introduction

The study of women writers presents itself as an elementary, almost founding, act in feminist approaches (in the broad sense). We begin the research with known and exemplary women to mark their aptitudes and their faculties. In the 1980s, surveys of women expanded. Literary and intellectual texts turn to the structures of feminine culture.

The effective tool for transmitting the thought and reality of society in the world is literature and writing. In this article we will examine two writers living in two different societies who have the same anguish and worry. Annie Ernaux and Zoya Pirzad both intend to describe and represent the social status of women through the heroine of their work who is sometimes the author.

Annie Ernaux, who is a French woman of letters and a contemporary author, was born in 1940 in Duchesne in Lillebonne (Seine-Maritime) in a modest social environment. She began her literary career with Cleaned out. Her literary work has a close relationship with sociology and her life. She draws the material for her writing from her own life, whether it be her childhood, her adolescence or the death of her mother. The work that we will examine in this article, A Frozen Woman, recounts the marriage of our writer in the 1960s. Ernaux examines the limits of female liberation at that time. We will see that she recounts her disappointment at the start of her marriage, when she found herself confronted with a husband who was conservative in his words, but much less in his actions, as well as her slavery despite her internal refusal. The dominant role of husbands and men in general in society is well described in her work. She defends the cause of women and tries to fight against their unfavorable situation.

Zoya Pirzad is an Iranian writer with an Armenian mother and an Iranian father of Russian origin. His first novel, Things We Left Unsaid, published in 2001, enjoyed immense success in Iran and was translated into French. She won the Houshang Golshiri Prize for the best novel of the year in Iran. Our writer subtly paints the portrait of a society dominated by patriarchy.

In this article, above all, we will verify the history of the female presence in literature and the place of women in reality and in dreams. Then, we will look for comparative elements between the masculine and feminine genders and study gender equality in French and Iranian societies.

I. The role of gender in the evolutionary psychology of women and men and its reflection in world literature

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Thinking about the past and searching for one's own identity has been a human endeavor since long history in various fields. Evolutionary psychology is one of the contemporary scientific disciplines that explores the formation of the psyche and human behavior under the experiences of the past and early ancestors. In this regard, humans are placed in the domain of animals, in the branch of vertebrates, in the order of mammals, in the family of humanoids and in the species of homo sapience, which genetically has a lot in common with hominoids.

In this regard, according to Freud: "Anatomy is destiny"; because anatomy determines the psychological, behavioral and social characteristics of people. Even among primates, it has been observed that male children choose cars and balls among the given toys, while female children prefer dolls.

Although biological sex does not determine all the differences between men and women, especially from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, but it causes a preferential and desire direction and strain; because young males try to imitate the behavior of adult males and young females also imitate adult females; so that even the female primates that grow alone in the zoo cage, still show the biological traits related to the female sex; in the same way, young males reproduce with adult males. Freud, in his psychodynamic theory, referred to these cases, by the roots of a kind of evolutionary psychology, as Oedipus complex in boys and Electra complex in girls.

In relation to the influence of gender in evolutionary psychology, David Buss' theory of Paternity Uncertainty can be considered in the formation and development of some male characteristics, such as male jealousy (paranoid male) and paranoia of sexual infidelity. According to Buss' opinion, species that have sexual reproduction often consist of two sexes: male and female. Comparing these two sexes is another way to test hypotheses about compatibility. A comparative method is to analyze the differences between the two sexes in the compromise issues they face. For example, in species where birth takes place inside the female body, such as humans, males have a trade-off in Paternity Uncertainty: they can never know with complete certainty if they are the genetic fathers of offspring born to their mate or no. But females do not face this compromise issue; they know that their egg cells (and not those of competitors) have been fertilized; because the egg cells come out of their own body. Based on

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this analysis, we can compare males and females and see whether males have evolved special adaptations to solve this problem or not. (Buss, 2012)

In relation to the role of gender in the evolutionary psychology of women and men, especially from the perspective of leadership styles, social roles and characterizations of world writers, it can be seen in the personification of their literary works (hubris syndrome) during which all leaders, at the beginning of their work show a kind of high empathy and forgiveness; but after consolidating, strengthening and forming their circles of power and authority, gender differences, especially in empathy, become more obvious, so that male leaders are faced with an increase in command and authority and a decrease in empathy; and on the contrary, women show transformational and participative leadership strategies more than men.

From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, these differences between men and women in leadership style and in expressing empathy are especially rooted in social-psychological evolution in the early periods. In the stage after hunting and in the beginning of agriculture (the emergence of wheat and eating wheat), women nurtured in themselves mostly the role of procreation and motherly qualities of empathy and participation. This high expression of the element of empathy, not only in social leadership in women but also in the characterization of the characters of great literary works, including the works of French Annie Ernaux and Iranian Zoya Pirzad, is evident as a kind of influence and adaptation of the common heritage of the culture of human evolutionary psychology in the role of gender.

David Buss and his colleagues (1998), in the direction of the grounding and during field researches to confirm their theory of evolutionary psychology, examined the difference in the views of women and men (gender role) regarding valuable characteristics in women and men on more than ten thousand people from thirty seven different world cultures; and despite the differences of people and cultures, they reached the evolutionary preferences of the following common factors:

A. Features that are valuable from the point of view of women in relation to men:	Efficiency and high income, hard work (resilience)
B. Features that are valuable from the point of view of men in relation to women:	Beauty and youth
C. Features that are jointly valuable from the point of view of women and men:	Love, understanding, intelligence

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The three cases A, B and C of David Buss in his research in confirmation of three hypotheses:

A. During the evolution of animals and humans, they prefer the male sex that can provide more resources for the members of the species and family.

B. During the evolution of animals and humans, the male sex, for the increase of reproduction and the transfer of their genes, considers the reproductive power of women (beauty and youth).

C. During the evolution of animals and humans, according to the concept of different parental investment in men and women, the value and influence of love, understanding and intelligence factors are important in preventing betrayal and emotional vacuum.

During the recent decades and the emergence of new strains of social changes in modern and post-modern societies and especially during the entry of more and more women into the labor market, this theory of David Buss and colleagues has faced challenges; Although, on the other hand, it should be acknowledged that human evolution, both biologically and socially-economically-culturally, over millions of years, has led to the emergence and formation of evolutionary and behavioral psychology with different criteria between men and women and also, the growth and development of the personality structure has become different; thus, each of the above two sexes requires certain criteria to choose its partner.

By examining the masterpieces of world literature from ancient times to modern times, especially *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer, *Madame Bovary* of Flaubert, *Thirty-Year-Old Woman* of Balzac, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* of Gabriel García Márquez, *A Frozen Woman* of Annie Ernaux, *Kaleydar* of Mahmoud Dōlat-Ābādi, *Things We Left Unsaid* of Zoya Pirzad and other characters discussed by the world's top authors, the evolutionary preferences of common agents of David Buss and his colleagues regarding valuable characteristics from the perspective of women, men and jointly, they confirm a kind of overlap, matching and even one-to-one correspondence with the theory of evolutionary psychology of David Buss.

II. The feminine characters in French and Persian literature

In *The History of French Literature* of Gustave Lanson (1895), women are systematically accused; Gustave Lanson applied a rhetoric of virility; he appealed to the old dialectic of the French analytical mind from which women would be excluded. Anthologies of women's texts or histories of women's literature, *a priori* favorable to women authors, repeat, once again, the same clichés.

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For example, Jean Larnac (1929), who reveals the attitudes of both sexes in the literary world, indicates that women do not produce great works (alone in any case) and that a failed family life is at the origin of their commitment to literature. It seems that recent literary histories (from the 1990s and 2000s) ignore the achievements of feminist researches: the place of women is very limited in these works.

We can easily see the first successes of women in bookstores, because contrary to the ban on women being professional writers, a few writers have ventured into it. Before the beginning of the 19th century in France and Europe, we did not really see women of letters. Nobody knew that Madame de La Fayette was a writer. Likewise, Madeleine de Scudéry never puts her name on a single one of her writings; she borrows her brother's name so as not to face the admonition of her time. In short, until the end of the 18th century, women could not be found in literature, even if some did in fact write. But there is a more important question: do the women who write represent their time? Not really. There are of course women who know how to read and write, they have often benefited from a very good education in the arts and letters, women from the aristocracy who frequent the beautiful minds of their time, but they are not representative of the overwhelming majority of women of the time who belong to the poor classes of society.

However, these women already present interesting ideas about society, giving a less fantasized view of women than their colleagues, and sometimes tackling surprisingly modern themes. This is for example the case of Madeleine de Scudéry who, in her works, regularly indicates aggressive criticism against marriage, this violence against women in which all rights are taken away from them, they who already do not have the capacity to take their destiny into their own hands: a beginning to speak out, even if women's voices cannot yet be widely heard.

The presence of women in literature from the beginning of the 1940s is one of the manifestations of profound changes in Iran. It was a period of transition that produced extreme feelings, between admiration and hatred. It was at this moment that the modern era of women's writing truly began. At the beginning, women only imitated the works written by men while showing a particular interest in morals and ethics. They considered literature as a means or weapon to educate their fellow human beings and warn them against certain potential dangers. This trend lasted around twenty years, before a notable evolution in the form and content of their writings appeared at the beginning of the 1960s.

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Persian literature has opened a wide range over the centuries and has nurtured different poets and writers from different walks of life. But the woman has always been hidden under the veil of ambiguity and has been nicknamed with various titles. In many cases, it was not even possible for him to live under the veil of ambiguity.

When we turn the pages of history, we are confronted with women artists, poets and talented women who rose to the occasion and, despite all family and social limitations, wrote under a pseudonym or pseudonyms.

The position of women in the history of literature has been weak. The space to express women's ideas and intellectual abilities was not prepared and they always found themselves in a difficult situation. For these reasons, when we look at history, we see that the number of female authors does not exceed the number of fingers on one hand.

In Persian literature, women have multiple missions; sometimes they are a manifestation of love and affection, sometimes they are a lover, and sometimes they are a compassionate and devoted mother and family nurturer, sometimes a woman is the manifestation of piety and confidence, patriotism, and, in another place, the woman is the symbol of resentment and sedition. Romance, which women excel at, is usually presented in one of two ways:

A) Physical (erotic) loves: loves in which most material and physical aspects are expressed. These loves are earthly loves, like the story of Soudābeh and Siāvash, Weiss and Rāmin, Bizhan and Manizheh, Zāl and Roudābeh.

B) Excuses: in this type of romance, the lovers do not pay attention to the physical and material aspect, usually these loves are chaste and the lover is not afraid to express his love quickly. It takes on a mystical and spiritual color. Lovers of this genre can be found in abundance in lyrical and mystical literature, the most famous of which are Leila and Majnoun, as well as the story of Zein-al-Arab and Baktāsh. These stories are a manifestation of ideal love, having a divine color and smell: a pure love without lust and without physical and carnal impurities.

There has been a lot of discussion about women having the role of mothers in our literature. In this position, the woman is the symbol of sacrifice, self-sacrifice, patience and affection.

In epic works, the mother's efforts to save the child from the clutches of the enemy are presented as a turning point in the epic and the history, and attributes such as the mother's abstinence and wisdom are addressed.

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II.I. The feminine presence in the works of these two authors

Today, feminism is one of the important research topics in sociology and cultural studies. These studies are important in the world and are expanding in Iran. Therefore, this article examines the works of Zoya Pirzad to see how the growth of the feminist movement in Pirzad's works has been discussed in terms of the subjugation or domination of women in fiction. The women who play the leading and progressive roles in the telling of Pirzad's stories go through an upward trend; they change with time and revolt. The sparks of intelligence, awareness and preservation of women's identities are quite evident in her novels.

In this article, the most important stylistic aspects of Zoya Pirzad's works are studied and analyzed with a feminist approach. Here is the evolution of thought, which leads to the evolution of language, in the works of this writer: in the collection of stories *Like Every Evening, The Acrid Taste of Persimmon* and *The Space between Us,* women are captivated by everyday life and have no will of their own. In the novel *Things We Left Unsaid,* the position of women is questioned, and in this novel we see the development of the role of women in the field of social activity.

From these works, the author expressed feminine feeling and the story of women's lives in simple language. The heroines of this collection are women without desire, temptation, sorrow or joy. The repetition of family problems and daily activities of women's lives in the family, such as cooking, dusting and cleaning, become the subjects of description and attention for the author. *Things We Left Unsaid* is the story of an Armenian-Iranian family. The protagonist, Clarisse, is the narrator of a story that takes place in the homes of various residents of Abadan.

Clarisse, the main character and narrator of the story, is a perfect example of a self-sacrificing and, of course, skillful Iranian woman. Throughout the story, she witnesses her particular feminine taste and her concerns with providing a clean and tidy physical space at home. She is also a good cook, a good seamstress and even a good gardener.

"When they left, the pessimistic side of my mind cocooned as always. What was the girl looking at so carefully? May not be there a dirty place? Does the kitchen look strange or ugly? The optimistic side rescued me. Your kitchen may be very busy; but it is never dirty; in addition, the opinion of a little girl should not be important to a person. I rubbed cheese on the butter, put the sandwich on the fourth plate and looked away. I looked at the dried flowers and clay pots on the

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shelves; I hung rings of red pepper and vinegar on the wall. The optimistic side was comforting. All these and many other things that are not in other people's kitchen and are in your kitchen, it is beautiful for you, even if your mother, sister, friend and acquaintance laugh and say that Clarisse's kitchen has become the same as the witch's cottage in the story of Hansel and Gretel, you should not think about it. The words of others should change your taste and you should not be discouraged by people's words and you should not… My eyes fell on the brick-on-edge course of the window. I had to change its place." (Pirzad, 1380, Markaz Edition, pp. 10, 11)

At the beginning of the story, it seems that by doing this and taking care of her children's problems, she feels complete inner satisfaction from life and can easily handle everything. She also ignores her husband's usual coldness and indifference and interprets them with optimism. Compared to other people, Clarisse also tries to hide her personal thoughts and ideas in order to minimize tension and discomfort to the extent that others are used to her role and cannot tolerate another side of this woman.

Her identity as a mother change throughout the story. She has a lot of responsibilities as a mother. She takes care of her teenage son and two young daughters. She encounters problems throughout the story. She is sometimes unable to control and resolve them.

The woman of the novel *Things We Left Unsaid,* like other writers' heroines and other heroes of works that have similar themes, is a woman who has adopted the traditional and accepted models of Iranian women and focuses on meeting the expectations of such role. For these women, achieving a distinct identity is gradually born amid hidden secrets and hesitations. The character of these women is also influenced by the roles they play.

The protagonist of *A Frozen Woman* is thirty years old, a teacher married to an executive, mother of two young children. She lives in a nice apartment. And yet, she is a frozen woman. Like millions of others, she felt her enthusiasm and curiosity — the strength and happiness that were once a part of her — ebb and flow under the weight of her daily routine. These very conditions that everyone seems to consider normal for a woman are killing her.

In *A Frozen Woman,* Annie Ernaux shows her gift for giving power and authenticity to a distinctly feminist voice. While each of Ernaux's books contains an autobiographical element, *A Frozen Woman* is the most autobiographical of all. Where a woman describes her relationship with her mother and a fleeting romance with a younger man, *A Frozen Woman* focuses the spotlight on

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Annie herself. Mixing affection, rage and bitterness, here is Ernaux in her most poignant, touching and inspiring form.

Ernaux continues her thinly disguised fictional autobiography, this time recalling with numbing intensity her transition to femininity trapped by convention and domesticity. The anonymous narrator reworks old ground by describing her childhood in a bourgeois but unconventional family. Her parents operated a small convenience store, a "landscape" where there were only "mute and submissive women". Her father peeled potatoes, her mother kept the books, and both encouraged their daughter to excel in school. "Dust does not exist for its mother or rather it's something natural not a problem." (Ernaux, 1981, p. 38)

II.II. The feminine condition in dreams and reality in Ernaux's and Pirzad's work

The evolution of society and human relations constitutes a reality which undoubtedly escapes no one. The key is to know whether this appears, depending on the period studied, as progress or decadence. Our opinions on the issue will always differ and the perception of said problem will differ depending on the position one occupies in the community analyzed.

The modern woman, blinded by feminist education, lives her specific actions as freedom, as choice and not as the constraint of submission to a code. She thinks she is a rebel since she claims to escape from her true nature. Is this not, in fact, a testimony to the lack of esteem she has for who she really is?

Our society sees women becoming masculinized and men becoming feminized. But what's more off-putting for a man than a tomboy? What's more repulsive to a woman than a tomboy? However, we forget that we are not equal, that it is even this difference between us that forges our relationships. The interdependence between husband and wife ensures the permanence of the couple. How to thrive in a household where everyone's roles are poorly defined?

The woman, in reality, is automatically a housewife. For the man, the woman had to do all the household chores, have children, and when the man came home, he had to find that everything was ready. On the other hand, the man had to bring in money and meet the financial needs of his family. This is not why the woman is unhappy or submissive; since at that time, the woman had value for her husband and in society, and she was even considered the main pillar of the house.

In modern families, women and men are equal. Both work outside. They exchange ideas with each other. Women and children do not obey men if they think their commands are not admissible.

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Women and children can decide for themselves. For example, women work outside the home, like men. When they return home, they will not carry out the orders of men simply because they are their wives. We believe this is a positive change in our societies.

We might notice this type of women in *A Frozen Woman.* For example, Annie Ernaux elaborates her feminine heredity through memory and writing. She builds her genealogy on the women's side. She digs, brings up images and expressions. Her language mixes the everyday, the banal, the simple, and, in a certain way, transfigure gives it a poetic voice. She puts in pictures. She traces her trajectory from child to young woman and makes a strange observation that she does not interpret. She grew up sheltered from the idea of a division of roles between men and women which would suggest the superiority of the former over the latter.

In fact, we can notice that in general the women in Annie Ernaux are devoid of any sign of femininity which allows this writer to describe what she wants to show about her women. This is why we see that the argument between the young girl and her mother is told and illuminated in her novel *A Frozen Woman.* This novel, as Annie Ernaux says, is a book devoted to the condition of women:

"At one point, I was over twenty-five, I realized that these were individual things, but which, in fact, belonged to social inequality, to the difference of cultures. And so I wrote on this… There is also the condition of women which interested me a lot. I wrote a whole book on this subject, which is called *A Frozen Woman.*" (Ernaux, 1996, p. 36)

Pirzad tried to portray an attractive image of an Iranian woman. Her novels often depict women seeking to discover identities and bring women's issues to light. Women, their ideals and their goals have always been the center of the writer's attention. The number and variety of female characters are one of the unique characteristics of the writer's works. For example, in the novel *We Will Get Used to It,* the emphasis is placed on the characterization, actions and dialogues of women such as Māh-Monir, Ārezū, Shīrin, Āyeh, Tahmineh and Mahboubeh.

Pirzad's art is to make the dialogues lively and real. The women in Zoya Pirzad's stories are real; we see them every day in the streets of the city. The women in her stories are constantly trying to make their lives the way they want. Pirzad deals with events and currents which, although normal, are very delicate and subcutaneous, in which women play a major role. She wants to respond to women's feelings, their attitudes towards life and their limits. Zoya Pirzad's art is there,

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transforming ordinary things into fictional events, into attractive and engaging events. The high frequency of repetition of family problems and daily tasks in Zoya Pirzad's works, such as cooking, cleaning, dusting, etc. is a crucial point.

"I looked at the kitchen wall clock. There was nothing left. Mother and Alice would be found in half an hour. "I can't wait to have coffee together," I thought. I took out the pack of cigarettes from the refrigerator. I don't know from when I heard that cigarettes dry slowly in the refrigerator. I did not smoke much. Only sometimes, when the house was quiet, I liked to sit in the green leather sofa, rest my head on the back, smoke a cigarette and think. In these rare moments of solitude, I tried not to think about everyday issues such as late night dinner and Ārmen's failure to study, and Ārtush's coldness and forgetfulness." (Pirzad, 1380, p. 64)

The description of daily work and its details, the vocabulary that revolves around family, women's issues, concerns such as cooking issues, women's clothing, their entertainment, food, colors etc. are the most important characters in the work of Zoya Pirzad. Most of the protagonists in her novels are women. In her works, she tried to present an attractive image of Iranian women. It shows the course of discovery of identity, ideals and goals of women in society who oscillated between tradition and modernity. We see a realistic description, short and simple sentences. For example, the attention to superstitious matters is well illustrated: "It is not without reason that his mother died a few years ago because it was unfortunate." (Pirzad, 2002, p. 41)

Iranian women have managed to change their situation in family and social life, despite a political and legal context that is *a priori* very unfavorable towards them. The keystone of this notable change is undoubtedly the increasingly widespread distribution of schooling to which women have massively accessed. Thus, they were able not only to reduce their gap with men in access to knowledge, but above all to extend their level of education. This significant progress, which has made younger generations increasingly egalitarian, has largely contributed to the shaking of the patriarchal order, first and foremost within the family. It was under these conditions that women began to control their fertility. Today, the fairly low level of women's fertility, the use of contraceptives by a large majority of them, and the continued rise in their age at first marriage are the characteristics. Of course, we must distinguish urban women from those in the countryside. But given the similarity in behavior between the youngest generations, it is very plausible that in the not too distant future, the socio-demographic characteristics of rural people will be close to

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those of urban people. Iranian women are no longer confined to the domestic space and wish to occupy the place that seems rightfully theirs in this area:

"New roles and places in the private sphere as well as in the public sphere. It is especially the youngest and most educated who aspire to equality between the sexes both in the family domain and in the socio-political domain. Certainly, the "road to establishing this parity is proving to be a long way to go, but the speed with which women have managed to reduce their gap with men in certain areas suggests that profound changes are possible and will soon occur." (Marie Ladier-Fouladi, Paris, p. 355)

The woman did not have much choice in the inner world and had to endure what the man imposed on her. We can say that women were always the "doers of everything at home" and this concept appears very obvious in the writing of Annie Ernaux who embodies a fight for the improvement of the situation of women in France as everywhere in the world. Also it is not only the author who represents a sexual writing but she is also a sexual reading; that is to say that at the time of the appearance of this author's novels, her readers were mainly women since the subject affects them more than men. Women try to revolt and free themselves from what male society imposes on them, to fight against the man who is the subject of the discourse: theoretical, moral, and political. The type of God, guardian of all subjects and all discourse, is always masculine-paternal in the West. For women, the so-called minor arts remain: cooking, knitting, embroidery, sewing; exceptionally, poetry, painting, music. (Luce, *Ethics*, 1984, p. 14)

Zoya Pirzad tries to study social realities. In his novel, *Things We Left Unsaid*, nothing is freely chosen. The characters, their age, their profession, the environment they frequent and in which they work, the event that happens to each of them, are not accidental. The author assigns to her characters professions that are directly related to the people, especially to the disadvantaged or middle classes of society, in order to give an accurate and real profile of the people by dealing with their problems and their lives. For example, Ārezū and Shīrin work as real estate agents and Sohrāb as a lock seller.

III. Comparative elements

Simone de Beauvoir underlines, without indulgence, the constraints of women who, "towards liberation", sought "salvation in literature"; but, she seeks the causes in the condition that society has given them (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, Gallimard, 1949, pp. 547-559). It is because woman lives "on

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the margins of the masculine world" that "she cannot grasp it in its universal figure" (*Ibid.*, p. 561). Without control over him, she can only "exhibit" her only reality: her own person. But, since the woman does nothing and makes herself nothing, she only "discovers" an "imaginary idol built with clichés" (*Ibid.*, p. 414). In this "universe of men" which is the world of culture where "she is only stammering", she "does not dare to venture onto new paths". Chanters of the bourgeois ideal of happiness, women writers exalt, under the cover of poetry, the "mystification" intended to persuade women to "remain women".

Simone de Beauvoir points out to women writers the paths of freedom and creation: transcendence, solitude, unveiling of the entire reality (and not of one's own person alone), of the contestation of the human condition (and not of the feminine condition alone).

Annie Ernaux does not want to remain locked into the role that her society imposes on her; this is why she begins *A Woman's Story* and *A Frozen Woman* with the description of the woman who lives in the shadow of her man and it is against this exile that the writer wants to fight and to what she wants to devote this story. She tries to trace her lineage as a little girl and that of a married woman. She always presents us with a woman dominated by a man who is the male, even the male of the world.

She believes in the superiority of men, but does not accept it, and therefore, she fills her pages with comparisons between the two pillars of life. If she shows us this superiority, at the same time she never ceases to communicate to us her certainty of the superiority of women. She works to prove that "women are superior to men" (Ernaux, 1981, p. 15). In other words, she knows that in truth men are superior to women when it comes to domestic work, breeding kisses and many other things, and, despite all this, she tries to play on knowledge and intelligence of women.

She uses simple words and she tells us what parents say to their children when they want to distinguish a girl from a boy, and, despite this perspective, the narrator's vision remains unequal; that is to say, she always defends women and wants to show their superiorities to their adversaries: men. "It doesn't make a difference to me that the women are more learned than the men." (*Ibid.*, p. 50)

Annie Ernaux finds that the sexualization of writing is a solution to make one's voice which is the voice of all women be heard. For her, it's not sex that presents the problem; rather, it is the male mentality that envelops his society where the woman almost only takes care of cleaning and caring

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for her baby. She wants to revolt against this erasure of her role through the generalization of her voice and her words to convince all women of a reciprocal equality which must be established in their society: “This silent devotion, this perpetual smile and this self-effacement in front of the head of the family, what astonishment, what disbelief, not yet too much embarrassment, not to discover a trace of it in my mother.” (*Ibid.*, p. 50)

Annie Ernaux shows that the tasks that fall to women are, above all knowing, how to tidy the house, iron, clean, as if these tasks were the other face of a woman’s existence. In other words, the author is trying to say that the primary purpose of women’s existence is to serve men in the world of marriage or sometimes outside this world. The child who is seven years old knows that he is “in the world to do something”. (*Ibid.*, p. 50)

The simple, everyday concerns and language of Zoya Pirzad’s characters lower the boundaries of Persian literature, thus making it accessible to the rest of the world for the sake of humanist sharing. In *Things We Left Unsaid*, everything is very slow; because, Abadan (the hometown of Zoya Pirzad in the southwest of Iran) in the 1960s was a very calm city.

“It’s me who turns off the lights” is one of the rare sentences, in *Things We Left Unsaid*, exchanged between Clarisse, our heroine, and her husband who neglects her and basically knows nothing about her. Clarisse belongs to the minority of Armenians in Iran, a protected minority integrated into the economic system. Clarisse’s husband is an engineer in a power plant who protects its employees by “parking” them in a sort of ghetto for privileged families.

Zoya Pirzad takes us into the daily life of this woman, the anti-heroine par excellence, whose life is tirelessly punctuated by the imperative’s incumbent upon her as a housewife, devoting all her energy to her husband and her children (mischievous twins and a pre-teen son) and an omnipresent mother and sister. Throughout the pages, the author makes us aware that something is not right in this perfectly compartmentalized and policed universe. The arrival of another Armenian family, adorned with an aura of mystery and linked to a prestigious and enriching past, opens up a horizon of possibilities that Clarisse had never glimpsed or hoped for until then. From this meeting, Clarisse’s respectable facade begins to crack.

“Leaning my head against the green back of the sofa, I remembered the Simonians: the boy’s delicate hands, mother’s beaded shoes, and Emily who had not spoken a word to me yet. I thought what kind of woman Emily’s mother had been. Mother had said, “she went crazy and found herself

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in Namādgar." I wondered how old I was the summer we went to Namādgar; eight years old? ten years old? The same age as the twins, maybe. I heard the metal door of the yard creak. I turned around and saw Alice and Mother coming from the window." (*Ibid.*, p. 66)

It's a story that undeniably invites reflection. The novel is a very beautiful portrait of a woman on the edge of the precipice but still held by an invisible thread. We understand that it is about fear of the unknown and family duty. Zoya Pirzad draws this portrait with discreet and diaphanous touches, distilling the emotions page by page with subtlety.

III.I. The lack of equal rights for women and men

One of the characteristics of Zoya Pirzad's style is the silent feminist protest which has a significant connection with the depth of the narration. The high frequency of words involving repetition and continuity, such as daily chores, demonstrates the women's daily fatigue with the practical trick of annoying the reader.

Pirzad and Ernaux focus on psychological, socio-cultural, economic issues and thus visualize an image of women's lives and characteristics in the eyes of the reader. The female characters in both stories seek to discover their independent individual identities during family life and in the exercise of feminine functions.

Despite their strong emotional attachment to their spouse, our characters experienced an emotional void, and, consequently, a feeling of loneliness. As housewives, the protagonists of these novels often spend time at home and therefore have a boring daily life, but still have a special commitment to fulfilling their duties and maintaining the family unit. However, women do not resist male domination. They are tired of being ignored and humiliated.

It is said that *A Frozen Woman* was "a turning point" for many feminists. The novel deals with the subject of male domination in all its aspects and in particular the inevitable internalization by women of their role in society.

It is an autobiographical and realistic novel which is written by a woman married to an executive, mother of two children, alternating between two jobs, that of a teacher and that of a housewife: a woman like most in some way. However, nothing could force her to be "like the others".

In her family, nothing is going on like what one could imagine in the 1940s. His mother, a grocer, works like a dog, does the accounting, and certainly doesn't have the time to take care of the house and the kitchen. Her father, a very caring man, wanted to garden. He does the dishes, cooks and is

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always the one waiting for her daughter, a little distance from the mothers of the "others", just in front of the school gate.

Her mother gave her, at the beginning of her life, a taste for reading and adventure: "My mother's naivety, she believed that knowledge and a good profession would protect me from everything, including the power of men". (Ernaux, 1981, p.73)

It is also there, at the girls' school, that she meets "the others". Those whose mothers spend their days cleaning, scrubbing hard the inside of their homes, preparing food for the fathers who are going to come home from work. It is there that she discovers the role that concerns her by her gender: "Little girls are gentle and weak beings, inferior to boys." (*Ibid.,* p. 78)

But this idea of inferiority is not yet her world; she won't be like that; even when she was very young, she dreamed of boys in a tender and raw way: "traveling and making love; I don't think anything seemed more beautiful to me at 10 years old." (*Ibid.*, p. 81)

Reality quickly catches up with her, her friends and her teachers gradually explain to her what a girl should be: a woman of the house in the future. Adolescence shapes it little by little: "(…) we, girls, are here to save the world through our prayers and our behavior." (*Ibid.,* p. 86) A friend, Brigitte, makes her understand that her mother is not a "real mother"; so, the narrator perseveres in correcting what her mother did not teach her: cooking, sewing, ordering…

A path to escape: her studies. While Brigitte left to become a secretary and pretty much married, the writer left for high school. She faces a new violence, that of class. His last four years of freedom before confinement: "Yes, I lived in the same way as a boy of my age, who gets by on state money, modest help from parents, babysitting and investigations, goes to the cinema, reads, dances and works to pass his exams, considers marriage a farcical idea." (*Ibid.,* p. 21) She meets the one who will become the ruler of the house. However, he is a socialist, like her who is progressive; he defends the idea of equality of men and women.

They are young, free. Both have to prepare their Capes, but one has to cook because the other isn't going to peel the potatoes: pregnancy. The Capes will be for later. Slowly, she maintains her prison, innocently thinking that hell and martyrdom are only temporary, so that the gentleman can finish his studies. He still doesn't find it "convenient" even though he showers her with compliments: "You know? I prefer to eat at home rather than at a restaurant; it's much better!" (*Ibid.,* p. 19) She could be indebted.

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But, when their child is born, she understands. All she has to do is to be the perfect wife, the perfect mother, that of the famous manual of the time: I am raising my child. All she has to do is to put up with her husband's reproaches when he comes home from work, when he sits down in his armchair reading *Le Monde* while waiting for dinner to be ready, after she has spent the day busying herself of her kid, of the house and trying as best she could to study for her Capes. It turns out that she succeeds in this wonderfully, so much so that she ends up getting it: French teacher, here she is. Another job to add to those she already does; "What should she complain about", they chant at her? 18 hours of work per week: she has plenty of time left to take care of the house and her "Bicot" as she calls him — it's the nickname of her child, not her husband. Her role as a woman perfectly internalized: new pregnancy, voluntary. "Enjoy the last moments with just one child as long as possible. My whole story as a woman is that of a staircase that we go down reluctantly." (Ernaux, 1981, p. 86) She is not yet 30 years old, but nothing can affect her anymore: she is a frozen woman. It's a (sad) marvel that Annie Ernaux has created. His dry and jerky style suits the theme perfectly. This book hurts, this book revolts, this book resonates. You could almost believe in bad luck. While the narrator grows up in a family which seems to have gone beyond gender stereotypes, while she then evolves in an intellectual environment which allows her to ask fundamental questions about her condition as a woman, she is overtaken by a "cursed destiny": that of being a woman in the 1960s.

This novel perfectly illustrates the irony of History. It is at the moment when she thinks of emancipating herself that the young woman encounters servitude.

Unless History needs more time: since the 1960s, have things changed so much? How many women will not recognize their family in his words? How many women will not find themselves in Annie's discovery of the role that men throughout History have assigned to women? Reading this book, almost forty years after its release, confirmed one thing to us: the fight is far from over; to read and to be read.

III.II. Analysis of female feelings

Throughout our reading, the idea of unhappiness produced by men dominates and marks the writings of Ernaux, who speaks of this notion in his novel *A Frozen Woman,* considering that men are the source of unhappiness and sadness: "Obscurely, I also feel that almost all of women's misfortunes come through men." (Ernaux, 1981, p. 30) Annie Ernaux makes us feel that a woman's

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life is always monotonous and frozen since she lives in nonsense: “Very clear years, without any alleviation which help to put up with a grandmother to look after the child, parents who relieve you of the hassle from time to time with invitations, or even enough money to pay the lady who does everything from morning to night. Me, nothing, bare bones, a husband, a baby, an F3, enough to discover the difference in its pure state.” (*Ibid.*, p. 182)

The protagonist is not just a frozen woman, but a woman trembling because of her cold life and because of her icy world. This is why she ends her work with a gloomy, cold paragraph, which shows us the disappearance of all desire to continue: “I was walking back to Bicou in the streets of Annecy, in winter. In the square at the station square, the water no longer flowed over the statue in the middle of the fountain. In his stroller, the bundled-up Pilou was trying to catch the pigeons that always zigzag around the pool. It seemed to me that I no longer had a body, just a glance at the facades of the buildings on the square, the gates of the Saint-François school, the Savoy where we played, I forgot the title.” (*Ibid.*, p. 182)

The lexical field in the works of Zoya Pirzad belongs to the family and the concerns of women. The novel *Things We Left Unsaid* is written in the first person, from Clarisse’s point of view and takes place in an apparent immobility of time, in a progressive accumulation of family events. It seems that the victim’s point of view is privileged. The narrator presents herself as a stranger rejected in her own world: “Until then, who had taken care of me exclusively?” (Pirzad, 1381, p. 216)

At sixteen, the narrator of *A Frozen Woman* coldly executes the maternal model. This mother, who goes out of her way to accompany her daughter to the library, to clumsily name things like her to better understand her and to adopt her young girl’s words, is in fact locked in a sort of citadel that no one wants to conquer. The maternal universe is consequently reduced to the state of a folkloric home which inspires only mockery or indifference: “Between twelve and fourteen years old, I will discover with amazement that it is ugly and dirty, this dust that I didn’t even see.” (Ernaux, 1981, p. 154)

The feeling of floating, described as positive at first, later becomes negative and makes life seem aimless and unreal. At the end of this passage, the narrator concludes that the solution to this problem would be the presence of “a man at her side” (*Ibid.*, p. 114) who would bear witness and give importance to the most insignificant details of every day. Later, this vision, becoming reality,

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turns out to have disastrous consequences. The narrator of *A Frozen Woman* experiences the pleasure of her freedom; but, in the end, she becomes frightened; her existence seems meaningless and uprooted to her: “Lovely the sleepless nights and the onion soup at dawn on the banks of the Seine, the babysitting and the inns, the life far from order; but, the impression also that this availability resembles emptiness.” (*Ibid.*, p. 117)

Annie Ernaux writes about the evolution and ambivalence of a daughter’s feelings for her mother: love, hatred, tenderness, guilt, and finally, visceral attachment to the diminished old woman. Like those of Ernaux, Zoya Pirzad’s novels are captured through the intellectual process of fragmentation of her writing. Clarisse, in *Things We Left Unsaid*, is a housewife, wife and mother, who could be qualified, according to social contracts, “an ideal woman”, but who begins to go unnoticed in the eyes of those to whom she makes life easy and pleasant, forgetting what she could have done with her life. She begins to feel the same loneliness as the female characters in Ernaux’s stories.

Other speakers are present in the text: those around her, which is to say her family and her friends, who are unaware of Clarisse’s aspirations, are violently taken to task by her: “I was very angry. Because of Nina who forced me to organize this dinner to, according to her expression, arrange the meeting of Émile and Violette; for Alice who only thought of herself; my mother who only thought of Alice; the children who were very happy, and Ārtush who only thought about his chess game. Why didn’t anyone think of me? (Pirzad, 1381, p. 216)

Conclusion

“Women’s literature” is defined as a literature of lack and excess. Lack of imagination, logic, objectivity and metaphysical thinking; lack of composition, harmony and formal perfection; too much ease, too many words, too many phrases, sentimentality, desire to please and too many moralizing tones and narcissism. The writings of these women often bring a particular feminine vision to literature, ranging from simple banter to stinging critiques of the social structures of their time. With these writings also emerge the first conceptualizations which will give birth to feminism.

Attributes such as kindness, companionship, patience, and skill are characteristics that, although not shared equally among these women, nevertheless partly represent a similar image of a

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dedicated Iranian woman. Confronting concerns that challenge this common image is the result of living in a time where women and all human beings are presented with different and multiple ideas for their identity and personhood, ideas that can challenge their usual image. *Things We Left Unsaid* and other female characters in similar novels are sometimes the same as women who live in the real world.

Most female returnees, like Clarisse, prefer to continue their lives by reorganizing it to incorporate many elements of both traditional and modern lifestyles. What they compile of their lives is a personal narrative that, while inherently pluralistic, brings to life a calming unity inspired by the feminine spirit.

In most of Zoya Pirzad's works (*Like Every Evening* and *The Space between Us*), women are represented in a limited family life, in the quadruple of the house and live in a discouraging daily life. The most important issues and themes that are seen in the lives of these women are the concerns, anguishes, illnesses and sufferings of family and office work. In the lives of the women in these stories, repetitive life has become so habitual that they fear change.

Being a woman, for Ernaux as for Pirzad, is not an essence, but a significant part of social determination. Ernaux's apprehension of the world, as *A Frozen Woman* clearly showed, could only be based on this distinction that she did not choose but outside of which she could not live. The test of life, despite "its contents which are the same for everyone", is always done individually: the body, education, social trajectory and the existence of others.

A Frozen Woman presents a continuity of women. They parade to focus on just one. Annie Ernaux elaborates her feminine heredity through memory and writing. She builds her genealogy on the women's side. She searches and brings up images and expressions. Her language mixes the everyday, the banal and the simple and, in a certain way, transfigure gives it a poetic voice.

Contemporary women's literature is sometimes a literature of denunciation. It calls into question the dogma of virginity or the practices of polygamy and forced marriages. It is also, sometimes, a literature of intimate questioning which questions history, politics and the false social image, sometimes angelic sometimes diabolical, of women and the relationship between men and women. In their works, women writers often focus on women's lives and issues and express their views on women and their place in society. Zoya Pirzad and Annie Ernaux, as realistic writers, devoted all

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their efforts to explaining the details of women's lives. In these two authors, there are common ideas and perceptions about the female personality.

The female characters in the stories seek to discover their independent individual identities during family life and in the exercise of feminine functions. Despite their strong emotional attachment to their partner, they feel an emotional void and consequently a feeling of loneliness.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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