

Exploring the Facts: A study of Patricia McCormick's *Sold* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Memories Of My Melancholy Whores*

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Abstract:

This paper entitled “Exploring the Facts: A study of Patricia McCormick’s *Sold* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Memories Of My Melancholy Whores*” highlights how the criminals and victims are treated in the society. How the Neo-Humanists supports and how the theorists condemns the pity and compassion aroused by the writers through their writings with the help of Moral Approach theory and with the novels chosen for study such as *Sold* and *Memories Of My Melancholy Whores*.

The Moral Approach of criticism has a longest history. Early writers such as Plato, Horace, Sidney are concerned with moral approach of criticism. Dr. Johnson, the great champ of eighteenth century did not hesitate to judge the moral content of the writers whom he discussed in *The Lives of the Poets*. In the twentieth century, the impulse toward moral evaluation has been expressed chiefly by the writers who are grouped by the label, Neo-Humanist. Their chief interest lies in literature as a criticism of life. Their analysis of man is traditional, according to them man is distinguished from an animal by his moral values. So the watchwords of Humanism are order, restraint and discipline.

Edmund Fuller in his work *The New Compassion in the American Novel* says one should create compassion through moral values and condemns the critics who have selflessly supported the lovable bums such as whores, drug addicts and rapists. Edmund Fuller says one should arouse sympathy and pity naturally but not artificially with any compulsion. He condemns the work *From Here to Eternity*

because it raises pity on the people like criminals, whores, etc. He deeply suggests, a work should create compassion by teaching moral values but not by pitying on their condition. He gives a clear statement that novels or any works should not deal with prostitutes or criminals. But he fails to understand the necessity of exposing their situation. It is not to arouse pity or compassion in them but to reveal the actual happenings in the society.

Prostitution is considered evil and women involved in prostitution are viewed as immoral beings without hearts. To change this concept, Dorn Checkley, Director of the Pittsburg Coalition against Pornography, has written,

Prostitution as an institution is evil. It doesn't matter if it is the 'world's oldest profession', it is still wrong. However, prostitutes themselves are not evil and neither are their johns. They are usually broken and needy individuals seemingly trapped by the circumstances of their lives. Ultimately, to accept and legitimize prostitutes and johns is not compassionate, it is lazy. Not to undertake the difficult task of leading, encouraging and calling them to the higher way is a failure to love as Jesus would have loved them.(Checkley)

Prostitution is against religion and morality and it is not accepted by anyone in the society. The sex workers are also not recognized in the society. They are looked as a mean creature. No women happily or willingly involve themselves in that malicious work. If ever they employ themselves in it, it is because of their inevitable situation. Certain writers wanted to expose the pitiable conditions of those women who are forced to engage in the sex work. This is not to justify the mean act but to reveal the pathetic condition of the prostitutes. Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Patricia McCormick are such writers who brought the intolerable life of the women caught up in prostitution to light.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his *Memories Of My Melancholy Whores* and Patricia McCormick in her *Sold* present the real suffering undergone by the prostitutes and the circumstances which force them to fall into the pit of prostitution. Both the writers depict the society that questions the morality of the prostitutes because they are women. Both, through their works, make the society realize the feelings of the prostitutes and woman alone is not the victim. Women are considered as Sakthi, Goddess and equal

to man. “To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha” (qtd. in K.Venkatachari). If a woman who sells her body is named as a prostitute, then what name would the society give to the man who enjoys sex from her?

Delgadina in *Memories Of My Melancholy Whores* undergoes prostitution because her button factory job does not fill her needs and she has to provide everything for her brothers and sisters. Lakshmi, in *Sold* agrees to go as a maid to give her family a comfortable life. However her fate drives her into prostitution.

Now that Gita is gone, to work as a maid for a wealthy woman in the city, her family has a tiny glass sun that hangs from a wire in the middle of their ceiling, a new set of pots for Gita’s mother, a pair of spectacles for her father, a brocaded wedding dress for her older sister, and school fees for her little brother. Inside Gita’s family hut, it is daytime at night. But for me, it feels like nighttime even in the brightest sun without my friend. (*Sold* 9-10)

Similarly, Lakshmi wants to help her family with,

I say, my vice full of boldness I did not know I had. ‘There will be one less mouth to feed here, and I will send my wages home.’ Ama nods weakly. ‘If I go, you will have money enough for rice and curds, milk and sugar. Enough for a coat for the baby and a sweater for you.’ She smiles wanly and strokes my cheek with her work worn hand. ‘Enough, I say, ‘for a tin roof.’ (*Sold* 54-55)

War victims and rape victims are molested and seduced under the camps in the name of refugees, they are gang raped and without any option end up in prostitution as prostitutes. Nadia Murad who is a human rights activist has been kidnapped by the Islamic State for about three months. In two thousand eighteen Nadia Murad along with Denis Mukwege has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict. Nadia in an interview with BBC, tells her experience how she has been caught up by the militants and converted into an Islam and traded under the IS slave trade. It has been the first time a survivor of atrocities has been awarded. Nadia has changed her life from a rape victim to a Nobel Peace Prize winner. There are lots of Nadia’s

out in the world. They face tedious situation in the war camps, they are continuously raped and they do not know what to do for their future, so they take the horrible decision to take over prostitution for their further earning. The society blames them as prostitutes and they treat them as untouchables. However, the society is the real reason behind the innocent souls ending up in prostitution.

Rape victims are afraid to face this society. Even a bold woman feels shy to face any man after the incident. She feels guilty as though she has committed the sin but the culprit gets ready to attack another victim. The society and the people lack morality and moral values but they judge prostitutes blindly. Edmund Fuller blindly condemns the writers who speak for the prostitutes. He is not aware that these writers are not creating compassion for them but they are educating the society that the sex workers are not the people to be looked down at. Each one has a different circumstance and critical situations which force them to be a prostitute. They too have families, children, siblings and duties to do. Delgadina has siblings to care of, as well as Lakshmi has a family to settle up with comfort. Pushpa has a boy and a girl to take care of. Even the terror face Monica has a baby and a family. But circumstances push them into the hell of prostitution.

Since the colonial times in the course of most of the nineteenth century, prostitution has not been a distinct criminal offense in the whole world. While police did not arrest prostitutes for night walking, vagrancy, antisocial conduct, indecent exposure, or uncouthness, prostitution nor solicitation for prostitution has been considered a distinctive crime. Brothels were in harmony mostly throughout public nuisance laws, which allow private citizens to complain when they are offended by neighborhood bawdy houses. In general, legal toleration has been the rule, and these laws are imposed against prostitutes only at irregular intervals. Thus, though prostitution could lead to criminal penalties during this period, it is neither purposely prohibited by law nor constantly suppressed in practice. This is not to suggest that prostitution has been positively valued in every society. There are oppositions for prostitution but complete eradication became impossible. In both the novels, the writers vividly capture the situations where the women try to protect themselves from the clutches of the policemen. Police even shatter the place of the prostitutes.

There was a stampede of footsteps, then running. And the **nthe** men were heading away from where we were hiding. Next came a heavy thud, a crash, then quiet. After that, all we could hear was muttering and the shuffling of feet. Eventually the front door slammed shut....I ran upstairs saw our room in chaos, our beds overturned, Anita's movie stars posters ripped from the wall.

The worst is what I did not see: Shahanna. (*Sold* 220-221)

Rosa Cabarcas, in *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* change her location because of the murder of a famous person "...following the banker's murder, she had taken a well-deserved rest in Cartagena de Indias" (*MOMMW* 89). These incidents reveal that women in prostitution are not leading a peaceful life.

By the Progressive Era, prostitution has come to exist and is treated as a free criminal offense. This development in the criminal law reflected and promoted new views of prostitutes as eternally deviant women. Having fallen from virtue, the prostitutes have been considered everlastingly worsened and capable of any crime. According to Barbara Meil Hobson, this perception originated in the Victorian Era, when expert and popular opinion held a fixed idea that sexual deviance be the source of all female criminality. A woman who crosses the great division between chastity and unchastity has no way back, not only because of society's condemnation but also because she has troubled the delicate mechanism that governs her nature. Thus, female criminals are considered viler than male offenders, since one violation has been ample to lead to a life of crime. A Victorian view of fallen women influences prostitution policy even in the early twentieth century, when prostitution becomes ideologically linked to every form of corruption, crime, and vice. By this time prostitution has not been simply another vice to be considered along with drunkenness, blasphemy, and others; rather, it has become the social evil.

Progressives vexed not only about increasing commodity and declining morality, but concerning the spread of disease as well. Venereal disease has both a real public health concern and, like prostitution, a symbol of social contamination. Syphilis and gonorrhea causes birth defects, infant blindness and general paresis (paralysis and insanity). However, venereal disease has been more than a physical health threat; it represents a threat to the social harmony as well. Thus, both physicians and the

public have been viewed venereal diseases differently than other contagious diseases that have similarly severe health issues. In the Progressive Era, because there is no known treatment for venereal diseases, they are not just medical phenomena. Instead, they symbolize dirt, pollution and eventually are envisioned as punishment.

As earlier, activities to criminalize prostitution arise in period of quick social change affecting or connecting women. Prostitutes symbolize not only sexual freedom or license for women, but also social and economic freedom-in direct challenge to norms of domesticity. The sect of domesticity continues to hold sway in worldwide, and its precepts led many men and women to oppose women's entry into the paid work force. Many trade unions, for example, insist upon a livable family wage for male laborers as the solution to the condition of poor families.

A prostitute, as potential disease-carriers, has been depicted as subversives, much like political dissenters or enemy agents. Despite a continuing sexual double standard, the spread of venereal diseases made quiet toleration of prostitution no longer possible. People see health issues and moral degradation equally, as disease degrades human body decay in morality degrades the values of the society. Beyond sickness the woman has to work for the owners too. The women are struggling in the hands of the owners. They have to take care of their physical condition as well as the owners. But their health issue becomes secondary and their owner's desire becomes primary. This is the situation of all sex workers. Patricia McCormick in her novel, *Sold*, explicitly reveals this concept through the character Pushpa.

Pushpa has been in bed for three days and nights, and now Mumtaz is in our room. 'If you don't get out of bed and see customers today,' she says, 'you are out on the street.' Pushpa nods stands slowly, then sinks to her knees. She kisses Mumtaz's feet. 'Please' she begs. 'I'll work tonight, I promise.' Then she is seized by one of her coughing fits. She coughs until tears run her cheeks and she spits blood into a rag. (*Sold* 201)

When discussing the topic of prostitution, it is important to distinguish prostitution, as such, from several practices that are generally linked to commercial sex or are confused for a necessary part of what is meant by prostitution. Oftentimes prostitution is linked with organized crime syndicates, pimps,

succumbed to an unforeseen temptation and tried to separate her legs with my knee. On the first two attempts, she resisted with tensed thighs....and my slow, retired animal woke from its long sleep. (*MOMMW* 27-28)

Society and critics questions the morality of the woman and not the man who seeks the pleasure of the prostitutes. The society blames the victim and not the beneficiary. It easily criticizes the soul which mutely undergoes the physical and sexual pains. It does not even give a mean look at the ogre who enjoys pleasure from the silent creature. In Marquez's novel a reputed columnist, who is ninety years old, is unable to control his erotic pleasure and encounters more than five hundred woman in his lifetime. He does not even leave his house maid Damiana, with whom he has sex once in a month. This man who views women as sex commodity is awarded the best client of the year. "I slept in the red-light district, the Barrio Chino, two or three times a week, and with such a variety of companions that I was twice crowned client of the year" (*MOMMW* 14-15). Through this novel, Marquez condemns the society which recognizes and venerates a person who maltreats women with his sexual power.

People only see the one sided verdict. There are also male prostitution, homosexuals and transgendered prostitution in the society, but the innocent woman is wholly marked and subjugated as prostitutes. Young male prostitutes in the Edo period of Japan were called kagama. Their clients were mainly adult men. In southern areas of Central Asia and Afghanistan, adolescent males between twelve and sixteen years old perform erotic songs and suggestive dancing and are available as sex workers. Such boys are known as bacchá. In India, a hijra is a physically male or intersex person who may sometimes enter into prostitution. Not all hijras are prostitutes, however, and many consider themselves to have a female identity in a male body and accept this as a sacred condition or gift. Common traditions in India are that Hijras dress as women and dance at weddings, child births, and other celebrations and demand a large amount of money from the owner. The most famous male prostitute of the Victorian era was the Irish-born John Saul, who was involved in mid eighties scandal. Cuban male prostitutes are called jinetero - literally horse jockey. A male sex worker in the Caribbean who solicits on the beaches and accepts clients of either sex is called a sanky-panky. Everything has been legalized nowadays; still

prostitution is questioned by law. Though prostitution is illegal it might reduce some of the crimes like the rape of the young adults. The ninety year old man in *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is literally a male prostitute who enjoys different kinds of women in different age groups. A man who cannot control his pleasure cannot blame the morality of the woman.

Laura Lee, escort, writer, and sex worker advocate, in an article “Sex Workers Want Rights - Not Rescue,” wrote:

To understand sex work, we must first define the term. My definition is simply two consenting adults exchanging sex for cash. This definition is important, because all too often sex work is conflated with trafficking, child sex abuse and rape - and it is these connotations that drive the scrutiny and negative attention we in the industry so often face... I believe that morality has no place in any discussion on sex work. It has a way, though, of sneaking in - often through the religious orders who are proposing the further criminalization of our trade...Sex work is work, just like any other. And those of us in the industry deserve support and respect - not to be reviled and stigmatized. As sex workers we want rights - not rescue.(Lee)

The client uses the prostitute's body as a means for sexual gratification. Sexual pleasure is his primary motivation. The client understands that something other than sexual desire motivates her actions. Only a very few stupid men believe that a woman desires him when she rejects his sexual advances without monetary compensation. The client's lack of concern for her is equally obvious insofar as he accepts her terms. The client's secret objective hides between the cracks in a common liberal account of prostitution. Exposing this objective will show that prostitution does not only fail to meet minimum criteria of respectful sexual relations but that it also raises deep anxiety for any moral theory.

The writings of both the writers, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Patricia McCormick, suggest that they question the views of Neo-humanist critics who wanted the works to preach moral values. These critics highlight that a work becomes a good work only when it deals with religion and moral values. So, those writers condemn the works which focus on the criminals and prostitutes. They believe that those

works would not help in the healthy mental and moral development of the people. But both these writers have presented the facts about the prostitutes which do not create pity but makes the world know the real fact. So, as Edmund Fuller comments, the writers are not creating compassion or pity for the prostitutes but exposing the painful life and feelings of the prostitutes, which would never ever affect the moral values.

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