

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**FEMINIST THEORY TO VALERIA MINER'S 'MURDER IN THE
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT'**

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse Valeria Miner's Detective fiction, 'Murder in the English Department', by using the feminist theory. This paper also analyses the sexist dialogues in this novel. It also analyses the misogynist language of a few male characters present in this fiction. This paper attempts to explain how this novel is related to and analysed through the 'Radical Feminist Theory'. It also attempts to understand feminism on the political level and how handles law or should handle cases of women who are sexually harassed.

Keywords: Feminist, sexist, misogynist, radical feminist theory, sexually harassed.

The following paper uses the feminist theory to understand this detective fiction. The protagonist of this fiction fight against sexual harassment of women and thus the theoretical framework for this research paper is the 'Radical Feminist Theory'. Radical feminism is a political and theoretical perspective that is mainly focused on how women are dominated by men, regardless of race, class, caste or ethnicity. The domination could also be sexual domination as shown in this novel. A man attempts to rape his female student and she murders him. Radical feminist theory used in this paper attempts to understand how that male character sexually dominated his female student and how by law she was innocent, and murdered him for defending her own self. Radical feminist theory on rape cases can be understood from the writings of the Radical feminist theorist 'Catherine A. MacKinnon'. She defines sexuality as, "A social construct of male power that is defined by men and which is forced on women. Rape, sexual harassment, incest, prostitution and pornography are abuses of women and also abuse of sex" (MacKinnon). Few instances from this fiction can also be analysed by using other feminist theories.

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‘Murder in the English Department’ is a detective fiction where the protagonist of this novel, Nan Weaver, is an assistant English professor waiting for her tenure. She starts a campaign against sexual harassment of woman as she was once herself a victim of rape. She is shown as an outspoken feminist and hence has gained a sexist professor, Angus Murchie, as her enemy. The problem arises after the murder of Angus as everyone thinks that Nan Weaver is the one who murdered him as she was one of his biggest enemies. Nan weaver already knew who the murderer was but tried to save her as Nan Weaver knew that Angus Murchie tried to rape his female student, Marjorie Adams, and in order to defend herself from this rape, she murdered him. This novel is a fast-paced, non-traditional, feminist detective fiction that places a strong woman in a battle between proving her innocence and her ideals and principals.

The protagonist of this novel, Nan Weaver, is shown as the victim of rape. She understands and believes that sexual harassment should be an abuse to women and by law it should be punishable. This fiction deals with the issues of females who are sexually harassed by dominating men in a variety of ways. Nan weaver is shown to be struggling for her tenure and a permanent position in her university. She finds it very difficult to get the tenure as the university is filled with patriarchal domination and it is difficult for her to get tenure in this male dominated world. Nan weaver is a character who does not commit crime but still doesn't mind going in jail for saving her student who actually murdered the professor. Weaver is shown very much determined in her believes of feminism and thus fights for her student. In the novel she calmly claims that “A woman is fighting for another woman” (Miner). This statement of her states that a woman should always support another woman who is getting oppressed by the domination of men. In one of the scenes, Professor Angus Murchie greets Nan Weaver by brushing his hand on her ass and she feels very uncomfortable. According to Radical feminist theory, this touch can also be considered a minor type of sexual harassment where a man touches a woman without seeing her comfort and without seeking her consent. In this novel, Nan Weaver is compared to the beauty of her student Marjorie Adams. Miss Adams, with her long and blonde hair looked very elegant and Professor Weaver was always teased by the name ‘Shortie’. She was asked questions like, “Are you sure you are the real professor?”. This question, according to the feminists, can be explained by stating that people have this stereotypical mind set that if a girl is beautiful or in Weaver's case if she is of a short height, then she couldn't be capable of being a knowledgeable person. Professor Weaver is shown as a divorcee. She broke her marriage with Dr Charles Woodward as he was a very dominating and stereotypical man. This decision of getting a divorce and getting back her maiden name was not very much appreciated by her, kind off stereotypical sister, Shirley. Her sister was a typical family-women, who didn't have any identity of her own and her entire life revolved around her husband and her children. Whenever

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her daughter says that she does not want to do the household work or ask one of her brothers to do so, Shirley says that you have caught the 'Feminist Disease'. By stating this, Miner tries to convey that how the term feminism is misunderstood by the stereotypical people. Feminists understand this concept as having stereotypical gender roles where man is the bread earner and woman is stuck only to her household duties. Nan also uses a term called marginal characters. Here, Valeria Miner states that according to the patriarchal society, the blacks and the women are all marginal characters, that is they are not the main ones in this world. In chapter sixteen, miner writes, "everything sounded like a rapist unhinging the windows" (Miner). By this she wants the readers to understand that a woman, while walking alone at a lonely street in the late night, is always afraid of men. According to the Radical feminists, until sexual harassment doesn't count under a crime by law, women will be scared by every man when they are alone. Lastly, when the entire mystery of the murder gets solved and Nan Weaver as well as Marjorie Adams proved as innocent, the judge states that "Rape is an act of physical violence that it warrants substantial use of force in self-defence" (Miner). According to Radical feminists, this statement is a success to their theory and work.

This novel, 'Murder in the English Department', transforms itself from a work of suspense to the work of feminism and political fiction. This novel deals with some characters that has a mentality of victim blaming. This novel is the portrayal of a middle-class, working feminist woman who fights against sexual harassment and hence has to fight for her own life.

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