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## Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature

| ISSN (Online) 2502-146X |



**VIVID**  
Journal of  
Language and  
Literature  
eISSN: 2502-146X

Literature

# The Uniqueness Heroines Depicted In Gillian Flynn's Novels Entitled *Gone Girl* And *Dark Places*

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: November 05, 2018  
Revised: January 22, 2019  
Available online: March 28, 2019

### KEYWORDS

Heroines, Females Character,  
Gynocriticism Approaches

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### A B S T R A C T

This article is aimed to study the uniqueness of female character or heroine in Gillian Flynn's novels entitled *Dark Places* (2009) dan *Gone Girl* (2012). The concept of heroin and gynocriticism approaches is used to examine the uniqueness of the main character in both novels. Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* and Libby Day pada *Dark Places* can be considered as antiheroine. From the result of the analysis, it can be concluded that Flynn introduced an interesting female characterization. The anti-heroine characters are portrayed in an intriguing plot. She presents woman as offender and sexual manipulation interestingly. The exploration of feminine vulnerability to undermine the dominancy of masculine privilege has brought the themes of both novels to.

## INTRODUCTION

Woman struggles in seizing equality and justice on second-half of twentieth century are surrounded by some significant movements in certain field, such as in politics, household, career and education. The women writers have to appear through a variety of literary works as a statement that women also have the similar chance and capability to create masterpieces of work like male author or famously classified as literary canon.

One name of female authors who contributes in crafting female literary canon in contemporary literature is Gillian Flynn. She is known for her works such as *Sharp Objects* (2006), *Dark Places* (2009) and *Gone Girl* (2012). Flynn's *Dark Places* got several prestigious awards like New York Times bestseller, New Yorker Reviewers' Favorite, Weekend Today Top Summer Read, Publishers Weekly Best Book of 2009, and Chicago Tribune Favorite Fiction choice. In 2015, the movie adaptation starring Charlize Theron was released. Flynn's last novel, *Gone Girl* [1], is also celebrated as an international sensation and being New York Times bestseller lists. *Gone Girl* was named one of the best books of the year by People Magazine and Janet Maslin at the New York Times. Nominated for both the Edgar Award and the Anthony Award for Best Novel, Flynn wrote the screenplay for David Fincher's adaptation of *Gone Girl* [2] for the big screen, starring Ben Affleck and Rosamund Pike.

Unsurprisingly, there must be certain reason behind Flynn's achievement in these novels. Things that make readers wonder and awe through her literary devices such as characterization, plot-building or hidden themes. At the first sight, Flynn provides the reader an adventure of irony behind the story of Libby Day as a female main protagonist. Libby is a girl who survived the serial murder in Texas in 1985. As the fortune ones, adult Libby in contrary grows up as a wasteful human being who has no purpose of life, a cynic, kleptomaniac, cold-blood and idler as she concedes "I was not a lovable child, ... unlovable adult. Draw a picture of my soul, and it'd be a scribble with fangs". Through this characterization, Flynn creates an ironic character which is not sympathetic at all.

Furthermore, Flynn continues the exploration of irony in *Dark Places*. Intend to get profit from the story of the terrible murder of his family, Libby somehow traps in a mission to free Ben Day as wrong-accused killer of his family. This is where the height of the conflict presented by Flynn. Libby was a key witness who pushed Ben to jail for twenty four years. Sardonicly, Flynn puts Libby as the only one who could liberate Ben Day from prison [2].

Set of irony which is presented by The Days in the *Dark Place* makes this novel becomes interesting to discuss. In terms of character, Libby Day was within the limits of a hero(ine) and villain. Libby's awful characterization must deal with her noble mission, to save Ben Day. Libby's trip is like a hero's journey due to deliberating Ben from more regretful punishment. Also, the salvation acts of Patty Day and Ben Day still leave room for debate whether good or bad.

In the second novel, *Gone Girl*, Flynn retains the bizarre devices that are similar with *Dark Places*. In terms of characterization, Flynn promotes Amy Dunne as the female protagonist. Throughout the story, Amy Dunne is described as wicked wife who wanted to punish her husband over evil plan which is arranged exceptionally brilliant. Motive that encourages Amy to do this vicious plan is a trivial issue, that is "to taught Nick a lesson" [1]. In this case, Flynn pushed her heroine character to beyond the limits to do as far as possible, in order to satisfy personal desires and fulfillment.

Aside from its main female character portrayal that is really appalling, *Gone Girl* also challenged their readers through the series of plot-twist that arranges implicitly in plot. At the beginning of the story, Flynn dictates the readers to sympathize poor Amy as a victim of her abusive and ignorant husband, Nick. In the middle of the story, Flynn effectively deprives the reader's sympathy toward Amy after revealing that Amy falsified her suffering for the sake of personal ambition. At the end of the story, Flynn totally swipes away reader's sympathy when the novel unmasks the real face of both sides, Amy and Nick. In this term, Flynn manipulates the reader's sympathy and sentiment through the falsehood of the two main characters.

The last aspect that astonishes *Gone Girl's* reader is the celebration of violence and explicit sexual visualization. In the story, Amy is deliberately toying with the fragility of American's paradigm toward violence against vulnerable women, the myths of pregnancy, and sexual exploitation as Amy acknowledges "America loves pregnant woman" [1]. Flynn purposely ignores the moral barrier that always hindering woman writers to talk about it, celebrating it or even utilizing it as literary devices. In this phase, Flynn tries to break the old tradition and the dominance of men in using or exploring trickery, violence and sexuality in pieces of literature. What is more, with grounding in theory and historical research, Showalter sees Gynocriticism

as a way to “learn something solid, enduring, and real about the relation of women to literary culture” [3].

Gynocriticism is also “a theory of culture that incorporates ideas about women’s body, language and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social context in which they occur” [4]-[6]. Women’s culture and men’s culture are represented by two interesting circles. One of these is specific to women and the other is specific to men. Historically women have been the muted group and men the dominant group. Showalter adds that feminist theories need to articulate the area specific to men and put it at the centre of women’s writing. Showalter believes that one of the great advantages of women’s culture model is that it shows how the female’s tradition can be positive source of strength as well as a negative source of powerlessness. Showalter mentions the same point in women’s history of literary creation saying that women have traditionally been considered as “sociological chameleons” who have historically been allowed only to adopt lifestyle, class, and culture of their male counterparts. Showalter considers that without apprehending the framework of female subculture, one would either totally miss or simply misinterpret the themes, motifs and structures of female literature and would finally fail to make necessary connections within a tradition. The uncovering of the female subculture and exposition of a female model is the intention of Gynocriticism.

In two acknowledged dictionaries, Merriam-Webster and Oxford English Dictionary note that the word “anti-hero” was first used in 1714 [7]. Oxford English Dictionary offers a list of early works in which the earliest source is *The Lover* by Sir Richard Steele. In this work, the author, who is complaining about his wasteful age, discusses how the notions of heroism have changed as men chasing after women are insensible of love and do not respect females. He calls them brutes and continues: “I shall enquire, in due time, and make every Anti-Heroe in Great Britain give me an account why one woman is not as much as ought to fall to his share; and shall show every abandoned wanderer, that with all his blustering, his restless following every female he sees, is much more ridiculous” [9].

Abrams describes antihero as “the chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual or dishonest” [5]. J. A. Cuddon notes that the history of literature is full of fictional heroes who have been granted noble qualities and virtuous characteristics. However, the antihero is usually the one who is given the ability of failure [6]. An antihero might not have high moral standards, and might be indecent unlike the traditional principle character of mythology, folklore or legends. Lacking bravery, he is sometimes a coward. As a result, he is not honoured as a saviour or a leader. He can attempt to claim a war medal with his so-called brave actions, but he does not actually deserve it, or he simply cannot achieve it. He is a “cowardly, weak, inept, or simply unlucky” type that springs from ancient literature [10].

The original practice of Antihero in literary work is probably used in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *Notes from Underground* (1864) in place of hero or protagonist [11]. In the ending of the novel, the underground man who is the narrator and the protagonist points out that he made a mistake by writing his memoirs because there is no point in showing how he had spoiled his life. He confesses that “a novel needs a hero, and all the traits of an antihero are expressly gathered together here” [11]. With example of underground man, Dostoevsky tries to portray a contrary the example of an antihero who does not satisfy the expectation of readers, but still dominates the novel as the main character. The uniqueness in literature usually define as *bizarre*

but possibly in part because it is difficult to define. Though it may sound like some sort of exclusive and super-strange underground literary.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the uniqueness which used by Flynn as her peculiarity. It is done by studying the intrinsic elements of the both novel, especially the characters and plot. As well, another element such as taboo and prohibited themes is also to be tested to value the quality of the work as a whole. There are three main focuses the writes want to examine in this paper. They are the uniqueness elements as reflected in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, The uniqueness elements as reflected in Gillian Flynn's *Dark Places*, and the analysis of Gynocriticism criticism from both novels.

## METHOD

In conducting the research, the writer follows three steps: collecting the data, analyzing the data, and presenting the result of analysis. In collecting the data, the writer used library method as the main tool. The writer collected the data from library and selected documents. Next, the writer divides the data into two categories which are primary data and secondary data. First, the primary data, which is taken from literary work itself in the novel *Gone Girl* [1] and *Dark Places* [2] by Gillian Flynn. Then, the secondary data are taken from several sources by gathering some books, journals, articles from reliable source to give input and supporting statement that is related with this research.

The second step is analyzing the data. In analyzing the data, the writer used critical perspective through critical theory called Gynocriticism. Then the writer identified the relationship between the content of the novel with the issue that relevant to the term of Gynocriticism by Elaine Showalter. In the end, the writer explained the relationship between the arguments, the data and the related theories descriptively to reach the final conclusion. The written result of the research contains quotation from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentations" [3]. From the quotation above, it shows that the data deals with description, exploring the issues and understanding the phenomenon through the words rather than numbers or pictures.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are four special features identified which are used by Flynn in *Gone Girl* novel. They are anti-heroine character, plot-twist narrative, female sexual weaponized and redefining the perspective of love. Anti-Heroine in Amy Dunne character obviously is the most unique in the novel. Flynn creates Amy Dunne with dual-layer contradictory personality. At the surface, Amy Dunne character is a "Cool Girl" type. She deliberately creates herself as a representation of an ideal woman in society of America as explained in Amy's confession:

Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. Go ahead, shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl [1].

In Amy's mission to get Nick's attention and love, this is kind of girl she pretends to be. Based on this, we can highlight Amy's perfectionist and ambitious trait as a lover. However, in a

deeper layer, Amy Dunne showcases her female identity to a fault, a point of murder and mayhem. She tired of Nick's negligence and slackness as a husband. Her intention "to taught Nick a lesson" (328) after cheating on her is undeniable. Amy finally transforms herself as a beyond-imagination villain. She does frame her husband for a serious crime as her demand.

Furthermore, the most dangerous affair about Amy is that she will do absolutely anything, including lying, blackmailing, and even committing murder, to get people to bow to her. It is can be seen from several occasions. She wants to see Nick on electric chair for cheating on her. She tries to control her neighbors at the cabin complex when she runs away, and kills Desi so she can attach her disappearance on him. The worst part is in the end. Amy deceives Nick and forces him to live with her through a pregnancy she caused on purpose as her final act.

Psychologically, Amy's anger and resentment towards Nick (and everybody) seems more impulsive as Amy confessed "But I've always been jealous too, always — seven dead dancing princesses" (311). Also, Amy's revenge personality is acute as his ex-boyfriend, Hillary told "Friends see most of each other's flaws. Spouses see every awful last bit. If she punished a friend of a few months by throwing herself down a flight of stairs, what would she do to a man who was dumb enough to marry her?" (405).

Furthermore, Amy's roller-coaster psyche is a long-term effect because of her parent's huge expectation in her image as Amazing Amy as reflected in: "They get to be perfect without even trying, without even facing one moment of existence, while I am stuck here on earth, and every day I must try, and every day is a chance to be less than perfect" (310). Amy was raised through the pressures of her parents placed on her to actually be Amazing Amy, not just herself. Amy in whatever situation, must act like an Amazing Amy as she concedes to herself: "I can't fail to notice that whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right" (46). Here, Amy is a kind of scapegoat from her parents' storybook character. She seems to lose her freedom to be her own person due to the force from her parents. In the other hand, Amy did a good treatment for herself. Amy has an extraordinarily high self-regard. It is described in a quote "Committing to Nick, feeling safe with Nick, being happy with Nick, made me realize that there was a Real Amy in there, and she was so much better, more interesting and complicated and challenging, than Cool Amy," (312) as she explains of her marriage. However, Amy's heavy disappointment forces her unstable psyche into a deep darkness until she finally reveals her true face as quoted in her statement: "Nick wanted Cool Amy anyway. Can you imagine, finally showing your true self to your spouse, your soul mate, and having him not like you?" (316).

Amy's sociopathy is not the main point. It does not reveal anything else. The story does not really explore whether Rand and Marybeth, her parents, actually raised or exploited Amy in a way that contributed to her mental state. Amy in fact, was a victim and also a tricky offender villain who framed her husband to give him a death penalty. It is clearly portrayed that Amy Dunne is not a sympathetic character as a noble hero(ine). Neither are any of the characters, including the male ones; the egotistic Nick, Nick's misogynistic father, or Nick's exploitative lawyer. She was not a hero in the story because it is no longer "Angel versus Satan" story. However, Amy can be seen as revengeful mastermind with a good point to stand for. In the end, Flynn minimizes the binary of "good and evil" to provoke people's expectation about being-perfect wife and daughter in modern life.

In *Dark Places*, Flynn clearly applies four main features to develop her uniqueness style of writing approach. Unlike *Gone Girl's* Amy Elliott Dunne who is grown up in a sufficient and lovable family, the anti-heroine in *Dark Place* is a completely unsympathetic character. She

admits her awful personality in simply dark description: “I was not a lovable child, and I’d grown into a deeply unlovable adult. Draw a picture of my soul, and it’d be a scribble with fangs” (10). Her name is Libby Day, the only survivor from the infamous family murder in Kansas. She survived from brutal massacre at seven years old. Nothing good and great comes from Libby Day’s attribute. Instead, orphan Libby grows up in miserable condition: “sullen and boneless” and “stuck in a series of mobile homes or rotting ranch houses all across Kansas” (10). This pitiful circumstance stereotypically never brings out a hero or protagonist. Alternatively, Libby turns into a bitter and hopeless antagonist as she conceded to herself “I have a meanness inside me, real as an organ” (10). She is completely nothing extraordinary and glorious at all.

Furthermore, Libby Day character is a realist rather than idealist. After that tragic night, she is “so fucking lonely” (327) and “... depressed. I guess I’ve been depressed for about twenty-four years” (11). She does not have relative, money or spirit to improve her life. However, Libby tries to do anything –mostly bad things– to survive. She usually steals people’s properties “Sometimes I even take the purse, if the crowd is drunk enough” (92) to suffice her needs. She also plays victim and sells the murder case to Lyle Wirth “Pay for my time, in a way” (126) to fund her life. Even though Libby is trapped in troublesome life, she always has the way to endure it.

Another trait that emphasizes Libby Day’s anti-heroine feature is the absence of moral code. She confessed that she “adored those Old West villains” (91) and declared herself as “i am a liar and thief” (91) without doubt. She keeps real hurt herself. She totally ignores Ben in her entire life “I realized again I knew nothing about Ben’s life. I didn’t even know what a cell looked like aside from what I’d seen in the movies” (130). She is comfortable with bad situations things and things that are not appropriate.

Libby Day actually is more concerned about her own moral code. Her moral code is something quirky and personal. No one could ever understand that code because they never grow up like the poor Libby. That makes her character is truly immense. The last characteristic that Libby Day owns as anti-heroine is irony. Not alike a hero, Flynn describes that her character is never being expected to perform a mission. The mission is to prove Ben is not the actual murder of her family. In this case, Libby pushes into an action against her will as learned in her thought: Was I really going to go talk to people who might have killed my family? Was I really going to try to solve something? In any way but wishful thinking could I believe Ben was innocent? And if he was innocent, didn’t that make me the biggest bastard in history? (131).

From the quotation above, she confessed that she is the cause of Ben’s in prison. Her testimony has been send Ben out into twenty-eight years punishment. However, the plot brings Libby into the biggest paradox in her life. Until she succeeds to prove Ben’s innocent, it is the only virtue she ever done in her life. Flynn once more challenges her reader’s concept of hero through Libby Day character. She might be not heroic at all but she is realistic and relatable. Flynn just brings the experience about common people’s struggle into her writing. She learns heroicism through Libby’s imperfection and dispute with reality. One of the most important qualities to remember is her thinking and values are often antithetical to those of the norm. For example, the sort of traits valued by most members of society—such as honesty, strength, integrity, and compassion—will never be exhibited by Libby Day in a story. Or, she might have a character deviation where she reluctantly adopts some of these traits. Traditional depictions of fictional characters meant that main players were good guys with traits that we all want to reach. Flynn’s

bizarre device through anti-heroine turns those assumptions upside down. In the end, for Flynn, heroicism is just an illusion.

## CONCLUSION

In the novel *Dark Places*, Flynn interestingly shows the uniqueness of her writing through original characterization, problematic plot, and dilemmatic moral value. First, she develops an anti-heroine model as the female main protagonist through Libby Day character. Then, Flynn sets plot-twist as Libby Day's self-redemption in her story life. She create two personalities (as victim and offended) from making Libby as the victim of her family murder, she left by her mother and siblings into Libby the hero who saved her brother from false accusation. Flynn also inputs her complicated thought about human's depression versus demand of life. In the end, Flynn conveys big question about the philosophy of love. In the novel *Gone Girl*, Flynn reuses similar formula of her previews work applied in entitled *Dark Places*. Flynn evolves the anti-heroine model through tricky Amy Dunne character. The plot-twist is narrated as anti-heroine's journey of revenge. Flynn's also create two personalities in Amy, she becomes a victim of her marriage life which is her husband has an affair. Moreover, Flynn breaks the rules of women's writings because she uses taboo discourse. From the result of the analysis, it can be concluded that Flynn introduced an interesting female characterization. The anti-heroine characters are portrayed in an intriguing plots. She presents woman as offender and sexual manipulation interestingly. The exploration of feminine vulnerability to undermine the dominancy of masculine privilege has brought the themes of both novels to . At last, Flynn tries to challenge the line border between morality and love. Feminine vulnerability is more dominant and masculine privilege is presented less strong.

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