

Feminist criticism of natalia ginzburg's ;he and i;

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Natalia Ginzburg once said, " When I write stories I am like someone who is in her own country, walking along the streets that she has known since she was a child, between walls and trees that are hers" (Thinkexist). Ginzburg wrote many stories from the female perspective based on her own life, which is why the previous quote is relevant. She wrote about what she knew which meant that she felt oppressed in her home just as her characters did.

" He and I" is a story about a female narrator who felt that she had little to nothing at all in common with her husband. The narrator doubted whether they even had anything in common to begin with and she becomes frustrated with how dependent she is forced to be on her husband. The narrator describes her husband as controlling to the point where she is forced to be subservient to him and thus she becomes unhappy. Due to the strong moral found in this piece of literature, Feminist criticism is necessary to fully understand " He and I". By using Feminist criticism, " He and I" can be analyzed through the female character, the male character, and the dialogue. To begin with, in order to examine " He and I" through Feminist criticism, one first needs to examine the female character.

The narrator is a woman who feels that she has nothing in common with her husband and yet she does everything he asks. The narrator chooses to conform to her husband's expectations instead of trying to be an individual herself. Ginzburg wrote " He loves traveling, unfamiliar cities, restaurants. I would like to stay at home and never move. All the same I follow him on his journeys" (Ginzburg). Through this quote one can see just how conformist the female narrator is in " He and I" because despite how unhappy traveling makes her, she does it anyway.

The narrator goes along with the beliefs of both society and her husband, that women are expected to be subservient to men by traveling against her will. This conformity can also be seen when Ginzburg wrote “ I don’t remember whether we did what he wanted or what I wanted, probably what he wanted, so that we left after a quarter of an hour” (Ginzburg). The tone that Ginzburg created makes it clear that the narrator probably did not want to leave but was again forced to do what her husband wanted. It also seems that Ginzburg was forced to conform in her own life and that she used “ He and I” to make connections to her own life. According to the Jewish Women’s Archive, Ginzburg left her home in 1940 with her two children to follow her husband Leone after he was arrested (Natalia Ginzburg).

The significance of this information makes it clear that Ginzburg, like the narrator, was doing things for other people, instead of for herself. Ginzburg and the narrator from “ He and I” were both conformist in their own ways. Next, in order to really understand “ He and I” one also needs to examine the male character. The narrator’s husband can be classified as the stereotypical male simply because he is very controlling of his wife and holds a sense of superiority over her. The narrator makes sacrifices in her life to gratify him. Due to her husband’s strong sense of machismo, the narrator seems somewhat bitter as she says, “ I don’t know how to drive.

If I suggest that I should get a license too he disagrees. He says I would never manage it. I think he likes me to be dependent on him for some things” (Ginzburg). Even though the narrator wants to delve deeper into independence, she cannot simply because her controlling husband refuses to let her as he refuses to let her get her license. The narrator’s husband also

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exhibits some controlling characteristics as the narrator says, " I can see well whether I am close to the screen or far away from it, but when we are with friends I stay with them out of politeness; all the same it upsets me because I won't be next to him two inches from the screen and when I don't sit next to him he gets annoyed with me" (Ginzburg). The husband in " He and I" makes his wife feel bad because she is not at his beck and call all the time.

By doing this, he prevents the individual growth of his wife as a person. He makes her feel bad about herself whether or not he knows it. In the article, " Don't Say the " F" Word, the author states that " A frequently expressed as well as demining idea is that women don't truly want to be equal with men, that they perhaps enjoy being looked after and taken care of, and that they are simply afraid of the work achieving equality might entail" (" Don't Say the " F" Word"). This idea that women do not actually want to be equal with men is an idea that the narrator's husband seems to believe simply because he says things that put down the narrator, such as the quote involving whether or not she should get her license. This thought process seems to be described in great detail in " He and I" because Ginzburg felt that like the narrator, she too had an oppressive husband. The narrator's husband harms his wife by going along with the belief that women are subservient to men.

Finally, to gain a full understanding of the message that Ginzburg tried to convey in " He and I", one needs to examine the dialogue throughout the story. The narrator develops low self esteem due to her husband's snide comments directed towards her. This is made clear through Ginzburg's words " He makes fun of the way I shop, of the way I weight the oranges in my hand wearily choosing, he says the worst in the whole market"

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(Ginzburg). The narrator found his treatment as being cruel because she loses her sense of being capable of doing things well on her own. Her husband's words make her more dependent on her husband instead of giving her a sense of individuality.

It isn't until the end of the story when the narrator begins to question her life with her husband. She says, " And I sometimes ask myself if it was us, these two people, almost twenty years ago on the Via Nazionale, two people who conversed so politely, so urbanely, as the sun was setting; who chatted a little about everything perhaps and about nothing" (Ginzburg). The narrator begins questioning if she was ever truly happy with her husband or if she just settled, which makes her seem a bit regretful about the marriage. However, her confusion over her marriage seems to open other doors for empowerment. It did for Natalia Ginzburg when she partook in politics to ensure justice for everyone (Natalia Ginzburg).

Ginzburg, like the narrator, became a stronger female hero as she lost her conformity. One can see that through dialogue, Ginzburg creates a strong heroine by making the narrator show a sense of doubt with her marriage directly at the end of " He and I". In conclusion, Natalia Ginzburg's writing is extremely vivid due to the fact that she wrote what she knew. Ginzburg's " He and I" is a strong piece of literature due to it being written from the female perspective. By using the Female criticism, one can fully analyze " He and I" by examining the aspects of the female character, the male character, and the dialogue.

" He and I" is an important literary element due to how strongly the reader can view the mind and troubles of an oppressed woman. This story provides insight on why women need to be treated equally and how much pain women go through when they are not. This story has benefits for generations to come because of the implications created involving equal treatment of women simply due to the fact these generations can examine the struggle themselves. ? Works Cited Acobas, Patrizia. " Natalia Ginzburg.

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