

FEMINISM AND SEXUALITY IN THE FILM POOR THINGS

Kirsy Irene Rivera De Jesús

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Approved by:

Dr. Rick Swope
Reader

Dr. Michael Sharp
Reader

Dr. Maritza Stanchich
Research Paper Director

Introduction

In last year's widely acclaimed movie *Poor Things* (2023, dir. Yorgos Lanthimos), the concept of feminism and womanhood is developed through the main female character Bella Baxter's quest for sexual freedom. Played by Emma Stone in an Oscar-winning performance, Bella must confront various societal norms through her journey to discover her own identity. The narrative skillfully weaves in different feminist ideas, portraying a woman seeking to know and express her sexuality in a society that attempts to limit women from expressing themselves sexually. Adapted from the 1992 novel by the late prolific Scottish novelist Alasdair Gray (Goldmann), the movie version shifts the focus to Bella (Welsh), instead of Max (known in the book as Archibald McCandless). The change of using Bella's journey to frame is reflected in Lanthimos' use of perspective with cinematic bright colors, Victorian gothic style, and beyond magical imaginative aspects which not only brings to life the stunning imagery but the dialogue is expertly written to mirror Bella's cognitive development that acts as a poignant commentary on the timeless struggle for women to have their independence and sexual freedom.

The film adaptation is a postmodern take on Frankenstein, set in a fictionalized version of London where the body of a pregnant woman who committed suicide was recovered by a scientist, Dr. Godwin "God" Baxter (William Dafoe). Godwin, who later became Bella's father figure, replaced her damaged brain with the still-living brain of her baby (automatically possessing her body and disrespecting her life-ending will). Godwin himself has done experiments on his own, which have rendered him impotent and caused him digestive difficulties that result in his burping up magically colored bubbles at every meal. They live in a Victorian gothic townhouse, much an aesthetically Frankensteinian creation where animals are roaming around and are cut up and sewn together by Godwin (or God for Bella). Bella's brain progression from infant in a woman's body to liberated female comes quickly but understandably. Bella is confined to this house and her life is controlled by "God," it is why the absence of color in the film is introduced when Bella lurches

her early motor skills and nonexistent impulse with her humane movements, her struggle in navigating her full-grown body, and her inability to articulate her feelings, as she explores her home without mental stimulation, all moments which are introduced in black and white film. While she progresses, Godwin's assistant Max McCandles (Ramy Youssef) notes her development and falls in love with Bella.

Through time, Bella develops a questioning sexuality that mortifies the entire household with also an urgent desire to see the world. Bella becomes fascinated by louche lawyer Duncan Wedderburn (Mark Ruffalo) who sweeps her off to Lisbon and later on a cruise, which consists mostly of sex in a variety of positions and self-discovery, a key element for her independence and autonomy. As she develops, the color palette of the film shifts from soft pastel tones to bright colors indicating a tonal shift from Bella and her process of self discovery. Her character displays maturity along the way, her knowledge is growing in complexity, and she understands that Duncan serves as a bridge to the outside world. However, along her path, she encounters a 'polite society' with moral challenges and evolves into a fully commanded and sexually liberated woman.

The purpose of this essay is to focus on how this interrogation of female gender-bending can magnify feminist stories by using the theories of Gayle Rubin and Hélène Cixous. The film illustrates a better understanding of its mission when analyzed through feminist theories like the American anthropologist Gayle Rubin and the French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous. Gayle Rubin's 1984 seminal essay, "Thinking Sex" in the book *The Question of Knowability: Race, Ethics, and Epistemology*, continues confronting the issue of social inequality by tackling the idea of what constitutes knowledge and its connection to racial discrimination. In a sex-negative society that only tolerates "the charmed circle" of preferred sexual attitudes, the social reaction to Bella's vaunting quests cannot be sidelined if applying Rubin's critique. Likewise, Hélène Cixous's seminal "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) encourages women to claim their sexuality and their bodies as sources of power and gratification, vividly wells up in Emma Stone's performance of Bella's character development. *Poor Things* does not only reveal Bella's emancipation but also

shows how Rubin's and Cixous's feminist principles play out within the larger context of gender roles, sexuality, and the relationship between power and authority. The conflict between Bella's awakening desires and societal restrictions induces audiences to rethink the political structure of sexuality and the feminist imperatives to achieve autonomy and expression.

The Sexual Liberation of Bella

Bella starts alone, the reflection of how many women put up with the shame associated with wanting to get in touch with the world around them in cultures and historical periods where reading as intellectual inquiry for women is deemed an abnormal activity. Her first relationship with her body and desires is increasingly infused with curiosity as she cannot silence the insatiable urge for an understanding of herself from the depths of pleasure, which is both witty and explosive. Those times, though very much personal, may be connected to dealing with the societal implications of the individual understanding of social norms and laws. Bella experiments with her body and expresses her sexual desires without limitations or shame, which exists in direct contrast to the conduct of "polite society." Bella's plunge deeper into sexual rediscovery is marked by a gradual shift to an assertive phase in her liberation expedition. She starts to defy not only her internal biases in how sexuality is portrayed but also the societal dictums that limit what is proper for a woman to desire and express. The sex scenes in *Poor Things* are frequently explicit, carrying the feminist ideological spirit of women having the free choice of their sexual activities and patterns without being judged. Every action of or indulgence in a woman's sexuality repudiates the account of female sexuality as something that ought to be curbed, suppressed, or might even get punished. Bella refusing to do as the purportedly rational people in the house tell her signifies her attempts to rewrite the script of her life and be the so-called princess of her own dreams to provide herself with the thrill of living and being in charge of her life.

Partway through the film Bella and Duncan are stranded with no money in Paris, Bella decides to work at a brothel and learns that not all sex encounters are enjoyable. In one of the

brothel scenes Bella suggests that the women should be able to choose the customers they want, the Madam explained how that would be bad for business since men enjoy things more when the woman doesn't want it. Another unusual encounter is when a father brings his two boys to explain to them the importance of foreplay and sex. These examples portrayed aspects of patriarchy, sex trade, and male violence. Bella's liberation and ascent are seen in this period when not only she ditches Duncan, but supports herself through sex work, and becomes a socialist.

Bella encounters disapproval among those near her, both in quiet mumbling and in direct denunciation. These reactions represent the face-to-face proof of the policing of women's bodies, which is the process of preventing the angry and inappropriate behavior of females in patriarchal society. Even though Bella does not back down in the face of such trials, symbolizing's the power that a person can call upon to overcome the hurdles and offer solutions to social constraints, that she deliberately defies patriarchal morality by shaving her head, cross-dressing, etc., is not merely rebellion, but rather a path she utilizes to reach a level of self-liberation. With the intensity of her feelings, Bella becomes a model of sexual sovereignty, a person who has a right to define herself and what she desires in an adult period of her life. Her example is of sovereignty over your happiness, the act of reclaiming who you are, and the efficacy of feeling good about oneself. In her ascent to comprehend the concept of sex and express it, Bella reveals a crack, a space in the story where women historically have been mostly ignored, their desires denied. For many spectators, Bella's trip becomes personal, with many women sharing this challenge to attain sexual liberation. Her filmic journey is an image of the strength that one may need to oppose and tear down the myths related to the social life of women.

An important aspect that also illustrates Bella's sexual liberation and knowledge development is the wardrobe used in the film. *Poor Things* costume designer Holly Waddington is without a doubt delivering a message with its subverting traditional Victorian silhouettes purposely designed with no corsets (because Bella lived free and not following cultural and fashion traditions) also the mesmerizing fabric textures paying attention to the practicality of the garments

and their symbolic significance at various stages of Bella's development, for instance, the "condom coat" at the beginning of her brothel period. Bella wears a latex, cheese-slice-colored type of coat (irony because it is freezing and she is wearing a plastic-latex material), which according to an interview with Waddington for *Whistles*, she wears this condom coat that symbolizes her first sexual encounter in the brothel (Whistles2024).

The main character in *Poor Things* helps spectators think about what they know about sex, what they are for or against with inhibitions struggling to be free. The film begs the question: is this struggle for sexual sovereignty inclusive? What distinct categories of women are presented? A key factor that embodies Bella's sexual awakening remains a foremost critical element when talking about broader feminist historical struggles for autonomy and self-determination. The first sexual body exploration encountered in the film is when Bella discovers the depths of sexual pleasures and starts masturbating, she finds objects around the house to use for her pleasure and tries to express her 'happy' discovery yet, she does not understand the social norms which prohibit certain conducts. In the symbolic apple scene, it highlights how Bella has a child's mind but a fully grown woman's libido, she does not understand why Max, and Mrs. Prim, the housekeeper, are so puritanical and secretive about something that can bring them so much joy. During this scene, Bella offers to work for? Mrs. Prim when she seems upset by Bella's behavior. Is sexual education for woman a taboo and something that 'polite society' does not talk about still today's contexts?

The struggle saw her turning and echoing a call to action that unfortunate women are still subjected to social norms that intend to control women and bar them from exercising their sexual agency. Bella's character development shows how self-awareness is transformative and that the search for freedom is enduring in the fight against societal restrictions. Different aspects of society circumscribe Bella as people judging her as her family, peers, and the community act as the agents of societal backlash. These reactions come with embedded mindsets, which deem her behavior as quite contrary to the social norm in regard to female conduct. Gossip and rumors are hidden implements to restrict and function as social controls (Giardini and Conte 12), reminding Bella

and others like her that they are not free as they believe in following their impulses. These social reactions prove, yet again, the dominant culture strictly controls a woman's body, and treats them as objects and not individuals. Thus, outside of the parameters prescribed by society is the step that is viewed not as a personal but as a public one open for civilizing the people for critique. This moral policing defines our historical society that has purportedly linked female sexual liberation with immorality and deviants. Bella's journey depicts that despite the progress, these biases are yet to disappear, making women's entitlement over their bodies a remote achievement and disorienting their pursuits. Surprisingly, the personal discomfort Emma is made to feel is just the tip of the iceberg working at the Parisian brothel, becoming a socialist, and returning home to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor. The shaming is deeper and far-reaching as it reveals a system designed to control women's sexuality through repression and gender hierarchies (Prabhu n.p).

Then again, the movie 'illuminates' the place of institutional mechanisms in their role as the reinforcer of these limitations that are created and perpetuated by society at large. Social and educational norms and cultural stories tend to magnify the tendency of holding disapproving and, in most cases, suppressive attitudes towards female sexual self-determination. In Bella's disobedience, we witness a radical act that deconstructs not only social attitudes but the very institutions that exist as sexist tools of persecution. The boundaries on expectations made of men also represent stereotypes, as the film depicts so effectively with the cad Duncan, played convincingly by Mark Ruffalo. This is why in trying to possess a young woman like Bella, who breaks up with him in one of the most interesting aspects of the movie is the way she tries on different norms and expectations, which prove a poor fit. These experiments expose the reality of the social construction of those norms, as opposed to the assumption that these supposed womanly behaviors are only natural. In the course of Bella's forays into a world of sexual experience and experimentation, the film also emphasizes areas of sexuality that intersect with other identities, which include class, race, and age. Such complexities might multiply the hardships young women face.

Bella's battle is not just to get rid of imposed sexual values but consists of a complicated system of social accustoms that determine what counts as truly ladylike behavior. These intersections expose complex ways in which interconnected inequalities and oppression function, the reason why the struggle for sexual freedom is closely linked to the broader fight against all forms of discrimination and injustice. In Nettle's opinion, the faceless society's reaction to Bella, with its underlining assumption of unrelenting female shaming, splendidly underlines the ongoing struggle for the female body (Nettle n.p). Her struggle calls for a total revamp of a 'polite society's attitude' that tells who you are, how to act, speak and act with manners towards sexual issues, a world where Bella can freely chart her own destiny. In elaborating Bella's storyline, *Poor Things* holds up a mirror of recognition for the common egalitarian heritage of viewers, who supports human equality with concerning social, and political views, and can feel that a shift to wholesome acceptance and affirmation is possible. In doing so, the movie goes beyond criticizing the usual. It also puts into relief potential futures where the narratives of sexual autonomy and expression are championed.

The way Bella challenges the typical stereotypes of women to assert herself and tell her own story that otherwise could have been suppressed by patriarchal silence is an excellent illustration of the idea of Hélène Cixous, in which women write themselves into existence and their bodies and stories. Cixous posits in her seminal 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," which is an account of *écriture féminine*, a specific form of female writing, an expression of womanhood, which is oriented along the lines of feminine fluidity, complexity and erotic. The character of Bella, whose actions and unwillingness to heed limitations, keep alive the spirit of this particular form of feminine writing. During the second wave of feminism, Cixous brings to *écriture féminine*, which looks at women's writing beyond the traditional literary confines, for example, an attention to the body, sexuality and gender fluidity. It is a pleading call for women to get down into the very center of their sexuality, to reveal and unearth the myriad ways they express in the language that defies the prescriptions of patriarchy and gives expressions to the existence of

diverse female experiences. Cixous essay is during the second wave of feminism in which it interprets struggles from the 1970s, while Bella's pilgrimage as a contemporary depiction of this call to action is seen through her concepts and choices that enact and embody *écriture féminine*. Her image is presented in the movie, where the woman is portrayed as not only one who fights society with taboos but also aims at understanding and expressing her desires on her terms. Some wardrobe statements in the film representing her sexuality and autonomy is having no corset, her hair is mostly worn down, and the clothes are also often incomplete or mismatched. This represents the patriarchy and women's roles during the Victorian period; bourgeois women were not working and dressed like dolls, they were corseted. The way women dressed dictated a way of looking and being in control through posture and walking. Thus, Bella represented freedom and was not shaped nor molded by societal norms. Bella's examination of what she has experienced sexually is her denying the efforts on the part of society to suppress its female population's sexuality and make them feel ashamed.

The act of erasing the limits and boundaries to discover her way into her sexuality is a powerful demonstration of her liberation and reclamation of the space that denies women the authority to define their own stories. Through the process of self-discovery, she is met by a wave of opposition, and as she travels through distinct epochs and places, she proves to challenge dominant worldviews and becomes subversive. This stage of resistance unfolds with Cixous's vision, too. Bella's merriment turned into something so fierce even the silence imposed upon her could not contain or stop it, mirroring Cixous's liberation as going beyond the individual to the whole society, which calls for establishing a new order of thinking, as well as social transformations (Varino 294). Cixous daydreams that this scenario will define a woman-led world with the stories of brave women who recreate our landscape, writing from a female perspective to disrupt existing patriarchal standards and help all of us to find a new way to relate and look at the world. Bella's experiences challenge us and give us a different perspective on the conflict we are facing. Spectators are moved to look inward, thereby potentially changing not only how viewers

perceive female sexuality but also how they recognize the abundance of women's experiences. Though a fictional invention, Bella is the hard evidence of the power of one's wishes, serving as a blueprint of rebirth and a daring act of rewriting the self with celebrative angriness and dedication. Talking about the sexual liberation of Bella, it is the creation of the "write yourself" movement that refers to Cixous's call to women to write themselves as living women. The fiction of her life is a setting for female sentiment wherein she looks at the pain of female affection and pluck, the contemporary takes are communicated vigorously. This aspect of the film touches on and continues with wider feminist discussions, going beyond the call for a radical redefinition of women's agency and voice. Her voyage does not simply mark a personal success; it is an overarching appeal for all to act, resonating with that of Cixous, who saw the world where women's tales and appetites were not only heard but claimed for their power to modify and become subversively free.

Bella's sexual expression reflects her views as well as taboo. Facing the same issues of conformity at the level of a community, her trip with Duncan to Portugal, Alexandria and Paris reflects a greater feminist fight for personal freedom and self-development. It emphasizes the imperative for being culturally changed, for the places where women can serve as representations and make their decisions without fear of revenge or any verdict from society. Bella's revolution is a fundamental challenge against a societal system that would rather have a commanding voice over women's sexuality to the point of dictating terms. This audacity is no longer just about achieving her rightful pleasure but is about criticizing the kind of society that will try to be controlling of her very will or her autonomy over her bodily choices. Society tends to appraise womanhood based on its sexual appeal to men and to align with the narratives that shape men's behaviors. Moreover, Bella's journey becomes a battle against the imperatives imposed by society and reconfiguration of existing narratives. This form of rebellion, which is enough, symbolizes the pains and constraints that many women share and foreshadows these patriarchal designs their daily lives experience.

Furthermore, how Bella is reentering sexuality overrides the ever-present stigma and silence around female desire (Chess Q pp). To her character's credit, the fact that she has refused to be another victim of society who silences sexual issues with the marks of shame and secrecy is a measure of her bravery, as she bullies back at the societal tendency to have this issue remain in the dark. It is, however, of even greater significance, for it is a direct exposé of a ubiquitous mindset expressed in lies and absurdities. Bella does not feel embarrassed about enjoying or talking about sex, this allows her to cast aside her possessive and controlling lovers, and to question the conditions at the brothel workplace. Eventually, she develops a healthy relationship with her sexuality; she understands sex should be enjoyable, not just for men but for women also, and that she should not be coerced into it.

By doing this, Bella's story can be a catalyst for dialogues, which might contribute to a reinterpretation of our culture on how sex education and conversations about consent should be conducted – ideally, one would have the topics open, respectful and understanding rather than closed, disrespectful and judgmental. The very soul of Bella's liberation pervades beyond the sphere of sexuality, undertaking intricate issues of power, rulership, and gender domination. Her path of discovery, however, ties power strongly to sexuality, which in turn intimates that society's control issues over female sexuality resemble the deeper power imbalances. By taking control of her sexuality and refusing to let others define and dictate her existence, Bella shifts the patriarchal power structures that attempt to guide her life. This obstacle is actually a great lesson, as it makes it worth taking the risk after you become aware of the potential of sex as the source of defiance. That is when the personal becomes the political and every individual act of insubordination sends shock waves through society and, most importantly, it destroys old power pyramids. On top of that, the plot of Bella as a narrator helps to internalize the role of solidarity in the feminist movement.

Nevertheless, her experiences, while special, are not an individual failure because of the troubles that many women face in various cultures and time periods. Her account is a rallying cry

that demands the joint undertaking of the dismantling of restrictive establishments for a world in which the embrace of the female individual enterprise merits celebration rather than condemnation. It stresses the importance of a feminism that is representative of many, that considers women of different backgrounds and social classes, and so embraces a variety of ways patriarchy affects women.

Rubin's "Thinking Sex" and Bella's Journey

In Gayle S. Rubin's "Thinking Sex" provides a fundamental framework in which the political realm of sex . While the film elaborates on the theme of Bella's sexual struggle as she tries to become a sexually free person, largely influenced by society pressuring morals and sexual attitudes, one can see the importance of Rubin's idea of the hierarchical evaluating of sexual acts. This paper probes into the thematic identifications between the contents of the theories and the movie plot and, among other things, show how the film has either accepted or defied Rubin's proposed view of a "charmed circle" which is Rubin's diagram explaining the characteristics and hierarchy of types of sex, whereby some sex is treated as normal, and other sex is treated as damned, and abnormal, more like politicization of sex (Rubin 1984).The category theory, according to Rubin, states that society cloaks sex by categorizing sexual behaviors into a sequence hierarchy, the "charmed circle" of which includes only heterosexual, monogamous, married, procreative, and non-commercial sexual activities. Bella's experience in *Poor Things* has a crystal clear and rich picture of the fight between the social norms people expect to exist and what everyone eventually believes in. Bellas feelings and decisions that are outside of the borders of the circle of happiness that are brought about by the norm and her desire to produce procreative heterosexual acts even provide her with a marginal place inside the circle. The society's

disapproval and disgrace that Bella experiences as she tries to explore her sexuality by, for example, masturbating or defying the so-called sacredness of monogamous intercourse or premarital activity not aimed at procreation are nothing compared to what she would be subjected to if she ever decided to defy the societal norms that demand that self-determination and pleasure are strictly reserved for men. Likewise, Rubin is correct to recognize that such taboo practices on sexuality come from a male-dominated class, which could also mean societal anxiety about controlling female sexuality.

Rubin's doctrine of sex negativity is the belief that society, by default, attaches sex with bad things if sex is out of place or in an approved context. That is a way the issue of sex-negativity is explored in this movie. According to Rubin, such a standard gives rise to the ratio of punishing sexual behavior – this non-standard behavior is looked down upon and actively suppressed in *Poor Things* debate between the sexual awakening of Bella and the pathetic reaction of Victorian society represented by fears followed sex negation as Rubin theorizes. The following events prove that society has deep fears and anxieties regarding the autonomy of women's sex and the steps patriarchal systems are willing to go to to maintain control over women's bodies and desires.

Not only does Rubin's work elucidate the social and legal structures that keep the magic of the forbidden circle intact, but it also demonstrates that these elements are essential to maintaining boundaries between groups. While all these processes are among the methods to regulate sexuality, the focus of the story *Poor Things* is not only on social ostracization, legal consequences, and medical pathologization. Bella's journey, through which she feels joy and fun and acquires new insights that repress her, is full of both personal and political risks that come with breaking through the existing norms. Rubin's thesis that the politics of sex cannot be separated from lived experience is further put forward by her storytelling, implying that how people conduct their sex lives is the most substantial of all politics.

But Bella's course can be defined as a struggle for autonomy and the change Rubin talks about. Notwithstanding the normative attitudes and pressures society imposes on Bella, she

proceeds to claim her sexual agency while scathingly critiquing the division of worth in the context of sexual acts. The rebellion reflects the marvelous influence of personal liberation and the reshaping of political dimensions of sexuality. Bella seems to be a personification of the dream of fundamental change, which reflects Rubin's re/request for something more shaded and equal in terms of sexual variety. The movie provides a mirror and a benchmark for Rubin's perception of our times, a reflection of and a challenge for modern sexual politics. By depicting Bella's psychological condition of being bound by the shackles of normality, the film *Poor Things* blazes a trail of an experiential interpretation of Rubin's theory, unwittingly producing a scathing criticism of sex negativity and the ordering of sexual acts. Another idea that indicates there is a promise of a bright future is Bella's bravery and bravado despite the conformist norms regarding sex. In summary, the clash of ideas between Gayle S. Rubin's "Thinking Sex" and the narrative of Bella's sexual journey in *Poor Things* gives a fascinating reading on the nature of sexuality as a politics. This is not only a direct depiction of Ruben's take on social prejudices towards sexual expression, but it also depicts a way of subverting the system and changing society. Bella's journey of sexual liberation stands as a phantasmagoric piece of cinema facilitating the rethinking of the audience's presuppositions on the sexual politics that the author so dynamically manifests. Through such an analysis, *Poor Things* stands as an all-important cinematographic investigation about how women are still undergoing the challenge of overcoming the politics of sexuality and subjugation, but as Rubin advocates for a radical review of the worldview of sexuality.

Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" and Bella's Sexual Expression

In her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous not only encourages women to write themselves to existence ceaselessly but to subvert and protest the norms of society through the use of "écriture féminine." The idea of feminine writing is not only about writing or the imagination or simply what women write but rather, it is about a broader sense of human expression by women and their freedom from the oppressive elements in society. This essay

expresses her philosophy, where she tells women about the wonderful opportunity to empower their bodies, sexuality, and intelligence through which they can become bold sources of power and inspiration. The part as brilliantly played by Emma Stone shows that Bella's experience in the film correlates with Cixous' feminist theory-, especially how Bella engages in sex as a type of feminine script writing or *écriture féminine*.

Bella's character stands for a struggle for womanhood, as well as an exploration of self in the context of heavy repression. The vicissitudes of her experience illustrate the idea expressed by Cixous that women from the ages of history have been silenced with their physical desires stifled and removed from society, always expected to follow a male rule. Bella, like Cixous's more perfect woman, is not a spectator in her life. She takes action and chooses her path instead of being a slave to fate, tradition, and her community. The author's investigation of her feelings and wishes based on the principles of "The Laugh of the Medusa" centers on the idea of female writing and patriarchy.

Writing female, as defined by Cixous, uses language that is body-oriented, emotional, and fluid-bypassing patriarchal discursive structures (Crawford 45). Some sexual affairs in *Poor Things* can be seen as the way Bella talks this language or comprehends everything around her through this newfound experience. Her behavior best expresses a deep gender understanding of one's body and its needs but, at the same time, provides an opportunity for the exercise of one's own sexual freedom despite being limited by society generally. The path she traces is characterized for instance the expressions of joy, wealth and, sometimes, pain, and each tells a word in the narrative of her body that she is writing as her ode to liberty.

This story, however, is much more important in the sense that it appears in the background of the binary symbols the patriarchy takes for granted in Europe. Cixous disregards boundaries between these identities and creates an alternative world where diverse ways of understanding and being can be combined. Without a doubt, "Bella's sexual liberation" can be considered as one of the personifications of this assumption because virginity in many cultures is a sacred belief in

terms of conscientious women's expectations, as opposed of simply getting rid of this state. Her experimentation of sexuality is not for its craving for pleasure alone; rather, it is a mighty scrutiny of her multifaceted womanhood.

In addition, her laughs, the joy she experiences in the discovery of her body, and the capabilities it holds for pleasure reflect deeply the last perspective of Cixous when she discusses the role of laughter in liberation. Whether it is by deconstructing the codes that govern and shape women or by literally showing women laughing in the face of their patriarchal punishers, laughter overcomes obstacles and opens spaces previously silenced by suppression. Her laughing or mocking, literal and symbolic, not only stand out, but they are also the refusal of society by which women's sexuality is repressed. It is a way for her to declare her presence, assert her refusal and reject all the decisions that are trying to pin her down.

Cixous's urging for women to write themselves into existence is, therefore, no less than an invitation to emphasize a new worldview and to taste a different way of life. It is implied that it is an expression of questioning the rigidity logic of patriarchal thought, when instead, it encourages us to embrace the structure that is in line with a dynamic and circuitous way of thinking. Although the poor things circuitous are the true stars of Bella's *Poor Things*, she sets the movie in motion, displaying her acceptance of those on the fringes. Her sexual discovery, for instance at the beginning of the film Bella learns to masturbate herself and is delighted by her discovery, this scene depicts woman's early sexual feelings and demonstrate positive ways of understanding early girl sexual desire, however, does not represent a chronological narrative of liberation and, thus, complexly and not as a single entity, is an expression of her identity in the making, as a process. It provokes viewer to rethink seeing women through the lenses of virgin/whore, passive/active and so on and, thus, forces the reconsideration of women's sexuality from a narrow to a more complex standpoint.

Poor Things could be appreciated as a film director bringing the writings of Hélène Cixous to the screen. The main protagonist Bella, at the core of this, implies that if she has to challenge

what stands that society tells us about sex and sexuality, she will be able to assert her autonomy over her own body and use her body as an outlet for self-expression. For example, the extent and frequency of the sex scenes in *Poor Things* carry the feminist ideological spirit of women having full agency and choice of their own sexual activities and partners without being judged. The narrator's account is a definite sign that gal power and sexual expression are key sources for overcoming patriarchal oppression. In line with Cixous' ideas, Bella's narrative urges women to be themselves, to cry out in the face of fixed rules and not hesitate to find any way possible to use their indescribably active preparation, every preference and expression of their multilayered, bright selves to tell of their existence, and so to become real for once and to exist.

Intersectionality Beyond Heteronormativity and Expanding the Feminist Lens

The idea of intersectionality, a term well studied by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the mid to late 1980s, has increasingly gain popularity in the sphere of feminist theory and practice (Bastia et al. 461; McCall 1785). Intersectionality argues that the social hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class are not separate phenomena that can be analyzed in isolation but are rather interconnected, and therefore, other factors contribute to the structure of one's identity as well. This framework especially enables one to evaluate what is less appealing in *Poor Things* and other texts that have been mainly driven by the female-centric issues, thus giving unconditional support to women. The significance of intersectionality and the impact of feminist theory when considering heteronormativity and moving beyond the norms in *Poor Things* is crucial since the film extracts some feminist theory, and the two theories (the work of Gayle Rubin and Hélène Cixous) are incorporated into intersectionality.

The marking of intersectionality in feminist discourse was a turning point in movement development in 1989, and the process of evolution of history. Originally, mainstream feminism was criticized as it was too preoccupied with the predicaments of white, middle-class, heterosexual women, thus diverting the voices of those who did not fit in such a semantically narrow

demographic (Taylor n.p). Intersectionality was a reaction to this limitation, aiming to make feminist analysis broader by reflecting the different feelings of women among the social units. It accepts that the battle between females and males has many parts, and it covers not only the struggle with patriarchy but also other kinds of oppression, related to racism, classism, homophobia, etc.

In *Poor Things*, Bella's undertaking of sex and contradiction accepted values makes a powerful fable for female strength and confrontation with powerless corruption. Nevertheless, that the story deals mostly with her heterosexuality is a great topic to delve deeper into the multilayered and richer feminist experiences, like the ones between the queer or the transgender individuals, to mention just a few. Since an intersectional approach to the analysis of Bella's character and plot exposes the fallacy of focusing only on heterosexual tales in the context of feminist discourse, such endeavor broadens our understating of the past and our ability to make scholarly generalizations. This sort of perspective and methodology enables the inclusion of various voices and narratives that reflect the real life of virtually all women and gender-diverse individuals, and not only those who align with the traditionally accepted gender and sexual identities (Bolton et al.; 13).

Deepening the feminist lens via an intersectional approach demands a conscious effort to embrace and account for the truth and the identities of the people who have been unjustifiably excluded from the feminist story. This expansion cannot just be viewed as a simple extension of representation for its value but as a core aim to shake up the power structures that underpinned and controlled the process of expressing gender identity and sex orientation. For example, the works that uncover the experiences that stem from the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality of Black lesbian women (Napier 5) have some different challenges when comparing the experiences of white heterosexual women. Through such narratives, feminism becomes more enriched as a concept not only for its own movement but also for its broader perspectives to include

all social classes and genders thus capable of advocating for the rights and freedoms of all individuals.

Intersectionality provides a way for more inclusive and fair feminism, which eschews the uniformity of definition and is rather keen to recognize and praise the scope of its movement. Approaching intersectionality with a feminist narrative and theory stands out in a heteronormative and monocultural context and facilitates communication and participation beyond the women whose views may be limited to one perspective. This is important to avoid creating divisions within the movement that may lead to one group benefiting from the oppression of another. Class and societal expectations shape Bella's experiences as well as her gender. The expectations placed upon women in the Victorian era may feel slightly different to those today. But the film can find insights into the intersectionality of gender, class, and societal norms, and bridge the gap between the Victorian period and the present. This is because Bella's social status influences how she is perceived, and the constraints placed on her. For example, discussions on the wage gap, and gender roles working at the Parisian brothel, the time when Bella visits Alexandria and sees poverty low-class people, and women with babies with no access to healthcare, and also the time she was stranded in Paris with no money 'experiencing the poor life of women' of those who are affected by socioeconomic and class status. The goal of the movement is not only to fight against gender-based oppression but to dismantle all the systems of oppression that affect individuals based on their multiple identities.

Enriching Feminist Narratives

A more extensive and holistic feminism is brought about through critical consideration and breaking away from heteronormative approaches. This idea of correcting, however, doesn't only mean introducing non-heterosexual relationships and identities into the discussion but the whole reassessment of the underlying beliefs that shape our perceptions of gender, sex, and power structures. While stories such as *Poor Things* can show a detailed look at the obstacles a woman

encountered within a heteronormative paradigm, the film adaptation of the novel fails to fully account for the great variety of other scenarios beyond this conformity. Heteronormativity, the dominance and acceptance of heterosexual attraction and relationships, is a widespread concept that often undermines any deviation from the heterosexual identity and establishes other sexualities and gender identities as invisible or marginalized (Orellana et al. 2). The way this social norm persists on such various planes, from simply the societal expectations to legal, medical, and institutional frameworks, in which relationships get legitimized, or the identities get discriminated, becomes part of the rule. Unlike Rubin's radical sociological theory of sexuality politics, which focuses on the multiple aspects of human sexuality in order to decipher the main ideologies, the dominant theory places a special emphasis on heterosexuality. Rubin argues against the contentious tradition of grading sexual activities and identities. Such a hierarchy appoints heterosexuality on top and rebuffs queer sexualities stating that the valuation of sexual acts and identities is political.

To be fair to revise heteronormativity, feminist narratives need to add or make central queer experiences and viewpoints to the picture intentionally, and in doing so, they contribute to the gender-based and sexuality-based stereotypes. This involvement is far beyond recognizing and creating the reflection of the phenomenon but viewing love, desire, and personality as more advantageous to people, which are both fluid and diverse. Integrating the visions of the LGBT community would not be possible without critically evaluating these values and the base assumptions which we produce these stories. This requires a dedication to theorizing the linkages between gender, sex, race, and class, which recognizes that these avenues of identity do not run as independent lines but are intricately woven as each entity defines one another.

The idea of feminine writing, introduced by Cixous is helpful for such an agenda. The Medusa asks for writing that expresses the female body and experience and the manner that defies the mental structures and language of the patriarch. Therefore, rules and principles for "writing the bodies" could also be extended to include representing bodily asexuality and sexuality, reflecting

their diversity and infinite nature. Feminist narratives develop into places of revolutionary thinking and emancipation from the clutches of heteronormativity with the active participation of *écriture féminine*. Through the process itself, resistance is formed against the limitations that this binary system creates.

The inclusion of the queer dimension into feminist discourse not only supplements the original content but brings about a qualitative change. Feminist criticism, at its core, is the centerpiece of much feminist discourse, but it has to continue to undergo certain rethinking in order to verify it with queer theory's basic rule. For feminism, queer theory's prominent feature of gender and sexuality as being diverse and non-binary, as well as the questioning of power structures, becomes a breadth of brand-new perspectives, which is why queer theory is essential for feminist movement and gender studies (Ella Ben Hagai and Zurbriggen, p.25). This challenges the idea of fixed identities and remains an agent of social and gender relations, and through that sexuality, relations of power are regulated.

Integrating queer theory into feminist narratives implies the discussion of different facets of identity and acknowledging that the paths of suppression and liberation are not uniform, taking into consideration that they are influenced by many on which the sense of identity depends. It is about confronting the binaries that have been used by patriarchy to structure feminist discourse, as they are, for example, the borders between the public and the private, the natural and uncanny, the normal and deviant. Through this method, not only are women's narratives enriching, but they also offer an insightful look at the power structures that rule our lives.

Moving beyond the normative heterosexuality within feminist narratives has direct repercussions from activism activities to shaping the laws and lives on a daily basis (Serrano Amaya 361). It means that there should be the revision of the laws and social systems that use heterosexual standards and make room for a complete acceptance of everybody regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It also affects education, healthcare, and the media, creating

a spectrum in which there is a substantial shift from heteronormativity to a more inclusive and fair approach.

Coming-of-age feminist stories, which narrate the rawness and manifold experience of being human, thus become the catalyst for social transformation. They do so either by going against the system, encouraging a new style of activism, or advocating for a better pluralistic and progressive society. Journeying beyond heteronormativity still presents various hurdles that restrain it from the free movement and flow and needs constant scrutiny, critique and dialogue for its uplifting. On the other hand, no matter how challenging the process is, the benefits will be significant. Theorists of feminism will manage to continue to develop a theory that can potentially describe real human diversity.

The Importance of Queer Perspectives in Feminist Theory

Providing space for queer people in feminist theory is not just acknowledging or visibility; it alters the paradigm of how to think about gender and sexuality and, by doing so, challenges the root of oppression and normativity. The perspective of queer feminism that pursues a critical approach to gender-binary representations and the heteronormative conventional stigmas regarding sexuality makes a crucial contribution to the redefinition of the content of feminist politics. It emphasizes the need for acceptance and validation of gender fluidity and sexual orientation components of feminism as part of the fight for gender, equality and equity.

Through the use of queer perspectives contributing to the intricacy of human experience, feminist theory becomes more diverse and corresponds even more to the collaboration of human experience. Queer Feminism highlights the dynamics wherein the overlaps of gender, sexuality, race, and class, among other dimensions of identity, point to the privileges and suffering of human experience (Alimahomed 1; Quéré 122). Such an approach, which builds on the ideas developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, helps attain a deeper understanding and overcome the multifaceted nature of oppression (Carastathis 305). Moreover, queer theory provides a possibility of novel analytical

tools and concepts for deconstruction of power. Ideas including "heteronormativity," "gender performativity," and "queer temporality" came from queer theory, which contributed significantly to feminist theory. This allows for further building of feminist theories as they are reinforced by a more all-round approach, allowing for the development of strategies that are more targeted and productive.

Queer voices and perspectives must continue to be integrated into the theory of feminism if the movement is to be truly inclusive and equitable. Traditionally, it has been a misconception that the feminist movement has been the reason for the exclusion of underprivileged groups, culminating in the movement's marginalization of women of color, working-class women, and LGBTQ+ people (DiQuinzio 1). By giving overdue attention to queer experiences and criticisms, feminism can amend the exclusive nature of the movement's history and move toward a broad vision of freedom. The embodiment of the feminist movement, which leaves no space for exclusion, acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences and, therefore, values unity among differences (Munoz-Puig 5). It concedes that true freedom for women is indissoluble, and only when all women are liberated from oppression can any individual be considered to be fully free, for instance Bella encounters sexual and sentimental relationship with a woman at the brothel. This idea of inclusivity and intersectionality lies at the heart of queer feminist politics with a queer feminism that advocates for feminism that is responsive to the needs and realities of all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Conclusion

In the acclaimed film *Poor Things*, the character Bella delivers her story almost strenuously through powerful narration, which vividly encompasses the essence of feminism and sexual freedom amid social constraints. Through the film's portrayal of her visceral experience, the idea behind the works of Gayle Rubin and Hélène Cixous are well illustrated. Throughout Bella's trajectory, the movie shows how sex-negativity and gender-biased evaluations of sex acts

function to discredit, as Rubin criticizes, as well as embodies Cixous's advocacy of *écriture féminine* where writing is a revolutionary means of self-discovery and visibility. The imagination of Bella as an individual character becomes this beacon of resistance as she tries to explore her feelings and desires without constraints and impositions from her surroundings. This struggle is a symbolic representation of the ongoing struggle for liberation and the passage of the right of individuals to manifest their sexuality free of anyone's fear or fear of imposing punishment. The film, therefore, is deeply connected with present-day discussions on feminism and sexuality through this process of letting women create lives out of their desire without fear. It highlights that the quest for gender equality, individuals' sexual freedom, and the recognition of a variety of sexual orientations and experiences constitute a plurality of values that together form the basis of our mutual effort to develop a just and free society.

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