

**Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)**

تحدي الفكر النسوي السائد في رواية جزيرة لأن هالام

الدكتور فرنانكين (2002)

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Received: 25/10/2023 Accepted: 27/02/2024 Published: 03/03/2024

Abstract

This paper brings into light Ann Halam's subversion of stereotypical gender and racial relations in her novel *Doctor Franklin's Island* (2002). It focuses attention on the ways in which the exclusionist attitude of white middle class women has been challenged by giving voice to coloured women. Taking its theoretical bearings from Elizabeth V. Spelman's *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (1991), the present article attempts to explain how Ann Halam traces the change in feminist discourse from an exclusionist view towards coloured women to a more tolerant and inclusive stance. This shift generates a more balanced relationship between Miranda, a white middle class woman, and Semi, a coloured British female character of Jamaican origin. This newly achieved bond of friendship resulted from the conciseness-raising process that the two teenagers experience. For Halam, modern women should adopt a tolerant attitude towards coloured women and, therefore, develop an awareness of the mutuality of the two races.

Keywords: Ann Halam, *Dr. Franklin's Island*, Identity, Metamorphosis, Freedom, Consciousness-raising, Journey

ملخص: تسلط هذه الورقة الضوء على هدم آن هالام للصورة النمطية بين الجنسين والعلاقات العرقية في روايتها جزيرة دكتور فرانكلين (2002). الورقة تركز الاهتمام على الطرق التي تم بها تحدي الموقف الإقصائي لنساء الطبقة المتوسطة البيضاء من خلال إعطاء صوت للنساء الملونات. اعتماداً على النظرية المستوحاة من كتاب إليزابيث ف. سبيلمان المرأة غير الأساسية: مشاكل الإقصاء في الفكر النسوي (1991)، يحاول هذا المقال شرح كيف تتبع آن هالام التغيير في الخطاب النسوي من وجهة نظر إقصائية تجاه النساء الملونات إلى وجهة نظر أكثر تسامحاً وشمولية. هذا التحول ولد علاقة أكثر توازناً بين ميراندا، وهي امرأة بيضاء من الطبقة المتوسطة، وسيمي، وهي شخصية أنثوية بريطانية ملونة من أصل جامايكي. رابطة الصداقة التي تم تحقيقها حديثاً نتجت عن عملية رفع الوعي التي عاشتها المراهقان. بالنسبة لهالم، يجب على المرأة العصرية أن تتبنى موقفاً متسامحاً تجاه النساء الملونات، وبالتالي تطوير الوعي المتبادل بين العرقين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ان هالم، جزيرة دكتور فرانكلين، الهوية، التحول، الحرية، الرحلة، رفع الوعي.

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene BENMECHICHE

1. Introduction

This study offers a feminist exploration of Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* (2002). The story of this work is about three children: Semirah (Semi) Garson, the narrator; Miranda Fallow, a direct allusion to Prospero's Miranda, and a boy called Arnie Pullman. These children, the only survivors of a plane crash, swim to an island where they survived on their own. The island proves to be owned by Dr. Franklin and his assistant Dr. Skinner, brilliant but insane scientists, who use the children as specimen for their transgenic experiments. These experiments

Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* (2002)

transform the girls into a bird and manta ray while the boy is transformed into a snake, an animal that was always linked to Eve. Skinner, horrified by the experiments, helps the children cure themselves by giving them the antidote and ultimately escape from the island. Dr. Franklin is killed after smashing into an electric fence and the children escape to the main land. The story ends with Semi dreaming for a world that will allow her and Miranda to become the creatures they were on the island without barriers between them.

At the outset of my critical analysis, I propose to set the work in its historical context, with a special emphasis on the circumstances that shaped women's status. This step in my view will hopefully pave the way for a better understanding of Ann Halam's feminist stance. *Dr. Franklin's Island* immersed in Britain at the turn of the twenty first century. This period marked a remarkable phase in the history of British feminism as it witnessed the rise of the feminist third wave. By this time, women activists built on the work of their foremothers to secure more rights and to achieve a more egalitarian feminist future.

In fact, the use of the wave metaphor came into prominence among historians during the late 1960s. It helped bring into light the main chapters in the history of Anglo-American feminism. Before the advent of the first wave in Britain which formed the earliest collective organized feminist activism, the defense of women's rights was the concern of few individual figures. The most prominent name was undoubtedly Mary Wollstonecraft whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) still remains a founding text in the field of feminist studies.

The first wave dates from the 1850s to the 1920s, more specifically, to 1928, the year of gaining full suffrage for women. This early feminist generation of activists planted the first seeds of change. They centered their agitation on issues of

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

education, employment, marriage, divorce and the vote. They managed to secure women's access to higher education and to a wide range of professions especially medicine, in addition to improving the legal status of married women.

After a period of abeyance during which the tide of activism retreated, the feminist movement reemerged by the late 1960s in Britain with the formation of the British women's liberation movement and the rise of the feminist second wave. British second wave feminists were deeply indebted to their foremothers; however, they endorsed a more revolutionary standpoint and engaged in more militant campaigns against patriarchal dominance. In this period, a key tenant of feminist discourse was the ideal of sisterhood. This concept manifested the universalist tendency of western feminist thought based on the assumption that women form a unified homogenous group by virtue of their gender. Although the promotion of such a claim participated largely in the enhancement of the progress of the British women's movement, especially in its early years, as it celebrated the principles of communality, solidarity and collectivism, it was soon called into question.

The critique of main stream hegemonic feminism and its universalist approach to the woman question was launched by marginalized activists in the women's movement since the late 1970s. These silenced voices included mainly, black, lesbian and working-class women who began to engage in recognition struggles to contest their inferiority status. The rise of identity politics or the proliferation of identity based struggles was motivated by the conception of women as a heterogeneous collectivity exposed to a complex web of oppressive relations based not only on gender but on other identity markers such as race class, sexuality, national belonging etc. Thus, this period marked a turning point in the feminist debate in Britain, shifting the focus from a rhetoric of communality and sisterhood to the

**Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)**

affirmation of difference. Black feminist activists contributed much to this key development in British feminist thought as they were the first to adopt an intersectional paradigm. Such an approach exposed the exclusionary and totalitarian tendency of western mainstream feminism. It reveals the existence of power relations among women themselves i.e. among white versus black women, upper middle class versus working class women etc. Accordingly, alienated feminist groups aimed at reshaping the feminist discourse throughout the 1980s and up to the 1990s. Through their incessant efforts, they managed to a large extent to dissenter the hegemonic Eurocentric narrative.

This transitional moment in the history of British feminism resulted in the advent of the third wave by the turn of the twenty first century. The movement in its new manifestation was led by young activists who founded their work on that of their predecessors, mainly on the process of re-evaluation initiated by marginalized groups especially by black feminists. The embrace of difference as an empowering force represented a foundational principle in their feminist discourse. While debunking the exclusionary ideal of sisterhood, these activists held a strong belief in notions of inclusivity, pluralism, self-criticism and border crossing. The current study will reveal how Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* contributes to the development of third wave feminist discourse by promoting its key principles. My main argument is that through the exploration of the evolution of the relationship between Miranda and Semi, the two female protagonists of the novel, from a relationship based on domination/submission to a more egalitarian bond based on mutual recognition, Ann Halem traces the development of British feminist thought from an exclusionary discourse that masked its totalitarian impulse under the banner of sisterhood to a discourse centered on diversity and tolerance.

2. Literature Review Since its emergence in 2002, Ann Halam's *Doctor Franklin's Island* has been the concern of few critical studies. These include Cat Yampbell's "When Science Blurs the Boundaries: The Commodification of the Animal in Young Adult Science Fiction" and Marion Deeds's '*Franklin's Island: A Suspenseful Story that isn't Preachy*'. Yampbell's article compares Peter Dickinson's *Eva* (1988) to Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* (2002). Her work promotes the view that the protagonists of these novels challenge taxonomic purity and in some ways position animals as superior. It argues that these texts challenge the contemporary cultural discourse that sees animals as a commodity for research or consumption, suggesting that these novels can serve as models of anti-speciesist thinking for their readers.

Marion Deeds in her '*Franklin's Island: A Suspenseful Story that isn't Preachy*' marks that both female protagonists, Miranda and Semi, "struggle to comfort each other and keep each other strong. This is a strong and touching part of the book. How do powerless prisoners maintain their spirit, their will, in the face of complete oppression?" (Deeds 5 §). Indeed, Ann Hallam wrote her *Doctor Franklin's Island* (2002) at a time of dramatic social, cultural, and political transition when young women were gaining new status. As Anita Haris notes, 'the future girl' who idealizes power, opportunities and success, is known for her "desire, determination and confidence to take charge of her life, seize chances, and achieve her goals." (Harris, 2004b 1) Modern young women, thus, have the chance to enjoy new freedoms and opportunities; they have more liberty to make choices. "Young women", as Anita Harris states, "have been encouraged to believe that "girls can do anything" and "girls are powerful." (ibid 7) According to Harris, "The category of "girl" is constantly being constructed and deconstructed, and young

**Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)**

women themselves are an incredibly diverse and dynamic population" (Harris 2004a, p. xxiv).

It is, in part, this tendency to celebrate modern young women's mutual relationships which this article aims to account for. More specifically, the current study is premised on the assumption that Halam's choice of girls as heroines for her story falls within the mainstream interest of modern writers who give much emphasis to the experience of girlhood. Halam, as we will hopefully argue, sustains the distinctiveness of girl's lives and challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions on which most traditional theories about women had been constructed. This article, thus, shall attempt to shed a new light on Ann Halam's novel by approaching it from a feminist standpoint. The main objective is to bring into focus the novelist's subversion of stereotypical gender and racial relation. After placing the novel within its historical frame, we will discuss, first, how Ann Halam critiques the old supremacist attitude of the white middle-class woman and, second, how she introduces a modern revisionist vision concerning non-white coloured women.

3. Theory The analysis carried out in this paper will be based, essentially but not exclusively, on the theory of Elizabeth Spelman as elaborated in her book *Inessential Women: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (1995). Spelman approaches the woman question from an intersectional lence. She is one of the writers who have placed "difference" at the centre of their philosophy. In her view, the relations between equality and difference are characterized by interrelationship rather than by mutual exclusion. Equality no longer negates difference, but rather is reliant upon this concept for its own meaning.

Spelman declares that no woman is simply a woman. Women are 'different' and thus they should raise their different voices and insist on the particularity of their experiences and

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

aspirations from positions which combine woman with race, class, coloniality, sexuality, dis/ability, age and other differences in a great variety of ways. The challenge to white women, therefore, is to recognize that they are raced in addition to being gendered and to work out how to understand and disentangle the privileges attached to whiteness and their implication on racism. The focus upon whiteness reinstates whiteness at the centre of enquiry and marginalizes women of colour and Third World women in the process.

Elizabeth Spelman considers the idea that gender differences can be understood in a multiple sense; that there are 'many kinds of women, many genders' (Spelman 1955: 176). She draws such conclusion from her consideration of the history of feminist thought which has been one of exclusion. Women who are different are excluded from the established norm of what it is to be 'a woman'. Therefore, Spelman thinks that the act of exclusion has resulted in the creation of an essentialist, racist and classist understanding of what it is to be a woman. Feminists, then, were defending the white, middle-class, Western woman: 'the real problem has been how feminist theory has confused the condition of one group with the condition of all' (ibid 4). The phrase 'as a woman' then, is, for Spelman, 'the Trojan Horse of feminist ethnocentrism' (ibid 13).

Spelman declares that she is not invalidating feminism; rather she thinks that she has created a new perspective for feminist activists. Furthermore, recognizing the existence of many kinds of women causes no threat to the coherence of feminism. On the contrary, Spelman argues, uncovering the battles among women over what 'being a woman' means and about what 'women's issues' are "is a sign of our empowerment, not something that stands in the way of such empowerment" (ibid 176). Feminist activists have strongly pinpointed that white middle-class women can passively cooperate with forces of

Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)

domination. They maintain the argument that these women can oppress others by being racist, classist, manipulative, and dominating. Accordingly, this paper affirms the view that Ann Halam consolidates Spelman's challenge of the traditional essentialist vision concerning women.

4. Decentring Privileged White Middle-class Women

Ann Halam, as it will be elaborated, endorses the claim that white middle-class feminists did not speak for all women. Through the character of Miranda, Halam criticises White middle-class women for being very domineering and exclusionist. Miranda is a white middle-class girl. Her parents are anthropologists with whom she travelled 'in all sorts of wild places when she was a child.' Now she is in a boarding school which is 'okay' for her. Compared to Semirah, Miranda is self-confident: "We shook hands. Her grip was thin and hard. My grip was pudgy and shaky, and my palm sticky with sweat. I hoped she wouldn't think I was afraid of flying" (Halam 2001: p. 08). Miranda's self-confidence induces Semi to trust her for her life: "I heard Miranda yell, 'We can't do it! We have to get away from these rocks!' I was absolutely trusting her with my life, so I swam with her, in the opposite direction from everybody around us. And that was very lucky, because it meant at least we were swimming *away* from the plane when the explosion happened" (Ibid p. 11). Among the key features of modern femininity are autonomy, choice, and self-determination. Therefore, Miranda sees herself as a capable, strong, and assertive woman.

Being white, Miranda spontaneously imposes her orders taking for granted Semi's submissiveness: "'Listen,' croaked Miranda, bumping into me. 'Listen to the breakers. Look, I can see the shore. We can make it. Come on, *swim*'" (Ibid p. 12). When they are drown in the sea, Semi is proud of Miranda who "sound[s] cool and grown-up, and in control" (Ibid p. 11). The

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

presentation of Semi as feminine, as it will be explained, places her in a lower position and gives Miranda the priority to command. Differences, thus, identify who controls whom. In this vein, Elizabeth Spelman declares that ‘many differences among us are linked to our being historical beings, living in particular places at particular times, subject to particular interpretations of our physical characteristics and activities. Our differences have been invoked to justify claims that some of us are superior to others and by virtue of this superiority are entitled, perhaps obliged, to dominate others. (Spelman 1955: 12) The two girls are of different origins; while Miranda is white, Semi is Jamaican. The differences in their backgrounds and thus personalities result in a gap between Semi and Miranda; a gap which had been widened by the presence of their friend Arnie: “While Arnie had been with us, he’d been like a weight in the middle of a balance bar. He’d kept us together, but in a way, he’d also kept us apart” (Halam 2002: p. 43).

Moreover, Miranda’s authority is imposed on Arnie as well although the latter refuses in vein to take orders from her: ‘*Now we should start walking,*’ said Arnie, ... Miranda shook her head stubbornly. ‘There are other priorities..’ Arnie refuses to take orders from Miranda: ...But why do I have to take orders from you?’ To impose her authority, Miranda reminds Arnie and Semi of her glorious deeds: “ “But I’m the one who found us fresh water and food, so maybe you should think about taking my advice” (Ibid p. 20-21). Feeling themselves weak, both Semi and Arnie extremely rely on Miranda who strengthens her position as a commander. Her heroic deeds are the main reason behind Miranda beyond her authoritative actions which make Semi and Arnie feel demeaned and belittled. When Arnie proposes to start the exploration of the island, Miranda stubbornly dismisses his proposal and imposes hers which was to build shelter as the above quotation shows.

Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* (2002)

Quite ironically, Miranda's oppressive manners are completely reversed to absolute submissiveness with Dr. Franklin. Franklin does not think that he is oppressing the girls; rather, he takes for granted the legitimacy of his experiments. Miranda willingly submits to this oppression. She avoids the belief that Franklin is exploiting them, a fact which needs an act of resistance. Rather, she tries to accept his doings by describing the experiments as an 'exciting experience.' Ann Halam declares that she has intentionally worked out Miranda's submissiveness. In a conversation given at the end of the novel, when she was asked about the meaning of her characters' names, Halam gives the following answer: "Miranda is the one whose name has a special meaning, a double meaning. She's someone who is admired (that's what first defines her), and then she's again the Miranda of *The Tempest*, in her role as the "daughter" who wants to believe that her "father's" magic is noble and good" (Ibid p. 209). Halam admits that Miranda of *Dr. Franklin's Island* is a parody of Miranda of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's Miranda is a teenager of fifteen years old. She is gentle and compassionate, but also relatively a passive heroine who displays a submissive and emotional nature. She finds her happiness thanks to the help of her father who uses his magical knowledge to arrange her marriage to Ferdinand. Prospero's possession and use of magical knowledge renders him extremely powerful and his daughter is proud of him. In *Dr. Franklin's Island*, we clearly notice this double facet of Miranda's personality. Miranda often appears charming and refreshingly confident, brimming with ideas and enthusiasm, and Semi has fallen under her spell.

Semi is not morally entitled to an equal treatment to that of Miranda. White women, of greater privilege, often dominate and exploit poor and non-white women. According to Naomi Zack, women of color experience patriarchy differently from white

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

women: “Many black women claimed that white racism was their primary problem: if they were treated badly by black men, they believed it was an effect of how black men were treated by both white men and white women; and if they were treated badly by white men, they were treated worse than white women were” (Zack 2005 p. 6). Miranda is the privileged patient for Dr. Franklin. His treatment triggers Semi’s jealousy: “but he talked to Miranda much more than he talked to me ... He hardly said anything to me about turning into a fish ... but the weird thing was, I felt jealous” (Halam 2002: p. 89).

Miranda’s personal strength relies on the privileges she is given and not on innate capacities. What is worth noting at this point is that these privileges are given by Dr. Franklin, himself a fallen person. Halam mimics Miranda’s naivety in believing that Dr. Franklin has great goals: “. . . there *is* a purpose in what happened to us? It’s not just crazy and cruel? [Dr. Franklin] talked about interplanetary travel. He said that was his goal ... but I thought she was totally deluded” (Ibid p. 142). Semi discovers that Miranda’s confidence in Dr. Franklin is irrational and that her ideas are ill-conceived. Like Prospero’s Miranda, Franklin’s Miranda has a blind confidence in science and its ability to change human conditions for the better.

At this point, Halam accuses science of depriving humanity of its instincts (the animal side within) in its search for a better human race. This theme has for long occupied writers and thinkers. For instance, in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), Wells questions the ability of science to tame wild nature. In *Dr. Franklin’s Island*, Halam goes further to present science as a means of depriving man of his humanity and making of him an animal. However, it should be noted that while by the late nineteenth century the animal traits within human nature were rejected, since the late twentieth century, animality within has been embraced. Semi at the very beginning of the novel sees

Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
***Dr. Franklin's Island* (2002)**

humans as animals. The children are aware of their position as human-animal adolescents in anthropocentric adult-governed societies. While awaiting the plane that will carry them to the Ecuadorian rain, Semi, in a clear foreshadowing of the children's imprisonment and treatment as animals by Franklin, compares the group of teens, including herself, to animals. In the airport, Semi imagines herself and her friends as if she is in a zoo:

I spotted a baby giraffe; a wolf cub; a slinky green-eyed lizard; a couple of pointynosed, mischievous young lemurs; a pouchy-faced boy ... who looked amazingly like a guinea pig. There was a sad girl who was like a baby seal—... There was an awkward, gangly boy ... who looked like a newborn wildebeest... But what kind of animal was I? I didn't know. (Ibid p. 5)

After their transformation into animals, the children seem content with their new hybrid identities.

Whereas Dr. Moreau uses the ethods of vivisection, Dr. Franklin utilizes genetic engineering to transform the children. Wells's Dr. Moreau explains that he performs his experiments because, "I wanted? It was the only thing I wanted? to find out the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape.... To this day I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter"(Ibid p. 56). In contrast, Franklin's aim is the creation of "a commercial proposition.... You take a pill, or a couple of injections.... You wake up in a five-star underwater hotel, on your ocean safari. Or on some kind of luxury cliffside flying lodge, on the wall. Spend two weeks exploring the deep ocean, or flying like a bird" (Ibid p. 171). Ethics is never mentioned; for Franklin, both human-animals and animal lives are meaningless as compared to his success, fame, and fortune. Rejected by his colleagues because of the immorality of his experiments, Franklin's wealth enables him to pursue his private research the aim of which is leisure.

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

His scientific experiments are intended to improve tourism so that leisure will be easily accessed. Both Semi the fish, Miranda the bird and Arnie the snake are a totally masculine creation; Dr. Franklin makes them up. However, this noble aim is lost and, in fact, his scientific advancement is not noticeably reducing the dark side of the human condition. Skinner says about Franklin's experiments: "He wants to study the psychological effects. Do you understand me? I'm warning you, he doesn't only want to change you, he wants to play games with you as well. *Do you understand me?* I don't know why but I think . . . in a way . . . that's what I really can't endure" (Ibid p. 71). One of the implications of Franklin's experiments is that they indicate his complete disregard for life and his lack of hesitation to experiment on humans. Franklin even sacrifices humans at the end of his experiments. This makes the interpretation of Franklin as an honest scientist difficult to ascertain. His dream of creating human-animals for entertainment purposes clearly indicates his consumerist biases. Franklin's bad treatment as well as his cruel experiments deceive Miranda's great expectations and urge her weak personal traits to come to the surface. The deception results in the appearance of Miranda's real shaken personality: "Miranda crouched over, with her head in her hands. She started rocking to and fro. I could see that she was shaking all over. I could hear her muttering, '*Freaks, freaks, freaks*'" (Ibid p. 108). In another instance, Miranda's self-confidence has fallen apart: "I'd seen Miranda break down, I'd seen her crying from fear and loneliness. But in all our trials, I'd never, never heard her talk like that before" (Ibid p. 154). Miranda's power is but a delusion.

This new perception of Miranda's fallen nature has affected both girls. It empowers Semi, as I will elaborate in the next section, while it drives Miranda to resort to tolerance. Elizabeth Spelman defines tolerance as follows: "to tolerate someone is simply to let her have her say; I needn't listen to her, I needn't

**Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)**

engage with her in any way at all. All I have to do is not interfere with her. Prior to and after I've allowed her to make her presence known, I can blot her out of my consciousness. It is as if I have simply imagined her being there" (Spelman: 1955: p. 82). Spelman argues that in order to embrace tolerance, white women should not just listen to coloured women but, more than that, they should provide them with their freedom. Coloured women should be able to take decisions for their personal problems. In *Dr. Franklin's Island*, Miranda has matured and reached this state of tolerance. After a long period of listening to each other, Miranda stops the oppressive treatment she exerted on Semi. She retreats from the scene leaving Semi to take decisions by herself. This marked the beginning of the second stage in their relationship. Semi reacts as follows: "I was alone, totally alone. Miranda had left me behind ... I seemed to hear ... the whisper of her human voice, fading away forever: *Exciting, Semi. Say it! Exciting . . . a great adventure . . .* (Ibid p. 158) Though Semi is very sorry when Miranda leaves her, she finds the freedom necessary for her to take decisions and be responsible for her life as I will explain in the following section.

5. Regaining Coloured Women's Status

Halam states that: "Relativism creeps in: nothing is fixed, the centre can be anywhere." (Halam 1999 p. 42) The present section, which focuses attention on the character of Semi, validates Halam's statement and shows that the centeredness of white women, as it has been shown above, is relative and power has shifted to colored women. To reach this aim, Halam traces Semi's metamorphosis from a weak and dependent person to a woman full of intelligence and prowess. After her journey on the island, Semi's personality develops to a more assertive and self-confident character; features that though deeply inserted within

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

her, could have never been discovered without the experiences she goes through on the island.

At the beginning of the novel, Semi is outfitted with feminine features that hinder her from being a self-independent and imposing person. Femininity denotes a range of characteristics and types of behaviour expected of women. These expectations, which vary from society to society and may even vary according to different groups within one society, are a construct of the society in which they circulate. However, despite such differences, these qualities are often defined stereotypically. Halam gives much importance to the feminine aspects when describing Semi's personality. For instance, women are said to concentrate on the details and not able to see things in general. Semi declares: "But I suppose I'm a typical nerd, good at the details, not very smart at seeing the larger picture."

Another feminine attribute that Halam presents as a barrier to interpersonal relationships is shyness. 'Shyness is defined as anxious self-preoccupation and behavioral inhibition in the presence of others because of anticipation of a negative evaluation by them.' (Bruch et al. 1998: 84) Bruch et al. further indicate that shy people have less friends than non-shy people, are more lonely and have less competence in initiating friendships. Bruch has also argued that it may be more appropriate for girls than it is for boys to be perceived as shy. (Bruch 2002: 1) Halam considers shyness as a feminine attribute. Semi declares that "[she is] shy. How [is she] going to survive for three weeks surrounded by total strangers? (Halam 2001: p. 6)" Shyness, in the case of Semi, proves to be a negative feature because it prevents her from communicating with the others: "... She smiled at me, and so did the baby owl. But oh no . . . My throat closed up. I simply *could not* speak. I can't talk to

**Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)**

strangers! I swerved off, and pretended I'd been heading for a nearby drinks machine". (Ibid p. 07)

According to Brush, 'shyness is related to negative self-referent thoughts, somatic arousal, and behavioral signs of anxiety during interactions with a stranger.' In many occasions, Halam shows that Semi's shyness hinders her from doing the right action in the right time. Semi comments: "As soon as I'd spoken, I wished I hadn't said that. I decided shy people shouldn't try to make conversation, not even in an emergency. If I manage to talk to strangers at all, nervousness always makes me say the wrong things. (Ibid p. 15)".

Shyness is associated with feelings of inadequacy and concern about negative evaluation. It may be linked to a third attribute which is physical attractiveness. Being physically attractive gives the individual more social advantages than unattractive persons. 'Attractive persons are presumed to be more warm, kind, sociable, intelligent, dominant, mentally healthy, and socially skilled than are less attractive persons.' (Bruch et al. 1998: 85) Semi is of Jamaican origins: "I told her about my great-grandmother's farm in Jamaica, which is the place I most love on earth; and my aunts, really my greataunts, who never got married and don't like children underfoot—which means that when we go there on holiday my brother and I run absolutely wild" (Halam 2001: p. 43). Thus, being physically different from the others may be the main reason behind Semi's feeling of unattractiveness which leads to her self-isolation. This makes of Semi a self-proclaimed outsider.

Moreover, another reason behind her feeling of shyness lies in her semi-sightedness, a physical disability that hinders her from seeing things as they really are:

"My God, Semi! It was *right by you!* Didn't you *see* it"? "She can't see anything much," said Arnie, who was standing there

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

laughing like an idiot. “She’s blind as a dozy bat, haven’t you noticed? Semi the semisighted!” I felt totally humiliated and ashamed. (Ibid pp. 28-29)

Another feminine characteristic that is attributed to Semi is crying. After Arnie’s humiliation, she runs away crying: “Suddenly, I couldn’t stand it. I couldn’t stand the whole thing, not for a minute longer. I ran away. I don’t know where I thought I was running to. I ran and hobbled and limped along the beach, until my knee gave way, and then I sat there, staring out to sea, crying. (Ibid p. 29)” Contrary to the previous attributes which are negative, Halam considers that crying in difficult situations is quiet normal: “In a really, really bad situation, most people will try not to break down. It’s instinct, and if you have any sense, you’ll let it guide you. But it’s also good, occasionally, to scream and burst into tears and get nasty, for a minute or two. It relieves the pressure (Ibid p. 30).” Crying is a positive quality because it reflects the person’s honesty. Semi’s inner feelings and outer behaviours are the same. Compared to Semi, Miranda conceals her weakness and her behaviour is not a reflection of her true emotions.

Although Semi’s feminine mannerisms are so prominent that they weaken her personality at the beginning of the novel, she is endowed with other positive qualities that foreshadow her strong personality which the reader discovers by the end of the novel. One of the signs of Semi’s innate power is revealed when a snake attacks the girls:

The snake came zipping after us. ... It looked big, about two meters long, and seemed as if it was out for our blood. Miranda screamed and screamed ... I grabbed the machete from the heap of newly gathered fuel, and I don’t know how I managed it, but I whacked away at the beast. I actually chopped it in half. (Ibid p. 28)

Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)

She spontaneously kills the snake, an action that entails an innate strength. At the same time Miranda's screaming is a sign of her weakness. Semi's powerful personality is unrealized until the end of the novel when she takes the lead of the events and rescues herself and her friends. This happens only after she has at last discovered Miranda's weak personality: "I felt so sorry for her ... Here in the white place, I could hear that she was trying to convince *herself*, inventing a pitiful fantasy as much for her own sake as for mine. Poor Miranda" (Ibid p. 111) Semi's approach to the situation is more realistic than Miranda's who prefers dreaming and providing unrealistic solutions to the problems: "I don't want to visit another planet," I said. "I don't care if it's impossible or not. I don't care if Dr. Franklin has built his own private spaceship. I just want to go home." (Ibid p. 111) Semi learns that there is no more 'Big Brother watching her'. She is able to cope with her problems, which need to be faced only individually. She realizes that she is not in need for great leaders to tell her what to do and to release her from responsibility for the consequences of her doings. This triggers the conclusion that Semi is quiet and shy with an undercover bravery of spirit; while Miranda is loud and jovial but truly a sensitive person. Semi and Miranda are different women with different opinions; however, they always have very interesting, fresh, new, and unique ideas to share and use.

6. Difference as Empowerment Pearson Carol S. declares that the mid-life transition helps the person to let go of the identities he/she spent half his/her life creating (his/her Ego identity), and to open up to a deeper, more authentic sense of Self. In the process, "we find we must let go of much of what we thought we were and recreate our lives" (Pearson 1991: p. 263). By the end of the novel, the three children have enacted a radical innate metamorphosis that has led to their consciousness-rising. Their

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

ability to reach balance denotes that the world's gender problems can be solved if tolerance is embraced. Significantly, at the beginning of the novel, the children were described as planet savers: "most of us identified by *Planet Savers* T-shirts, *Planet Savers* baseball caps, *Planet Savers* jackets, or at least *Planet Savers* lapel buttons (Halam 2001: p. 6)". Thus, their new identities can be enacted as models for how racial and gender relationships should be in a utopian world.

This section focuses on the ways in which the girls have discovered common points of interest that ultimately enable them to sidestep their differences. As we have noticed earlier, one of the most important words in the new lexicon of young female success is *girlpower*. Halam embodies this concept of girlpower which is highly significant in the image of Miranda as independent, successful, and self-inventing. Girlpower as a philosophy of 'DYI (do it yourself) and individual responsibility for social change lent itself easily to its transformation into a discourse of choice and focus on the self.' Both Semi and Miranda are presented as powerful and self-reliant persons.

The concept of "girlpower" endorses and values female friendships, even over and above the pressure to get (and bother about) boyfriends. Girl Power appeared to promise an all-female world of fun, sassiness, and dressing up to please your (girl) self." (Harris p. 34). In *Dr. Franklin's Island*, Semi and Miranda enjoy their time doing many activities for pleasure:

The time passed strangely easily. We watched films, we played games, we did fashion shows for each other, we plucked each other's eyebrows and painted each other's nails ... We found the microwave, and warmed up our pastries in the morning, so they were lovely and soft and gooey. (Halam 2001: pp. 89-90)

What we want to highlight from our discussion of these female characters is that Halam in fact acknowledges that women have

**Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)**

similar interests despite their different racial and class belongings.

Halam acknowledges the diversity of girls' lives, and the cultural dimension of that diversity. The girls in *Dr Franklin's Island* are the product of modernity. They have received a good deal of education which enables the loosening of the ties of tradition and thus gives them the possibility to come close to each other. As it has been argued in the previous section, Halam sustains diversity. Though of different genders, classes and races, the children successfully bridge the gaps that the patriarchal system has ingrained in them. The girls realize that their differences are a source of empowerment because they enable them to complement each other. Semi reflects: "Miranda is a high-flier, always striving to be the best, to get things right ... I'm more of a deep-swimmer, keener on things than people ... That's the way it seems to me, anyway. We're both strong, we're both weak, in our different ways" (Ibid pp. 156-157).

The two girls discover that they need each other: "Every day and every hour, I knew she was saving my life. And when Miranda needed me, when she broke down and cried, I was there. She wasn't always brave. She was just so much braver than me" (91). Miranda also expresses her conviction that their difference is the source of their empowerment: "'What are we?' I ask Miranda. 'Are we monsters? Or are we more than human?' She shakes her head. 'I don't know,' she says. 'You're you. I'm me. Let's go.'" (Ibid p. 199). The time the girls spend together enables them to chat lengthy conversations which help them see into their own depths. Honest dialogue in a safe space is a good method Semi and Miranda use to understand each other and thus sidestep their differences. Speaking out one's voice allows the negotiation of social parameters between Semi and Miranda, the

Zohra LAMECHE, Hacene Benmechiche

reconstruction of experiences of disappointment and, finally the resistance of the fear and trauma that patriarchal forces have ingrained as normal.

7. Conclusion

In summary, the current study posited the issue of the subversion of stereotypical gender and racial relations in Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* as its main concern. It revealed how the friendship of the two girls, Miranda and Semi, went through two distinctive stages that manifest clearly the progress of British feminist thought throughout the late twentieth century and up to the opening years of the new millennium. The first stage epitomizes the traditional self/other relation. Miranda appears first as a representative of privileged white middle class women who imposes her control over Semi, the socially disadvantaged and colored girl. Through this relationship of dominance/submission, Ann Halam voices her critique of main stream second wave feminist discourse which erases difference and silences the other to protect the dominant self. However, as my analysis revealed, Miranda and Semi's relationship witnessed a progressive change. Both teenagers experienced a process of consciousness raising. They enacted a radical innate metamorphosis that shaped a more mature relationship between them, a relationship based on bridging the divide between the self and the other. This decisive shift in Miranda/Semi's bond is emblematic of the revolutionary move in British feminist discourse towards a non-essentialist, non-judgmental and more egalitarian vision. The two girls are the very representatives of the young generation that generated and lead the third wave. They endorse its central principles of diversity, self-empowerment, tolerance and pluralism. The two friends were able to create a sense of unity across difference. They develop a belief that difference and equality are not mutually exclusive. Thus, Ann Halam's novel celebrates difference as a source of

Challenging Main Stream Feminist Thought in Ann Halam's
Dr. Franklin's Island (2002)

empowerment, a unifying rather than a dividing force that could lead to a more democratic feminist future.

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