Extended Abstract

Gendered Modernity and the Aesthetics of Everyday Life in Zoya Pirzad's *I'll Turn Off the Lights*

Introduction

Feminist aesthetics has emerged as an important field of contemporary literary and cultural criticism by questioning supposedly universal criteria of beauty, artistic authority, and aesthetic value. From this perspective, aesthetic experience is not regarded as a neutral or universal category but as one shaped by historically, socially, and gendered relations. Conventional aesthetic paradigms have frequently privileged heroic figures, grand narratives, extraordinary events, and public forms of action, thereby marginalizing dimensions of women's lived experience such as domestic life, everyday routines, affect, embodiment, silence, hesitation, and care work. Accordingly, everyday life can be understood not as a neutral background to human existence but as a significant site where power relations, gender norms, subject formation, and subtle forms of resistance are produced and negotiated.

Rita Felski's concept of "gendered modernity" offers a particularly productive framework for examining these processes. Felski challenges accounts of modernity that define it primarily through public institutions, rationality, progress, and historically significant events. Instead, she argues that women's experience of modernity can also be traced through the accumulated practices of everyday life and the organization of domestic experience. From this perspective, repetition, domestic labor, embodiment, affect, and ordinary routines are not merely private or insignificant matters; rather, they constitute important sites of subject formation and social negotiation.

Zoya Pirzad's novel *I'll Turn Off the Lights* provides a particularly appropriate literary context for examining these questions. Rather than relying on dramatic events or spectacular conflicts, Pirzad constructs much of the narrative through the apparently ordinary experiences of Clarisse, a middle-class Armenian-Iranian woman whose daily life revolves around household responsibilities, childcare, emotional management, interpersonal relationships, and domestic routines. The novel's sustained attention to apparently insignificant details transforms everyday life into a meaningful narrative and aesthetic space. The present study therefore examines how Pirzad represents gendered modernity through the aesthetics of everyday life and how everyday domestic experience becomes a site for the formation of female subjectivity, embodied awareness, affective experience, and subtle resistance.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method within a feminist post-phenomenological approach. The analysis is based on a close reading of *I'll Turn Off the Lights* through the theoretical framework of Rita Felski, particularly her discussions of gendered modernity, everyday life, domesticity, repetition, embodiment, affect, and female subjectivity. The study also draws selectively on related concepts from feminist scholarship and theories of everyday life in order to clarify dimensions of the novel that cannot be fully explained through a single theoretical perspective.

The analysis focuses primarily on four interconnected dimensions: the female body as a site of social regulation and embodied experience; cyclical temporality and the repetitive structure of domestic life; invisible labor, cognitive labor, and emotional labor; and everyday negotiation, sensory experience, and small-scale aesthetic creativity. These dimensions are examined through specific narrative situations and textual details in order to ensure that the theoretical framework functions as an interpretive instrument rather than as an independent theoretical exposition detached from the literary text.

Results and Discussion

The findings demonstrate that *I'll Turn Off the Lights* transforms everyday life from a seemingly neutral background into a central site for the production of meaning, power relations, and female subjectivity. One of the most significant dimensions of this process is the representation of the female body. Clarisse's body is repeatedly involved in cooking, cleaning, organizing the household, caring for family members, and responding to the needs of others. Her body therefore functions simultaneously as a working body, a socially regulated body, an affective body, and a body that carries emotional memory. Descriptions of clothing, physical appearance, skin, hands, and bodily sensations demonstrate how social expectations become internalized and transformed into self-surveillance. The female body is consequently not merely a physical presence in the narrative but a major medium through which gendered norms and everyday power relations are experienced.

A second major finding concerns the cyclical temporality of domestic life. The novel repeatedly foregrounds the recurrence of meals, cleaning, arranging the household, caring for children, and other routine activities. Clarisse's question about how many times she has prepared breakfast, lunch, or dinner exemplifies her awareness of a time that seems to return endlessly rather than progress toward a clearly defined goal. This cyclical temporality contrasts with the linear and progress-oriented conception of modernity traditionally associated with the public sphere. In Felski's framework, such repetition is deeply gendered because women's everyday existence is frequently organized around the continuous reproduction of life. Pirzad's narrative makes this temporal structure visible and thereby reveals the psychological and physical exhaustion embedded in repetitive domestic responsibility.

The third finding concerns invisible labor and the cognitive and emotional dimensions of domestic responsibility. Clarisse's domestic role extends beyond the performance of physical tasks. She constantly anticipates the needs of family members, remembers unfinished tasks, plans future activities, manages interpersonal tensions, and attempts to preserve emotional equilibrium within the household. Her exhaustion is therefore not simply the result of physical labor but emerges from the continuous mental and emotional involvement required to organize the lives of others. The novel thus renders visible forms of labor that are frequently naturalized as an inherent part of femininity. In this respect, the narrative connects everyday domestic practices with broader structures of gender inequality.

The fourth dimension of the findings concerns power relations and everyday negotiation. The novel does not primarily represent gendered power through spectacular confrontations or overt political conflict. Instead, power is negotiated through conversations, silences, reminders, sarcasm, complaints, bodily positioning, and small acts of disagreement. Clarisse's interactions with Artush demonstrate that her agency does not necessarily take the form of a complete rejection of the family structure. Rather, she negotiates her position within that structure. Her resistance can therefore be understood as gradual, relational, and situated in everyday life. Her

internal dialogue, self-censorship, indirect criticism, and occasional direct confrontation reveal the tension between social expectations and individual desire.

Finally, the study demonstrates that everyday life in the novel is not exclusively represented as a site of oppression, exhaustion, and repetition. It also contains possibilities for aesthetic experience, self-recognition, and positive forms of agency. Clarisse's sensitivity to flowers, colors, light, textures, clothing, household objects, and spatial arrangements reveals an aesthetic relationship with the material environment. Her embroidery, gift wrapping, arrangement of decorative objects, and creation of a distinctive kitchen space constitute forms of small-scale creativity through which she inscribes aspects of her individuality into the domestic environment. These practices do not necessarily overturn the gendered structure of the household, but they enable her to preserve a sense of self and to transform an apparently functional space into a personal and emotionally meaningful environment.

In this study, the term "sensory materialism" is used as an interpretive concept rather than as a term directly attributed to Felski. Similarly, "positive resistance" is employed as an analytical term developed by the researcher to describe forms of agency that operate through aesthetic creation, spatial organization, and the preservation of a personal sphere. These distinctions clarify the relationship between Felski's theoretical framework and the additional analytical vocabulary employed in the study.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that *I'll Turn Off the Lights* can be read as a significant literary representation of gendered modernity in contemporary Iranian literature. Pirzad's narrative shifts the aesthetic and political significance of everyday life from the margins of experience to its center. Through repetition, domestic routines, embodiment, affect, care, and sensory engagement with material surroundings, the novel reveals how female subjectivity is formed within the apparently ordinary structures of domestic life.

The study shows, first, that cyclical temporality represents a distinctly gendered experience of time in which everyday life is organized around repetition and the continuous reproduction of family life. Second, Clarisse's body functions simultaneously as an object of social regulation and as a medium of sensory and emotional awareness. Third, the representation of invisible labor, cognitive labor, and emotional labor reveals the hidden costs of maintaining domestic and affective stability. Fourth, female agency emerges not primarily through heroic rebellion but through everyday negotiation, silence, criticism, boundary-setting, and small acts of resistance. Finally, aesthetic sensitivity and domestic creativity enable Clarisse to preserve and reconstruct a sense of individuality within a restrictive environment.

Consequently, the novel challenges the conventional opposition between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of politics. The domestic space is simultaneously a site of gendered reproduction and a potential space for critical awareness, self-recognition, aesthetic experience, and everyday agency. From this perspective, Pirzad's novel demonstrates that modernity can be experienced not only through public transformation and historical progress but also through the subtle reorganization of everyday life. The aesthetics of everyday life thus becomes a means through which the novel renders women's seemingly ordinary experiences visible as meaningful forms of social, emotional, embodied, and aesthetic existence.

Keywords

Gendered Modernity; Aesthetics of Everyday Life; Feminist Aesthetics; Rita Felski; Female Subjectivity; Everyday Life; *I'll Turn Off the Lights*; Zoya Pirzad.

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