

ENGLISH HONORS THESIS

**THE GIFT OF AN EDUCATION: AGENCY IN WOMEN'S  
AWARD-WINNING MEMOIRS**

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### Abstract

This paper investigates memoir writing as a catalyst to future success and achievement as well as a documented literary artifact of one's ambitious triumphs. In Malala Yousafzai's debut memoir, *I Am Malala*, the author discusses the perpetually powerful ignition of her mind and how that led her to her quality education and second chance at life. Similarly, Tara Westover hails from her religious community and explores the agencies of poignant self-determination and authentic authorship in *Educated*. These women hold significance in their subjugations in that they tore down the walls of marginalization and an unattainable education as well as they created literature that shows valuable transcontinental change. Therefore, through a comparative close reading of the way in which Yousafzai and Westover defy the denial of education from their respective religious communities, this article argues that both women subvert expectations by firstly, pursuing their education and secondly, recording it in their life narratives of education. In writing about their experiences, both women exemplify how they use life writing to assert their agency through the dissemination of their stories, and encourage other women similarly oppressed by patriarchy. Despite facing multiple forms of liminality, they strongly disregarded the inaccessibility of their education and persevered. This ultimately led to their global success and achievement as articulate and capable women who continue to thrive instead of merely existing and remaining stagnant in an ever-changing world, all by inspiring others to create their own autobiographies.

*Keywords:* Memoir theory, authorship, agencies of autobiography, liminality, women's right to education

### **The Gift of An Education: Agency in Women's Award-Winning Memoirs**

The accomplished writers of two women's education life narratives, Malala Yousafzai and Tara Westover, assert themselves through self-determination and self-identification as forms of agencies that increased the authority in their own writing of an autobiography. There is a significant idea that their memoirs are acting as the surface level to their limitless education, and by sharing this, it has influenced others to create their own autobiographies and be confident with the outcome of that version of themselves. I argue how these authors who happen to be women, found themselves in their memoir writing through the main form of agency, being self-determined and unstoppable. This is valuable and profoundly matters for they have influenced others to do the same, in a contemporary version and with paratextuality. Their sheer and utter brilliance of the use of first-person point of view is found to be didactic, and as females with these empowering stories, they continuously change the entire patriarchal discourse through feminist critique.

It is the distinctness of their individual stories that is captivating to readers and ideally classifies them as the fiercest and most deserving writers of the modern world of literature. Westover flees a home so grounded, where her father is stubbornly one track minded, and where if you have any injury or sickness, you cure it remedially through a natural medicinal. Yousafzai grew up with loving parents living a fragile life and brought their daughter to school every day so that she could learn and flourish in the world, and so she refused to limit herself and bow down to the violent authority of the Taliban. The social conflicts and opportunities that both women found, was the groundbreaking to their escapes from old predicaments and home lives, and upon their observations of the societies surrounding them, they chose to defy all odds, rise above, and fight for their quality and premium educations. These women speak of the same God,

but how incredibly fascinating it was to discover that their journeys to achievement were the battle between God versus man contextually spoken by Yousafzai, and God versus nature by Westover. Finding the truest versions of themselves in this way is undoubtedly influential, and their messages serve others in ways where it can be so relative in certain aspects, and yet so opposite in others.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson lay the foreground as well as they set the bar for interpreting life narratives at best. A mirroring and parallel aspect to Yousafzai's and Westover's memoirs, is exactly how much gained agency is found throughout their narratives. These scholars' question, "How is this 'writing back', this changing of the terms of one's representation, a strategy for gaining agency? How might they gain agency through the very choice of life writing practices, many of which have the potential to intervene in existing social and political formations?" (Smith and Watson 235). Continuing in the form of a question, they ask deliberately to make the point of how these two women create a brand-new lens of breaking free of those barriers. "That is, are there strategic means of writing through the narratives?" (Smith and Watson 236). In essence, the central focal point to both authors and their gained agencies, is that the quest to having their voice heard was met, and this gained them a confidence that soared past patriarchy and prohibition of their religious institutions, even their governments.

In a following thought-provoking chapter of the memoir theorists entitled "In the Wake of the Memoir Boom", and according to the theorization regarding postcolonial ambiguity, "As writers deploying the form test its limits, probe its ambiguities, reject its humanist norms, and intervene in the state of violence it implicates, the postcolonial coming-of-age story becomes a sight of both reproduction of the individualist plot of development and the interruption of its troubling norms" (Smith et al. 129). This clearly states how open-minded the narrator must be in

order to convey at best the ambiguities of marginalization. Moreover, if the narrator conveys these implications, it will be evident enough for readers of the memoir to see. They certainly succeed in illuminating the lens of authorship and how it earned them authority in the world, in more than just the sense of an icon, but a powerful woman infamous for refusing to remain marginalized.

Moreover, both authors served their audiences with employed strategy, by means of getting to the point where they completely know themselves as writers and as women, and their incorporations of intertextuality and paratextuality were the smartest literary tactics used. This notion exceeds beyond the typical boundaries of ordinary women writing a rudimentary autobiography, these authors are remarking their survivals and triumphs with complexity, that they both believe in their own stylistic approaches, that it was the grace of God that has blessed them into the present. While these remain possibilities to their asserted agencies, it is an important reminder that they found themselves through writing their memoirs and their agency impresses readers and audiences with extraordinary creativity. Ultimately, they document their pilgrimages in way that executes intelligence and self-determination in their authorship and even more so as women. There is a praiseworthy concept, and that is how feminist theory interweaves finely into the area of these author's special ability to present the lens of possibility of changing their country's entire inhabited discourse. There is a multitude of reasons for defying the denial of their own education, however their one profound reason is that they are women.

### **Cultural Nationalism and the Right to Education**

In the second chapter of *Hypatia*, "The Dilemma: Nationalism vs. Feminism", in the Review of Women and Autobiography, Susan Babbitt elaborates "This family analogy, which is

adopted to bolster the impression that the nation is as ‘natural’ as the biological family, also ‘naturalizes’ the social hierarchy based on the subordination of women and children” (Babbitt 136). The overall structure of their self-narratives yields different conclusions, and their national affirmations varied, which is what makes them perceivably unique. It was never about leaving her family behind for Yousafzai, however it was about spreading her wings and flying. It was possible that she was called to action by a higher spiritual and religious force that resulted in her embedding her place in the larger collective of society.

Furthermore, her purpose was served as she received an education and inspired change amongst the Muslim fundamentalists, some of whom did not want women to be educated. The subjugated status of Third World women, in turn, is often the most fought-for battleground nationalism and although it is one of the proofs of the Third World culture's backwardness, it “becomes the symbol of ‘authentic’ national identity for nationalists that therefore must be maintained or restored” (Babbitt 136). In terms of how nationalism holds much susceptibility, the longer these women were to have waited in their patriarchal and religious dominating environments, the more static they were to remain. Nevertheless, their growth in the aftermath of defying their individual denials to experience an education, is visible throughout the lines of their autobiographies.

### **Review of Autobiographical Transitions**

As a literary form, memoir has the ability to showcase one’s personalized human experience. Yousafzai and Westover’s texts serve as a testament, that through determination and perseverance all is possible if you just believe. What becomes of them are representations of a voice being heard, a mind being considered, and a change moving in the righteous direction.

They have both spoken out and have transitioned from their individual backgrounds as they sent out an invitation to those who also have the potential to write a memoir. Their obstacles and challenges only ignited and fortified them into becoming the best version of themselves and reaching the realm of the highest self. Compelling literature should be remarked upon the future generations to come; and while they uphold this form of literature, they continue to lead by example which allows others to come up with interpretations of their own human experience.

Their narratives act as cultural artifacts because what they created has spoken for itself, and representation of a certain background, nation, or country has become monotonous in the sense that they left their hometowns and branched out, all for the greater good. Without their education they would not have produced such memorable literature, for it is experience that is the greatest teacher of all, and they were yearning to experience so similarly, despite their separate and derived nations and cultures. Moreover, they authentically produced their own work and utilized their own voice, not an echo of other people in addition to succeeding in captivating their audiences with their cultural and religious allegories.

Jason Breiter's *Introduction: Auto/Biography in Transit* is a dynamic and appealing article. He explains that creation is derivative of imagination; so simplistically, what you imagine in your mind is what can become tangibly creative. Their narratives are not only procedural and tailored from a literary standpoint, but they are also aesthetic of their cultures, they painted the canvas, they showed audiences what the major picture was in their lives thus far, and at that stage. He continues elaborating "Those in the first section all address the status of the document as a technology of the self, or think about how the study of life writing, and it's objects of enquiry, are themselves in transit and have the potential to change our ideas about the field

itself” (Breiter 6). Without their education, they could not write their memoirs to their greatest potential and maximum capacities.

Upon unveiling how photographs play a significant role in autobiographies, author Timothy Adams claims, “At first there seems to be something irrefutable about the idea that the presence of photographs within a text constitutes a clear distinction between life writing and other genres. Although novelists have frequently resorted to the visual for asserting a sort of fictive referentiality” (Adams 464). It is quite artistically intriguing and even cryptic how Westover’s designed book cover is a girl standing on top of a mountain watching birds fly around in the sky; it also revealed how she flew away and soared in academics and a life aside from the life her parents expected her to live. Referencing fictitious people is a tactic used by the authors in order to preserve the rights and privacy of others, especially significant people or relatives in the author’s life.

Furthermore, Adams evaluates how life writing and photography share commonalities, and that this amplifies the autobiography and satisfies readers by stating “Autobiography is a form of narrative characterized by a desire both to reveal and to conceal, an attempt at reconciling a life with a self, and as a result its power comes from the paradoxes I have been discussing throughout this essay, the indeterminacy of its sense of reference to the world” (Adams 492). The enthralling idea of self-reconciliation is found in both women's text, and it is also found consistently throughout. There is validation from the authors that their strength is unparalleled to other memoirists, and their narratives contained bold and courageous moves on both authors' parts. They are dovetailed in the sense that both authors discover their place in the world as well as reach the very core of themselves. A similarity between Yousafzai and Westover are the incorporated photographs in color print of nature, family, or even school. The



descriptive imagery of their surroundings was depicted in ways that made them create a cinematic-like memoir, where audiences gave undivided attention to their reading. This is just one of a multitude of suggestions for how others can provide that same ambience with their readers.

Memoirs containing narrative plots and modes thus structure the self-narrative; this is extraordinarily applicable with Westover and Yousafzai. With works that show a story of developing in the social world, these two women pertain confessions of their own self-examinations by means of having a journal nearby and documenting events as they are happening. This seemingly an intelligent tactic in the process of writing their autobiographies. Westover uniquely showed her coming into an artistic self-consciousness using syntax that picked apart each individualized milestone scene. Over the course of the narrative, it is intriguing to see that as each milestone is told, she is gradually growing and becoming into her own adulthood.

The social issues that came into existence were merely a defense mechanism coming from other students and fellow peers to hinder their achievements, by bringing them down in such a way that they no longer wanted to be a part of their own backgrounds, not out of disrespect of their home and families, but out of perseverance, brought about by a higher force of nature. These women's autobiographical transitions were based on the abundance of influential paratextuality and because they transitioned, is a main purpose to how they can lead others to seek the transitioning of their own life. The profoundness of naturalistic language and spirituality is introduced once Westover already reaches college; her embodiments of strength brought about by growing in a certain environment at school in Utah and defines her metamorphosis.

Westover's use of references to nature shouts metamorphosis caused by a higher spiritual level. Given the realm of spirituality that she speaks of, there is at times digression, such as her tone switching from passive to transgressive. She rectifies herself and gradually throughout the text gains agency in her writing, making this metamorphosis impactful, because it pays homage to other's documented life transitions, for it may be a relatable one. There is a fine match with these two women authors and their self-sufficient agencies, that can be identified as an exemplary autobiography. This is how their exuded influence grants someone else the potential to write with as much self-sufficiency in their own autobiography one day.

### **Tropes of Liminality in Memoirs**

It is prevalent to see the thematic tropes of these women and experiences of liminality in Margaret Willard-Traub's review of *Rhetoric of Gender and Ethnicity in Scholarly Memoir*. According to Willard-Traub, "The ways in which aspects of identity like ethnicity and gender are represented within the reflective texts I consider here—as contingent and complex, (...) interpersonal, historical, and social contexts surrounding them—help to define scholarly memoir as a material genre" (Willard-Traub 512). The author thoroughly explains how the Cuban American anthropologist Ruth Behar breaks down the multiplicity of her own writing self, alike to Yousafzai and Westover do. "Identifying herself as storyteller, anthropologist, and daughter, she not only writes about her parents and how her relationship with them has affected her professional life: her parents are also inscribed as one of the audiences for her writing" (Willard-Traub 513). Ultimately, the critical aspect to this self-reflexive and shadowed biographical context is that the anthropologist was the ultimate storyteller of her and her parents' relationship, and is crucial to take into deep consideration their stories and how they fortified themselves

through education and literacy to document that journey to the quality of education they so deserved.

For example, Yousafzai ultimately achieved her destiny, in that their cultural stereotypes were not complications to her apprenticeship because authorities in the United Kingdom understood well that no one should have to risk being shot in order to receive an education. The people she was the most concerned for were her peers from school, and her mission was to take them out of the horrible state they were in. Westover attended was an American institution in contemporary time that did not contain any such cultural stereotypes that would chastise her right to an education, only the faced challenges of being intelligent enough. Nevertheless, it was the aspect of alienation that Westover has stated that was the initial narrative confession of her self-examination. The stereotype that she was afraid of being condemned over was her upbringing and her home life. While she was educated and influenced to keep trying her best, there were weights on her shoulders as she so vividly shares due to the fear of being socially and academically accepted and efficient enough. This is relatable with others and of the young generation, and their yearning to tell their own story and release that out into the world is exactly what these two women served by releasing theirs. Both authors' texts were fascinating by means of their adamant tones of honoring their education as well as how their documented journeys were curated in the form of a memoir; these women who are in religious communities are denied their education because of their gender.

### **Interpretations of Pain Within Memoirs**

Encompassing the family history and dynamics to both authors' memoirs is how Yousafzai's family supported and encouraged her to be the greatest version of herself that she

could become. There is a significant variation to that over Westover's family who took a few steps back and alienated her. The fact that she was homeschooled became a red flag to institutions; Westover had to deal with the emotional struggles of being re-alienated on her journey of higher educational learning. However, when the tables turned and her family treated her as her feared state of mind and predicament, it only empowered her to rise above that familial circumstance. "This author sees a danger in over-celebrating the performative tactics of resistance associated with ideals such as hybridity and nomadism and suggests that we remember the pain involved in migration" (Hogarth 172). Westover's entire life trajectory changes, and given the ideals that Hogarth reiterates from Madelaine Hron about hybridity and nomadism, it compliments Westover's themes of such. This is quite a remarkable detail that can be a subject division with potential to be discussed in college English composition courses, if these two memoirs were chosen texts on a syllabus. Westover epitomized and paved the way for others to tell stories of wanderlust and the discovery of oneself, which can be found in written agency.

A necessary aspect of remembering pain from immigration in Yousafzai's instance is translating that pain from mind to paper. To be able to write her feelings is one form, and it is so in the style of a journal. "However, since, as Benjamin said, 'to translate is to transform', the interpretation of pain will depend on the reaction of the writer's target audience, providing a challenge to us as interpreters, as we must choose how to approach these expressions of pain conscientiously" (Hogarth 172). A valuable point to take away from was her ability to document the sociopolitical and economic disputes at that time, while expressing the depth of her pain and angst is incredibly talented; once again this was all given the allowance of an education at peace that she received. The nations and societies that read either Yousafzai or Westover's memoirs will find that pain is certainly transitional, however it is stylistically and didactically transitional

as well. Some will relate to either or text, while some will only criticize it for its major addressed issues such as administration and women as the weaker, more vulnerable human being, although Yousafzai and Westover insisted on how they did not have to remain that way.

### **Overcome Obstacles of Marginalization**

Westover's overall educational development varied from Yousafzai in the sense that they thrived in two different countries. It was never about leaving her family behind for Yousafzai, however it was about spreading her wings and flying. It was possible that she was called to action by a higher spiritual and religious force that resulted in her embedding her place in the larger collective of society. Upon discovering the astonishing idea that her narrative shifted from mere thoughts into action, Yousafzai also skillfully shifted the narrative from a cultural one to a historical one. It was quite recognizable that she claimed her own country as the alternative diverse, then she praised her new location of receiving her education as dominantly cultural. Similarly, to Yousafzai, Westover also delivered audiences and readers the full package of establishing their own destinies, and traveling the road less traveled on; by producing their own authentic minds and writing personal narratives that capture their memories that ignited them to change. Their memoirs are ever deserving of acclimation not only for their achievement in writing their story, but distinctly for the social and political pillars they have approached resolution in that transcended the way audiences peacefully perceive their own society and country.

This becomes validation for others to write and share their own stories, voicing their life purpose, and influencing others that their voice also matters, as well as it showcases literature as valuable for its transcontinental change. The imperative analysis of the usage of self-examination

as a form of agency in Westover's memoir, it was the aspect of alienation that she stated was the initial narrative confession. Her self-writing was allegorically a shield, representing protection from the outside world's condemnations and stereotypes of her strict Mormon upbringing and past home life. While she was educated and encouraged to keep trying her best, there were weights on her shoulders as she so vividly shares due to the fear of being socially and academically accepted and efficient enough. To elaborate further, Yousafzai's family supported and encouraged her to be the very best version of herself that she could become. There is a significant variation to that of Westover's family who took a few steps back and alienated her. As she was raised, the fact that she was homeschooled became a red flag to institutions; Westover had to deal with the emotional struggles of being re-alienated, thus fearing that she would remain alienated into her journey of higher educational learning.

### **Yousafzai's Agency of Self-Determination**

There is a critical point to be made about Yousafzai's memoir and her increased mobility and access to education. The incredibly articulate excerpt named "Between Life and Death" exhibits something pivotal that she writes in her original language, then directly beneath that it reads in translated English: "Guns of darkness! Why would I not curse you? You turned love-filled homes into broken debris" (Yousafzai 243). This completely and gracefully validates her voice bursting through like beaming sunrays through the ominous clouds of conventional literature. This short yet significant excerpt projects her subliminal reference to the Taliban as well as it showcases her incredible ability to allegorically contextualize her true feelings. *I Am Malala* has now become a significantly showcased memoir, for her fierceness is unparalleled to other memoir writers, as well as her immobility and inaccessibility to education were catalysts to

her determination and perseverance as she faced a near death, to stand up for the right to a quality education.

On the topic of non-radical models of female subjectivity, Hesford elaborates exactly how Yousafzai's act of bravery has majorly benefitted the youthful and future generation: "In becoming a symbol for Pakistan moderates, Malala Yousafzai has also become a symbol for the West—a symbol for democratic maturation and the rationality of rights. Speaking to a group of American Girl Scouts, then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton characterized Malala as 'very brave in standing up for the rights of girls'" (Hesford 140). An act of bravery is what she was commended for, and that act of bravery was included in this memoir; in such a way that it has been passed down to the next generation in the form of literacy, that also holds historical value. The fact that young girls were able to read her memoir and see the story unfold and be able to look at pictures along the way is the transfiguration of this piece of literature, becoming a best-selling memoir that has been made famous throughout the globe.

Hesford continues to eloquently state that "Malala's advocacy for educational rights carries her safely into the folds of Western liberalism (...) the assassination attempts also fueled narratives about the attack as an assault on childhood innocence and the logic of futurism" (Hesford 140). The author continues to explain how cultural nationalism transcends in literature over time and that aspect of logic in the futurism of literature and the openness to public premier education indicates that there is a will and a drive by the prospective student. Audiences will thus come to understand then how there should never be a dangerous military organization hovering over their rights. Yousafzai provides audiences with a distinctness in her suffrage, that became the epitome of realness.

While her injury from the Taliban was traumatic, it was anything but dramatized. This was by far one of the realest depictions of coming to a near death and recovering to the point where she not only experienced a physical transformation, but an intellectual transformation. She believed in herself enough despite their horrendous acts, and she celebrates the fact that she was able to leave her home to live anywhere in the world except there. It is to insist that Yousafzai wanted to have an education of course herself, yet so much more than this, she wanted other women and men to have the same opportunity in life. “I still presumed that the reason they weren’t with me was because my father didn’t have the money to pay for my treatment. That’s why he was still in Pakistan, to sell our land in the village and our school. But our land was small, and I knew our school buildings and our house were rented, so what could he sell? Perhaps he was asking rich people for a loan.” (Yousafzai 279). She made an affirmative argument that the Taliban were to have reign over no one, especially her.

There is a proliferation of acute insight and sharp observations that ultimately declares Yousafzai as determined. While it is not simplistic enough to transform the habitual norms into a new world, she transforms her thought process and her way of thinking of becoming conscious of something bold: stepping outside of a comfort zone into new territory. The violence seemed ever gruesome, yet the author acknowledges the fact that the Taliban were unfortunately so superior and powerfully above the people of her land. “One of those visitors was major general head of military operations and swat. There is good news coming from the UK, he told my father. We are very happy our daughter has survived. He said our because now I was seen as the daughter of the nation” (Yousafzai 279). She never once agreed that they belonged virally spreading tyranny or violence to the degree that they had, however she provides an abundance of thorough explanation of the powers that be. To be able to flee family and friends must acquire an



enormous amount of ambition and a purpose to depart. There are remarkable aspects of self-intervention even the forgiveness of self, once she arrives in the United Kingdom; and is of course best depicted in her memoir.

The speaker's greatest aspect of this memoir is how she juxtaposes her life from her native land into a new and anticipated environment that she has never been exposed to before, and her descriptive syntax yields how she does not dread it, yet rather falls in love with it. The amount of determination it takes to move away from a relative as close to her as her sister and to have prior knowledge of her sister's vulnerability and fragility in life, is overcoming all trials and tribulations of herself, knowing that she may be better off not abandoning her, but making her own path and fulfilling her own wishes in the life. "Though we loved school, we hadn't realized how important education was until the Taliban tried to stop us. Going to school, reading and doing our homework wasn't just a way of passing time, it was our future" (Yousafzai 146). She does not take a single day for granted, and this is ever-present throughout the course of the autobiographical text. Fundamentally what is to be comprehended going from Pakistan into a sovereign country such as the United Kingdom, is the severity of the war from her place of origin. She might uphold the utmost amount of respect and civility, yet from the text it seemed as if a new home and a new chance to be educated in a different environment was a gift presented to her after her critical injury. So it is in essence that her depiction of herself going from the hospital to that predicament is classified as healing as the form of agency within her memoir.

In recent discussions of conflict in Western and Southern Asia pertaining specifically to the Taliban, a controversial issue has been whether children should be the targets ever again. On the one hand, some argue that children are held in the highest regard to all groups, yet they are held as child-soldiers, on the other hand with this group. From this perspective, it is

indecipherable how the children that are made soldiers to the Taliban and how those factors into the main principles of Yousafzai's text. The tones of God and religion create a sense of inclusiveness to others of this faith and allures them into reading and comprehending the depth of this memoir. Then I'd pray. At night I used to pray a lot. The Taliban think we are not Muslim, but we are. We believe in God more than they do and we trust him to protect us" (Yousafzai 237). Certainly, the text holds an unbelievable amount of serious and heavy-hearted tones. On the other hand, however, others argue that it is a memoir about pilgrimage. By living in fear in her own country, it made it apparent to see how she would never acclimate. Instead, she rested in a free and sovereign country, where the sky is the limit as to what she can learn, think, create, and speak about. Moreover, this is imperative to take away from her feelings and beliefs in terms of how Islam verifies not only that she is Muslim, but that despite how the Taliban claims to be, her faith is more inclusive than the Taliban's. She has since gracefully passed along the torch of inclusiveness to her peers and people who have collaborated with her on her online bulletin. This completely verifies that if one's memoir agency is strengthened as Yousafzai's, they can go on to enhance the future literary discourse.

### **Denial of Education by One's Own Government**

There is power in the way Yousafzai advocates for herself, in addition to the extreme forwarding of the Taliban's denial of education to women such as her peers. There was an outstanding critical moment in her story that majorly indicated how excessively powerful the Taliban was. "At regular intervals along the road we passed army and Taliban checkpoints side-by-side. Once again, the army was seemingly unaware of the Taliban's presence (...) usually car journeys are an adventure for us children, as we rarely go anywhere. But this was different.

Everyone was depressed” (Yousafzai 179). This ignited Yousafzai’s fuel to see how her own people were held captive, and she denied this forceful authority that denied her literacy and education.

It is a critical focal point as well to address that the socio-political burdens were not just a limitation to Muslim women, it was a limitation to people in the country of Pakistan and outlying countries, regardless of creed. In her chapter of “The Valley of Sorrows”, she discusses how her and two other girlfriends learned about journalism from a British organization. “I had become interested in journalism after seeing how my words could make a difference and also from watching the ugly Betty DVDs about life at an American magazine” (Yousafzai 199). It was the striving to be like the American journalist, that captured Yousafzai, only she set the bar so much higher for herself and achieved her own innovative style of journalism gracefully. While her pivotal journey showed a great deal of courage and fidelity to refusing to be put down or put in a corner, that ended up liberating other women close to her back in Pakistan to voice their own stories through Yousafzai’s social media bulletin titled *Podium*. This online website is a digital blog that anyone from around the world can access. The establishments as well as the incorporations of her social media platforms and accessibility to a digital bulletin of blogs, shows the continuity in her hard work and strength, all in which derived from her life changing experience of refusing to be just another controlled and limited Pakistani girl.

In essence, her metamorphosis from girl to a woman is one for the ages, and iconic to share the literacy of in secondary or even post- secondary college level English composition courses. Referring to the agency Yousafzai delivers to her readers in *I Am Malala*, it significantly addresses her status of being unheard of and simply in the shadows, to an astonishingly privileged and ever-deserving place in the world. Author Anne Meade Stockdell-Giesler explains

in *Agency in the Margin's Stories of Outsider Rhetoric*, “The common thread in each essay is the study of how the groups have managed to successfully use rhetoric to exert social power and establish agency in a world that denies them privileged status” (Giesler 9). She goes on discussing how the writers of social movements are often times viewed as illegitimate for they are “limited in the scope of persuasion in society at large (...) many of the subjects discussed in this new collection simply cannot access former social movements or choose to express themselves otherwise” (Giesler 11). Her assertion of how persuasive Yousafzai’s role was to society, went beyond just projecting her traumatic experience of being shot by the Taliban, thus automatically making people only sympathize with her. Yousafzai won over the hearts of many for the most crucial reason of all: she risked her own life, to help save others. This Christ-like duty granted her a life of not only freedom, but the ability to uplift others coming from a similar impediment for the rest of her life. She is of many privileged people out there in the world of social media; however, it is more honorary to see her succession.

More critically, the inclusiveness of other young women is on Yousafzai’s agenda. One of the many positive lights about social media platforms such as Instagram, is they are both pursuing endeavors that show their constant and passionate pride for their right to education for beyond themselves, but for others as well. For example, Yousafzai shares a link in an Instagram story post that takes us to her bulletin, where she presents achieving students who are apart of activism. There are many female students and activists that are showcased by Yousafzai, giving a brief backdrop of an Afghan, or a Muslim woman were forced out of school. She centrally focuses in on the girls that she has personally met and spoken to, and one of them is Sotooda Forotan. There are many hints of a patriarchal domination even out there by the Taliban still, for they are favoring the education of boys and young men, but they are still disregarding women’s

education and pursuits. Yousafzai's tone in these bulletin presentations is demanding and still very influential. Keeping in mind, Westover had experienced a similar form of domination, where she was not accepted by her religious institution and community to go outside of the country for her post-secondary education. However, it must be remembered that while she defied the denial of her education, it is because of how she tailored her own education that has made all the difference.

### **Using a Feminist Lens with Memoirs**

Similarly, Yousafzai and Westover's texts can be ideally viewed through a feminist lens, and there is a substantial amount of evidence that proves it can be. Not only did I unveil that feminist theory and memoir writing are integral literary perspectives, but I also saw Westover in a new light, as she writes from a personal and religious standpoint. In feminist theory and memoir writing there is a journal written by Johanna Brooks titled *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*, here she presents contemporary writing from the Mormon feminist movement. In-depth she claims that feminism is branded and has recovered the lost history of female leadership and empowered women through theology to write their own literature whether that be in the form of an essay, poem, prose or autobiography. She states that "At the same time, some within the Mormon faith view feminism as essentially incompatible with the doctrines of the LDS church, perceive in contemporary feminism to be critical of or even hostile to the role of the family in Mormon doctrine" (Brooks 5). The ways that this connects to Westover's text is not only through the fortification of people of this faith to continue believing that they are living through Jesus Christ's atonement and life as his would live it, but it also actually empowered

Westover to persevere in her secondary and post-secondary education from this religious principle.

She so finely puts into context “From its beginnings, the Mormon movement attracted and produced women who were leaders, thinkers, and visionary, women who found purpose in building a new civilization (...) premised on the ideals of cooperation, knowledge-seeking, and personal and collective transformation” (Brooks 6). Westover validates these religious principles gracefully, in a manner that is clear and concise. She makes ultra-innovative references to two grand life binaries: God and nature. As a reader I comprehended that she tends to favor her faith in the inevitable evanescing of humanity to the forces of nature. Her exquisite ability to convey her flourishing aspirations of excelling in academics and earning a college degree derives from this notion that she favors her faith in God, and perhaps even slights nature in a way that she temporarily disregards it; for it acts as a hindrance to her success.

Moving into the Christian and Mormon concepts told by Westover, they denied her a great education, and so she insisted that she chased her seemingly impossible dream. Westover thoroughly speaks of God and nature in ways that imitate her emotional narrative patterns in the process of achieving her dreams. This shows that the issue was not only limited to stereotypes driven by people in the west and Midwest regions of the United States, where Westover received her secondary education. Westover has so much observation of her family it’s almost as if she’s looking from the outside in and the way she styles the gained agency aspect of her writing is she sees her family from a different perspective than the one she experienced living through. The shift in her point of view was the most valuable evidence to extract for it displayed her metamorphosis, and her voice only became stronger thereafter it.

In the beginning of her memoir, she initially sounds apprehensive, almost degrading herself. "Learning in our family was entirely self-directed: you could learn anything you could teach yourself, after your work was done. Some of us were more disciplined than others. I was one of the least disciplined" (Westover 46). She takes the scenario of her aspiring to be educated in a different setting other than the home she dwells in, and heavily compares it with her deeply rooted and grounded stubborn in his ways father. "It usually took about an hour for dad to notice the Tyler was not among his brothers. Then he burst through the back door and straight into the house with Tyler sat studying in his room. 'What the hell are you doing?' he'd shout, (...) 'I got Luke loading I-beams by himself— one man doing a two-man job— and I come in here and find you sitting on your ass?'" (Westover 48). While this detailed dialogue holds a bitter tone, one that could have nearly discouraged her to suffice and just stay home to help her family, it transformed into a light bulb that flashed over her head, giving her a wakeup call, and to deny her family's struggles without her, indicating that she did not settle for anything less on her journey to academic success.

This is distinctly how she advocated for herself, and it started in the home she was raised in; and it ended with her receiving numerous awards for her memoir *Educated*, one award even being Obama's chosen Favorite Book of the Year. The ways that she refers to the written memoir as getting out her story to impact other women around not only the United States, but throughout the world, is how she was determined to stand out among her siblings. Coming from a family of seven and her mother homeschooling every one of them, she chose to keep her eye on her most precious prize, and the level of conformity that she was susceptible to growing up was one she ascended beyond. She claims it was all because she had the faith to, and she never turned her back on her siblings or her parents, she made returns home, and even though her

father was deranged, she still honored her family for they were the first people that she held dear to her heart.

### **Westover's Response to Gaslighting**

Westover gravitates well toward the generative and departing form of agency in her writing. The profoundness of her naturalistic language and spirituality compliments her body and embodiments within the memoir. Given the realm of spirituality that she speaks of, there is at times digression, such as her tone switching from passive to transgressive. The figurative and descriptive language she uses allegorically foreshadows the wisest choice that she will make, and that is how she does not want to erode as the mountains will, as she has described, nor falter, for she willingly chose to defy the denial of her education and prosper despite what her religious institution warned her of.

Although some might object that gaslighting does not play a contributing factor in *Educated*, I would reply that there is an existing perception of gaslighting, and they are seen in levels. Firstly, there is a very minuscule level of it that occurs when the speaker repeatedly visited her home from college campus and spent quality time with her father again. Her father, being so set in his ways, stubborn and slightly narcissistic, made Westover feel as if she was an outsider. The aspect of alienation coming into play not only in this scene, but consistently throughout the autobiography, yields Westover suffering and endured gaslighting from the members of her own family, particularly a parent. The issue is a critical form of manipulation, and this establishes a plan for example Westover; a plan that entails a fleet from family and friends that no longer serve a good purpose for her, and do not support her entirely for going to an institution that is so very different from her home and roots.



The differentiation between her and her family, are not directly connected to the idea of gaslighting per say, rather it is the gaslighting that makes Westover want to go back immediately to the institution of higher learning, since that is where she is thriving. Family can no longer convince her to go back to the way things used to be, predominantly because she changed as a human being, as a woman. This is crucial in the sense that it is relative to Yousafzai's work, for she also transformed from a girl to a woman in the process of her life writing. Westover's book brings to the table quite a bit of potential findings for exactly how she asserts agency in her memoir. Specifically, she grants her audience an engaging and understandable read; and while she succeeded in writing her own narrative, she also succeeded in delivering her own cultural transcript. In keeping, Westover's presentation of her choice of a life writing practice, seems as if she was educated in the school system her whole life. The fact that she was homeschooled yields no direct correlation in her ability to withhold authenticity in her authorship, for she gained so much confidence in herself, that the newer version of herself replaced her past upbringing.

There is a specific notion that is brought about in authenticity, she rapidly goes from a real genuine author to a real truthful human. Moving forward with her incredible capability of portraying the "I" in her writing, this sort of "I-ness" she nails embodying her personhood. This immediately abolishes her state of vulnerability with her own family. While she keeps her references and borrowings of inspiration to a minimum, she still incorporates them into her memoir. Her literature serves as a form escape, which is almost compatible to men or women who share a similar upbringing as herself. What was found as most compelling was Westover's ability to tell her life cycle and where to pinpoint the most significant events in her life. The undertones of individuality and healing from the gaslighting by her own family are categorized as elements of what makes up an autobiography that leads by example for the masses, and for

people whether male or female, to voice their experiences of being misled and manipulated in their own life narratives.

It is imperative to keep in mind how her empowerment and strength prevailed and how she stood up for herself. The most novel idea she states is at the very end of her work:

Until that moment she had always been there. No matter how much I appeared to have changed-- (...) That night I called on her and she didn't answer. She left me. She stayed in the mirror. The decisions I made after that moment were not ones she would have made. They were the choices of a changed person, a new self. You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education (Westover 329).

The singular worded sentences here signal her emphasis on what are the most important factors in transforming. Her metamorphosis going from a homeschooled young girl into an intelligent and articulate young woman that graduated college holds a sense of integrity that is best unraveled in the form of a memoir. The elements that come to mind when reading *Educated*, is that the speaker is extraordinarily contemplative. The abundance in her description makes me validate how it truly does not matter if one does not receive a formal education. Based on the discovery that education pillars are composed of self and ambition, the way one designs their own education is fundamental as much as it is necessary throughout every institution. The right to be able to receive a formal education, on the other hand, comes with perseverance and the will to change one's norm.

These autobiographical sources from which they are reconstructed ignite this American woman. Thus, she is delivering to us the viewpoint not only from a woman, but from a place of victory overcoming the obstacles of tyranny that were inflicted upon her at such a young age.

Potentially, the exposition of her memoir became classified as praiseworthy and contemporary literature, and certainly content for others to learn about. Something quite exemplary that comes immediately after this idea would be the scene she is in where she is still resenting school, yet her brother is already in it. “‘Off to college!’ Grandma said once we were settled onto the floral-print sofa. She turned to me. ‘You must be so proud of your brother!’ (...) Leave it to Grandma to think getting yourself brainwashed is something to celebrate, I thought” (Westover 49). This woman’s voice may be a part of the dominant narrative, her biological sex may not be, and being that she is female and American, there is a sense that she is automatically qualified to the mobility and access to education. How astonishing is it to know that she blended in so well, yet she experienced a lot of disruption in social arrangement.

### **Aspects of a Multi-Referential Narrative**

One of the greatest contemporary literary theorists, Gerard Genette, known for defining narratology as the ideal narrative structure that holds theory in the concept that the written narrative is “communicated through a wide variety of media—such as oral and written language, gestures, and music—and that the “same” narrative can be seen in many different forms” (Mambrol 2016). Both memoirists possess these definitional qualities and beyond just these traits, they continue to lead by example, which is only going to continue inspiring others to write their own life narratives. While Genette designated many forms of structural narratology and has placed them into their own genres, his major contributions to this myriad of intertextuality must be comprehended and honored for their own significant meanings. He refers to paratextuality as the referring “to the relations between the body of text with its titles, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, and first drafts” (Mambrol 2016). Considering Yousafzai’s and Westover’s similarity in

exemplary craft of incorporating illustrations and notes, they qualify as memoirists that exhibit paratextuality in their works. Not only does this show an incredible amount of mastered technique, but it also shows the multi-facets of their authorship, and this convinces so many others to want to master for themselves, in their own memoir developments.

The two women pertain confessions of their own self-examinations by means of having a journal nearby and documenting events as they are happening. This seemingly is a smart tactic in the process of writing their autobiographies and showcases their artistic self-consciousness. Over the course of the narrative, it is intriguing to see that as each milestone is told, she is gradually growing and becoming into her own adult. The realization of her place in the larger collective society is alike to Yousafzai's, only they happened to take place in two different countries. There is value in this dichotomy, although Yousafzai and Westover both had their fair shared experience of being educated to a certain degree in the United Kingdom. These two women explain in their own ways how their granted education after fighting for it, became their salvation. It is critical to acknowledge when gravitating toward Yousafzai's text, that Muslim women do not need to go to the West to find salvation, they also find themselves anywhere, for salvation is an internally spiritual and mental state of being. Furthermore, their individual downfalls and enlightenments were as equivalent to their struggles to remain strong in a community that does not care if they thrived or not.

The equity that accumulated from this specific area in their writing, only propelled them to continue speaking their truth, and bettering themselves not only as women, but as human beings. This identifies their beautiful writing agencies and indicates their self-making. They made their life what they wanted it to be once they realized the waters parted between them and their families. "It's the same old story, my father said, and he was right. Musharraf promised to

end the old feudal system by which the same few dozen families controlled our entire country and bring fresh young clean faces into politics” (Yousafzai 76). Judging by this reference, it is the inferior statuses and positions of both Yousafzai and Westover in their own specific ways that made them feel that the destination of learning was intangible. Through this mastered analogy, her observations and notations become what it was like doing homework for the first time and how she sees herself becoming more balanced, and more patient, while she sees her dad downwardly spiraling and frustrated.

She learns here to depend on only herself, not only for better health, but for greater intelligence and once again, this exposes the generative and departing form of agency in her writing. It is prominent to see how non-negotiable she is when it comes to others' attempts to change her, while succeeding in her multi-referential narrative.

I walked back to the kitchen, comparing the clean, balanced equation to the mayhem of unfinished computations and dizzying sketches. I was struck by the strangeness of that page: Dad could command this science, could decipher its language, decrypt its logic, could bend and twist and squeeze the truth from it. But as it passed through him, it turned into chaos (Westover 126).

This specific scene of revisiting to the home she was raised in, she describes in a way that yields her father's frustrations with the subjects she was learning in school that brought her much stability and peace, and how their relationship as father and daughter was turning dichotomous. It was astonishing to see how much confidence she gained after this scene, and more importantly, her descriptive imagery creates that scene play out like a film in the reader's minds.

The preliminaries of the agency are addressed clearly in the memoir. Specifically, in the body's middle chapters. The way Westover addresses her initial feelings in the beginning of the

memoir, and then how that takes a toll toward the middle, is a furthering sign of metamorphosis of self, through writing autobiographically. Her beautiful transition going from living a limited life to living a limitless one indicated that there are hardly any gaps or silences within the memoir; this is since there is a cohesiveness to her writing. It shows that she is best at writing about how nature is still winning over humanity. Furthermore, this indicates that no matter how academically proficient she becomes, the inevitability of nature outliving her, a human, is quite profound in its own sense. Westover mastered self-transformation and transition as forms of agencies within her memoir, and allegorically taking a little goldfish from the bowl into the ocean. This was best exemplified when she realized that taking breaks from school to home setting.

Fascinatingly enough, it was going back to the place that once kept her stagnant that was also the place empowering her to keep walking the track she was on. Westover was not a woman who lived a strict life any longer; adventure and wonder were her drives, and she emphasizes that well in the middle of her memoir. She makes it clear how much she intended to accomplish all before what her father called “Days of Abomination” that were to come. If there was ever a time to get all of one’s life accomplished before those end days were to near, Westover found the time to make the most of her life by pursuing her education, for she realized it was her life not her parents, family, or anyone else’s life. Nevertheless, when the tables turned and her family treated her as her feared state of mind and predicament, it only empowered her to rise above that familial circumstance.

### **An Educational Gift That Keeps on Giving**

It is important that audiences and readers get the full effect of Westover's and Yousafzai's texts, and how their agencies of strength and self-discovery are not only addressed but flawlessly written. Their destinies and the traveling on the road less traveled on are fuel-components to creating this exact style of agency. It needs to be instilled in the minds and hearts of many that these are two accounts that have been acclimated for their voiced memoirs, and while others have that same ability and chance to do so, they may not relate to these women, therefore making them authentic and unparalleled stories. They deeply desired to be educated, and unstoppably fought for it, to the point where it became their necessity rather than luxury; and they not only exceeded the limitations inflicted upon their religious and social institutions, but they also deliberately and unapologetically broke down the walls of marginalization.

The achievement of their individualized dreams is the result of the gift of acceptance into higher education. Comprehending how their written memoirs have already inspired multiple generations is important, and not only are they courageous creations, but they are also icons for education and societies to come. Westover and Yousafzai's findings of themselves amid writing their life narrative holds the greatest value, that others can also find. It takes recognizing literature as such in order to see its laudable effect it has on people to write their own version of this agency of self-discovery. The agency of self-determination is the catalyst to the documentation of one's autobiography in that there must be an element of being defiant and courageous enough to change the authoritative and patriarchal discourses that hinder women's and even men's ability to voice their life story.

These two memoirists will remain unforgettable for they changed the way a memoir is even made; especially for how they carried the torch in terms of carrying on the legacy of a

memoir. Their asserted agencies are the contributing elements to their educational success and achievement and their publications were blessings in the sense that they depicted what it meant to live life to the fullest and with the greatest potential. They are leading examples in a world that is becoming more accepting and understanding of one's diverse path in life. Their memoirs are literary artifacts of achievement in not only writing their story, but distinctly for the social and political pillars they have addressed that transcended the way audiences perceive their own society and country. With written content as undeniable and notorious as these women made theirs to be, it is clear to see that their agencies are the planted roots to their gardens of literacy, and as agency should be for every aspiring memoirist. Their memoirs reveal beauty and strength in their pilgrimages, as they both master their figurative and physical journeys. If it was not for Westover or Yousafzai standing up to their authoritative systems and showing up for themselves to write their stories, there would be two less memoirs in the world of literature that honor one's true-life purpose. With their abilities to influence others and instilling that their voice matters, it is an autobiographical phenomenon, and that much more proof that one can do anything they put their mind to.



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