

Women image in Angela Carter's Works; Passion of the New Eve, Sadeian Women, Bloody Chamber

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ABSTRACT

The present essay explores the women image in Angela Carter's works. It tries to shed light on the women images presented in her fictional works from point of view of subordination of females to men and patriarchal views toward them. The focus is on her two works and collection of short stories: *Passion of the New Eve* and *Sadeian Women* and *Burning the boat*, *Bloody chamber*. To do so, the views of Baudrillard, Althusser and De Beauvoir are used to depict the depthless image of women and the function of ideology in shaping women identity. For example in case of *Tristessa* the focus is on the function of the media in shaping women image or in *Juliette and Justin* case the emphasis is on the role of the ideology in making identity of the female figures that is to say ideologization plays important role in their characters. In her short stories female figures are treated like commodities and are exchanges between males.

KEY WORDS: Angela Carter, Women, image, subordination

INTRODUCTION

This study tries to explore the variety of the female figures in the works of Angela Carter who is famous for her influential novels and writings about world of women. In most of her works the central character are the female figures who are suffering and in most cases because of their subordination to men or patriarchal systems which suppress them. The essays focuses on the female characters and explores the way they are subordinated to men under the patriarchal societies or how they are represented in the media or how they are treated as the commodities in and even are exchanged between men as goods. Nowadays feminist studies are important ways of uncovering the subordination and suppression of women which are portrayed in fictional works. So works as the present study are the continuation of the attempts to study the role, image and function and formation of the women identities in the societies which are represented in literature. Therefore in this study the writers understanding the importance of such studies try to depict different women images represented in Angela Carter's works.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Angela Carter(1940-1992) :British novelist and journalist who is famous for her feminist and picaresque novels and writings. In 2008 *The Times* ranked her tenth in their list of the 50 greatest writers since 1945. she has been a prolific writer and along with her fictional works she had several essays published in respectable magazines. The works which has been under the study in this essay are *Sadeian women* (1979) and the *Passion of the New Eve* (1977) and collection of short stories, *Bloody chamber* (1979) and *Burning your Boat* (1995). Women: In the 20th century and particularly since the second world onward there has been radical changes in fields related to women. There have been plenty of writings about the women rights and many feminist writers have tried to depict the suppressed image of women in their fiction. The central focus has been on the patriarchal system which continues to suppress and subordinate the women. Feminist writers by recourse to their imaginative powers even tried to deconstruct the clichés about the women and to make a way for men to experience the suffering of the females.

Image: Images are important in representing the role and function of women in society and literature. So in this study attempt is to focus on the image which sometimes are clichés and represent their real role in society. Hence the image represented in fiction and literature is a fruitful way of exploring the female role in literature. That is why the present study has focused on the image of the women in a feminist writer work.

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Subordination: here in this study subordination means the linkage of female characters to males that is to say, their independence to men in shaping their identity and character. It seems that they do not possess identity of their own without men. In this study the women of harem of Zero are the best examples for subordination of women to men. In many images of the women it seems that without men women are not complete. Even in case of Juliette who moves up socially it is possible only with alliance of men.

Women image in Angela Carter's works could be viewed from different angles since her novels and essays present variety of female characters. This paper attempts to depict some aspects of female characters in her novel *The Passion of New Eve*, *Burning the Boat* and *Bloody Chamber*; collection of stories and essay on Sade story; *The Sadeian Women*. To do so, characters are chosen from Carter's works and accordingly are analyzed by recourse to the ideas of different critics and scholars. Tristessa in *Eve* is analyzed under views of Jean Baudrillard and applying Althusser ideas on the concept of ideology Justine and Juliette characters and their reactions are brought under consideration too. Women of harem of Zero under Woolf and De Beauvoir views are analyzed. At the end of the paper, using Rubin's ideas on historical subjection of women as a gift and commodity, female characters in stories of *Bloody Chamber* and *Burning the Boat* are represented to show how they are exchanged as commodities and material properties.

Depthless image of a suffering figure: Tristessa

Jean Baudrillard in his book on postmodernism discusses images in the postmodern era as to be depthless. In *Simulacrum* and *Simulation* he defines simulation as generation by models without origin or reality: a hyper real (Baudrillard, 2006, 1). Angela Carter in *The Passion of the New Eve*, in my view, depicts the depthless image of a beauty created by media who is passed as genuine. But as a matter of fact, the process is only possible by recourse to specific technological sources; modern media. People who are the consumers of media as the source of information or entertainment are exposed to what the owners of media like. They could create any image without need to the real one. Cinema and television and nowadays virtual world of internet, themselves are the truth, they do not think of the real one behind their images. In *The Gulf War did not Take Place*, Baudrillard argues that "as the consumer of mass media, we never experience the bare material event but only the informational and coating which renders it sticky and unintelligible like oil soaked sea bird" (Baudrillard, 2006, 32). That is the case of Tristessa in the *Passion of New Eve*, a depthless unreal beautiful image create, to use Marxist terminology, by Capitalists who now not only own the means of production but also in postmodern era own mass media as the source of information and entertainment. To look at her from Baudrillard point of view she/he is the real example of simulation or simulacrum. She, let me call him/her she here, because later in the novel we discover that she is a real he, is the symbol of beautiful public figure attracting plenty of male spectators as well as Evelyn. Nobody doubts about the originality of this pretty image, she is rendered in a perfect way she is given a role in the public to play while she is not the real sex to fit for the role. But under the pressure she has no other choice and she is earning a lot of money which is enough motivation. Remembering his/her request of change of sex of the Mother as a surgeon (Carter, 1977, 173) proves she/he is not satisfied with double character or uroborus, she likes to be perfect one sex not half of each and apparently she is inclined to accept the unreal image defined for her by media. To claim that is she a victim or suffering or not, is a little bit complex but to go into detail a little and track some clues could lead us to a conclusion. It goes without saying that in reality to have one sex and to pretend to be other in a compulsory manner is not a pleasant experience and we have to bear in mind that he possess "awfully ineradicable quality of maleness" (Carter, 1977, 173). Eve also wondering about Tristessa believes he is "the greatest female impersonator and so forever cheated of experience" (144). In her eyes she is suffering. At least he cannot act as a male in public and that is why she is accused of being 'dyke' and source of sterility by Mr. Zero who addressing her cries "I am avenging phallic fire I have come to fecundate your sterility you dyke of dykes you jamajar of infertility" (Carter, 1977, 127). He is expected to act but he is not the real one only fake image, Zero only could see the image without real created by mass media. She is the example of what Baudrillard states in *Gulf War* "images contaminated by structural unreality of images" (Baudrillard, 1995, 46). In my idea, Tristessa deeply absorbed in her image-role while suffering ready to accept the role permanently even contrary to his biological sex. He is biologically male but from point of view of gender at least in the eye of public she is female. So She/he lives in paradox of identity and in last analysis, to put it in a Marxist language, victim of capitalist postmodern society which exerts power on its members and even forces them to act against their instinctual desires and absorbed in their image-role, Tristessa even so rich but is living in a golden glass jail now. For me the climax of the story is the love between Tristessa and Eve in which they experience true love and here for the first time Tristessa gets out of her image and acts according to his true nature and behave like a male. In reality there have been many examples like her but an exact copy is the one that Judith Butler refers in her essay *Gender Troubles*. She mentions a cross-dresser

by the name of Divine who features in films. This hero/heroine stars in many films of John Waters. Butler believes that through impersonation “it is implicitly suggested that gender is a kind of permanent impersonation that pass as the real... her/his performance destabilizes the very distinction between the natural and artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer” (Baudrillard, 2006, 38). In my opinion here Butler idea of impersonation approaches to that of Baudrillard simulation. The same as Tristessa case, in spite of your biological sex, your gender could be decided culturally and in these two examples from the world of media ,we could observe that the concept is reinforced by the aid of mass media especially cinema. Tristessa, Divine or whoever you call is products of the mass media but without origin. Butler argues that double character of impersonators originates from phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality (Baudrillard,2006,38). In other words, under social forces they are acting unlike their actual nature ,and as mentioned above Tristessa deprived of his/her true nature and experience suffers and killed at last apparently while he is experiencing real love with Eve. The ending at least is that of a tragic hero but his/her flaw is not within but imposed from out. As the last word about this name it is fruitful to mention that the name is a Latin one meaning “riot, sad”. (Ourbabynamer.com web). In my opinion she is both sad and in riot, she is leaving in a remote place in heart of desert by his own cutting any contact with the society which forced him to act against his natural instinct and deprived him of true experience.so he dies suffering but at least in love in last days of his life.

Women of Harem of zero: Victims of ignorance

The second image of women presented in *Passion* by Carter is women of harem of Zero. Seven women, of different ages who live in a condition worse than animals but content with it. In my opinion here Carter parodically criticizes women of this kind and males simultaneously. These women represent exactly what Simone de Beauvoir calls them in *Second sex*: “a vassal” (Carter,1977,15) and a god like husband is their master. But the point here is that they themselves help to their subordination and slavery. It seems that they completely believe in Zero to be a superman who is a poet god and ridiculously in quest of finding origin of sterility. They are exemplifying those women who as Virginia Woolf puts it in *Room of One's Own* “serve as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size”. (woolf,1991,12). they play exactly the role of the other for zero and accept their subjection. Zero symbolizes the traditional tyrant patriarch and these women by their passive subordination empower him. They believe that sexual intercourse with this impotent man guaranties their continuing health and strength (Carter,1977,88). They voluntarily accepted the role of a vassal and the ‘Other’ because they could easily escape away or get rid of Zero by killing him. They trust in him with body and soul and sell themselves to serve him. De Beauvoir in description of slaved women states “no doubt it is more comfortable to submit to blind enslavement than to work for liberation” (Carter,1977,17). I am wondering how they are satisfied with their animal like life. Which one is more difficult to live, in stable like a beast or to protest? They accept the former and the reason for that, in my opinion is their consciousness and ideological becoming in a way or another that encourage them to submit rather than protest. In patriarchal societies it is commonly believed that men are transcendent and women immanent, while De Beauvoir believes that all human have potential for transcendence and immersion (De Beauvoir,1991, 12) but here seemingly these women deny themselves the former one preserving it for their prophet husband Zero. The paradoxical point is that there are female riots and revolutions near them and women town Beulah is nearby. Carter here attacks those who passively live in subordination and criticize their arrogance. But implicitly stating that behind their ignorance are themselves but again victim of their own false consciousness which is shaped by others, may it say, by ignorant patriarchs to shape ignorant enslaved minds.

Juliette and Justine image in Sadeian Women

A banker goes bankrupt and his two vulnerable daughters are out in the society by their own. The story which Angela Carter relates us is destiny and adventures of these two girls who was written by Sade. The girls are from the same family but lead radically different life and end in destination different from each other as well. They are standing at the opposite far end of a line exposing diverse mentality and reaction to life which shapes their image in the story. Here the attempt is to show what causes these two sisters to react totally differently to the life and society which their aim is to be a normal member of it. To do so, by recourse to writings and ideas of critics such as Althusser, Mitchell, Cixous and Kolodny, diverse aspects of characters and their subjection and their reaction to the subjection will be clarified.

Louise Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” explains how ideology represents imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of life (Althusser,1998, 294) and also how it interpolate individual as subjects(Althusser,1998, 299).In other words he clarifies how ideology ,let’s say religious, ethical or legal, shapes consciousness of individual and forms his attitude and view toward life. In the case of Justine and Juliette the focus is on ethical ideology and its effect on the characters consciousness and reaction to life. When one is wondering about the different reaction of these sisters to their adventures and disasters in life, it would be useful

to go in depth and find the final cause. For Justine preserving her chastity and generally speaking her body is of utmost importance and to do so she has to suffer a lot. Remembering that she pays so much to preserve her chastity, and most of her troubles and predicament originates from the fact that she does not want to submit her body, to me it seems interesting to figure out what is the reason behind. Here the concept of ideologization comes to play its role. According to the ideology in which Justine lives in to have sex with anyone out of religious or ethical rules is a severe sin or guilt and keeping what is between her legs symbolizes the idea. So all her actions are in terms of keeping on with her divine duty of preserving chastity and body from intruders. Althusser believes that despots and priests are responsible for imposing these false ideas in people minds as truth (Althusser,1998, 295). He believes that “Priests and Despots forged the Beautiful Lies so that in the belief that they are obeying God , men in fact obey Priests and Despots” (Althusser,1998, 295). So Justine imprisoned in the dominant ideology of society is busy to carry on her duty. Her consciousness is shaped by this ideology and there is no way out. The duty seems so axiomatic for her that never doubt about it. Althusser emphasizes on the obviousness of the ideology for the individuals and to subsume ideological ideas as the persons’ own that individual consider her/himself as Subject and the initiator of the ideas. He goes on stating “It is indeed peculiarity of the ideology that imposes without appearing to do so” (Althusser,1998, 300). Her imagination is preoccupied with ideological becoming and now it is passive and closed to anything new. In fact her mind and imagination is dominated by others or ideology makers. She is enslaved by the others or to say it impliedly as Althusser’s word, “by cynical men active imagination” (Althusser, 1998, 295). She leads a complete life of living in ideology and her ‘internal verbal discourse’ is shaped by that which causes her to be a permanent victim and sufferer. In her fight in the society she is deprived of any weapon, no family no money and no body. In fact her body is her vulnerability.

At the other side of the pole we have Justine’s counterpart; Juliette. She is from the same family but later in her life chooses a different life and in spite of all vicissitudes, she is prosperous. At least for the beginning she is under the same ideology that Justine is subjected to but she is able to let herself free from the jail of ideology but again imprisoned in other one but this time one in which she has a role in shaping. In her ideology unlike Justine’s, body is a weapon not a vulnerable point. It seems that she is imaginative enough to escape from the dominant imagination of the ruling patriarchal class by recourse to her body. Cixous while discussing women body as the material for female writing assumes body as women goods a privilege territory which has been kept under the seal (Norton,2006,29). She is right about Justine, she likes to keep her body kept as much as possible but Juliette uses a different strategy about her body. She is clever enough to use her goods and territory and hears Cixous clearly stating that “a woman without a body cannot be a good fighter” (Norton, 2006, 29). Justine is not a good fighter and at last she is defeated since she deprives herself from her sole weapon but Juliette exploits it to climb in society and claiming her big share in life. She starts most of her financial political liaisons with sexual intercourse and generally speaking her body is a ladder in life for promotion. Cixous calls women writers to put their body in their texts (Norton,2006,26) and Juliette puts her body in context of life. she is aware of the unique empire(Norton,2006,26) she owns and is able to escape from the “brainwashing” which women are given in the society(Norton,2006,28) through this she is able to be a member of the ruling class while Justine remaining in her brainwashed condition has difficulty in earning a living. To look at the case from Butler’s point of view who claims “ women has been frightened about their body and not to go away behind some boundaries ”(Norton,2006,40) seems to be true about Justine but not about Juliette. The former, seemingly is afraid of anything related to her body while the later shows enough bravery to explore her territory or in Cixous word the “dark continent which is neither dark nor unexplorable” (Norton, 2006, 31). But for Justine her body remains dark and unexplorable and accordingly suffers to the very end of her life.

Women as Commodity and Gift

Gayle Rubin in her essay ‘Traffic in Women’ discussing the concept of gift giving from the early periods of history states that women have been most precious of these gifts(Rubin,1998,542). She goes on saying that in the past women are exchanged between men, tribes and primitive communities in order to tie them to each other and make peace (Rubin, 1998, 543). Like any other gift such as domestic animals and fruits or any other property, women are considered the same and one of the valuable properties possessing high value or exchange value. The exchange of women as a gift among primitive people helped so much to sustain peace in society because with exchange of women instead of any other material properties the ties between them are stronger and they became kin to each other. She claims that not only capitalism but also the concept of kinship is the origin of women oppression (Rubin,1998,544). Here the focus is on exchange of women as commodities in Carter’s collection of stories *Bloody Chamber* in which beautiful girls are considered as commodities and exchanged generally between men.

In *Bloody Chamber* (Carter,1979,105) a 17 years old beautiful virgin poor girl marries an old wealthy powerful marquis who has married several times before and his last one has died 3 months ago (Carter,1979,107). The girl lives in destitution with her mother and the aim of the marriage seems to exchange marquis wealth with the girls

beauty, body and virginity. The family under the pressure of poverty has no choice. But with this deal girl not only bids on her body but her life. Marquis buys the girl as raw material for his brutal bloody chamber ritual. He has the money and power so feels has paid for that. The girl also has the feeling of being bought. While she is wondering about her destiny she thinks “when I saw the ring for that I had sold myself to fate I wondered how to escape it” (Carter,1979,116). The girl realizes the nature of the exchange and deal and tries to get rid of the situation but only with the help of her mother she could escape from death because the marquis is so serious about the deal.

In *Company of Wolves* (Carter,1979,144) the girl submits her body to the wolf in order to escape death. “ to sleep between the paws of the tender wolf ”(Carter,1979,148) the girl has to give something to secure her life and she has nothing as commodity except her body ,beauty and virginity. The deal is done and everything goes in peace between the girl and the beast. Grandma is too old to be considered as commodity and has nothing to be exchanged so she is eaten. But the girl is young and fresh has high exchange value to save her life. Here instead of money, power replaces it. Marquis had the money and the wolf has the power to tear down. At least here the exchange is between the girl and the wolf and there is not the third party to exchange her like the cases of *Courtship of Mr. Lyon* and *the Tiger's Bride*.

“My father lost me to the beast at cards” (Carter,1979,127). this is the first line of the *Tiger's Bride* which in my opinion the focus is on the girl being treated as a commodity and property like any other one and possible for losing even at cards. She is her father's commodity and he has right to sell or lose her. Interestingly the beast like most other beasts in Carter's stories is wealthy powerful and has a castle. The castle in my eye stands for privileged authority and power which everything is possible among its walls. The girl is exchanged instead of cost of father's loses to keep the peace between the Tiger and father. In a view it seems continuation of the old custom of exchange of women among primitives as Rubin mentioned above. In *Courtship of Mr. Lyon* a beautiful girl's father in a snowy night after being fed in a beast house picks a flower as a present to her daughter because has no money now. Mr. Lyon accuses him of theft and only with invitation of the Beauty for dinner peace is settled (Carter,1979,123). Here the exchange is a little romantic and the flower and the girl are exchanged in a way but again the father treats the girl like her last commodity in deal with the Beast.

Conclusion

Carter's works are rich in depicting females images giving diversity of representation which could be viewed from different angles. Most of the images portrayed in her works prove women oppression and suffering. As in case of Tristessa a depthless female image, product of mass media in postmodern era, we noticed her/his suffering as being deprived of the true experience and concept of depth and surface from Baudrillard point of view. Women of harem of Zero present submissive condition of women who themselves help to their oppression and subordination and Carter attacks both ignorant male and female figures here. Woolf and De Beauvoir's ideas were fruitful in understanding their subjection. In Sadeian women, Justine and Juliette characters were analyzed under the theory of ideologization in Althusser and origin of their reaction to life and society was clarified. Justine remained in ideology and passively accepted the role of a victim as a sufferer but Juliette escaping from the dominant ideology formed her own and got promotion in ladder of life by recourse to any brutal means. In stories of Bloody Chamber we noticed that most of the female characters are treated as commodity and properties under the views of Rubin which was a reference to history of women oppression and subjection.

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