

Comparing Dryden's Cleopatra in All for Love and Hawthorne's Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter: A Study of Women and their Power.

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ABSTRACT: For ages the concept of ideal has been associated with the image of a woman. This idea of the 'Ideal woman' has been consistent but the definition meets remodelling with shifts in situation, environment and time. There are tales of women who becomes the epitome of strength reflecting the traits of sacrifice and endurance glorifying the statue of selflessness while there are also women who refuse to compromise with their selfhood and stand against all odds to show the stronger side choosing to be unrestrained.

This paper shall study how the idea of strength and femininity in women is inconsistent focusing on similarities and differences that run in the two popular women of different ages as depicted by two writers i.e. Dryden and Hawthorne in All For Love and The Scarlet Letter.

Cleopatra V, the last Ptolemy queen of Egypt stands as the symbol of strength who denied accepting the subordinate position given to her trusting her own ability to be a great ruler. She defied all the norms of the Ptolemy dynasty and the gender constructs of the society as a whole in pursuit of her desire to live in her own terms, to be in power and established herself as one of the strongest woman in history. Her strength lies in her assertion of self against the world. And there is Hester Prynne a woman of dignity who protects her essence by going against the rigidity of the puritan society of Salem in the Massachusetts Bay. She wilfully decides to fall in love with a man and bears a child for him without the validation of marriage. Knowing that it was considered to be a heinous crime, she decides to bear the punishment alone not out of fear but with her own will. She shows her strength not by an act of physical rebellion but a rebellion of endurance. Her assertion of self finds its reflection through her ability to sacrifice and endure.

The focus of the paper is to bring out how these two contrasting yet passionate protagonist show two dichotomies in women through these two paradoxical models of power and strength, one with an outrageous rebellious nature and the other with an angelic ability of perseverance.

KEYWORDS: Ideal Woman, Endurance, Strength, Femininity, Sacrifice, Rebellious, Angelic

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I. INTRODUCTION

Disagreement on the societal gender role constructs is accompanied by another conflictingly ambivalent concept of the 'ideal woman' being an obedient daughter, a submissive wife, a forgiving mother and what not, women are best if they forget about themselves and always keep others before them. Sita from Ramayana who is the embodiment of endurance, Draupadi who silently accepts to be the wife of five husbands who had other wives apart from her, Kunti who in fear of society sacrifice her motherly instincts and leaves her infant son Karn to flow to his own faith. In Nnu Ego of Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood we see a symbol of endurance amongst the women of Nigeria under the harsh domination of Patriarchal society. These women's name is always taken with utmost respect for the strength of forbearance they have shown. While there are also women like Jane Eyre who defies the societal norms by marrying a man who already has a wife knowing the fact that Rochester's love for her is all genuine. She relies on her confidence that is complemented by education she got. At the end finding the consummation of her love without losing her sense of dignity. The denial of marriage is also seen in Margaret Mitchell's Heroine Scarlet O'Hara. "She is somewhat unusual among Southern women, whom society preferred to act as dainty creatures that needed protection from their men". There are also women who went against determined Masculinity like Rani Laxmi Bai who stood against the British Raj being a mother of an infant dying as a soldier in the battleground. John of Arc who believed in her divine connection with God and went to battlefields disguised as man was tried for heresy and burnt alive later declared as a saint. All these women are of great courage and potency while being quite and yielding like Sita or being outrageous like Rani Laxmi Bai they are always the ideal. It's merely the time and the situation and the choice. Limiting the definition of the ideal shall never meet a definite end. It will keep on shifting. But never can anyone question who is stronger? Or ask which side is the better version of woman but just accept the two sides and in both she is the best version of herself.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both the primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the works of the respective authors. The secondary sources include texts, articles, journals, critical references and internet sources. All the collected sources were used to analyze the objective of the study. The study is based on feminist perspective and gender roles.

III. DISCUSSION

Cleopatra is a quintessence of strength in the history, the last pharaoh of the Ptolemy Kingdom to rule Egypt. A legendary queen, who took control of her country when she was only 21 and became its guardian for 18 years, commanded her own army. She was the first one to write and speak Egyptian language and embrace Egyptian culture and customs including worshipping traditional Egyptian Gods rather than Greek religion. She made her country full of resources with the help of foreign allies. Being very young after she was taken to the works of the court and she ruled alongside her father for four years and after her father's death when she was forced to marry her own brother as per customs. She was determined to rule alone and not share the power as the position of the women was that of the subordinate to man. When her husband ascended the power of the throne she raised an army against him eventually losing after which she had to flee laying the impetus for journey of a woman with dimensions of strength and in her selfish pursuit of power as Dryden has asserted "Her name alone was exotic just like the lady herself" and is determined to achieve her goals she used all her abilities to manipulate minds and events to her favour and of the best in her possession was her immeasurable wit, her adorned voice and her seductive beauty. Stubborn in her pursuit she defied all the norms, broke the gender roles and kept going. The validation of her abilities is her love affair with two of the most influential men in the history of Rome she gained the reputation of a brazen beauty and irresistible temptress. Accounts from history depict Cleopatra using her charms to bewitch men of great power. She has been an inspiration for artists of all age and time. It is believed that she considered herself the embodiment of Egyptian Goddess Isis. Her sense of pride makes her more an attractive figure.

Hester Prynne is another woman of grace a devoted mother, abandoned lover, estranged wife, a woman with high spirit and her most important role is that of an iconoclast, one who opposes established conventions. She is described in the first scaffold scene as, "Young woman was tall with a figure of perfect elegance and large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw sunshine with a gleam and a face which, being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a market brow and deep black eyes. She was lady-like, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by certain state of dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace. Those who had before known and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscure by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to how her beauty shone out and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped."(p55)

At the time when she is introduced to the readers with her guilt displayed before the crowd of the settlement her feature makes her appear holy. Hester holds her baby close to her bosom which is compared to the Virgin Mary. In the crowd where everyone is busy scorning her for the crime that she has committed she gets lost within herself to the flashes of the past where she was once a cheerful young girl with a family of her own. She was shifted to the care of a person who stayed detached from this world and she had manipulated herself into the happiness that she never felt before. Hester was not a puritan by birth but she came from old England to this new world because of her husband's decision. While she was sent to England earlier her husband could not reach her as he was captured by the red Indians After her husband was captured it was Dimmesdale, the minister of the congregation and the nobleman who was always there for her. Both Hester and Dimmesdale developed a deep connection and intimacy that led to love and the act of intimacy led to Hester's pregnancy. The irony lies in the fact that the act of love making is considered to be the consummation of love and togetherness but here it becomes the reason for their separation. The testimony of their love led her to bear a life of loneliness and sends her to share a life with the letter A. She names her daughter Pearl. She is the living scarlet letter whom Hester brings up alone. Pearl brings out the rebellious side of Hester more as it is Pearl that she defies stereotype. Hester brings her daughter up alone and never succumbs to the pressure of the puritan ministers who try to separate them. With time Hester grows and her status of a fallen woman with the stigma of an adulteress with letter A in her bosom elevates her to that of an angel. In her journey from an adulteress to Angel she mostly grows as a woman. She explores her spiritual growth stating that she could see through the flesh of people and could see the hidden guilt that most of the people during puritan settlement had. She becomes more humble and is able to connect more with the pain and sufferings of the poor and does her best to serve them gaining the love and respect from people who once desisted her.

Cleopatra was exiled by her own husband reason being her defying nature and her will to dominate and run the throne all alone. It would not be wrong to say that it was her lust for power that led her away from her own families love and affection. It was also her sense of pride and her confidence that made her deny bowing

down to the age old tradition that had been followed by the entire lineage of women in her dynasty. She chose power over her role as a wife and was ready to cross any limit to gain the fair position that she thought she deserved. The journey of Hester Prynne and the exile that she has acquired as the consequence of the act of love she chose. She loved Arthur Dimmesdale and expects nothing in return that is reflected in her denial of revealing the name of the lover or the partner of her sin. She keeps it with herself and accepts the exile that is given to her as a punishment by the society. The return from exile in Cleopatra's story is that she takes the throne back with bloodshed while Hester's return is in the hearts of the people who exiled her through her act of charity, kindness and love. Cleopatra's response to her exile is one of the most heroic. While Hester's response is the acceptance and penance is another graceful act showing the power of woman.

The passionate love affairs of Cleopatra with two most influential men of the time are glorified in many works of art. Her love for Anthony could be more or less seen as a pursuit of her aim to remain in a stable condition though Dryden has glorified their love. The desperate efforts of Cleopatra in keeping Anthony bound to her though he was suffering from all other aspects of life shows the selfish motives of her. Her smart tools of manipulation are that she uses through Alexas, her eunuch servant in multiple events whenever she hears that Anthony has decided to leave her. After the death of Caesar when her position and life was in danger she uses her charm to woo Anthony, though Dryden has skipped the account of this event is not in the play it is in the accounts of many historians and writers like that of Plutarch wrote in his book *Parallel Lives*, "but she was going to visit Anthony at the very time when women are at the acme of intellectual power".

As Schiff notes Anthony needed Cleopatra for her to fund his military endeavours in the East and Cleopatra needed him for protection. Showing love as genuine yet it was also a political Savvy. Her ability to keep intact with whatever and whosoever she wanted shows an amazing quality of a woman that uses her qualities for her own sake which is remarkable. Being passionately in love and that with the man of power and convenience makes her love selfish. The short lived love affair of Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale that soon blocks the further Chances of togetherness between the two is deep and compassionate. Hester's love for Dimmesdale is very different from Cleopatra's. While Cleopatra keeps all the possibility of separation away Hester wilfully picks to be aloof from the man she loves just in order to save him from a public shame. She decides to bear the shame alone and staying at the same settlement though as an outcast she has freedom to meet him with an excuse of taking spiritual guidance, yet she keeps away from him to protect him from the repeated reminder of the sin he had committed with her. This selfless nature of her love makes her a woman of great dignity and places her love for Dimmesdale at the most respectable status.

Both Cleopatra and Hester are rebels. But their rebellions are different in nature yet they fight against the subjugation and reflect the strength of women in their own respective ways. Cleopatra's revolts with extremity and bloodshed using all her tactics and experiences of being in the throne earned her more enemies and a tragic end while the way in which Hester goes against the laws of the society brings transformation of her status in the same society. She becomes a figure of kindness and charity. The letter A that signified the Harsh word Adulteress metamorphoses into Angel and able.

IV. CONCLUSION

History stands as a testimony to the strength of a woman and the extent to which she can bear to make her love survive it also has witnessed the reach of violence that a woman can lead to quench the trust of her hatred. She can stand as an epitome of forbearance and at the same time she can be also the symbol of destruction. The strength of women meets no finite definition. Hence, the question is either a selfless woman is the ideal woman or the woman of free will is the ideal, must be changed as some are both, while some are neither yet they are women with strength. Hester and Cleopatra are described as the most beautiful women. While Cleopatra is known for her vigorous and determined stubbornness to manifest all her plans Hester on the other hand is a woman of dignity not ready to give up her self esteem. Though belonging to different ages and environment both have remarkable audacity. Beautiful in their own ways both women challenges the ways of society and walks on the pathways of their own deliberate decision and choices. One filled with decency and ability to transform the suffering into freedom and the other rejects to suffer and revolts. Hester and Cleopatra are two of the most celebrated heroines in literature continuing to inspire the idea of power in women.

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