

Women Torn Between Thwarted Oppression and Aggressive Self-Expression in the Writings of Atwood, Carter, Byatt and Winterson

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Abstract

This writing evaluates the position of contemporary women through their fiction, assessing how much their position has improved from the times when women were relegated to being a passive angel in the house, or condemned to asserting themselves in aggressive monstrosity. The writings of four contemporary women writers, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt and Jeanette Winterson, suggest that however much improved the position of women in both their social lives and their careers, women are still frequently confined to a diminished personal and social status as a result of men's vulnerability and desire for female support, even as they patriarchally assert themselves over them. Women struggle to escape victim status through ruthless methods, while some women manage to achieve fulfilment even despite their oppressions.

Keywords: *women, self-expression, trapped, power, angel, monster, Carter, Byatt, Atwood, Winterson, Woolf, Cixous*

Özet

Bu makale çağdaş kadınların durumunu ürettikleri edebiyat eserleri yoluyla değerlendirmekte ve kadının ya evin edilgen meleği olduğu ya da saldırgan bir canavar olarak suçlandığı zamanlardan bugüne durumunun ne yönde geliştiğini incelemektedir. Dört çağdaş kadın yazar, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt ve Jeanette Winterson'un eserleri göstermektedir ki kadınların durumu her ne kadar yaşam ve kariyer açısından olumlu yönde gelişmişse de, erkeklerin ataerkil güçlerini ortaya koymadaki kırılğanlıkları ve bu konuda karşı cinsten görmeyi arzuladıkları destek nedeniyle kadınlar hala erkeklerden daha düşük bir kişisel ve sosyal

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statüye mahkûmdurlar. Bazı kadınlar merhametsizce bile olsa bu kurban statüsünden kaçmak için mücadele vermekte, bazıları ise tüm baskılara rağmen kendilerini gerçekleştirebilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kadınlar, kendini ifade, kısıtlanmak, güç, melek, canavar, Carter, Byatt, Atwood, Winterson, Woolf, Cixous

While considerable progress has been made by women in the twentieth and twenty-first century, in life as in literature, a predominant trope still impedes women within a double bind which traps them into being a procreative, innocent victim on the one hand, or a sexually predatory monster on the other. This situation has been trenchantly described by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), reflecting their evaluation of nineteenth century women of letters. In the nineteenth century the alternative to being an angel in the house meant that women could find themselves out on the street; in many places in the third world this still means that women are actually beaten or shot dead. Certainly women have gained many rights since the nineteenth century, including the vote, an opportunity to gain an education and a professional career, and basic judicial rights. Largely through the gains of second wave feminism, women have gained a measure of economic and sexual independence. Yet each step forward is dragged backwards by counterbalances. While women are represented in the professions, a glass ceiling often bars them from the higher levels of the educational, political and business world, as limited, token women break through into top positions. Far more women succeed than they once did, yet their success by no means reflects the early promise indicated by the intelligence and potential of young girls.

Women still need to rationalise and personally defend every advance in their freedom against social prejudice and vulnerable male egos and their fragile virility. Sexual freedom is a fraught issue in many parts of the world, especially the third world, and most women remain responsible for their fertility and the care of their children, leaving them juggling career and family concerns in a delicate balance. H  l  ne Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) forty years ago encouraged women to write their bodies and to express themselves forcefully, mind and body, through their "sexts" (Cixous 342), while asserting how they may be caught between the

devil and the deep blue sea, “the Medusa and the abyss” (341), between lonely professional success, or smothered in domesticity. As Sylvia Plath asserted fifty years ago in her fig-tree metaphor in *The Bell Jar* (1963), women wish to express themselves in both their private and public lives, and not be obliged to choose one over the other: “One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor.... I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-tree, starving to death, just because I couldn’t make up my mind which of the figs I would choose” (Plath 81); we may wonder how much Plath was able to manage both of these choices in her short life. How far is it possible for women to experience a full human life; or do they remain restrained into negotiating with patriarchal comrades, husband or boss, for moderate victories under ultimate male control?

As Virginia Woolf suggests in *A Room of One’s Own* (1928), women in literature have been imagined as amazing and powerful, exemplified in “Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Phèdre, Cressida, Rosalind, Desdemona, the Duchess of Malfi [...] Millamant, Clarissa, Becky Sharp, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Madame de Guermantes” (Woolf 44), while in real life they are condemned to showing men in flattering, enlarging mirrors, “reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (37) rather than living as subjects in their own right. Annette Kolodny describes her “painfully personal distress at discovering whores, bitches, muses and heroines dead in childbirth where we had once hoped to discover ourselves” (Kolodny 97). This paper evaluates the position of women through a few works of four contemporary female writers who elaborate the pitfalls rather than the glories of the double bind restraining women over the last decades. And even the partial victories shown in fiction published in England and Canada presents a more optimistic view of women’s potential than that available to women in many other parts of the world.

Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* of 1972 suggests the professional and personal limitations under which women operate, as its anonymous narrator negotiates her position beside the male foibles of her lovers and superiors. Analepsis constantly draws her back into her previously damaging affair, which she whitewashes under the name of marriage. Her art teacher lover

puts down her efforts by dismissively retorting that “there have never been any important women artists” (Atwood 537); as a result she becomes a commercial artist. She describes deserting her child, although this child was never allowed to be born. She only learns when she is pregnant that her lover is already married and has his own children. Succumbing to his pressure to abort her baby, he diminishes her experience: “it’s tough ... but it’s better this way” (565), as she feels herself subjugated to patriarchal power, stuck up in a metal frame as “they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar” (559). After the distress of the abortion which she confounds with an illusory wedding, she leaves him, remaining unable either to return to her parents or to trust any relationship again. She describes the trauma of this experience as losing part of her body, like an amputated limb, which leaves her insensate as a result. In her current relationship with another fellow-artist, Joe, she is insouciant, acting ‘masculine’ in her casual sexuality when they meet, coolly taking off her clothes as if she “were feeling no emotion. But [she] really wasn’t” (22).

She again becomes trapped in this relationship, between the sensitive helpmate role he wants her to assume, or the selfish predator she veers towards; he denounces her for her lack of moral support, feeling himself insecure alongside her greater professional success. He throws pots and then mutilates them, slashing them, as they “uphold Joe’s unvoiced claim to superior artistic seriousness: every time [she] sell[s] a poster design or get[s] a new commission [for illustrating children’s books,] he mangles another pot” (541), in his emotional knee-jerk vulnerability to her artistic success and superiority. Thus we see Woolf’s view of the relations between the sexes a century ago still persists, with the woman expected to reflect the man back to his inflated ego in a flattering looking-glass and his assumed superiority, his insecurity longing to see himself enlarged, and his fury as he is balked of this flattering view (Woolf 37). Inoculated against marriage, the narrator plans to escape by moving out, as he bombards her with emotional blackmail in an attempt to ensure her love, to gain the security of marriage from her, and to bolster his weak, castrated male ego. “The truth is, you think my work is crap, you think I’m a loser, and I’m not worth it” (Atwood 580). Refusing such requests for reassurance from a grown man, his demands for sympathy make her feel she’s trampling on a small animal, in his appeals to her pity. No wonder she states that men

should be superior, while it is obvious that they are certainly not (583). Atwood's narrator discusses with her friend Anna the physical problems and side-effects of contraceptives and marriage for women, while the reader witnesses Anna's husband David's physical and psychological demands on her, including brutally raping her in bed, or diminishingly insulting her and degrading her in public. Even if Anna's abjectly passive behaviour towards her husband aggravates his savagery towards her, Atwood still suggests the lose-lose position of women having to suffer negative male physical or psychological bullying while he asserts himself, leaving the victim either breaking away from the relationship, undergoing trauma, or burying herself in insensitivity.

Tears and Violence in Castration and Androgyny

Angela Carter's dystopian critique of putative feminism, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), presents women either as oppressing others by asserting their own power, or remaining oppressed within their feminine weakness. Carter wrote this novel while making her study on the dual bind of women in *The Sadeian Woman*, (1979). This work presents women as either weak or powerful; the abject Justine of the Marquis de Sade is eventually abused to death by submitting herself to the whip hand of men and women, while Juliette and Eugénie associate with tyrants in exerting dreadful power over the vulnerable. This dialectic is exemplified in *The Passion of New Eve*, although those in positions of strength and weakness change places throughout the novel. This satirical work shows the chauvinist Evelyn falling into the hands of the parricidal Mother of the cult of Women, after bullying his lover Leilah. The Women blazon their theme of revenge against men in the truncated phallus they use to signify their intentions. They exploit their power in the chthonic, matriarchal Beulah just as cruelly and dictatorially as men have always done. When Evelyn falls into their hands, he undergoes castration and a forced sex change into a woman, helplessly expressing the irony of being "castrated with a phallic symbol" (Carter, *Passion* 70). The Mother who operates on him proclaims herself the Castratrix of the Phallogocentric Universe, as her ambiguously feminine, maternal power is seen in her double tier of grafted breasts. Evelyn is made to suffer punishment for his cruel behaviour to Leilah in enslaving her as a sex object. In fact he had actually been caught by Leilah's tantalising pursuit of him, an interplay with himself as apparently "a bird of prey,

although my prey, throughout the pursuit, had played the hunter” (25). He enjoys tying her to the bed, and beats her when he returns to find her in her own excrement, dismissing her as “a born victim” (28). This behaviour only perpetuates his self-confessed abuse of women from the beginning of the novel. He describes himself as perfectly normal, other than finding perverse amusement in tying a girl to the bed before copulating.

As soon as Leilah becomes pregnant, he is suspicious about the child being his own, and deserts her in hospital after a botched backstreet abortion, her organs bleeding into sterility, from which she somehow rises to pursue him and wreak her revenge on him in the Mother’s enclave in the desert, in this magic realist novel. Carter suggests “our external symbols must always express the life within us with absolute precision; how could they do otherwise, since that life has generated them?” (6). Her dystopian narrative implies that if women were given the chance, they would bully and butcher their way into grasping power against men just as they have been bullied in the past. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter asserts the necessity of the predatory Juliette’s need to achieve power for women, but she also insert the proviso: “I do not think I want Juliette to renew my world; but, her work of destruction complete, she will, with her own death, have removed a repressive and authoritarian superstructure that has prevented a good deal of the work of renewal” (*Sadeian* 111). First liberation through female aggression, and then the breakthrough to a glorious liberation for both sexes; of course we are still living in hopes of such a future.

When Eve escapes the parthenogenetic pregnancy the Mothers of Beulah wish to foist onto her/him by impregnating her with his own sperm in order to carry the Messiah of the new age, she helplessly flees this fate. Out of the frying pan into the fire, she becomes prey to the sadistic misogyny of Zero. While Zero is an extreme man he yet represents many typical misogynist qualities, beating his seven wives and dehumanizing them to a status lower than the pigs in whose excrement they struggle. Rape is only the first step in a systematic humiliation and objectification of these women. They are forbidden language, either with each other or with him, and the possible weapon of their front teeth is taken from them, in order that they might not injure him in fellatio; he is clearly terrified of any sort of ‘vagina dentata’, feeling himself castrated by the ambiguous power

of the film star Tristessa. His victimized women have masochistically accepted their subservience to him (*Passion* 95), including his assertion that they need the sacred elixium vitae he ejaculates into them. They return to him after “peddl[ing] their asses in Los Angeles” (98), and finally die with him after the humiliation and rape of Tristessa, slaughtered by their destruction of her house which rebounds on them as Tristessa escapes with Eve/lyn. Most women are isolated and dispersed in domesticity throughout nations and classes; while these women have the potential of each other’s support, they fail to achieve sisterhood or any freedom from Zero. They demonstrate the masochism Carter describes in *The Sadeian Woman*, as Justine draws down disaster after mishap not only on her own head but on those of others, refusing to learn the rules of survival or negotiation.

When Eve/lyn joins Zero’s women, physically trapped in her newly minted female body, she learns the female masquerade that she will henceforth need to play, which part she was not born to. We may remember that all women need to learn their role as women, as suggested by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Simone de Beauvoir also affirms that women are not born but made by their experience of femininity. Eve/lyn undergoes the suffering which is integral to the lives of the women in Zero’s harem; she suggests that boredom and suffering would have destroyed her if she had not been able to smoke pot or grass; she also asserts that anger kept her alive. Eve understands her/himself as a former violator at the moment of her own physical violation, in a karmic order that determines that s/he must be punished (*Passion* 102). Quick to flee persecution or stealing away, as Cixous suggests (343), Eve is finally given a chance to fight alongside the Women by the very Lilith s/he had once abused under the name of Leilah. Leilah/ Lilith has forgiven her, as well she might, having ensured Eve’s transformation into a woman for his previous sins. The Women give up any attempt to create a miraculous Messianic birth in preference for engaging in a physical fight for their rights in an apocalyptic, chaotic America. The end of the novel shows their Mother goddess terminally washed up on the beach, having lived past idealism into helplessness. Carter dismisses the idealistic dreams of such feminist fanaticism in this novel and in *The Sadeian Woman*, asserting that “The goddess is dead” (*Sadeian* 110). Eve/lyn’s behaviour swings from sadism to helplessness as his or her circumstances determine, like the masochist Leilah who

becomes a powerful Sophia or Lilith as Mother abdicates from power. As the narrator in Atwood's *Surfacing* declares: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim" (Atwood 644).

The curious case of Tristessa represents the most tragic wo/man of all, who like Zero's women, believes in the necessity of women's suffering, expressed in her adopted name of many tears, and through the screen images she projects of herself, including her poignant acting of Emily Brontë's Catherine Earnshaw in the tragic *Wuthering Heights*. Retiring to the desert, Tristessa recreates this suffering in the glass tears surrounding her mausoleum home, performing divination "by means of tears" (*Passion* 143). S/he confesses himself "seduced by the notion of a woman's being, which is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being" (137). S/he had believed this would make him inviolable to rape, enabling him only to "be broken" (137), leaving the essence its integrity, as s/he fantasises her child being eaten by rats. A man who feels himself a woman, s/he embodies the "perfect" woman through a conviction of woman's identity created as "the shrine of his own desires" (128).

As gorgeous film star s/he shamefully hides the evidence of her unwanted male sexuality, tucking his appendages into her anus, becoming neither man nor woman, perhaps androgynous. S/he experiences a final blossoming as a man in responding to Eve's love, as they combine their masculine and feminine correlatives (149) into glorious passion together, until the child crusaders revert him to his female persona and intolerantly shoot his outrageously dubious sexuality. Tristessa lives out his belief in the female suffering he chooses: "Tristessa. Enigma. Illusion. Woman" (6). This novel relates an interplay between predators and victims as they change places and roles.

The single breakthrough beyond empowered savagery and abject weakness is Tristessa and Eve's passionate realization of their male and female selves in a brief apotheosis of love together, leaving Eve expecting a child at the end. The wild sexual exchanges of this novel may suggest the androgyny which Woolf finds so important for self-expression in art; representing only one side of the human equation is necessarily incomplete (Woolf, *Room* 102).

Self-expression through a Painful or Monstrous Kali

Some of A.S. Byatt's stories present strikingly resilient women, as seen in Sheba Brown of her "Art Work" in *Matisse Stories* (1993), who rises above victimization without violence. The queen hinted in her name is an illusion, for Sheba is an abused mother and domestic cleaner. A battered, Guyanese-Irish home help, she sometimes turns up to work for her artistic employer, Debbie, in tears and with strange coloured bruises as a result of her man Hooker, whom she considers as an 'act of God' or beyond her control (Byatt, "Art" 42-43); she uses a police order to keep him away. But she survives this experience to quietly and indefatigably create her squashy sculptures from every possible source; skips, jumble sales, recycles, hand-me-downs, until her work finally achieves vindication in public fame. Debbie meanwhile struggles as the family bread winner to find time for creative, non-commercial art work, with her double burden of organizing the cleaner, children and husband alongside her paid work for a magazine; in this family, female liberation has enabled Debbie to be the cash worker, while her husband expresses himself idly at home. She panders to the sensitivities of her artist husband Robin, calming him when he provokes their cleaner Mrs Brown, who discusses his work and colours, daring to move his things while cleaning. Despite the luxury of his comfortable home studio and his privileged status, Robin is struggling to get his rather uninspired art work exhibited.

Climactically, Sheba Brown's highly original "brilliantly coloured Aladdin's Cave" (77) gains exposure on television. Her knitted, crochet and rag rug tapestries reveal mad faces and peeping eyes, elegant and sinister spiders and flies, treasure chests of crazy collections. Pink and chocolate pouffe breasts suggest a faceless Diana of Ephesus, and a "dragon and chained lady, St George and Princess Saba. Perseus and Andromeda" (79) sits in the centre with a daintily embroidered Botticelli Venus face. On television Sheba explains her "urge to construct" (84) and release all this splendidly "inexhaustible and profligate energy" with the sole tool of a knitting-machine. Surviving abuse and her menial job, she emerges unscathed, declaiming: "Well it all just comes to me in a kind of coloured rush, I just like putting things together, there's so much in the world, isn't there, and making things is a natural enough way of showing your excitement" (85).

After this artistic family is suitably humbled by the achievements of their inspirational and indigent cleaner, Debbie manages to get back into her desired wood engraving herself, as well as providing for the family through her commercial art. Robin, whose art had long remained fixated on static blocks of colour, starts to take an interest in oriental mythology, and creates a splendid picture of Kali the Destroyer, rather closely representing Sheba Brown: “that prolific weaver of bright webs” thinks Debbie indignantly. But she observes that his work has been liberated into “a new kind of loosed, slightly savage energy in [its] use of colour and movement” (90). Clearly their cleaner Sheba Brown has revolutionized this household, her inspirational creativity surpassing domestic oppression and grief. She transports the family beyond their tired quotidien, creatively surmounting the obstacles of her underprivileged status and out-arting her artistic employers, thereby subverting all the clichés of class, race and gender together.

In “Body Art,” *Little Black Book* (2004), Byatt again offers an indigent and physically disadvantaged, while sexually liberated Daisy, who achieves self-expression despite her restraints. She undergoes a destructive and botched abortion and invasive surgery which almost sterilises her, resulting in an infection of her tubes entailing the loss of an ovary. Undestroyed by this experience, she uses it to create an amazing installation of the goddess Kali in the form of an Arcimboldo portrait in a converted church. Transforming ‘stolen’ material from the hospital where she volunteered to make decorations, she creates an enthroned Kali sitting surrounded with plastic infants and mothers, composed of skulls, prostheses, dead men’s hands and fetuses; Kali brandishes a saw, and her knitting shines like blood. This work of art illuminates the real pain, “human harm, and threats to the female body” (“Body” 106) that Daisy had undergone in her botched abortion, making use of the experience as therapy in order to transcend it. Homeless and found ‘nesting’ in the hospital, the gynaecologist Damian briefly houses her, to which she responds by “repaying” him with sexual favours, and ends up getting rather miraculously pregnant through her ‘saviour’, again needing an abortion. Despite the reproductive traumas she had expressed so graphically, Damian bulldozes her into bearing what he assumes to be his baby; she sees this as an issue over the ownership of his sperm. She finally agrees to carry the baby to term, but her situation

is imperilled yet again through the “life-threatening incubus” (109) introduced into her body. She suffers pre-eclampsia, barely making it into labour, where she releases nine months of pent-in terror and rage in screaming and weeping. Damian is rather dubiously called in to save her in the near fatal birth of her and their child.

Byatt ends this magnificent story with an epiphanous finale. Both unintentional, fortuitous parents meet around the child by Daisy’s bedside. Daisy expresses her powerful feeling of love for her little girl baby which transfigures all her suffering: “But when I *saw* her – that was love, that was *it*, I know what it is” (124). Thus she passes through the destructive risks of Kali as well as finally vindicating the magnificent new life which emerges through her. Maternity offers a precarious climactic achievement beyond the impasse of this situation. Carter remains sceptical about any achievements made through the channel of mothering: the “maternal superiority” of making a life which is constantly deferred to the value of the next generation will never gain women any power, she asserts. “Because she is the channel of life, woman as mythic mother lives at one remove from life. A woman who defines herself through her fertility has no other option” (Carter, *Sadeian* 107). Certainly Daisy expresses herself through her art, while also affirming her celebration and love of her miraculous daughter. In both these stories, Byatt uses the theme of goddesses like the cruel Kali, or the procreative Venus or Diana in many-breasted fertility, as well as the victim Andromeda. She suggests that female artists who undergo and transcend suffering may create from their experience of pain, both artistically and procreatively. Replicating the situation of many nineteenth century writers, they forge their art through suffering.

In a final example from Jeanette Winterson’s *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), the dualism of victim and predator I am elaborating here is projected onto the nineteenth century Babel Dark, who loves, but cannot free his mind from suspicions. Deeply and passionately in love with Molly O’Rourke, they agree on a tryst, and she suggests a bed trick, where he visits her secretly at night, shades of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* and illicit love. She waits for him in a warm dark room, frankly inspecting his excited body as he undresses. After making love, she shows him how to pleasure her, and the fatal seed or poison of suspicion falls into his

benighted mind. How can a girl initiate such behaviour; could she have been entirely sexually innocent before knowing him? Following her home on one occasion, he watches through the window as she embraces a man. Hence when she becomes pregnant, and everyone encourages him to marry her, as has been the custom for centuries in England, in order to regularise their relationship and provide a home for the resulting child, he remains sunk in his bitterly benighted ignorance. When she begs him to marry her, he beats her so severely that she falls, and then he leaves her to bear alone the child who is born blind as a result of his physical abuse of her. They have a second chance when they meet fortuitously at the Great Exhibition in London, although by this time he has literally made himself ill and destroyed himself by marrying a coldly unsympathetic 'good' woman.

These two perpetuate their lives permanently split for him between lifelong marital penance with a woman who freezes and sickens him to death in mental agony, with whom he tortures both her and himself in grief and anguish. He also enjoys two month periods of escape and fulfilment with the sunshine love of his life, Molly O'Rourke and her child. Her sexual warmth or prescience, "was a bright disc in him that left him sun-spun. She was circular, light-turned, equinox-sprung. She was season and movement, but he had never seen her cold. In winter, her fire sank from the surface to below the surface, and warmed her great halls like the legend of the king who kept the sun in his hearth" (Winterson, *Lighthousekeeping* 88). Enjoying two months each year with Molly and her child, he suffers ten months of agony and exile living as an apparently respectable pastor. Molly makes one final attempt to free them from this perversely hypocritical and wretched lifestyle years later by visiting him and proposing their escape from these lies in order to live joyfully together. But Babel Dark is caught in the symbolism of his name; he can neither accept his present life, nor escape his doubts regarding Molly. Winterson weaves these stories into source material for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. However, she suggests that the respectably married pastor of Salts, the Reverend Dark, is not Dr Jekyll. Rather the illegitimate visitor of Molly who visits her in Bristol, Lux, is the good Dr. Jekyll, the lover who lives outside social laws. It is Mr Hyde the monster who is the pastor trapped inside his respectability, as his persistence in blind, intolerant behaviour condemns both his families to an abjectly wretched life. What Molly

never tells Babel, because he persistently mistrusts her, is that he saw her embracing her brother; she is entirely innocent throughout.

These contemporary writers' imaginative recreations of women's situation up to our times exemplify women trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea, placing suffering and innocence on one side, with experience, self-assertion and joy on the other. Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* shows the woman debilitated and traumatized by male insecurity and weakness which persists in refusing her as an equal, while requiring her moral support. Angela Carter shows many forms of love and abuse in *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve*, which only rarely breaks through into mutual sympathy. She suggests that life is a playground between victim and abuser; and one would scarcely prefer the victim role. Naive innocence merely enables oppression and subjugation, while sexual and intellectual self-fulfilment often condemns their exponents to patriarchal rejection. It is pointless to castigate women who exploit a similar power to that used by men. Male insecurity leads men to oppress any display of female liberty, while women remain trapped into being defiant *femme fatale* on one hand, or domestic drudge on the other. A.S. Byatt's stories do offer the position of subjugated women magnificently breaking through into splendid self-expression. But Jeanette Winterson shows the dark, male perspective in *Lighthousekeeping*, of male insecurity leading to blind possessiveness, causing men to enclose women behind walls; one would like to wish that such stories are dated, but we know they are not. Whether crushed in innocent abjection, or grasping power in order to survive, women are far more sinned against than sinning. It is high time for us to embrace and engage with women's glorious self-expression through her "sexts" as Cixous says (342), asserting themselves in every possible way without restraint, in the twenty-first century.

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