



JOURNEY AS ATONEMENT IN IMOGEN BENNIE'S NEVADA

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ABSTRACT

Imogen Bennie's Nevada is a fiction written about trans woman, for trans woman and by a trans woman. Trans woman in reality are different from trans woman portrayed on television. The author has strikingly replicated the inhibition of society. The plot sketches in detail the dark story of Maria Griffiths, a young trans woman living in New York City. The whole novel is about how Maria, the central character, has to live a life past-transition. The desire of self- destruction always creeps into her mind and the knowing of self is gained in the light of others' tranmutation. Maria sets out on a journey that will most certainly change her forever.

Key words: *Journey, Trans, Atonement, Betrayal*

INTRODUCTION

Imogen Bennie's *Nevada* is a fiction written about trans woman, for trans woman and by a trans woman. The novel details about redeeming the self from the past, from unfaithful relationship and to look into the future. It is about renewing and moving on. In fact, the whole novel is about how Maria, the central character, has to live a life past-transition and how to exist like a three-dimensional person who cares about her body, her mind, her life, her friends and lovers. It is about to find out the ability to exist in a relationship with another person.

Bennie's *Nevada* is a darkly comic story of Maria Griffiths, a young trans woman living in New York City. The central story revolves around her discontent nature of living. She often tries to seek validity for her values by moving from place to place. The story is more about

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Maria's stream of consciousness, monologues, about her identity, queer way of life and pop cultural life. She indulges more and more in thinking. She loses her job at the firm where she works, crashes her friend Piranha, steals her friend's car, inhales heroin and drive all the way. When she finds out her girlfriend has lied to her, the world she thought she had carefully built for herself begins to unravel, and Maria sets out on a journey that will most certainly change her forever. The desire of self- destruction always creeps into her mind and the knowing of self is gained in the light of others' tranmutation. The novel has an epigraph saying "*sometimes saying good bye could be so easy so come on*" *come on, come on, leave this city.*" (Die! Die! Die!, 155)

Pain of Betrayal

The novel begins with the description of unreal relationship between Maria and Steph. Maria feels distanced herself from Steph, when she finds out that her friend has beguiled in her life. Betrayal, anger, and sadness creep into the interrelationship. Maria literally feels her brain is shutdown because of the unexpected turn of events. At this moment, Steph impels Maria to respond. She urges "it would be nice if I could get a response to that. It would be nice if I felt like you cared at all" (10). But Maria reacts the other way. She exhibits her repugnance thought silence. For her, the disloyal relationship gives a sense of removal, which has become familiar in her life. She attempts to internalize the betrayals and tries to keep herself safe. In the wake of betrayal and anger, Maria finds self-pity. To keep herself safe, she becomes astute. The moments of insecurity and tears lead to disharmony. Reconciliation is comprehensively unworthy. Maria contemplates breaking up with Steph. A kind of meta-thinking gets into her brain on how to prevent the feelings of her girlfriend. Driving to the end of Brooklyn Bridge, she views the green light and gets the clarion call to obviate the relationship with Steph.

Life as a Trans Woman

Trans woman in reality are different from trans woman portrayed on television. The trauma, misconceptions and mystery surrounding their bodies are difficult and painful. Bennie has intensely put forward what others think of trans woman. The author has strikingly replicated the inhibition of society. Maria is sarcastic, appalling about her condition and on occasions, she presumes, it is pointlessly sorry. The weird ideas people have about trans woman are terrible. It is a hilarious, complicated assuming self-journey to the affirmation of being a trans. Being in damage control mode and to remember what weird ideas people have about trans woman. For Maria, transitioning is a painful reward. In her teenage, she figured out that she was trans. No one reads or cares being a trans. It is a process of boredom and depletion. In fact Maria visages both, she feels otherwise privileged with her body, at the same, she



feels it is not glamorous or mysterious. Becoming a trans woman was a very special episode for her but it is terrible and weary. Maria expresses her pain by saying “*here is what I’ve figured out about myself, here is how emotionally honest I can be, here is how vulnerable I am*” (121).

Journey and Atonement

To quote the words of Damon Galgut, “a journey is a gesture inscribed in space; it vanishes even as it’s made. You go from one place to another place, and on to somewhere else again, and already behind you there is no trace that you were ever there.” Maria’s journey begins in search of contentment. She takes steps towards Piranha, who lives anywhere, postulating to find atonement. Travelling to New York gives her happiness. Though she was travelling in a wrong direction to find Piranha, the ride becomes faster. She texts her mentioning that she broke up with Steph. In fact it was Maria who gave her the name Piranha for her angry nature. The friendship between Maria and Piranha settled into a kind of sisterhood. Their relationship was like a matching armor or complementary armor, letting none to get in. Finally Maria reaches Piranha’s apartment and expresses herself as “I have a million bajillion trans things that I need to figure out, still. I am totally the Buddhist monk who’s all convinced she’s attained enlightenment!” (88).

The suppressed anger and self-pity is verbalized. She expresses her words by saying “that feeling without words that I had my whole life like oh my god something is seriously... with my body and the way everybody is reading it” (88). The wish to be alone and experiencing the transition defends her mind. Piranha advises her on the need to take the adolescent adventures, which she missed at her younger life. The conversation between both generates different perspectives. Maria learns to be extremely irresponsible about her life from then. The momentary relationship between both grows up. After, breaking up with Steph, Maria takes her shelter under Piranha’s roof regularly. Piranha replenishes her by uttering “I just need you to understand that I feel kind of resentful about the fact that you’ve ignored me pretty bad for so long and now that you’ve got a reason” (112) to stay beside me.

Maria’s desire for self-destruction was not as profound as dealing with people. The intention to maintain a strong and beholding relationship fails frequently. To latch on with Rae, Leah, and LL could not clasp for a long period of time. The transitioning was hard and being trans was even harder for her. The spinning relationships in her life forge her to maintain a defense mechanism, a kind of turtle shell, to protect her from any components of catastrophe. It seems like tans was the only catastrophic thing happened to Maria. The unaccountable way of leading life without any care and self-sacrifice gets intense in her life. She needs someone to articulate her excitement, pleasure and pain clearly. The ever wandering and never fulfilling



emotions debunk her life. She needs someone to understand where she is at and what she needs.

The voice of atonement wriggles Maria about her irresponsible way of leading her life. James interrogates her stand on relationships by saying “like nobody cheated on anybody and you didn’t just stop having interests in common” (224). Maria and James start get close. Gradually, she realizes “I don’t need to be irresponsible in every way. I think what I meant was that I need to stop feeling responsible, to everybody all the time, for presenting this consistent and static face” (224). The reconciliation and apprehension of where she belongs procreates her thoughts. She comes into terms to get over the idea of getting rid of her own emotions. The contemplation of being responsible in a relationship means being consistent and stoic arises. It also meant her to debunk her own feelings.

CONCLUSION

The novel does not end on a happy note. Maria chooses Nicole at the end. There is no getting into home and finding a perpetual relationship. At the end Maria, Steph, James, Piranha move on with their momentous pop cultural way of living. The characters betray and show resistance through silence and seek atonement in acquiring new relationships. In fact, the novelist leaves the plot loose and bestows the readers with their own imagination.

REFERENCE

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