



TOWARDS A POETICS OF FEMINISM: THE NEW HISTORICISM AND POST-MODERN FEMINISM AT THE CROSSROADS

DR. K. VIJILA

M.A., M.Phil., M.Ed., Ph.D

Associate Professor of English

St. Johns College

Palayamkottai (TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of my article is to undertake an analysis as to how Alice Borchardt, a renowned American novelist, interacts with history, with feminist concerns. The interaction is one post-modernist demonstration of art which permeates the narratives of the recent times. I consider Alice Borchardt The Dragon Queen as one specimen of postmodern feminist art which has incorporated a wide variety of the postmodern discourse. Within the parameter of my analysis I have attempted to demonstrate how her novel The Dragon Queen excavates the very real history of history as “a complimentary perspective from which to view the recent revival of interest in questions of history in literary studies in the United States (Montrose 25). I infer that by problematizing history. Alice Borchardt carves out a new worth, a new response and a new deliberation in her text.

INTRODUCTION

Alice Borchardt is one writer, whose collection of fiction is not much talked about in the American literary scenario, the simple reason being the much of her fictional materials run at a tangent with magical and non-human elements. At one point it may look like a Harry Porter movie, at another, it eventuates a feeling of animal comics. This is one postmodern crisis, I wish to make a reference to. While post modernism is pivoted upon *pastiche*, naturally then Alice Borchardt’s fictional materials demonstrate configuration of magic realism and new historicism. Eventually Alice Borchardt can be regarded as a postmodern feminist, in that she saddles her texts with new historicist ventures. Thus, *The Dragon Queen* is expressive of manifestations of historical perception of the artist who “began with a desire to speak with dead” (Greenblatt 1).



Alice Borchardt pinpoints the facts that humanity has lost its potency to disseminate any ethical balance. Hence, she brings in the non-human conditions which metaphorically enunciate a new living with a lease of new ethics.

A postmodern text, *The Dragon Queen* with its self-narrative, has central human love and eco-balance. One witnesses the dragons playing on the beach, with the clear proclamation of the novelist that “the only way that you learn about love is to love and be loved” (*Dragon Queen* 25). [hereafter, referred to as *DQ*] The novel is also reflective of the Arthurian legend. According to Neal Wyatt:

The tales of King Arthur are pure reading pleasure, mixing romance, magic, and myth into stories that continue to spin off into new threads. As winter melts slowly into spring, spend the last of the cold dark night’s ensorcelled by the magic of Merlin, the boy he found, and the Knights of the Round Table. (110)

The dragon as a symbol lies heavily burdened in the novel. Yet, with a visionary strategy, Alice Borchardt weaves her story from the dragon world, which is indicative of the primeval innocence.

According to Sheila Soup:

Set in a Britain freshly rid of Roman rule, this tale is loosely based on Arthurian legend. Readers meet a noble Arthur, a wise Morgana, a mesmerizing yet nasty Merlin, and a very different sort of Guinevere. Raised by wolves and endowed with ivy like skin armour reminiscent of Celtic tattoos, this young woman is no frail maiden in need of a Lancelot. Young Guinevere blossoms into womanhood while finding herself at the centre of struggle for the soul of her country. On one side is the powerful arch druid Merlin, who has sold out to Romano-British slaveholders. On the other side are matriarchs, sorcerers, and sorceresses, all of whom honour the old ways. With a sense of destiny and the fire of youth, Arthur and Guinevere navigate worlds mundane and surreal. Magical encounters border on the whimsical while retaining an often-frightening edge. During these encounters, Guinevere discovers her affinity for dragons and chooses her destiny with Arthur. (154)

Back in the animal world, one sees “three of them, two men and a woman.... After leaving the child gone directly back down” (*DQ* 28). Itonia is the human who leaves the child in the animal world.



History is back again, in the company of Idonia, Dugald and Titus Maeniel recovers the static historical truth of these “Romans presentations” (33) for everyone knows they have no morals. And yet, the Saxons are no better. Unlike Merlin, Idonia is exhibitiv of the feminine grandeur and splendour.

Alice Borchardt attaches the abandoned child to the animal world. The child begins life suckling at the wolf’s teats. In the company of the she wolf and the pups, the child “was just as happy to stay where I was” (51). The child is the ‘I’ of the novel. And then later the “I” turns out to be the historical Guinevere. The non-human world adopts Guinevere, who grows up in the world of love, concern and sharing. Guinevere’s first adventure with the pirate predicts her evolution of life. She is first exposed to the war band, a historical realism tinged with an ethical blank. The helpless villages support this war band which indulges in raids, and then “flirt with the girls of the village” (DQ 54). No villager loves but only tolerates them, and hence there is “potential disaster to a family with a marriageable daughter” (54). Especially, the boys of the war bands are really tough and sadomasochistic that they quite often enact their masculinity on innocent girls at the cost of the virginity. Once, Guinevere of the impending attack by the pirates, he is too romantically involved with Issa to listen. Guinevere has to fling a pebble that “took him square to the middle of the forehead” (55) to rivet him to sense. She administers a lot of strategies to help salvage the island from the pirates. The pirates thrown aboard leave behind Kyra, a victim of molestation. Together with Kyra, Guinevere sets out to redefine gender. She is on a quest for a wholesome of being. In this regard, the words, warrants mention here. Jasbir Jain writes:

And freedom means to breathe freely, to meet people to have an openness of experience. But women have been kept in kitchens and parlours, in purdah and in luxury but deprived freedom. Virginia Woolf in her two lectures on: Women and Fiction (1928) later developed into A Room of one’s Own (1929) develops this at length. The narrative begins with the young woman being shooed of the lawn and being entrance to the library, both acts of exclusion. She is treated as a trespasser and must have a chaperon. Her freedom is curtailed and made dependent on the other people. (3)

Kyra is the remainder of this historical really submitted by Alice Borchardt, as she writes:

As to women aboard the vessel, they had seen their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons killed by the slaves. Many had been raped, some repeatedly and those pregnant or with babies at the breast had seen their newborns killed, because a woman with a child at the breast was worth less than one without. They showed no mercy. (61)



Guinevere is accorded the status of a new woman. As the novelist puts it; “for when women take revenge, it is with all their hearts and souls, not to mention considerable inventiveness and ingenuity. Every villager attests the fact that without her [Guinevere], we would have been taken by surprise” (DQ 61).

Kyra is a one-eyed woman. She is the rape victim of the chief of the pirates who “gouged my eye out because I fought him when he tried to have me” (62). She has lost her man and son, Camry. Kyra is given refuge and she takes up rebuilding not her hair cut like one. She quietly refurbishes the house and fixes the floor up with hides. An excellent weaver herself, Kyra brings Guinevere her sad story of victimisation. As the novelist records:

Being a woman didn't get me much of anything... that was when he gouged out my eye, saying it would make me more compliant, and he was right... I behaved the way the other women did, doing what I was told, even seeming to welcome their embraces (DQ 65)

Kyra begins to reconstruct her fragmented self and body in the company of Guinevere. She teaches Guinevere the songs of yore and teaches the legendary stories of the past. Guinevere learns astronomy, and the “meaning of the constellations- -the warrior, the fish, the dragon, the twins, the bull, the lions, and many more” (70). Yet Guinevere’s relationship with Kyra is something more than that. As she speculates:

That satisfied me. Kyra taught me history. Not as the Romans knew it, the story of wars and kings, but about the journey of the humankind and how we won out over both gods and beasts and now rule over both of them.... All but for the veiled, she who is fate, and even the Romans but kneel before her. (71)

Guinevere begins to grow. A new woman she is, she learns to fight from Maeniel. Dugald teaches her “of real dragons and how to rule”, as she finds time to run at “wild along the shore with mother, Black leg and Kyra” (78). Alice Borchardt fits Guinevere in the company of the agents of Nature as one finds Guinevere hunting “deer, rabbits, and even bear and big cats” (78). As Guinevere attests, “I ran with the wolves until I could run down hare, and I can still go for miles even after a lot of strife, labour battle, and child bearing” (78). And thus, Guinevere is affixed to a virginal ambience of Nature:

Then there is green, the coloured emerald learning secrets, light and fair as masses drifting sea grass on the water, or clear shading away into blue where the sea meets shore. But blue, blue what do we know of the blue? The pure arch of summer sky over



the ocean or the blues as light is lost, first transparent, then translucent, finally shading in to shadow as the surrounding beasts reach the deeps. (DQ 83)

Enlightened by Nature, Guinevere sets out through the journey of life. Her evolution of life, as constituted by the events that follow, submit what Guinevere is. She grows up to be a woman. She is exposed to knowledge by Maeniel and then Dugald. Both of them argue quite repeatedly about this. Dugald is strongly supportive of the Romans as signifying “the culminations of thousands of years of civilisation, beginning in the east and spreading westward” (84)

Maeniel, at the same time, is worried about Merlin, who rears Pendragon’s son to be a king. Alice Borchardt foregrounds these incidents before Maeniels’ act of equipping, Guinevere encounters a failed kidnap attempt by one of Merlin’s men on board, who promises her nice jewellery, if she really cares to walk with him “up to the rocks” (86). In the meantime, Guinevere with an axe, “similar to the ones carried by one of Merlin’s men on board, who promises her nice jewellery, if she really cares to walk with him “up to the rocks” (86). In the meantime, Guinevere is a witness to the great epidemic brought to the land by the crew of the ship, Issa loses her son to the epidemic. And worst of all, her stepmother, the she-wolf dies.

Alice Borchardt’s forges a new value in the death of Guinever’s mother. The dream she has before her mother’s death, establishes the divine in the animal world. In the dream, her mother does not fear death as she says, “none of us do, and it is God’s gift to us” (87). The statements stand antithetical to the human desire to live long. That is why, Guinevere is of the perception that “mother was a wolf and maybe she didn’t want to go to a place where there were humans” (DQ 93). Guinevere is able to conclude thus of Maeniel, as she speculates “wolf or not, I can believe he has a letter education than Duglad” (93). She also recollects with a sense of gratification, her mother’s selfless love, as she believes, “I would have died had not mother been willing to give me her milk and for no short time” (93). Alice Borchardt enacts the events of the last rites of Guinever’s reaction thus, “I walked out on the headland and put my head on mother’s body a cold lump under the lines. The flames....blazed with fierce intensity as the roaring, exploding sheets of fire took my mother’s soul to the stars” (97). As one finds in *The publisher’s weekly*.

Magic rules in this first volume of a trilogy that focuses on the fabled Guinevere’s adventures before and after she comes to Camelot. Borchardt (Night of the Wolf) paints a vivid portrait of the future queen, who is no pale Pre-Raphaelite princess. Suckled by a she-wolf, his child of power is protected by a Druid, Dugald, and the Gray Watcher, Maeniel not to mention a shape changing wolf man. Daughter of pagan queen, this warrior beauty takes control of her own destiny. Bold, courageous,



prophetic and possessed of powers that enable her to communicate with dragons and wolves, as well as with a shrunken head, this Guinevere engages the reader immediately, even as a spindly toddler thrown into a wolves' den.

Alice Borchardt projects the evolution of the young Guinevere, through a postmodernist pastiche, among the few things. The historical Oracle at Delphi is invoked. Guinevere asks, "If we would face raids that year" (DQ 98). Gradually, the novelist posits an eco-feminist drive as one finds Guinevere going out with "other woman to collect acorns and hazelnuts" (98). Guinevere is much concerned about her old people as she works her "way to and make sure you had plenty of food" (99). This is revealed by Alice Borchardt through Guinevere's speculation, "so, I and the rest of the women had been climbing around the rocks for several weeks, collecting the surplus. It reposed in big baskets on the thresholding floor. They had to be turned every day to ensure they were placed in the basement of the chief's house" (99). Further, as found in *The publisher's Weekly*.

A fine, lyrical storyteller, Borchardt reinvents familiar character, including a young Arthur and an evil Merlin, who seeks to control the once and future king of Camelot. This dark sorcerer may dismay some Merlin lovers, as he would rather see Guinevere dead than as Arthur's queen. It's an interesting concept in a long line of derivative explorations of a mysterious character who has long enchanted Arthurian fantasy devotees. In the prologue, Guinevere writes: "I am myself a creature of the dance, the dialogue between earth and sky, "and readers will eager for the dance to be continued in the next instalments.

Guinevere, is part of the community's economics too, as she is engaged in the collection of enough food for winter. She has been embedded with an arduous task "that might be dangerous somehow before bringing bread to the table" (DQ 99). Alice Borchardt positions Guinevere, as against the backdrop monarchical anarchy as attested as follows, "The king makes a loud noise among the people and says, "We have women here for the taking. Who needs a wife? Hire them for a year. See if you suit. Yes, some have children at their skirts. All the better, you will know they can breed well. Come and look..." (100).

Guinevere is against this, and she has "no wish to be bestowed in a place not of my choosing" (100). This sets off a rage in Dugald, her teacher who means, "That this is what comes of teaching a woman to be independent" (100). Alice Borchardt sparks off another contest with Guinevere's brother, Black leg expressing his desire to marry her. He has enough reasons to justify that they are not blood relatives and he has only fostered her when she is abandoned by her kin. The rest of the events establish Guinevere as a mighty hunter and then, the saviour of her community. In her capability to set up fire, she defends Maeniel and Black leg from the



notorious onslaught of the Bear. She emerges as a metaphor of a new woman. And eventually, her becoming a new woman arises out of her subaltern status.

Guinevere is aware of the cultural reality that woman, though useful as a companion, should have to end up “a third of fourth wife of a strong lord or the successful leader of a war band” (DQ 104). She must spin, weave, gather wool, and tend to his dairying. Guinevere grows up to be the darling of Nature enshrouded by the valley and the lakes, enlightened by the cool air and the dying sun. A mighty hunter she is, Guinevere can run well with an animal’s speed before she hunts them down, and can even skin precisely at the boar’s snout. The turbulent adventures she encounters are all figurative significations of her life’s pathways. In “the deep gloom of the summer forest”, Guinevere moves on “like a column of light” (DQ 113). She is now capable of grading the ambience as she “could smell the air, clean, so clean it held only the scent of the trees and grass” (115).

In order to enunciate a sense of completion of the metamorphosis, Alice Borchardt immerses Guinevere in the mystical aura of Nature punctuated by “the broadened streams, the fish that carry lights on their bodies and the jellyfish wandering among the water like phosphorescent balls (122). She is suffixed by the dragon, which signifies wrath. The dragon by the revelation “of its origins and life” (123) enunciates a new beginning. Wisdom comes from the dead. The dead man teaches Guinevere, the significance of death which “is the fate not just of our kind, but of all living things” (129). As she recollects further, “Maeniel told me once that a very wise man tells him that if we did not die, we could not live” (129). The dead man evokes an awakening in Guinevere. As she understands now, she is no ordinary woman. She does not have to go whimpering.

Guinevere is awakened into another place of reality, which warms her of stagnation. Stagnation causes death quickly and hence, she should not draw back now, but “must go forward” (148). Guinevere does move forward into the path of realisation of self as projected by the dragon. This is how she speculates the journey of life:

As they told me during the journey no other living creature is at peak with men. We have attained great power and we use and abuse it in a casual manner. Knowing no laws but owns, we are a scourge to all the other great kingdom of life. They might feel a friendship with me, but not with any other of my kind. (DQ 149)

Alice Borchardt reaches the next level of psychic refurbishment of the subject. In order to intensify the growth of self in Guinevere, she uses the magical world populated by the dragons and the dolphins. Guinevere, as such is found submerged in Nature’s ambience



characterized, by a selfless love and purity. Purity as constituted by Nature's elements gets equated with the virginity of Guinevere. As cited in the website:

The Dragon Queen is a vast departure from the Arthurian legends that we all know and love. So much and so that many of the characters are unrecognizable. I like the idea of Guinevere as a leader and a warrior. There are far too many negative role models in modern fiction. Many in novels aimed at young women. A Guinevere, who is not a selfless court ornament, or a simpering, adulterous, twit, is most welcome. Even refreshing, a sex addicted, sadistic, blood thirsty, Merlin on the other hand, came as a bit of a shock.

When Guinevere is nearly lost in the fathomless depth of the forest, only the dragons come up to save her. They acknowledge Guinevere's courage, and not her men's intelligence, as they take her across wild cliffs; Guinevere is filled with music and joy as she sees "rising waves with deep troughs, purple, green and black in the failing light" (DQ 137). When she listens to one of the big black whales singing, she concludes that this must be her world. This is how Alice Borchardt projects her mindset, as she writes:

And again music floated into my mind. It told of a land frozen, summer and winter alike. Off bergs drifting, glittering like diamonds in an all too brief sunlight; of bears white as the snow packs over which they hunted; birds that didn't fly but swarm, insulted by their feathers in an almost frozen sea. (138)

Further, the dragon assure a "union with the love of God" (138) her. Alice Borchardt posits an environment, untouched by the outer world of caprice and malice. The wind from the sea is indicative of a cleansing agent which "blew away some of the fog" (138). Guinevere begins her new phase of life with the dragons. The food is unadulterated as it is "wrapped in seaweed and seasoned with both salt and the crystals of honey" (139). The magnificent arches of the mountains and the cliffs do not bother her.

Alice Borchardt projects the idea that Nature alone has the potential to provide human kind its ultimate succour and solace. Also, Guinevere's pure state of mind is equated with the fact of her being a virgin. Nature alone can provide comfort to Guinevere. The "cliff the hallows, and the darkness below" (143) do not battle her, but add only joy and fulfilment to Guinevere. "The water tasted of morning" designates Guinevere, as the pioneer of a new moment seen beyond "the glow on the horizon and sunrise" (143). An all the natural elements gain elegance when it is perceived through the presence of the Flower Bride "which is a tree formed of the flowers" (DQ 143). As Alice Borchardt quaintly describes, "Blue eyes the colour of the martin's breast; long dark hair brown as the queen's bark; and skin pale creamy



white, and brushed with the merest hint of flames like the flowers” (143). At one point, Guinevere becomes the Flower Bride. This is one narrative transition, with which Alice Borchardt proclaims a new directionality of character. As cited in the web:

We also meet briefly, two of Arthur’s companions, and find them also much changed. They aren’t completely human. Having read other books by Alice Borchardt featuring ancient pagan demi gods, unicorns, and journeys across the River Styx, the seal people were no surprise here. Why did Borchardt only hint to it? Why not just use the word “Selkie”? Reading the description of an unusually pale man, with dark hair and liquid eyes, who catches fish in a unique way got a little

Nevertheless, Guinevere is interrupted by Dis, the Lord of Death. She now feels the fire pouring over her fingers “into the dead wood that blocked the stair” (144). She feels the power of Dis, which extends itself toward her. Now, she hears the wild shrieks of the seabirds promptly following the lightning that “scorched the rock” (145). The fear of death intrudes upon her as she gathers:

The fear of death is a wonderful and terrible thing. It sent me fleeing back to the wall, under the light wall, near the vine. The pain struck again and I understood my choices, because the palm of my fire hand was purple and the purple shed away to blackness at the nails. My hand was dying (DQ 145).

And then, Guinevere sees the apparition of Merlin, the chief Druid of Britain, who wants her dead. This is followed by a group of slaves who are left behind, by their captors “to guard...something important (147). As they confess “Our lives depended on our doing a good job, but like many slaves over the countries, we revolted against our masters” (147). The dragons reach on time to deliver Guinevere “to the quay on which I was sure the Gray Watcher must have first set foot in Britain” (149). Guinevere is forced to encounter the most evil thing in her life – Merlin. Now, she remembers what the dragons have said during the journey that “no other living creature is at peace with men” (149). There is then, an authorial intrusion: “We have attained great power, and we use and abuse it in a casual manner knowing no laws but our own, we are a scourge to all the other of my friend” (142). According to Zachary petit, “She’s the writing legend who gave vampire fiction new life. He’s one of today’s most promising young thriller authors. In this exclusive dual interview, mother and son discuss the family reunion of sorts where their writing paths are crossing for the first time: the supernatural genre”.

Guinevere, nevertheless is captivated by the pressure of Arthur “who would inherit the seat of a high king” (151). She is relieved, that there might be some rescue. He is enthralled by



Guinevere as the morning star” (151). He feels that he is now free to follow his own inclination. He makes her the offer of marriage. Paradoxically, Arthur is also another significant of history, burdened by the fact “that most chieftains of his rank take – sometimes must take – more than one woman, and... find it both inconvenient and sometimes impossible to marry in the conventional sense” (DQ 151). Guinevere likes his candid Nature for in just “one smooth stroke he had offered... the respect and recognition due any ranks” (151). Guinevere’s arrival prompts a ritualistic sacrifice. She is bathed and accommodated in a huge room furnished with alabaster cranes and “a band of mosaic on the floor” (153). As the novelist puts it, “the sacrifice was on the altar, ready to be poured into the trench; “oil, fruit, wine and last but not the least, a sleeping child. The thick sent of verbena filled the air in the smoke rising from the fire, ready to chase the smell of the blood” (153).

Alice Borchardt contrasts the Nature’s world of the dragons, dolphins and the Flower Bride with Merlin’s world characterized by the “soap, heavy with myrrh, surprisingly rough” (154). Guinevere manages to wriggle out of the place and she promptly hits “the circle of light in the pavilion” (154). She is backing home with the Gray Watcher, Black leg and Kyra. Alice Borchardt arranges the events in such a way, that they reinforce the thematic potential of art. As John Brannigan writes, “An important realisation of new historicism is that literature and history are inseparable...literature is a vehicle for the representation of history; it does contain insights into the formation of historical moments. It reveals the processions and tensions by which historical changes come about” (169).

The Dragon Queen also projects culture and history in parallel. Alice Borchardt brings into focus the political and cultural ideas of the historic times of Arthur. A literary text does its duty in the sense that it provides options to explore the working of the creative literary canon bound by the literary devices. While one is engaged in exploiting the historicity to interpret the literariness of a text, one is also aware of the literary devices that meditate history. In other words, Alice Borchardt’s *The Dragon Queen* manifests “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (qtd, in Brannigan 170). Hence one could surmise that *The Dragon Queen* is history embedded in cultural politics as it unmasks eco-feminism, feminism and post structuralist paradigms. It is deeply interlinked with the ethics and moral values of Authur’s time. And so, *The Dragon Queen* could be allegory of the feminist encounter between the European kings and the native subjugated women. The story of Kyra is crucial to the interpretation of the novel. While Merlin represents the colonial sadomasochist, Kyra is indicative of the subaltern. Alice Borchardt foregrounds the turbulent Nature before she invokes the disastrous male anarchy as personified in Merlin. The statement, “the road was a terrible place, frightening yet beautiful”, suggests the subaltern and eco-feminist simultaneously. Guinevere finds herself, once having escaped Merlin and his lot, on an island “wrapped in a fog that was mixed with rain” (DQ 183). Guinevere is stranded in a place “the



rocky coast of Scotland” (103) as she is swept over by the merciless rain. Once cleared of Nature’s wrath, she encounters the volcanic cliffs, which portend disaster. She cannot put her foot forward. Since the path is “slick, very green grass mixed with lichen and tufts of moss”, she feels that she is “locked within the cages of thrones” (184). This diffuses a mild identity crisis in her. The crisis is intensified, when she recognises the flowers “within the cages of thrones”. It reminds her “of roses because some were red often dark as red velvet – others white marked with scarlet bars” (DQ 184). The novelist projects Guinevere’s fragmented self, thus, “It was not here, the muggy heat only a long summer in the wetlands beings. I had begun to perspire. The dump clouds drifting among the throne bushes wet my face. I didn’t see any other people, and the island felt somehow alien” (184).

The fragmentary self seeks a safety valve of illusion. Guinevere gets off to a dream. Majesty is Maeniel’s raven which heralds good news, and safety to its people. As the novelist observes, “He was respectable, intelligent and had a family of his own in a niche on the cliffs” (185). Guinevere thanks the bird “as well as I could” (185). The bird flies Guinevere safe ashore out of the forest which is “a maze, clear paths rare” (186).

Soon after, Alice Borchardt switches to the historical moment in which one finds Merlin as merciless human. He is representative of the cultural male anarchy which derives pleasure out of pain, before he takes away his life. As the novelist puts it, “The villain had been leading him [the boy] by a chain fastened to a huge cock ting. It was so large that it must have made normal sexual intercourse impossible. Merlin was stroking the boy’s chest” (198). Merlin pressurises the boy into a new stimulation of pleasing pain. He kneels behind the boy and begins to caress him. This is how the novelist draws the horrible apparition that makes Merlin: “Now it was no longer merlin but a wreck of things the sea cast ashore – nets, driftwood, broken floats, lengths of twisted, rotten rape lashings of kelp and doles” (DQ 202).

Though Arthur is under the custody of Merlin, as the latter has taken his mother, Ingund, a captive, there is some respite. He has two wonderful companions Gawain and Cain. Gawain is significant in that, he is manly man of twenty-three “and had already acknowledged four bastards” (DQ 206). He had been conceived after his mother’s six month visit to the Isle of women, “a thoroughly strange place” (206). She conceived of a non-human a giant seagull which “took Morgana to the top of a crag, and the mating took place in the air among the clouds over the open ocean” (207). Cain is his bosom companion. He is so amiable, kind and concerned towards Gawain. Both Gawain and Cain have entrusted upon themselves the duty of the oath man, who never ran even if they do not will, under Arthur. Alice Borchardt projects the position of the three thus: “Hawk of May, Gawain, was one of the people of the hawk, born as it was thought, of the union of his mother with a hawk. There were others, many others. Arthur the Bear, Morgana – yes – Morgana – an owl, Cain, the seal” (215).



Merlin proceeds with his anarchical act by entwining the boy with the rope so hard, that it not only twists his body into a curve but also strangulates him by the throat. As Alice Borchardt writes:

The boy had an erection so often that it looked painful. The sorcerer was careful not to touch the genitals. He seemed to be waiting for something. He slapped the boy gently on the rump...the boy moaned in pain... Uther had never seen a male so engorged. His organ looked as big as horse's. (199)

The boy is later pushed into the pool when he “began gasping for air” (DQ 201). When it is clear that the boy is recovering, Merlin pushes his face into the water, and then pulls it out saying “You are alive. Did you know that?” (201). When the boy thanks him he “bent the boy’s hand back....Then, with one swipe of the knife he’d used to cut the ropes, he cut the boy’s throat” (201). As Alice Borchardt writes:

This is Merlin’s rite associated with his sorcery. And one Merlin was sure the Saxons would prevail. But they didn’t face they were forced to flee in large numbers. What they need is a high king who will accommodate them, and thanks to your artifices, Arthur is the only heir. (216)

Alice Borchardt develops the storyline of Guinevere side by side with Arthur’s Guinevere emerges as a philanthropist, who envisages a genuine vision of humankind. She attests the very dream in the company of divine Nature. The dragon, a mythical animal, is demonstrative of the innocent and divine power of raw Nature. The dragon, then allegorically, projects itself, as the further vision of destiny enshrouded in immaculate love and splendour. The dragon is one creature that braves all sorts of weather before it brings in sure redemption and safety to Guinevere. The dragon’s potential is but brought out by the novelist who posits the great capability of performance. The novelist’s gradation of the dragon is the intuitive will of the splendorous Nature, which alone can salvage the postmodern humankind. The dragon, further by fierce power, fears “no storms” and is “fast, strong and travel in – among the lost” (217). Summarily, it invokes the historical Ulysses, who delights in voyages to heavenly domains hitherto unknown to humankind and unsurpassed by any generations of voyages. The dragon is expressive of a fierce, yet vibrant spirit, as it progresses to seek, to strive and never to yield. Further, Guinevere is patronized by the philanthropic gestures of the Flower Bride. As evidenced in her adornment of the flowers, she feels comfortable and quite confident, as she braves her way through the stormy threats enacted upon her by the chauvinist Merlin. Strapping “the flower to my waist” with “their fragrance drifted around me”, (DQ 218). Guinevere is never at a loss to continue her journey towards safety. The



flower birds engulfs her psyche with its “violent whirls” and then with its “brilliant colours of white, red, orange, blue and all the shades in between – cascaded from sleep cliffs adorned with broken rocks” (DQ 218). She feels extremely strong as she glimpses “between patches of thick fog that lay on the water” (218). As Olive Banks observes: “By seriously exploring the Nature of female sexuality and the conditions under which it can flourish, the radical feminists have been successful in coming to terms with women’s needs without denying them altogether or subordinating them to male demands” (221).

Guinevere contests religion with her perception of Nature. She establishes the fact that heaven comes under the church’s propriety and no doubt, church is another factor, which has designated woman as secondary. Once, when she raises her doubt about this, Black leg tells her, “why couldn’t we spend an evening eating fine – cooked venison without attempting to solve all the conundrums of the universe among ourselves” (221). Yet, she attests the fact that “Mother left me her heart” (222). Guinevere’s mother, the she-wolf, brings her up with the knowledge, chipped out of her perception of the kingdom of possibility as she says, “she lives in mine, and to a wolf is the wisdom of first things first” (222).

Nevertheless, Guinevere has been reinforced by another crisis, a crisis eventuated upon her by this knowledge of contest. Through the forest imagery, the novelist foregrounds the issue, as Alice Borchardt writes:

The world was completely dark. The only sound was from the wind whispering in the forest. The fire was long burned out, but the rocks were still warm. I was thirsty....I had wanted the salt. My exertions were such that I carved it. But it had awakened thirst in me and the water nearby was all salt. (DQ 222).

Though, Guinevere has the potency to outwit the complexity and intricacy around humankind, she feels “this darkness overwhelming” and she has a premonition that the wolf Maeniel “taught me to carry light the way most humans do” (223). She holds Kyra responsible for educating her with this knowledge of perceptive sensibility, “for they knew each star pattern and had songs for each one. “the salmon, the warrior, the maiden and all the rest” (226). She is sure that Kyra is possessive of the ancient wisdom.

This accelerate an identity crisis in Guinevere as she speculates, “I was really frightened now. The sheer terror of my predicament struck me, and I felt the stone in the belly that is deep, mortal fear” (226). She is also oriented toward the knowledge of the unknown by the Flower Bride, where “skin was the delicate flower petals of the spring – blooming vine, the long trailing branches of the willow, her hair” (228). This is indicative of the identity strain in Guinevere. It attests the fact that Guinevere, as a human, may not be able to fully



comprehend the divine agenda of Nature. Yet, she feels that wide chasm between herself and the Flower Bride, “They are woven into the warp and well of the universe. Their time is of ours. To them each morning is the first morning. Each spring is the first and again the last the world knows. That is why no man foolish enough to love one ever survives. He is always betrayed”. (DQ 228)

This is one sterile postmodernist condition that Alice Borchardt wishes to drive home. She makes Guinevere perceive this knowledge of truth and hence, the latter is determined now more than ever. Guinevere is all set to take a performative role which is imperative in the contact of the male anarchy. Through the following passage, Alice Borchardt illustrates Guinevere’s determination of self will and courage, as she writes:

Do as the Flower Bride suggested, challenge my fate. I was doomed to be a scullion, running about the kitchen being badgered by a cook, a lower servant in a great hall, help prepare feasts I would never taste. Or the second, or even more, a minor wife of a great chief, bowing humbly to my betters and raising such children as my husband would allow me to bring up to respect their father. (229)

After having cursed Dis, Lord of the Dead, Merlin and his associate Igrana take their own path which assures her a self-identity.

Alice Borchardt now creates a momentous episode in which one finds Guinevere totally equipped to carry on. She reaches a farmhouse which has a thatched roof in that, “it was covered with low growing soft wheat and the wheat was still grass coloured and hadn’t begun to head up” (230). Guinevere is grateful to a lady whose “farmhouse is protected by the Flower Bride her own guardian” (231). She makes Guinevere “presentable” as she touches her hair which “arranged itself into a coil as my neck” (DQ 233) Guinevere finds herself “wearing a soft green dress...with a leather belt ornamented with bronze knots” (233). The farm lady bestows Guinevere with flowers which “have many powers, not the least of which is truth” (233). Alice Borchardt makes the little girl of the family to sit well with Guinevere. Together with the feminine lot, Guinevere builds her up physically. Guinevere passes on her newly inherited legacy to the child Treside that ---“she [Treside] should be warned to be cautions but not so frightened as to be immobilized by Terror” (239). Guinevere’s noble deeds invite appreciation from Risderd, who “complimented our womanly skills [and] thanked me for watering the kitchen garden” (246).

Alice Borchardt now moves on to present Arthur’s crisis eventuated by Merlin’s wrath. Just like Guinevere, Arthur always invites compliments in that, he is all set to save a community of farmers from their enemies. The following observation illustrates his crisis: “I am Arthur,



he thought, and I don't know what that means" (DQ 218). Arthur's identity crisis is eventuated by the historical reality that he is born of conspiracy and ill will. He does everything to do away with the past that haunts him in the person of Merlin. Merlin wants to exploit Arthur's sense of identity crisis through "the trick of the light that made...the letters vanished into an ebony shimmer" (269). The crisis of Arthur further, is revealed to the readers, through the silence of the forest out of which emanated "green, grey, black and russet, the colours of autumn" (269). It "thickens black as the opening of a well, a forest pool over dead leaves, the black lake of bogs, the black north wind, as the eyes of death in an empty skull" (DQ 270). The intrusion of the Flower Bride brings consolation to Arthur. Arthur can feel "her caress on his cheek with that oh-so-soft fingered" (270). To Arthur, she is the representative of the first meeting of the first dawn "where mankind was not even an idea" (276) and those "ancient trees gave their souls into the wind and, borne by it, yielded up their life and created the poetry of the forests" (270).

Arthur, not projective of any human malice, "did most resemble a lizard" (270) to Guinevere. Through the snake and the lizard imageries, Alice Borchardt invokes the archetypes. While taking exception to this, Arthur undergoes a torturous thought "in this shadow land we all visit before walking" (292). As Alice Borchardt puts it, "Torture, why go to such elaborate lengths to cause him pain? The fortune always wants something, even if only to derive satisfaction from the struggles of his victim. His suffering was desired. The less he suffered, the more futile the torture was" (294).

Arthur's crisis is further intensified by "the skulls staring up at him (and) beginning to acquire personalities" (295). Arthur resurrects history. Alice Borchardt recaptures facts through Cain. Cain brings in the reminder that Vortigen in Merlin's victim. As he observes, "They were murdered when they tried to make peace with the Saxons. Merlin is a supporter of the Southern landowners who keep them as mercenaries. He felt that the office of high king should be abolished" (314). Cain also posits the fact that the Saxon tribe is characterised by the rotten soldiers and corrupt legionnaires. And in the end, as he puts it, "we were driven back to our forests and swamps, into one futile revolt after another" (315). He stresses the point the Saxons do not have a ruler like Arthur. His idea of the Britons warrants mention here:

Luckily, we had our forests and swamps here. In the south, in open country, stronghold after stronghold felt, and the people were enslaved by those chiefs clever enough to make common cause with the Romans and become traitors to their own people. In that part of Brittany, you served the Romans or you died. (315)



The evolution of Arthur as a redeemer is witnessed when he becomes so corporative and expressive, as he saves Balin and the community from the enemies. Yet, the episode enunciates another historic encounter for Arthur.

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