

“Evil Woman” in the Ancient Egyptian Literature

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Abstract—This article, by using feminist criticism and archetypal criticism, aims to analyze the evil woman images in the ancient Egyptian literature like Great Mothers of terror who tries to capture right and cause deaths, the enchanter who is very crazy and fascinating and the wife who betrays his husband to understand the complexity. Also this thesis reveals the spiritual and cultural meaning of the evil woman images. Lastly, the paper sums up the reasons from Anima, the good and evil in the traditional human nature, male-dominated society and the male author’s viewpoint on female.

Index Terms—the ancient Egyptian literature, feminist criticism, evil woman images, causes

It is often seen and become a remarkable phenomenon that there are a lot of "evil woman" images and related discussions in the ancient Egyptian Literature. This paper, by using feminist criticism and archetypal criticism, analyses the figures of “evil woman” images to interpret their complexity. Also this thesis reveals the spiritual and cultural meaning of the evil woman images. Lastly, the paper sums up the reasons from anima, the good and evil in the traditional human nature, male-dominated society and the male author’s viewpoint on female.

I. THE “EVIL WOMAN” IMAGES IN THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

A. *Great Mothers of Terror Who Try to Capture Right and Cause Deaths*

Kindness is mother goddess Isis and Hathor’s main character, but they also possess the character of terror. Isis is aware of God La’s power, so she has strong eagerness to possess La’s mysterious and magic name. Egyptian sincerely believe that if they know the La’s mysterious name, they can govern the universe. She parched the clay stained with La’s saliva by fire and made it into a sharp spear. And then, Isis put witchcraft on it, and turned it into a viper and then forced the viper bite her father. Isis thoroughly understands the skill of curing snake wound by incantation, and forced her father to tell herself the mysterious name. So Isis had La’s power. From this goddess, we saw that she attempted to capture La’s right and became the master of the universe.

Hathor was a virtuous cow goddess, and also the goddess of war and death, so she also had brutal and bloody character. In ancient Egypt, there was a myth about Hathor’s killing excessively. Hathor who was in the shape of lion to the world killed the world and licked them up. She killed without batting an eyelid, and was addicted to killing. She indulged herself in it, and she was red all over, standing in the middle of blood-sea, drank hot blood which was sending up foam, and couldn’t stop. In this myth, Hathor is a terrifying female and homicidal Goddess, “the withdrawal and deprivation of love” is manifested in her character, which is the negative behavior chosen by the classical woman or great Goddess. Her mouth acting as trespassing symbol of tearing and devouring is specialized by the dangerous negative goddess. She kills all lives indiscriminately and drinks human’s blood ceaselessly. Her hunger and thirst can be solved only by killing innumerable humans. The character of the fiend-like goddesses such as being crazy about blood, addiction and madness is expressed vividly.

B. *The Evil and Unfaithful Human Females*

In the instruction literature, a lot of maxims express the bias against the females, and the females are regarded as the synonym of passiveness, waywardness and degeneration.

“Do not open your heart to your wife. / what you have said to her goes to the street.

Make your wife see your property, / but not to hand it to her.

Do not hand food of the whole year to her.

What she does with her husband today she does with another man tomorrow. /

Do not rejoice in your wife’s beauty; her heart is set on her lover. / Be sure not to let a woman work for you, because she will think of herself firstly.” (Lichtheim, 1976, p.169—180)

From the poem, readers can see that people take sarcastic, negative, doubtful attitude towards the females and the females are regarded as chatters who are disloyal and distrustful.

The author of *The instruction of Ptahhotep* warns males to be very careful when they approach females. The female’s charm attracts the male, makes them uncontrollable and finally causes their death. The evil action is attributed to the females. However, the males define themselves as the persons with resisting the temptation.

1. **The Enchanter Who Is Very Crazy and Fascinating**

In *Khamwas and Tabubu* (Lichtheim, 1976, p.133—136), hostess Tabubu with female charming, is evil and greedy. The female figure embodies the tempting function of Goddess of terror, who controls the desire with power of temptation to result in crime and destruction. Tabubu was full of female charm, but she is also fatal container.

The hero of the story, Khamwas was deeply impressed with Tabubu's beauty when he was visiting Temple of Ptah in the city of Memphis. He lost his heart over her. He sent someone to ask about her. Then he knew that she was born in a clergy and noble family, not a common woman. He passed message to her: prince Khamwas, son of King Ramses II and high priest of Ptah at Memphis invites her to share one wonderful hour together. If possible, he would give her gold and silver; he'd like to help if she involved in any undeserved matter."

After Tabubu heard Khamwas's request. She sent the messenger of Khamwas to tell him "he must come to Bubastis, to her house to visit her." Khamwas forgot his status and duty, and went to Bubastis to see beautiful Tabubu, the woman who appeared many times in his dream. Tabubu gave him a warm welcome. She told Khamwas if he really wanted to spend a wonderful night together with her, he must draft a contract first, give all his possessions to her, and make sure that his children have no right to share his possessions with her in the future. Tabubu also asked Khamwas to kill his children in case they and Tabubu might have dispute on possession later. Khamwas agreed all these demands, for he was controlled by his desire at that time. He killed his children, and threw them out of the window to feed cats and dogs. When Khamwas and Tabubu drank together, they heard the terrible sound made by cats and dogs when they tore children's body.

It tells people that woman is synonym for temptation, evilness and greediness. Their beauty is irresistible for man, even a man of fine breeding like Khamwas. The women can only bring destruction to womanizers.

2. The Wife Who Betrays Her husband

There are two evil female images described in the story of *The Two Brothers*. (Lichtheim, 1976, p.205--211)

In this story, the young brother Bata's sister-in-law provoked and lured him. After her shameless attempt had been refused, she was angry and ashamed and afraid of being punished by her husband extremely. So she went further on the evil road. She disguised herself as beating-up. After her husband's returning, she postured as a pitiable creature, and brought a false charge against Bata by confusing right and wrong. She said that Bata beat her up, was going to do irreverence to her, and threatened her not to disclose. Her provocation made the elder brother stamp with fury and itch to kill his young brother at once. The young brother sliced off his genitalia just for showing his innocence, and was forced to leave his native place and live in the Valley of Pine. When the elder brother knew the truth, he killed his wife after coming back, and threw her to the dogs.

Bata was favored by La and gained an exceedingly beautiful wife who was born by selecting the finest of all gods. He loved his wife extraordinarily and told his experience to his wife without preserving it. He also told her a secret that his heart was put on the top of the pine, and that once the pine fell down and the heart fell, he would die. After that Bata's wife abandoned her husband, came to the palace, gained very high status, and was favored by the Pharach. This woman exposed Bata to mortal danger again and again. First, she asked the Pharach to send people to cut down the pine which Bata's heart was put on, and then asked someone to kill the bull which was the Bata's avatar, and cut down the Bata's avatar--Persea trees. When she was watching the carpenter working on the two Persea trees, a slice of tree flying from the trunk fell into her mouth and then she swallowed it unguardedly, so she was pregnant and born a boy. This prince was Bata himself, who became the Pharach of Egypt. He questioned and punished his wife.

There are two reverse female images in the story of the two Brothers. Depending on the male power, the two females, fed by their husbands, live without care, however, they commit crimes. One of them lures her brother-in-law, but doesn't succeed, then she fabricates lies so that her brother-in-law almost dies. Her brother-in-law becomes disabled because of her, finally she pays for that, she is bitten dead by a dog; the other deserts her family and murders her husband, for which at last she never escapes from punishment. From the female viewpoint, readers will have different opinions about the two female figures.

Bata's sister-in-law is not a loose woman who is known far and wide, because she at least beared the young brother—Bata's existence. As Bata said, "She is like my mother." She only had the obscene idea once in a while. And she gave a reward to her brother-in-law by saying "I'll sew a good dress" so as to beg joyousness from him. That shows her jejuneness and lamentableness. Bata's sister-in-law's astonishing destructive power breaks out after her failure in evil cause. She upsides down, even making her husband kill Bata for her own safety by means of threatening to kill herself. Combining it with the ancient Egyptian society, reader knows that the male's disloyalty causes him to a largest extent, to have physical punishment or loss of property after divorce, but for the female, if sensuality leads to the break of marriage, women will be driven out of the family penniless, and go bankrupt in reputation. A story is recorded on Papyrus Westcar. A priest's wife carried on a clandestine love affair with a man, and was reported to the king by her husband, and then was burnt alive. (Lichtheim, 1976, p.69) Even though Bata's sister-in-law would not be burnt, if she were deprived of marriage and social economic rights, and were isolated by the society, it is very difficult for her to live in this world.

Therefore, under the extreme dread, undoubtedly it is hateful for her to go against her conscience and inflict others. But it was really imperative. However, the punishment she got is so terrible. If she would be eaten by dogs, she would not get eternal life afterlife because of incomplete body. This makes people feel sorry for her.

Bata's wife was a "sex cup" given by Gods, especially by male Gods. They gave him the women lest he might not feel lonely. It was common occurrence in Gods' world that treating women as prize and placebo. Goddess Nehsi, the mother of God La once suggested Horus inherit throne, and send God La's two young and beautiful Goddess Net and Aset to Set as compensation. Even Goddess cannot avoid such fate, how could women made by Gods avoid it? Strange

enough, Bata, who was very poor and suffered ill treatment from his brother and sister-in-law in childhood, married with the daughter of God, who is more honorable than Emperor's daughter. Theoretically, family status is not so important in love and marriage, but everyone knows actually people inevitably have class nature. Will the beautiful daughter of God, who is fit to be princess, love this tough farmer and hunter? This "prize" lived in her so-called husband's home. The husband was busy to make a living every day. He often stayed outside for several days when hunting. She had no relatives, no friends, no children, and must follow her husband's warn that she can't go out, "Do not go outdoors, lest the sea snatch you." So she led an isolated life. Although Bata told his wife the secret related to his wife, he hid the truth that he can come back to life. So actually, he didn't tell everything to his wife. Furthermore, readers must notice such a fact: the gift given by Gods appeared in the form of "wife". The couple is just a couple in name only because Bata castrated himself in order to show his innocence to his brother. So they have no sexual relationship, which is indispensable between normal couple. Love and sex are two indispensable factors in harmonious life. If Bata's wife would worship her husband like a disciple, she can get self-satisfaction and comfort through spiritual power and know the meaning of life. But, the fact is not like this. Bata's wife is an exceedingly beautiful wife who was born by selecting the finest of all gods, but not a puppet without feeling. To eliminate her loneliness she left home and walked to a pine nearby, which was the beginning that she betrayed her husband's warn. Nobody, even herself, would not expect that small, unimportant "betray" start her miserable life. When the sea saw her, it sent waves to follow her. The pine got a lock of her hair and the sea carried that hair to Egypt. On the bank, laundryman of Pharaoh found it. The sweet smell of hair soaked Pharaoh's clothes. The clever secretary told Pharaoh, the hair came from the daughter of La, and in her body, nearly every God's variety can be found. Pharaoh sent a lot of warriors and chariots, and also a woman who held many precious women's ornaments. They took her to the court of Egypt. The fairy tale didn't tell us whether warriors and chariots were used, whether there was a war or not between warriors of Pharaoh and Bata. But we know from the story, Egyptian Pharaoh had sent messengers to grab Bata's wife. This behavior irritated Bata, who killed all the messengers except one. So there are two possible reasons for Bata's wife's arrival at court. First, Pharaoh's army defeated Bata, plus the temptation of jewelry; second, while Bata was hunting outside, Pharaoh sent army to convey, as well as jewelry to lure, the woman come willingly. As it is known that woman will always testify her value through finding a successful man. Throughout the love game, the rule of survival of the fittest permeated. Of course, we cannot exclude threaten factor, because the woman didn't abandon her husband and escape when Pharaoh sent people to come at first time. In short, the woman came to Pharaoh under his threaten and temptation. She became his beloved princess and was called "the incomparable". However, the unfortunate fate went with her. She was forced to go on a road of killing husband.

There are many popular Chinese editions of Egyptian fairy tales. Those editors all ignored one plot: before the woman took action to kill Bata time and again, Pharaoh "negotiated, and asked her about her husband." She told him to "send someone to cut the pine then he would die." (Lichtheim, 1976, p.87) Pharaoh sent warriors to do so. In other words, the murder was done by both Pharaoh and the woman, but not her own intrigue. The powerful and brave Bata made Pharaoh worry a lot. As long as he lived, Pharaoh must take the bad name of grabbing other's wife. He was afraid of Bata's revenge every moment. Bata's wife was born beautiful, once she got the chance of accompanying the king, she apparently didn't want people to treat her as someone else's disloyal wife and despise her former humble experience. Woman can only pursue her independence through depending on others. They can't separate from the temptation and control of power. So it is inescapable for them to foster cunning characters. That is the tragedy of women.

The wife didn't show any feeling towards Bata, and even detested him very much. So for three times she made efforts to kill him. But Bata thought she was his. She is a glittery "sex cup" given by Gods. He thought he had permanent right of detaining her because of the permission of marriage. He regarded the woman's loyalty as one of criterion for his self-affirmation. He never allowed any deviate behavior of women. He turned into ox, tree, and son to chase her.

If we turn off the myth coat, and mainly focus on the human being's life in the story, we may find she is controlled by Paternity all life. The tragedy color is thick. This malicious beauty betrayed and killed her husband. She set various of obstacles for the hero. She appeared greedy, cunning and desirous. Bata's wife has her natural human shortcomings, but she is the victim under the control of super power and cultural discrimination. She cannot avoid the fate of being controlled by others. Born as a female, she's regarded as being absent in Libido and vigor and as an incomplete inferior human-being. So as a "sex cup", she is awarded to a man who cannot match her, living isolated life. Her self-sacrifice seems to be her privilege; Then she stands on the king's side for wealth, power and love; under the king's command, she becomes a medium for which two men fight; As a result, only she is a sin, only she continues on the evil road and gets punished. Compared with her, the two guys who trap her into sin abyss are never punished. One of them live to die, killing other people to get rid of his notorious fame of robbing other's wife and horror of being revenged. He enjoys the superior beauty and produces his siblings. The other regards female loyalty as a standard of self-affirmation, he is so persistent in his wife that he becomes the successor of his enemy who is honored as his father by making use of his wife's body. The fairy tale originates from real life and reflects the nature of paternity and sex-politics. In the society, the female's bad luck should be attributed to gods in high rank. If they restore the myth to secular life, readers should contribute the female's life to the situation of being inferior, which deprives females of their independent personalities, having no choice for their lives. The female's bad luck should also be attributed to supreme male power and to

female's decreasing into "substances" which have values of using and being exchanged. From the evil female, readers see a potential power of resistance, subverting paternity and power-control.

II. CAUSES OF THE "EVIL WOMAN" IMAGES CREATED

From the above analysis, the male writers in ancient Egypt express the idea in the way of building up female figure: Women, who are full of passion, without rationality, and lascivious, are symbol of desires. They resorted to all means to satisfy their greed and ambitions. They are ambitious and ruthless, unpredictable, mysterious and lack of responsibility. They don't obey the authority and disciplinary rules. So it is difficult to control them. All women's desires result in the collapse of males' value system and threaten males' power. In the male writers' minds, there is a profound anxiety: women, not only as the creation of human beings, the source of meaning, but also the source of general disillusionment and the most profound and most devastating betrayal. Fiend-like images embody the culture image of women, women desire, and the symbol of death.

Why did "evil woman" image appear frequently in the ancient Egyptian Literature works? The author tries to explore its causes.

A. *Influence by Anima Archetype*

Carl Jung (1987) points out that "Anima archetype is the absolute female image in male's collective unconsciousness, she is always mood, response, impulse of the male before-hand. Sometimes Anima is a graceful goddess, sometimes she is a succubus or a devil." (p.127) Archetypal women become a part of human consciousness and had been given negative characteristic just like devil when human face of death, destruction, dangers, difficulties, hunger and defenseless situation etc. "They dominate lust and destroy the male's consciousness. She is dark, cruel, crazy, indulgent, seductive, ostile, stimulating." (Neumann, 1998, p. 27)

B. *Good and Evil in the Traditional Human Nature*

It should be acknowledged that male writers in shaping the images of women, are impacted by good and evil of the traditional model of human nature. Zhou Zuoren said, "People are strange things in the end, brilliant like gods on one side, having animal-liking hobby on the other side." (Zhou, 1987, p.201) This shows that the elements of human nature include both "good" and "evil" and the two elements are essential attributes of human nature. Each individual human has "good" and "bad" in their deep mind, according to the proportional share of "good" and "evil" in human nature and the impact on human life and human society respectively, people are judged as good and bad. In Shakespeare and ancient Egyptian male writers' works it seems not surprising that there appear angels on behalf of "good" and fiends on behalf of "evil", or the woman images both as "good" and "evil".

Why does the author analyze this phenomenon in feminine perceptive in the end? Because the human nature of good or bad is a factual assessment and also a value judgment. In the view of Humanity's good and evil (virtual and valuable), social perspective should be included as well as individual perspective. On the community, the factors which are good to individual's total (as a category of people) survival, development and improvement, are regarded as legitimate and reasonable components and they are called good. In contrast, they will be called bad.

It is noteworthy that this judge standards seem objective and universal, but how to cognize and understand the judge standards, how to analyze and select it and how to determine the nature and make the decision will be greatly effected by many judge's own factors (subjective and objective conditions and time-space positioning). The judge's own factors embody subjective elements and value judgment of their own in human judgment. Therefore, the judge of good and evil in human judgment involves some kind of values or subjectivity which are named as subjective or valuable concept of good and evil. As in the class society, different classes of people will make different and even opposite Human Nature judgment to the same human factors and actual performance. It is entirely possible for the individual to make good or bad judgment from his own desires which will fundamentally damage the overall (including the judge himself) survival, development and improvement; And the community is entirely possible to make good and evil judgment of human from the community desires (namely the desires of the strong group) and in the name of social welfare which fundamentally damage the majority individual's live, development and perfection in the society. This shows that in male-dominated society, the standards of evaluating female characters and acts will inevitably bear male imprint, which centers the desires of men. It will fundamentally damage the women's lives, development and perfection to evaluate and judge women in the name of public.

C. *Male-dominated Society*

Male-dominated society is just like prison authorities which have the right of discipline and keep the suspects under round-the-clock surveillance. Both females oppressed by Male-dominated society and male writers accept reforming morality without using any violence. So the male writers of ancient Egyptian made women evil images by values and ethic of Male-dominated society consciously or unconsciously.

D. *The Author's Viewpoint on Female*

Helapuinke (1997) proposes that "the inner part and the spirit of an artist and his outlook on the world are formed gradually depending on a lot of factors, including the factor of experience." (p.157) Besides the background, the

author's personality and his particular experiences and thoughts affect his work all the time.

The facts which constitute story environment have never appeared "on their own" and they present before us according to certain perspective and certain observation point. In literature, people have never studied the original facts or time but the facts or events depicted in some way. We can write two different facts when we observe the same fact from two different angles. Male authors who live in male society of the cultural ideological environment, are unable to be free from the limitations of history, the narrative is formed from the male viewpoint and the female images are from male narrative perspective which causes the unreal life situation for the female and the female will be imprinted by man right culture.

It can not be known writers of the myths, legends and story due to age, but male's perceptions of females can be revealed through unique the instruction literature of the ancient Egypt such as *The instruction of Ptahhotep*, *The instruction of Annee*.

Do not rejoice in your wife's beauty; her heart is set on her lover.¹ (Lichtheim, 1976, p.173)

"In whatever place you enter, / Beware of approaching the women !/ Unhappy is the place where it is done, / Unwelcome is he who intrudes on them.....He who fails through lust of them, / No affair of his can prosper." (Lichtheim, 1976, p.68)

"Once you are attracted by her glass-like body,/ you will not control the development of the situation./ A thousand men are turned away from their good,/ A short moment like a dream /Then death comes for having known them." (Jin, 2003, p.70)

Male writers tend to ignore male's shortcomings in literature, and bend themselves to reveal the trap which was made by fiend-like females. When women allured men into a failure, they would bring a false accusation against men on the contrary. Women lust after vanity, abandon her husband cruelly, and murder her husband. They also lure male to destroy them, and so on.

Basically, Feminism of ancient Egyptian man writer is the same with that of the writers of other nations. They view females as being passive, tempting, degenerate and destructive. Although some speak highly of the greatness of females, (basically limited to mother and goddess), because it is quite rare in ancient Egyptian works, it does not play an important role in ancient Egyptian works. The literary works they have written display the various demands, imaginations and description of females and gender relations in symbolic and aesthetic significance in male-dominated society.

III. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, for the reason of limitation of Anima, the good and evil in the traditional human nature, male-dominated society and the male author's viewpoint on female, the negative female images in ancient Egyptian Literature alienated as "evil woman". As traitors of patriarchal cultures, they become symbols of negative and rotten. They are objects of males' desires and "the other" excluded from the male power center effectively. The females images are controversial because their personalities are not independent, their self consciousness and values are defective, their subjectivity are limited extremely.

The development of history is calling for the development of literature, so it is expected that female images will continuously take on new appearances which are suitable for the times' footprints by the writers from one generation to another generation.

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