

Memories of Pain and Struggle in Angela Carter's *Wise Children*

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Abstract:

Literature covers diverse aspects of human life which are mixed of different tastes, pleasures and emotions. In Angela Carter's Wise Children, Dora preserves her lifelong memories that how her sister Nora has suffered in her experience, which has exacerbated other hardships in her life. She re-enacts her own experiences of abandonment, separation, grief, and bereavement. The current research underscores three interrelated tropes of abandonment, separation, and loss in the life of Dora and Nora. These tropes surface and resurface as both the sisters on the road of recovery from the earlier times in their childhood when their father abandon them and their grandmother takes care of them. Dora's serious concern about the different aspects of life becomes a loss of her own self. The present circumstances compel her to reconnect to her past. She explores her past and brings out the unresolved pain attached to the various experiences of abandonment, separation, and loss in her life. Thus, the current research underscores the various aspects of childhood, memories and trauma experiences of the two sisters and their effort to live through the different hardships.

Keywords: Experience, abandonment, separation, loss, grief, bereavement.

INTRODUCTION:

Narrative in literature has been an immense point of study from time to time. Writers use it for their cultural, social, personal and allied human representations. Gender and the different ideas about gender identity and how it shows up in society have always been an issue because they change over time, no matter how people are mapped out culturally. It has been the norm in the cosmos to see the division between men and women based on sexuality and other factors such as a person's social, cultural, and political background. Angela Carter's *Wise Children* underlines that everyone has to play different roles to fulfil one's responsibilities in society as a whole. However, some people have been forced to give up their roles. When a person denies one's true self, the part of self that makes the existence real, one reaches a crisis. Said explains this by stating that, "there is a sheer fact of isolation and displacement, which produces the kind of narcissism masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation and community. At this extreme the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments". (146). The different events of life affect in the building of one's true spirit.

Angela Carter's *Wise Children* underlines the new skills of handling the pain of bereavement, along with her sister, Dora is seen challenging her firmly held beliefs and living life in a reconstructed manner. She highlights the various instances of sensual

disorder that Nora explores, while at the same time, she grieves her present loss, thereby connecting the past to the present. This recovery ultimately becomes Dora’s self-reconstruction. The novel becomes famous for the particular feature of temporal discontinuity as Dora amalgamates her present situation with her autobiographical past events. The relational continuity is followed as the shifting narratives can be seen as a kind of dialogue and as commenting to each other. In the process, she explores her past experiences that appear as the different stages of pain right from her childhood to the adult age.

MEMORIES OF PAIN AND STRUGGLE:

There are various forms of abandonment: physical, emotional, social, philosophical, and spiritual. These various forms and their reactions to them tend to vary from individual to individual and society to society. For Susan Anderson, “Abandonment is a cumulative wound containing all of the losses and disconnections stemming all the way back to childhood”. She calls “abandonment as a feeling of isolation within a relationship, an experience from childhood...a father leaving his marriage, moving out of the house, away from his children, a woman who has lost her job and with it her professional identity, financial security and status. Feeling abandoned by her life’s mission, people grieving the death of a loved one report feeling of abandonment” (abandonment.net). Said comments, “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past... exiles feel therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as a part of a triumphant ideology or as resorted people” (141). After being abandoned by the father, both the girls feel the same in the novel.

Wise Children serves as a medium of the depiction of the critical moment in Nora’s life. It grows into a challenge that questions her firmly held beliefs and thoughts and she becomes ready to face her own fears, experiences of trauma, separation and violence of the past. Carter through Dora narrates, “At the first bars, we couldn't help it, it was as if a voice told us to do it, we were impelled, we got up and danced. 'Dance,' I say, but we didn't know how - we jumped about in time and clapped our hands” (33). Nora has faced the different levels of emotional abandonment throughout her life. This fear of abandonment evolves from various instances when her father is not present with her family, even during important events. Carter explores the emotional intimacy a female child with her father and not having any moments of father-daughter relationship or providing for the family. Pamela Thomas says, “Children who have been abandoned by their father are more likely to express a fear of abandonment in other facets of their lives as they grow. For girls in particular, this can translate into issues with commitment and trust. She further states, when a major figure walks away early on in life, it may be hard to dissuade her from the belief that everyone else will also walk away” (qdt in Campell 1). Both Dora and Nora develop an unvoiced fear of abandonment which gives rise to other fears in their lives.

Claudia Black talks about losses a child may suffer as a result of abandonment. According to Black, “The unnecessary losses a child experiences may range from loss of quality and quantity of time with a parent, loss of childhood as a result of unrealistic expectations placed on the child, loss of hope, loss of opportunity, to loss of innocence” (8). The different events in Nora’s life added to her fear of unresolved abandonment. These separations and hardships make Nora a mature and courageous woman, as evident in her handling of her different stages of life. Carter writes, “But Nora's own first sexual encounter, cold and drunken, down a dark alley, as Dora reports it, as it happens, is with a married man, yes, but also a pantomime goose. Some might want to

call it cheap and squalid realism, she suggests, but panto is full of wish-fulfilment and life can be larger than itself, if we choose to let it” (xiii). Nora spends her childhood with her grandmother under the cultural and social conflicts. Her grandmother provides maximum love and affection to both the girls, “Come on, girls, I’ll show you the real thing.’ He gave the gramophone another wind. I can’t give you anything but love, baby, That’s the only thing I’ve plenty of, baby...” (33). Nora faces similar abandonment when unable to settle in the social system, and her involvement in different local activities. She now remains in a sense of loss, loss of roots, culture, and society. She feels as if her roots have been chopped off and it would be six years before she will grow new ones. Nora experiences a cultural conflict, as the culture and society. Both Dora and Nora face the hard realities of life in the theatre company, such as unable to find employment and forgetting a steady job. She feels as if all doors had been closed, and she felt abandoned by her life.

Nora is a woman who has experienced a series of traumas and sadness throughout her life. Her exile leads her to become short-tempered, leading her to seek means of displacement. This isolation and displacement resulted in a sense of deprivation that resists efforts at all levels of life. However, exile also provides an opportunity for growth, maturation, and transformation. Nora has always grown from every experience of trauma, pain, and grief. Dora faces the most difficult set of her life as she writes about her life events. During their early days to the young age, both of them feel suppressed and not liberal. Black comments, “These are questions we seldom take time to ask ourselves, but the answers are vital in our recovery. It is helpful to take the time to write your responses...Through writing you may find yourself more vulnerable and, as a result, more honest” (62). She faces a series of traumas while her job. Both the sisters have a get a secondary role in the theatre. “I know the answer to the second question, of course. Bound for oblivion, nor leave a wrack behind. Never spawned, neither of us, although Nora wanted to, ever so, and towards the end of her menstrual life greeted each flow with tears” (Carter 11). The news of their financial condition after the death of their grandmother exceeds every other pain and loss they have suffered in their emotions.

Nora expresses her strengths and weaknesses, failures and successes, pains and gains by garnishing them with the lived experiences of her life. Her recovery comes at two levels: one, she recovers from the pain and grief of her sister Nora’s ultimately pain, death and separation by giving a detailed description of the immense pain that had surfaced in her heart. According to Black, “Connecting your past to the present is more of a rational, insight-oriented process than an emotional process. The cause-and-effect connections you discover between your past losses and present life will give you a sense of direction” (62). On the other hand, she recovers from the previous wounds of grief by articulating them in the form of a story meant to be written for her sister Nora. “But truthfully, these glorious pauses do, sometimes, occur in the discordant but complementary narratives of our lives and if you choose to stop the story there, at such a pause, and refuse to take it any further, then you can call it a happy ending” (Carter xvi). Both the sisters face all the traumas of life with patience and win over all the circumstances of life.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, Dora recounts the pain of her past to sublimate the pain of the present by connecting to her past in a rational and insight-oriented manner. She emerges stronger and stronger with her sister. Through her narrative, Dora answers the questions that

haunts her all her life and writes the responses to these questions. The entire novel is full of the incidents of pain and struggle which become the very foundation of Nora’s life. By challenging her internalized beliefs, putting the past behind, and developing a sense of self by identifying the feelings inherent in her heart, Nora learns new skills to handle the traumas of her life, as seen in handling the different situations in her life.

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