

النساء المسنات والمقاومة السريالية للنظام الأبوي في كتاب "بوق السمع" للكاتبة ليونورا كارينغتون
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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل مفهوم النبذ في رواية "البوق السامع"، وذلك بتطبيق نظريات جوليا كريستيفا التي تتناول العلاقة الوثيقة بين الشيخوخة والهوية الأنثوية والنضال ضد المبادئ الذكورية. يقاوم نص كارينغتون الآراء الاجتماعية السائدة حول المرأة المسنة باعتبارها كياناً مهمشاً ثقافياً، تافهًا، ومنبوذًا، خارجًا عن نطاق أنظمة السيطرة والمعايير الاجتماعية. ومن خلال الشخصية الرئيسية ماريان ليدربي ومجتمع النساء المسنات غير التقليدي، يحوّل النص الشيخوخة من حالة إدانة اجتماعية إلى مصدر للوعي الروحي والثورة والفهم. تفوّض السمات السريالية للرواية المنطق الذكوري السائد، وتكشف عن القبود التي تحدد مفهوم الأنوثة المرضية والحكمة والنظام الاجتماعي. وبإظهارها النساء المسنات كأشخاص يتجاوزون النظرة النمطية، تشير كارينغتون إلى النبذ كنقطة انطلاق نحو الحرية لا الإذلال. تزعم هذه الدراسة أن الغموض المفروض على النساء المسنات، ويا للمفارقة، يؤدي إلى أشكال من المواجهة تُزعزع استقرار السلطة الذكورية وتُتيح فرصًا جديدة لهوية المرأة تتجاوز الشباب والجاذبية والامتثال المنزلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإذلال، شيخوخة المرأة، هوية المرأة، المقاومة النسوية، النظام الأبوي، التحول الروحي، السريالية

Elderly Women and the Surreal Resistance to Patriarchy In the book "The Trumpet of Hearing" by Leonora Carrington

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is analyzing the concept of abjection in *The Hearing Trumpet*; to do so, Julia Kristeva's theories are applied because they discuss the close relationship between getting old, female identity, and fight against masculine principles. Carrington's text resists the prevalent social opinions on the subject of aged women as culturally unnoticed, trivial, and abject bodies misplaced from systems of control and desirability. Via the chief character Marian Leatherby and the unconventional community of elderly women, the text develops old age from a circumstance of social censure into a source of spiritual awareness, revolution, and understanding. The novel's surrealist features undermine male-controlled logic and uncover the limitations that describe satisfactory femininity, wisdom, and social order. By showing elderly women as people who exceed normative outlooks, Carrington refers to abjection as a point for freedom rather than humiliation. This study claims that the indistinctness forced on old women ironically leads to forms of confrontation that destabilize masculine power and generate fresh opportunities for female identity beyond youth, attractiveness, and domestic compliance.

Keywords: Abjection, Aging Women, Female Identity, Feminist Resistance, Patriarchy, Spiritual Transformation, Surrealism



1. Introduction

This paper examines *The Hearing Trumpet* through Kristeva's notion of abjection with the aim of examining how aging women are at the same time regarded as socially imperceptible and spiritually authorized. Born in Britain, Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) as the writer of *The Hearing Trumpet* went to Mexico for the rest of her life after escaping a mental hospital and Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II. She became a global figure with her works depicting mythical worlds. In addition to sculpting and painting which were exhibited around the world, Carrington also wrote novels, essays, and poetry. She was also known for creating mysterious, dreamlike works, depicting strange scenes of birds, cats, unicorn-like creatures, and other animals.

Published in 1974, *The Hearing Trumpet* is regarded as one of the most avant-garde texts of feminist surrealist literature due to defying overriding norms concerning gender, aging, and social order. It is believed that in her texts and paintings, particularly work done in her later years, Carrington was mostly interested in ageing through the character of the old women. In other words, Carrington found the ageing course the root of many ingenious opportunities (Kent 2017, 293). Also,

In *The Hearing Trumpet* the ambiguity of form and shorter length allow for a space in which it is possible for Carrington to construct a world shaped around a woman in extreme old age, and to imagine that world differently. Rather than being constrained by age, *The Hearing Trumpet* capitalizes on the freedom experienced by its nonagenarian female protagonist who no longer bears the beauty of youth and its siren call to suitors, who has passed through the all-consuming demands of motherhood, and is unwanted as a grandmother. (Kent 2017, 297)

Via the story of ninety-two-year-old Marian Leatherby, Leonora Carrington establishes a narrative in which ageing women, often discharged by male-controlled society as impractical, foolish, or imperceptible, turn into dominant causes of renovation and confrontation. The novel mixes surreal images, dark humor, and spiritual symbolism so as to depict the structures that relegate females, chiefly elderly women whose bodies and identities no more keep to cultural principles of femininity, splendor, and efficiency.

In male-controlled societies, old women are mostly considered as socially abject people. Their old bodies defy societal outlooks focused on youth, sexuality, and domestic utility, instigating them to be barred from systems of discernibility and value. This disregarding can be grasped through the concept of abjection developed by Julia Kristeva, who alludes to the abject as that which society abandons so that it can uphold boundaries of identity, order, and uniformity. Old women in *The Hearing Trumpet* dwell in this deranged place as they are observed as pointless, ludicrous, and socially unfortunate, still just through this



abolition they reach admission to supernumerary measures of knowledge and self-sufficiency.

Carrington alters old age from a sign of weakening into a foundation of spiritual and groundbreaking authority. Marian and the elderly women surrounding her are outside conservative male-controlled beliefs, permitting them to question power, religion, levelheadedness, and gender averages. The surrealist structure of the novel also strengthens this resistance by refusing chronological logic and implementing unreal conversions, occult symbolism, and artistic self-determination. Surrealism becomes not only an artistic method but a feminist policy that disturbs patriarchal systems of meaning and opens space for completely fresh female identities beyond societal control. Moreover, the writer's own life experiences played an important role in her coming up with this novel:

Carrington's magical hermeneutic is visible in her painterly conjuring of enchanted worlds, and legible in her literary works. She attained an almost mystical status in the eyes of fellow surrealists, who saw her as a visionary who had accessed occult realms of the psyche during her institutionalisation at a hospital for the mentally ill in Santander, Spain, in the early 1940s. (Silverblank 2021, 103)

2. Significance of the Study

This study is significant due to its investigation of the exemplification of aging women in *The Hearing Trumpet*, a text that criticizes traditional patriarchal opinions regarding femininity and old age. Whereas lots of literary studies concentrate on women with regard to youth, attractiveness, and sexuality, old women are often mistreated or classified as fragile, unreasonable, or socially unfit. By concentrating on elderly female characters, this study discusses how Leonora Carrington reorganizes old age as a site of confrontation, knowledge, and spiritual transformation rather than deterioration and indistinctness.

The study is also substantial for the reason that it employs Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection in order to analyze elderly femininity. This theoretical framework helps this research to reveal how aging women are situated as socially abject figures in male-controlled culture, still how this segregation can become a cause for emancipation and alternative identity development. Likewise, this study adds to the study of surrealism as a feminist style of resistance. In *The Hearing Trumpet*, surrealist elements interrupt conservative concepts of rationality, gender roles, religion, and social order.

3. Statement of the Problem

In societies controlled by men, women are often respected in relation to such averages as youth, beauty, sexuality, and domestic efficiency. As women grow older, they often become socially relegated and culturally unseen since their

bodies and identities are no longer in line with prevailing principles of femininity. Old women are consequently signified as inert, illogical, grotesque, or unrelated human beings in social and literary contexts. This eradication is in line with Kristeva's notion of abjection: the system through which society removes bodies and identities that intimidate acknowledged rules and limitations. Old female bodies become abject since they are in contrast with masculine beliefs regarding femininity, order, and allure.

The problem this study addresses is how the selected novel recreates the identity of aging women through Kristeva's theory of abjection. It inspects how the social hiddenness executed on old women becomes a circumstance that leads to resistance to patriarchal norms and access to alternative forms of identity and power. The study also scrutinizes how surrealism acts as a literary approach to subvert prevailing cultural descriptions of femininity, shrewdness, and female worth.

4. Methodology

This study is based upon a qualitative textual examination to inspect *The Hearing Trumpet* by Leonora Carrington. The research mostly revolves around the depiction of aging women, surreal resistance to patriarchy, and the transformation of socially disregarded female identities into bases of spiritual and emblematic power. Also, the qualitative approach is the most suitable technique for probing the novel's themes and narrative structures.

Moreover, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and female identity is employed in this study. Kristeva (born 1941) is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, psychoanalyst, feminist, and novelist who has lived in France since the mid-1960s. After the publication of her first book, *Semeiotikè*, in 1969, Kristeva has had a profound influence on critical analysis and feminism. Her work includes numerous books and articles on such diverse fields as semiotics, intertextuality, and objectification. She was also a pioneer of structuralism during its heyday, and her work has had a significant place in poststructuralist thought.

Kristeva presented the notion of abjection in her work *Powers of Horror* to define the mental and social procedure through which societies discard what jeopardizes identity, order, and social borders. The abject alludes to what is left out, upsetting, or socially intolerable since it defies systems of meaning and constancy. Bodily degeneration, aging, death, and forms of difference are often linked with abjection since they unsettle cultural notions of purity, control, and regularity.

In other words, abjection is a process in which the subject considers everything that is in conflict with him as other and distances them from himself through negation and rejection. In this way, the individual establishes boundaries for an ever-unstable "I". In societies ruled by men, women's bodies are recurrently

exposed to abjection, particularly when they no longer comply with principal values of beauty, youth, sexuality, or productivity. Old women become culturally indiscernible since aging female bodies defy male-controlled principles of femininity. They are typically considered as incompatible, unreasonable, redundant, or unsuitable people for society. This expulsion resonances society's struggles to get rid of or silence identities that interject approved gender principles.

The Hearing Trumpet is a significant literary text in which these abject identities are recuperated and transmogrified. Marian Leatherby and other elderly women live in socially disqualified positions, yet the novel represents them as spiritually stimulated, intellectually autonomous, and resilient to patriarchal power. Through Kristeva's theory, their social indiscernibility can be recognized not only as domination but also as a circumstance that permits them to be outside conservative structures of control.

5. Discussion

5.1. Aging Female Bodies as Abject Figures in Patriarchal Society

The Hearing Trumpet is a novel with a paradoxical plot, but it melts and disintegrates with intense heat into something infinitely different. This book is one of the most original, exhilarating, satisfying, and imaginative novels of the twentieth century, and shows old women as individuals who are left out from masculine societies that respect women chiefly due to such qualities as youth, attractiveness, sexuality, and practicality in the household.

The elderly female body becomes culturally troubling since it is no longer in line with the recognized criteria of femininity. Through Marian Leatherby and the elderly women at the institution, the novel reveals how male-controlled societies downgrade old women and push them into societal inconspicuousness. Yet, Carrington simultaneously alters this segregation into a cause of confrontation and spiritual supremacy.

This relegation can be discussed in light of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva elucidates that abjection is rooted in what "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1982, 4). The abject is something excluded by society as it jeopardizes social borders and prevailing descriptions of ordinariness. Aging female bodies become abject because they stand for deterioration, death, and the failure of patriarchal principles that focus on youthful femininity. Kristeva also claims that "it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity" (Kristeva 1982, 4). As a result, it is found that elderly women get in the way of patriarchal identity because they are outside socially adequate feminine roles.

From the very beginning of *The Hearing Trumpet*, Marian is behaved as someone unimportant by her family. Her son Galahad and daughter-in-law



Muriel speak in front of her as though she is unable to comprehend them, supposing that her deafness and old age have made her logically inapt. Marian discloses this marginalization when she hears their conversation through the hearing trumpet given to her by Carmella. She realizes that her family intends to send her away to an institution because she has become a problem. Marian states, "I was ninety-two years old and no one expected me to understand anything"

(Carrington 2005, 7).

This quote signifies the social removal undergone by ageing females. Marian is not observed as a lively subject with acumen or agency; instead, she is preserved as imperceptible and troublesome. Her age eliminates her from important contribution in family and society. Male-controlled culture decreases her identity to physical decay and reliance. Carrington also refers to Marian's physical appearance in ways that defy customary femininity. Marian defines herself as having a beard and an eccentric body that no longer fits cultural standards of female prettiness. She says, "I have a gray beard which unfortunately has never been long enough to plait" (Carrington 2005, 1).

The image of the unshaven old woman interferes with inflexible gender beliefs and undermines patriarchal classifications of femininity. Marian's body becomes grotesque from the viewpoint of societal standards since it crosses borders between mannish and feminine appearance. As stated by Kristeva, the abject inhabits unsteady borders that endanger systems of order and identity. The elderly female body consequently becomes culturally upsetting because it defies classification within patriarchal standards of standard womanhood.

Kristeva defines the abject as something removed with the intention of maintaining collective structures, writing that "the abject tears me away from the indifferentiated and brings me into subjection to a system" (Kristeva 1982, 111). This idea is noticed in Marian's elimination from domestic space and taking her to a retirement institution. Her family tries to separate and control her because her old age symbolizes an interruption of social order and domestic normality. The institute itself symbolizes society's craving to get rid of elderly women.

However, Carrington does not think of these women as powerless individuals. Their being invisible makes them able to flee men's expectations concerning marriage, exquisiteness, submission, and domestic labor. Besides, the novel's surrealist features fortify this renewal. Carrington employs absurdity, mystical visions, and unreal occasions to discard normal patriarchal systems. Surrealism undermines social reality and generates spaces where downgraded females can redefine themselves outside cultural limitations. As Marian moves deeper into surreal experiences, her abject status becomes connected to freedom rather than indignity. Similarly, many critics have acknowledged that Carrington's

surrealism forms feminist alternatives to patriarchal control. It has been stated that,

In the last two decades Leonora Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet* has received more attention within academic circles than it ever did at the time of its publication in 1974. Natalya Lusty, Susan Suleiman, and Gloria Feman Orenstein have discussed in much detail the novel's strong feminist ethos, as well as its subversion of Surrealist tropes. (Ochoa 2010, 121)

Eventually, it can be added that *The Hearing Trumpet* exposes how societies ruled by men refer to elderly women as abject human beings so that they can continue governing principles of femininity and social order. Through Kristeva's theory of abjection, Marian's relegation can be realized as a procedure of segregation based on bodily difference and social indistinctness. Yet Carrington renovates this abjection into authorization by showing how elderly women attain spiritual independence because they live outside patriarchal systems of value. The novel consequently retrieves the aging female body as a site of confrontation, alteration, and alternative female identity.

5.2. Social Invisibility and the Erasure of Elderly Female Identity

As mentioned before, Carrington discusses how patriarchal society makes elderly women communally imperceptible by depriving them of power, personality, and worth. In the systems that limit femininity to youth, beauty, sexuality, and efficacy, old women are viewed as weights rather than agents with self-governing identities. Carrington condemns this cultural expurgation through the experiences of Marian Leatherby, whose old age makes both her family and society let go of her presence and humanity. Yet, the novel also exhibits that this hiddenness ironically enables elderly women to cultivate spiritual liberty and confrontation beyond male-controlled authority.

Kristeva claims that abjection alludes to what society refuses with the aim of maintaining steady identities and social order. She writes, "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being" (Kristeva 1982, 1). This sentence proposes that the abject is not only barred but also retains troublemaking influence. Elderly women become abject in masculine society because their aging bodies and identities are in contrast with governing ideals of femininity. As they no longer symbolize cultural anticipations connected with beauty, fertility, and attraction, they are forced toward inconspicuousness and social prohibition.

Marian is regarded as a woman who is no longer logically or socially significant. Her being hard of hearing becomes representative of her elimination from evocative communication and participation. Marian states, "My family really believed I was deaf, which was far from true" (Carrington 2005, 5). Despite the fact that Marian can still hear incompletely with the hearing trumpet, her family thinks she cannot realize conversations or make any



decisions. This represents how a masculine culture makes elderly women silent by depriving them of freedom and seeing them as sluggish people rather than forceful ones. Her identity is obliterated not because she does not have perception, but because society is not aware of her voice.

Marian seems to be a problem, which cannot be handled easily; this is why she is not viewed as a person with wants, capacities, or sentiments. In fact, her old body changes her into a concern. The family's choice to institutionalize her denotes society's determinations to remove old women from the public and the household. Kristeva's theory helps clear up this matter. She states that abjection transpires when human beings go through what intrudes societal borders and identity systems. She writes, "What is abject... does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982, 4).

The ageing female body does not fit in patriarchal classifications because it no longer fits perfect definitions of femininity. Aging discloses mortality, physical renovation, and the uncertainty of beauty standards. Consequently, old women become socially painful figures who are barred from discernibility. Their presence reminds society of degeneration and transience, realities patriarchal culture tries hard in order to conquer. Carrington also denounces the reduction of elderly women to ineptness through Marian's images of how others observe her. Marian says, "At the age of ninety-two one does not expect to be taken seriously" (Carrington 2005, 18). This internalization of indistinctness reveals how male-controlled beliefs affect female self-image.

Marian knows that old women are supposed to vanish socially and expressively. Their experiences, views, and wishes are not viewed as pertinent because they no longer satisfy socially appreciated feminine roles such as maternity, sexual allure, or domestic provision. Yet, Carrington transmutes this invisibility into a type of emancipation. As soon as Marian arrives at the institution and becomes detached from conservative family structures, she gradually becomes autonomous and spiritually responsive. Unencumbered from patriarchal outlooks, the elderly women establish different social relations based on resourcefulness, storytelling, mysticism, and shared confrontation.

The novel's surrealist tone additionally supports this renovation. By employing a number of strange images and illogical events, Carrington ends masculine shrewdness and engenders spaces where demoted females can restore their identities. Their elimination from patriarchal society allows them to resist its supremacy from outside its borders. Kristeva's notion of abjection consequently becomes essential to understanding Marian's renovation.

While patriarchal society seeks to wipe away elderly female identity, the abject position also produces potentials for confrontation. The imperceptible old woman becomes hazardous because she does not satisfy societal prospects and normative control. Carrington repossesses the relegated figure of the elderly

woman and converts her into a representation of astuteness, uprising, and spiritual autonomy.

6. Concluding Notes

It was found that *The Hearing Trumpet* offers an influential feminist condemnation of masculine society through its depiction of aging females as both socially relegated and spiritually transformative human beings. Through the character of Marian Leatherby and the other elderly women surrounding her, Leonora Carrington confronts cultural expectations that relate female worth with youth, gorgeousness, and societal efficacy. Instead of depicting old age as a condition of weakening and insignificance, the novel shows it as a space of autonomy, confrontation, and understanding.

Drawing from Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, this paper reveals how aging women are treated as abject subjects in male-controlled culture since their bodies and identities are in contrast with governing ideals of femininity and social order. Nevertheless, Carrington changes this abject status into a source of liberation. The indistinctness implemented on elderly women by society incongruously makes them able to throw away masculine beliefs and attain otherworldly insight, self-rule, and cooperative power. Hence, abjection is both a kind of refusal and also a chance for freedom and identity refurbishment.

In addition, the surrealist quality of the novel protects this conflict by challenging practical structures and conformist gender roles. Via surreal visualizations, spiritual descriptions, and absurd narrative transformations, the novel throws away patriarchal reasonableness and produces imaginative spaces where elderly women can go beyond systems of control and restriction.

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