

REBECCA: The Voice of Hope and Rescue in the Play *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

Marie Clements

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Abstract:

The Unnatural and Accidental Women (2005) is one of the most provocative and revolutionary play written by the Metis playwright Marie Clements. The play is based on the real-life events that occurred in Canada. The indigenous women were murdered in the streets of Canada. They were often ignored by the society. The death of these women had no impact and it was treated with indifference. The Canadian Metis playwright Marie Clements raised the issue of violence against the indigenous women in this play. The play blends reality with the technique of surrealism. The playwright has successfully employed the style of heteroglossia in the play.

Key Word: Metis, Surrealism, Heteroglossia, Indigenous.

REBECCA:

I'm looking for my mom. She went for a walk twenty years ago, and I haven't seen her since.

RON:

And you think she's down there.

REBECCA:

Yup.

RON:

Why?

REBECCA:

She was last seen down there.

RON:

Why now?¹

The above conversation between Rebecca and Ron in the play *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* speaks about the missing of Rebecca's mother. Rebecca had lost her mother nearly twenty years back. She was mere a girl at that time. When she began to search her mother, she was a grown-up woman. She had never forgotten her mother. Rebecca is the mouthpiece of playwright Marie Clements. Clements has attacked the hypocrisy of local administration of Canada. The play is based on a real incident of missing of indigenous women in Canada. The Metis playwright took this issue seriously. Rebecca was the daughter of one of the

victims. She had been separated from her mother. She did not know the fate of her mother. While searching her lost mother, Rebecca came to know that ten women including her mother were in missing list. These women were brought back to life, when Rebecca began her search journey. Initially Clements was not interested to write a play on this topic but an article pertaining to the murder of women completely changed her mind. She states.

It came from four page spread I read in *the Vancouver Sun* in 1988. It was quite a detailed story of Gilbert Paul Jordan's career and of them events.... I guess what really put me over was that it was a huge spread on him and may be half a page of all of his victims and very little of them as human beings—just basically their last traced days².

The culprit was Gilbert Paul Jordan, a white barber who was prejudiced against the indigenous working women and sex dwellers. The theme of the play is based on discrimination. The victim indigenous women were intoxicated beyond the limit. When they became unconscious, their throats were slit by the murderer. He left no evidence to establish the crime. But Rebecca appeared in the drama as path finder. She solved the murder mystery. Clements has employed the surrealistic technique to solve the mystery and enhance the curiosity. The playwright has successfully employed the technique of heteroglossia. She brought the dead and alive on the same platform to articulate their voice. The alive characters existed in physical world while the dead became the denizen of spiritual world. The play reveals the pain and anguish of indigenous voice. Earlier the indigenous voice was silenced. The dead spirits appeared and they remember themselves. They resisted and reclaimed their stories. The life of the indigenous women was treated as unimportant. The indigenous history, identity and perspective came to the light after the efforts made by the playwright.

Rebecca's relentless search for her lost mother is an attempt to go back into her past. It is an attempt to go back into memory, history and time to land into the world of invisible ghost. The ghost is physically absent referent. Rebecca's absent mother has haunted her for last two decades. The play is not merely a narration of murder committed by the barber but also of Rebecca's own loss and longings. Whenever Rebecca asked her father about her mother, his answer had a lack of clarity. Her father was also aware of his wife's fate but he did not dare to utter the truth to his daughter. Rebecca's early life suffered stigma because of her mother's sudden departure from her life. She never wore snowshoes in the memory of her mother. Her mother had promised to give snowshoes. She had thrown away her shoes. The mother's affection always accompanied her invisibly. She remained present before her daughter in spirit form.

REBECCA:

My dad—the Character—was still full- limbed but hard of hearing when he died. Still asking “Eh?” No Mom. Again. “Where’s Mom?” again. He said, “She left us. I didn’t know anything was wrong.” He sat down. I took my running shoes off. I would never wear them again. Nothing was going to be normal.

REBECCA takes the turning shoes off and kicks them. AUNT SHADIE turns around and silently picks them up, putting them properly under her chairs. She exists. (20-21)

Rebecca was anguished because she failed to comprehend the disappearance of her mother. She did not surrender to the adverse situation. She struggled to extract the truth. She visited every place known to her to search to search her mother. In the meantime, she came in touch with the invisible spirits of Mavis, Valerie, Violet and Verna. She came to know the truth of their curtailed life. They were murdered in their youth. The search of her mother took her to different places. She met Ron. Rebecca never revealed her mission. Rebecca and Ron were close to each other. Even Ron was surprised to know that after the gap of

twenty years she was desperately searching her mother. Ron was a cop. He thought that Rebecca was hunting for husband. She needed a suitable life partner for her. But Rebecca made him clear of his mission.

REBECCA:

The worst thing that can happen is an old beat-up suit will sit down and try and dazzle me, which is usually more sad than it is offensive. Beside, I am looking for someone.

RON:

Who- Mr. Right?

I married Mr. Right. And divorced Mr. Right. So, now I'm looking for really. (94)

Rebecca told Ron that she was looking for her mother. Ron was astonished to hear her. Rebecca narrated her difficulty for searching her mother. She told Ron that she was last seen in this down place. Ron was surprised of her selected place. They were the cheap places mostly dominated by the working-class people. Ron thought that the search of Rebecca will go in vain. But Rebecca had done her work more meticulously than other. She knew that her mother mostly visited these kinds of places. She was frequent visitor of such kind of areas. Rebecca visited near Empress hotel. Her wallet had fallen there. She did not know it. When Rebecca came back to her place, she received a call. The call was from an unknown person. He informed Rebecca that her wallet was kept by him. It is in his possession. Rebecca went to meet the person who had kept the wallet of Rebecca in his custody. He was well behaved. He called Rebecca to come inside his shop. He was the barber and he was also known to Rebecca's mother and father. He had seen Rebecca long back when she was a small girl. He told Rebecca to come inside the shop. Rebecca disclosed her mission when the barber asked for it.

REBECCA:

Really, I have been looking for my mother. She was last seen in this neighbourhood. (116)

The white barber was intelligent enough to read the situation. He immediately came to know that Rebecca was the daughter of Aunt Shadie. He behaved politely with Rebecca to trap her. Rebecca was not so foolish to become his victim.

GILBERT:

Right.... right. Mind isn't what is used to be. *(laughs)* Have a seat.

REBECCA sits.

I saw you in here last night. It must've fallen from your jacket or

Something. I'm just glad I could help. (115)

The barber requested her to take her seat. She sat there on the chair. He immediately offered her a drink but she declined. Rebecca became suspicious of his behaviour. She immediately pretended that she was horny for sex. Now it was her turn to nab the culprit. Rebecca told Gilbert that she wanted to shave him. Gilbert did not agree but Rebecca's sweet and sexy words forced him to agree to her proposal.

REBECCA:

I'll be gentle.

He reaches up to touch her. She grabs his hands.

You have beautiful hands. I have loved men's hands.... I bet you've loved a lot of women...

GILBERT:

Women have always taken to me. I know how to make a woman happy. I know what they want to hear.

He places his hand on her breast. (122)

Rebecca closely watched his shops. She saw the braid of her mother, which she wore before her missing. The braid was the most authentic evidence to prove that the culprit was none the else but Gilbert, sitting before her.

Rebecca put the cream on his face. She began to shave. She wanted to punish Gilbert. She decided to end his life. As Rebecca raised her hand to slit his throat, he opened his eyes. The barber resisted Rebecca and almost came close to foil her plan. Suddenly Aunt Shadie and the rest of the murdered indigenous women emerged from the mirror. They helped and held Rebecca's hand steady and together killed the barber.

Rebecca braces herself. She takes the razor and is about to cut his throat.... The barber's eyes suddenly blaze open. He grabs her hand and they struggle with the blade.... AUNT SHADIE emerges form the landscape as a trapper. She stands behind Rebecca.... He looks up and and panics as he sees AUNT SHADIE and THE WOMEN/ TRAPPERS behind her. Squirming they silt his throat.

Rebecca became successful in her mission to nab the culprit. She punished the barber with the help of her mother and all other victims. The barber was sentenced to death. His throat was slitted in the same way, which he applied for his victim. The playwright successfully employed the surrealistic technique and heteroglossia to convey the message of the play.

Reference:

1. Clements, Marie *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* (Talon Books, Vancouver, 2005) ninth printing 2024 P.95. All subsequent references to the book will be incorporated in the text.
2. Patricia Hill Collins, 'The Tie that Binds: Race, Gender and US Violence; Ethnic and Racial Studies, 21, no.5 (1989) 922 (Quoted from M.S. Soumya literature article The Unnatural and Accidental Women by Marie Clement)