

# Feminism Fighter or Patriarchy Victim —Taking *Grass is Singing* for Example

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*The Grass is Singing* is a complicated novel including race, gender, and other political issues. As the main character in the novel, Mary is a typical round character who are more realistic and her personalities somewhat inconsistent. A full development and complex traits also make Mary like a real person. From the perspective of feminism, should Mary be viewed as a feminism fighter or a patriarchy victim? The independence and strong-minded in her characteristics showing not only her strength, but also her identity as a colonialist. Mary is merely one of the victims of patriarchal society, for she is coerced by the social prejudice and her personal predicament between Dick and Moses.

**Keywords:** *The Grass is Singing*, feminism, patriarchy victim

## Introduction

Personal is the representative of political, which can be the best slogan to summarize Mary's whole life. The slogan expresses a common belief among feminists that the personal experiences of women are rooted in their political situation and gender inequality, and it focuses on men's power and women's oppression. What's more, the slogan also suggest that personal experience is the result of social structure or inequality, therefore, this problem, gender discrimination, could not be solved by personal solutions but only by social changes. In the novel, Mary is a ubiquitous women image in the world, but she is also a special character with unique and pathetic experience.

## The Common Feature of Mary

First of all, Mary has a complex politic identity, because the novel, *The Grass is Singing*, is surrounded by two major political hotspot issues, colonialism and racial discrimination. These two stereotypes derived from the inequal society structure suffocate Mary till her last second, and render her a wretched ending. Mary Turner is coerced by colonialism and racism; therefore, she is a unique character among all the other female images. In other words, Mary's marriage is different from other female's, such as Anna Karenin and Lady Chatterley, for her marriage is under the shadow of political issues. However, Mary's marriage is also a universal one, for it is a "lightning marriage" between a city girl and rural boy, whose concept is greatly disparate from Mary. The tragic ending definitely can be foreseen from the beginning. As seen from the comparison of before and after the

marriage, the tragic marriage is not only created by Mary herself, but also some gossiping women who had said Mary ought to get married. In other words, the traditional patriarchal culture is not only forged by male power, but women also add fuel to the fire (Ma, 2013). For instance, those who gossip Mary's appearance, and remark behind her back the reason why Mary does not get married.

Before she gets married with Dick Turner, Mary lives a self-sufficient life in the city with a decent occupation, comfortable accommodation, and a lot of friends. The writer depicts Mary as a modern female image who are independent in financial status as well as value judgments. Mary can choose whatever she wants to wear, and the hairstyle, also she has her own judgment on marriage. Mary disdains male's image in the beginning, because her ability actually is superior to some men. Obviously, compared Mary with Dick, the former is more aggressive and dominant than the latter. All of these proves Mary is a victim of patriarchal society rather than a feminist, because Mary is aggressive in gender position, and she doesn't find a solution to ease the gender tension pervading the society. Mary disdains male just like other male gazing the female in defiance (Xia, 2009). Therefore, Mary is excluded by both male and female because of her maverick thought and behaviors. When Mary's father died of old-age, Mary should have been out of the shackles of traditional patriarchal notions, for there is no male character to manipulate her own life, and she is not subject to other male any more. The last link that bound her to a childhood she hated to remember is removed by her father's death. However, will the patriarchal society allow a woman owning a room of their own? Will the patriarchal society allow a woman being single all the time? Will the patriarchal society render women the freedom of choosing their own lifestyle and dress style? Absolutely the answer is negative all the time. The traditional patriarchal society will not permit Mary, a woman, to live a man-like life, because women are subordinate to men, and they can not live independently. Even recently people can see and hear a lot negative and harsh comments from the internet criticizing dressing code on women. Therefore, the so-called friends of Mary, becoming members of the patriarchy, interfere with Mary's choice of dressing style, hair style and even marriage value.

After Mary gets married with Dick Turner, she is changed by the patriarchal society gradually. At first, Mary is full of energy to make a comfortable home for both Dick and herself, but gradually, everything is changed, including herself. Mary is no longer the independent modern lady, nor a cultivated person with high education. Mary tends to depend someone who are more strong-minded and masculine than her and Dick, and Mary is inclined to use whip to "cultivate" the natives. As time goes by, Mary becomes more savage than before she was. Mary loves the man who are strong in appearance and dominant in personality, but she never loves Dick who is weak and goal-less, and pitiful. As Simone de Beauvoir expressed in *Le Deuxieme Sexe* that woman is not born, but becomes. All the male qualities Mary favored is the stereotypes the traditional imposed on the male. The society imposed these stereotypes on Mary, but Mary imposed these stereotypes on Dick. Both of the two people are victims of the patriarchal society. Therefore, the writer does not mean to present Mary as a feminism fighter, but a picture of victims under the shadow of patriarchal society.

### **The Unique Tragedy of Mary**

Since "personal is the representative of political", personal is also unique in the world, and what makes Mary's personal experience especially tragic in the end? Mary was killed by the native houseboy, a native African, the so-called Mary's lover. The question is how can a white woman has intercourse with a black native

houseboy. As we all know, from the perspective of feminism, white women are the belongings of the white male, and the natives are quite inferior to the white males in social and economic status. The intercourse between Mary and the houseboy degrades the “white culture” and undermined the authority of the colonist (Xia, 2009). The affair between Mary and Moses are extremely complicated to analyze, for the word “love” is insufficient to support their ambiguous relationships. It is a paradox for Mary loving Moses, for she shows no sympathy for the natives and she even treats the black people harsher and crueler than Dick. Mary is a total and incurable racist and colonialist, for she is influenced so deeply by the extreme conception that she doesn’t notice that. The independence and strong-minded in her characteristics showing not only her strength, but also her identity as a colonialist (Ma, 2012). The complex affair between Mary and Moses can be interpreted as Stockholm Syndrome, which means developing a positive even adoring feelings towards the individuals holding them captive or abusing them.

For one thing, as we mentioned above, Mary favors the man who are robust, strong-minded, and masculine and Moses is the perfect choice of this image. Owing to his black skin, the biggest block in transforming the ambiguous feeling into love, an extremely mixed feeling between Mary and Moses is created, neither hatred nor love. For another, Mary is a determined colonialist, but she can’t help being attracted by Moses. Trapped in colonialism conception and private emotion, Mary’s arrogant of being an honorable white woman hurt Moses’ dignity of being a human. The triangle relationship is common in most of novels, but the colonialism and racism add more political allegory to the story, which makes the novel standing out the other books. The tragic ending is quite different from *Anna Karenin* who went to the train station desperately, and the novel, *Anna Karenin*, focusing on a higher and lofty theme of life and ethic. *The Grass is Singing* focuses on a minor area that Mary’s dilemma, a woman with patriarchal conception, and a white woman attracted by a black houseboy (Ma, 2013). Therefore, this feature of her dilemma makes a unique woman out of the novel, Mary Turner, and his tragic marriage becomes the sacrifices of political issues, which are different from others’. In one word, the differences between Mary and other female image of novel lie also in her image as a victim of patriarchal society, not a feminist fighter. According to the discussion of the slogan “Personal is the representative of political”, the truth of female’s subordinate situation in society is revealed by the novel. From the personal and unique personal experiences of Mary who are in an unequal society for female and minority ethnics, Mary’s personal problems are transformed into political problems, and these problems could not be solved by personal solutions but only by social changes.

### Conclusion

Feminism is not revealed by Mary’s feature, but the patriarchal feature is disclosed by Mary. The reason lies in Mary being not a feminist, which come from Feminism, as a campaign that aiming to end sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression that are certainly absent in Mary’s personality. As mentioned above, Mary is on the contrary to feminism, and she becomes one of the members who intensify the gender opposition. When a woman showing the patriarchal features, she certainly is excluded by the other people, which is the reasons why her female friends laughed at her, and the male neighbors dislike her. The tragic marriage of Mary reveals the strict requirements that the patriarchal society impose on women, which are one of the indispensable reasons of failure marriage. Therefore, Mary’s tragic marriage is just a normal failure prevailing in the patriarchal society.

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