

TRACKS (2013) & WILD (2014): A STUDY ON SOLO FEMALE TRAVEL

Dr. M. P. Reshma

Associate Professor

PG & Research Department of English

Govt. Victoria College Palakkad Kerala

Ph: 9400846344

EMAIL: reshrenjith@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The article studies two movies, Tracks (2013) & Wild (2014) through a feminist lens to understand solo female escapades into the wilderness, as an act of healing and redemption. Female travelogues are much celebrated for the nuances in character and conflict that it posits. Both the travelogues delve deep into the realm of personal chaos, transmuting pain into manifestations of release and relief.

Keywords: Travelogue, Biographical, Solo, Memoir

A Lady an explorer? A traveller in skirts?

The notion's just a trifle too seraphic:

Let them stay and mind the babies, or hem our ragged shirts;

But they mustn't, can't, and shan't be geographic.

(from a cartoon in Punch magazine, 1893, cited in Robinson, 1994, p 1)

Vita Sackville- West's 1926 travelogue *Passenger to Teheran* begins with a rather provocative and famous line, "Travel is the most private of pleasures" (25). And yet, travel writing by no means was an easy task for early female writers since travel itself was regarded as a masculine venture. In the 1800s, it was socially unacceptable for women to travel without the accompaniment of their family or husband and female solo travels were unheard of. Thus, early women writers had to be extremely careful while providing materials that could excite and invite audiences to read their travelogues. They had to remain within the boundaries of appropriate behaviour so as to not offend their readers. Therefore "...most early travel writing by women began with an apology, an assertion of the humility topos, and a declaration of authenticity" (Saunders 3).

Female travelogues have come a long way since those early days and at present it is a thriving genre. With the advent of internet and social media platforms, travelogues have become instantaneous, heterogeneous and with wider reach-out. Thus, the present 21st century has seen an explosive resurgence in travelogues.

Movies too have become a forte for traveller expressions. Travelogue movies is a besotted genre for celluloid entertainment. There are plenty of movies with solo male travellers, who are put at the mercy of their fate, to overcome situations on which they have little to no control. Applauded movies like *Cast Away* (2000), *Life of Pi* (2012), *127 Hours* (2010) are but a few examples of male solo travelogues through adversities. Female solo travelogue movies also have a fair share of acclaimed movies like *Nomadland* (2020) *Eat Pray Love* (2010), *Lost in*

Translation (2003), Under the Tuscan Sun (2003), Thelma and Louise (1991), and so on. An early example of a female solo travelogue movie is Roman Holiday (1953), which is also a charming romantic escapade.

Many solo -female travel movies are in fact film adaptations. Nomadland (adapted from 2017 nonfiction book Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century by Jessica Bruder), Eat Pray Love (based on Elizabeth Gilbert's 2006 memoir of the same name), Under the Tuscan Sun (adapted from Frances Mayes' 1996 memoir of the same name,) are but a few examples.

Wild (2014) directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, is an American biographical adventure starring Reese Witherspoon, and based on Cheryl Strayed's 2012 memoir Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail. Strayed's memoir is about her grit to hike the 1100 miles Pacific Crest Trail as a process of self -healing. Tracks (2013) directed by John Curran is an Australian drama film starring Mia Wasikowska and Adam Driver, and based on Robyn Davidson's memoir of the same name. Davidson's memoir chronicles her nine- month trek across the Australian desert, accompanied by her pet Labrador and three feral camels.

Both movies are well-known and well-received for their portrayals of female travels, that are underlaid with deeper intentions, making the journeys difficult and almost impossible to undertake. Both women share common traits of troubled past and seek solitude and time-away from humanity, by deciding to walk alone, across difficult and unforgiving landscapes. Both the Australian desert and the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) become platforms for female redemptions, that are signified through the arduous journeys undertaken.

Travel becomes both, an escape from the self and the quest for the very same self in Wild. Troubled by her mother's untimely death by cancer, Cheryl, is devastated into a chaotic existence overruled by drugs and derangement. She has sex with random strangers, which eventually destroys her marriage. She chances upon a book on PCT, while waiting to decide on the fate of her pregnancy. Eventually she gets an abortion and decides to go for the PCT. This decision is a compelling call for self-healing by the protagonist, who by then is feeling completely lost.

Tracks portrays the personal journey of a woman, caught in a pivotal moment of her nation's history, the 1970s. While Australia was negotiating the prospects of aboriginal rights, Davidson was engaged in "an individual search for her "self" in the world (Beck 94)". She renegotiates her Australian identity through her encounters with the Aborigines. There is a re-accessing of Australia's racial history and also a resistance towards white racist narratives. She is also met with the deep-rooted misogyny that rests within the Australian Bush country, where women travelling alone are regarded as unfeminine and unsafe. Davidson seeks solitude and prefers the company of her dog and camels. Haunted by early childhood memories of abandoning her pet dog and the suicide of her mother, Davidson like Strayed embarks on this quest across the desert to push her limits. To quote Davidson herself "Some instinct- and I think it was a correct one-led me to do something difficult enough to give my life meaning (Black)".

Both movies become significant through the representations of the cultural negotiations undertaken by the women. While there is a celebration of self-transformation, both films also breakthrough geographies and cultural frontiers. Both movies reassess the gender and

geography equation and traversing difficult terrains become at once a physical, emotional and psychological journey. Both women crossover the unforgiving landscapes to find redemption in their blistered feet and tattered bodies. Strayed reaching the Bridge of Gods and Davidson reaching the ocean, both signify a sense of purpose and meaning achieved through pain and hardships, wilfully chosen to endure. Both women travel through adversities imposed upon by nature and by their past and much like Margaret Atwood's poem *Journey Through the Interior*, these women are often found floundering upon their decisions and life-choices. However, as the journey continues, there is an intensifying of nature-woman bond, that also paves way for the self-healing. Both women undergo moments of deep anguish and loss through their journey and the movie screen emanates with their sense of hopelessness. And yet, eventually, they get up and find reasons to walk ahead.

"Women have always been in motion and for a variety of complex reasons; and their traveling has always been gendered and embodied traveling, situated within complex social, cultural, and historical forces" (Smith XIII). Both *Wild* and *Tracks* have brilliantly portrayed these negotiations that women indulge in through their solo-travels. The journey is signified with pain and chaos, that finally renders a pilgrimage like endearment to these travels through a final acceptance of uncertainties by both protagonists.

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