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FLEX AND STRETCH: THE INEVITABLE FEMINIST TREATISE ON CATWOMAN—THE MOVIE

(WARNER BROTHERS 2004)

Intro

Analysis

Summation

Notes

“From a Life that was Taken a New Life will be Born!”—Movie Trailer

If the goal of Western feminism’s first wave
was to gain recognition that women
are citizens and not chattel

If the second wave surged up to gain
for women the same rights as men—
to work, over our bodies, under the law

Then the third hove up from desire
for those same rights *as women*: recognition.
Equality doesn’t mean homogeneity.

And the first washed out over its backlash
the dark reputational cloud that obscured
Wollstonecraft-Godwin’s work a century after her death,
(bereaved Godwin, penurious, published her journals,
that detailed “promiscuity” to a judgmental world [Curran 189],

so when Edgeworth suggested Barbault join her in
a women's periodical, Barbault demurred: "We should
possibly hesitate at joining with ... Mrs. Godwin" [Pepys 599]).

The second wave fell to similar backwashing
like 1989's Montréal Massacre of fourteen women
who dared to study engineering, murdered
by a man who shouted "I hate feminists."

The third wave brings its own invidious rip tide
at least as powerful as that which drowned Patience
and raised up that Venus-on-an-Air-Conditioner
Catwoman

*"Bast represents the duality in all women: docile, yet aggressive;
nurturing, yet ferocious."*—Ophelia Powers

Allude to *Xena Warrior Princess*,
Veronica Mars, praising the strong
struggle for self of each eponymon
in each vicious social fiction.

Quote *Athena's Daughters* to prove
critical credentials. Temper praise
with a caveat re: the generic ghetto.

Raise briefly *Dark Angel*, regrettably grounded
by the shallow pitch of her own narrative arc.

Sneer equally briefly at others, say *Elektra*,
or *TrueBlood*, outside the genre, but down
with the gender bend and stretch, though
fatally pandering to the pick-up fantasy,
girls just wanna ...

Then rapture over *Buffy*, especially the high school seasons, wherein she is powerful in pink.

Mention (*ahem*) your own Buff article, really not terribly relevant here, though perpetually about-to-be reprinted.

Quote *Buffy and Philosophy*:

“Buffy is sexy because of her strength, not in spite of it” (Marinucci 75)

Note that success will rest in any heroine who attains a wholly female sense of self entitlement, despite the “cultural, psychoanalytic, and fictional expectation that they *should* be masochistic if they are ‘normal’ women ...” (Massé 2)

because “... the intertwining of love and pain is not natural” (Massé 3).

“You are a Catwoman, Patience ... But you are not the first.”—Ophelia Powers

“A Kiss Could Change Her Into a Monstrous Fang-and-Claw Killer!”
(1942, *Cat People*)

“A Tender Tale of Terror!”
(1944, *Curse of the Cat People*)

“To Caress Me is to Tempt Death!”
(1957, *Cat Girl*)

“Men Die! Women Sigh! Beneath
that Batcape—he’s all man!”
(1966, *Batman–The Movie*)

“An erotic fantasy for the Animal in us All.”
(1982, *Cat People* remake)

“The Bat, The Cat, The Penguin”
(1992, *Batman Returns*)

Michelle Pfeiffer’s Selina-Kyle-style Cat,
brought to a feline self by her premature demise:
 ever so like the Bat,
 except for gender and wealth and
 so, not much like him at all—

 “‘Oh ... I would love to live with you in your castle
 forever ... like in a fairy tale ...’ (Batman caresses
 the back of her head; she claws him on the cheek)
‘But I just couldn’t live with myself,
so don’t pretend this is a happy ending.’”

She has to choose—fairy-tale future
or tortured past. Sad, but her own. She faces

another truth: the mansion ain’t big enough
for more than one self-flagellant soul.

He gets the home, car
help, privilege, cave.

She gets ambiguous morality,
fierce independence,
 a singer sewing vaccum
 for that painted-on look

and the teasing tendency to regard
the men as prey-mates

in subsequent litters of comics
and our destination,

“CATch her in IMAX”
(2004, *Catwoman—The Movie*)

“I might not be a hero, but I’m certainly not a killer.”—Catwoman

The credits show seven writers
but at least fourteen
stuck their fingers in
the decade-long dyke

Michelle Pfeiffer
Ashley Judd,
Sean Young,
turned it down,
finally, Berry
got tapped
trapped
in a contract.

.

“In a movie that stinks of pure desperation,
Warner Brothers try to reinvent the character ...
but just end up with something you’d
expect to see in a litter tray.”

“The special effects are second rate and
completely obvious, the direction ... is pitiful
and the Catwoman outfit, while slightly sexy,
is just plain stupid.”

“... in pieces it’s pretty good; unfortunately you have to look at it all at once on the big screen, which means that this movie is a car wreck.”

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For only the third time in Razzies’ history, a recipient showed up to accept an award,

Halle Berry, clutching her 2002 Oscar, said

“First of all, I want to thank Warner Brothers. Thank you for putting me in this piece of shit ...”

“Catwoman epitomizes fantasy: what every woman wants to be, who every man wants to be with.”—Halle Berry

Sigh. So
Hollywood-true

and real-world wrong:

as if all men desire
a “who” barely
more than a “what”

and all women want
to be some thing.

(and her end is propped up
on a preposition. Humph.)

"I don't care that the FDA never saw the headaches and the nausea and the fainting spells. Those are symptoms I can live with ... With what we stand to make from consumers demanding their fix, I can live with it being addictive. But these side-effects from the long-term studies ... I thought I could live with it. I can't live with turning people into monsters."—Slavicky (the inventor of Beau-line beauty cream):

The masochistic pact:
feel like shit but look fantastic.

Guinea-pig pretty-girls the first
corporate casualties, Slavicky the third.

Second? Patience, flushed from the factory
accidental witness, incidental victim.

"I was everything they wanted me to be. I was never more beautiful, never more powerful. Then I turned forty and they threw me away."—Laurel Hedare

Snap! See this close-shorn, stunning model,
stony fisted, shattering the glass ceiling

too far gone in fury to see
—oh no!—it's really her floor

cantilevered over eighty stories
of air-conditioned pressure

that shoves her out the very frame
she broke in her ecstatic hubris.

But wait! Will she reach for
the feline whip-hand held out?

No. Laurel chooses to die shattered
over living cracked,

Pygmalion's worst nightmare,
a castrating she-sculpture,

done in by cosmetic crazy-glue
and (tsk) an un-shee-mly desire

to rod-rule the body corporate.

*"I was a professor for twenty years, until I was denied tenure.
(*sniff*) Male academia."*—Ophelia Powers

Conduit, catalyst,
powerless Ophelia Powers

wears her unshorn hair down,
predictably.

Second Wave's comic cut-out,
priestess of resentment
crazy cat lady,

driven by the distracting honour
of bearing wisdom
like Mary hauled typhoid:

a drab passer-on
who never really partakes.

Powers teaches Patience
she died.

And to be reborn she must
destroy what's left of herself.

OPHELIA'S EXHORTATORY SONNET

Ophelia: *“Càtwomen are nòt contàined by the rùles of società; you fòllow your òwn desìres. Thìs is bòth a blèssing and a cùrse. You will òften bè àlòne and mìsunderstòod. Bùt yòu will expèrience a frèedom òther wòmèn will nèver knòw. Yòu are a Càtwoman. Every sìght, every smèll, every sòund, incrèdibly hèightened. Fierce indepèndence, tòtal cònfidence, inhùman rèflexes.”*

Pàtiencie: *“Sò, Ì’m not Pàtiencie ànymore?”*

Ophèlia: *Of còurse you àre, child. You are Pàtiencie, ànd you are a Càtwoman. Accèpt it, child. You’ve spènt a lìfetime càged. By accèpting whò you àre—all of whò you àre—you can bè frèe. And frèedom is pòwer.”*

“There are really three characters: Patience Phillips, Catwoman, and a fusion of the two.”—Halle Berry

Why does she have to choose

between Ophelia Powers’ out of control straggle
and Laurel Hedare’s sheer shorn strength

between “the unremarkable life of an unremarkable woman”
and someone whose “goals are larcenous”, but who
“simply cannot resist the urge to do good”

between “a woman who can’t seem to stop
apologizing for her own existence”
and “a sleek and stealthy creature balancing
on the thin line between good and bad”
?

Because of
a man of
course.

Catwoman: *You like bad girls?*

Tom Lone: *Only if they like me back. No, listen Patience. Bad isn't something that does it for me.*

Catwoman: *Okay. Bad, good: gotta be something in between, right? Maybe it's a little more complicated.*

Detective Tom Lone jails his lovely lady
for murder. Thank Bastet
she escapes in time to save his life!

Then takes his advice,
alibis herself by sneaking back
into his life, her prison.

Tom Lone: *Well, detective work is kinda like dating. It's all about the pursuit. But when you catch 'em ...*

you cage 'em.
You keep them safe
so they can be good.

“Studying the trope of the husband allows us to consider how and why the figure who was supposed to lay horror to rest has himself become the avatar of horror who strips voice, movement, property, and identity from the heroine” (Massé 12).

*"Look at it this way Lone. You might have lost your woman
but at least you got your man."*—Detective #2

When he first spies her
teetering on top of an air conditioner
he rescues her

from a real danger (physical instability)
but a false threat (mental instability).

When he last sees her
beating the crap out of Laurel Hedare
she rescues him

from a real danger
(*"Don't be stupid Laurel; you don't wanna kill a cop."*)

and a real threat
(*"I'm a woman, Lone. I'm used to doing
all kinds of things I don't wanna do."*)

"What finally does lay Gothic horror to rest is the refusal of masculinist
authority as the only reality to which one can turn and return" (Massé 12)

[Catwoman's voice, over the final scene of Lone reading her letter]:

*The day I died was the day I started to live. In my old life,
I longed for someone to see what was special in me.
You did, and for that, you'll always be in my heart.
But what I really needed was for me to see it.
And now I do. You're a good man, Tom.
But you live in a world that has
no place for someone like me.
You see, sometimes
I'm good. Oh,
I'm very
good.
But
sometimes I'm bad.
But only as bad as I wanna be.
Freedom is power. To live a life untamed and unafraid
is the gift that I've been given, and so my journey begins.*

Still, Patience had to push off
to pull on that heroic cat suit

"So, I'm not Patience anymore?"
—Patience Phillips

and after all the argy bargy triumph over
cosmetics and falsity and corporate evil

"I don't know who you are"
—Tom Lone

and Our Hero's struggle for, her final fragile
contingent attainment of, an integrated identity

"I'm the same girl you were with last night"
—Patience/Catwoman

Catwoman has to leave
Tom, her friends, everything

"You're confusing me with somebody else."
—Catwoman

because a movie can't bust a block if it
shows a world with enough flex and stretch

"I'm Patience Phillips."
—Catwoman.

to fit a whole
female hero.

NOTES

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