

What Rough Beast?



by Phyllis Chesler

Have I grown “too long in the tooth,” become unfashionably old-fashioned? Have I finally lost my radical edge and become—oh dear God—a boring traditional? Do I belong to an era that’s well on its way out, to a time long gone by? Am I—of all people—suddenly prudish?

I. Am. Not. And yet I, am mortally, mightily, offended, even shamed by all the beautiful actresses on stage and on the Red Carpet at the Academy Awards wearing haute couture in which their perfected breasts are half-bared and with skirts slitted right up to their hips. I mourn the loss of less-is-more, the glamour, style, and dignity of yore.

Therefore, I salute Cate Blanchett, (Louie Vuitton) Jamie Lee Curtis, (Dolce & Gabbana), Michelle Yeoh (Dior), Michelle Williams (Chanel), Stephanie Hsu (Valentino), Andrea Riseborough (Alexander McQueen), and Malala Yousafzai (Ralph Lauren) for their silky, sparkling dresses which dared leave something to the imagination.

This view of mine is only seemingly contradictory given my position on niqab and the burqa, even on hijab, now that women in Iran and Afghanistan are risking beatings, prison, and death for demanding the right not to be forced into covering their hair. However, while one might oppose the burqa, one need not necessarily embrace nearly bare-breasted female singers and actresses, crawling around on the floor like savage animals, imitating orgies with the Devil.

None of the male actors, musicians, producers, editors, screenwriters, or sound effect mavens at the Academy Awards bared any part of their private parts. Most wore suits and tuxedos. A very few wore shirts open to their mid-chests but there was nothing seductive or eye-catching about it, nothing “provocative” to see there.

Such half-naked dressing is a dreadful form of appeasement, a dangerous, terrified conformity. Pre- adolescent and adolescent girls copy this style. They are soon prey for perverts. Music videos celebrate writhing, half naked women, almost bare-breasted, almost bare-assed—and they’re famous, presumably wealthy, they’re the new role models for the masses.

Have we truly entered a new kind of barbarism, birthed a terrible Second Coming? If so, as the great Irish poet once wrote:

“And what rough beast, its hour come round at/last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”