

The Androgynous Ideal in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*

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Abstract

The present study is an analysis of the gender constraints, and the limitations of living in a gendered society. It uses Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* as the primary text to explore the restrictive nature of the gender dynamics. As western society provides two opposing experiences for masculinity and femininity in the society, gender becomes political issue. Carter's work is a contemplation of the said issues. Using feminism as the primary theory, this study centres itself to explore Carter's vision and brings out the imbalanced gender hierarchy of the society as is present in *The Passion of New Eve*. Since the 1970's, fantasy has offered an exuberant expansion which has facilitated female authors equally to condemn the present societal exercises and to contemplate on unusual social classifications. Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* embodies, relative to this exact standpoint, an inventive and pioneering reconstruction of feature feminine and masculine patterns. Carter eliminates and deconstructs the gender peripheries amid man and woman. Regardless of one's gender and at times because of that, one can turn into the prey or the predator. A dominating male can never under any circumstances understand the oppression and violation a female endures until or unless he himself go through that same ordeal.

Keywords: Gender equality, transformation, suppression.

Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* is a feminist defence against the gender constrains. It is a tentative narrative in which Leilah is portrayed as a male sexual desire, who persistently renders herself as pleasing from the male's viewpoint. In the course of impacts amid myth, both traditional and modern, and authenticity, the novel discovers, amplifies, and seldom distorts the mysterious desires and nightmares that uphold or rupture sexual truth. *The Passion of New Eve* depends on a

sequence of illustrations of illustration itself, as if to underline the indirectness of its theme, the novel twists on the unpredictability of manifestations, the reflecting, replication, dividing, and disbanding of illustrations of the sexual matter or entity. Gender is the primary theme of the novel, the main development being the metamorphosis of Evelyn, a male, into Eve, a female, is a gendering operation, and it cannot be challenged that gender invade such feature of the narrative, from the lives of individual characters to the wider variations of the narrative. Evelyn is changed from a sexist, biased male into the antecedent for the future of sexual relations. His metamorphosis elevates topics of identity, subjectivity and masculinity/femininity in human beings, and to the extent these connect to construct one's aspect in the view of others.

The novel is, therefore, the learning of Evelyn, an archetypal patriarchal spirit who considers female to be a product of happiness and has to be taught by his occurrence of womanliness. Through the gender transformation of Evelyn, and the experiences of Eve as a woman, the writer provides a stinging commentary on the experience of having the gendered body within the confines of a male-centred society. The male gaze, with all of its prevalent implications, serves as the marginalizing tool to reduce femininity to the status of the lesser Other. Carter interweaves the narrative with a specific focus on the sexual dynamics of the gendered society. The text consists of a number of problems connected to sexuality, sex and gender, as well as essential feminism, and patriarchy, and the present study sets out to explore the said dynamics with the focus on the marginalized gender, the lesser Other of the society.

Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* has been contested and scrutinized from a variety of perspectives, over the years. Its influence, and its commentary on the modern issues continues to find an audience, especially the insight into the two clashing genders has proven itself to be a valuable source of gender study for the literati. Without doubt, the profundity of Carter's work echoes in its popularity. It has also been said that the movement of post modernism wouldn't make sense without her (Barker, 1995, p. 14). Indeed, Carter's commentary on the facets of modern

experience is valuable for it sheds light on the underbelly of the age, and holds the mirror up to the highly suppressed strata of the modern society.

In its effort to argue the case of gendered experience, Carter intermixes, swaps, and interchanges the gendered body. As she blurs the physical and psychological lines between both genders, Carter comments on broader issues pertaining gendered body. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf (1977) posits, "in each of us two powers reside, one male, one female; . . . The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating" (p. 106). Further, in *Towards Androgyny: Aspects of Male and Female in Literature*, Heilbrun (2006) argues, the potential of the principle of androgyny to have "an unlimited range of personal destiny available to either sex" (p. 219). Androgyny, if defined simply, "[signifies] fluidity in the assignation of gender linked characteristics" (Gamble, 1997, p. 152). Indeed, the necessity for a reform in the way genders are perceived is of importance, as the existing norms tend to be restrictive, e.g. biological essentialism.

According to the view of Merja Makinen, (1992) all men are monsters to women and they do their best to enact the violence upon a female (p. 7). Carter in *The Passion of New Eve* undermines the idealistic concepts of torment and misery. The hostility which is forced upon the females in Zero's harem, subtracts their sagacity of identity. Extensively, every sound they formulate when they incarcerate Eve is a monstrous sound. The main concern for Carter is that the natural distinctions amid males and females are not central in the edifice of sexual personalities as their amplification in composite civilizing systems which narrow along the apt or inapt performance and corporeal manifestation for every sexual category (Makinen, 1992, p. 2-15). *The Passion of New Eve* opposes any conservative outlook of the mother appearance. Accordingly, Ward Jouve (1994) pointed that in this narrative, Carter stalked down the prototype to destruction (p.157). After organizing to break out from Mother's program Eve becomes a strong and implausible description of a woman's survival in Zero's harem. Given that Zero is the first male Eve comes across after her transformation, seems an apt payback for the dishonor which, as Evelyn, he mounded on Leilah.

Like most feminist writers, Carter recognized that the realistic novel is just not enough to portray the existence of women engaging in the patriarchal structure from a feminist standpoint. John Haffenden in 1985 observes that Carter's gift of outrageous fantasy construction, ingeniously illustrating on myths and fairy tale, facilitates her to invoke tremendous nations which have lock up structures leading the modes and suggestions of genuine men and women (p.76). J. Edward Ahearn points out that the doomed setup of *the Passion of New Eve* beautifully sets the context of sexual themes that conciliate the whole book (461). About violence in Carter's works, Jacqueline Pearson (2006) indicates that Carter generates a location where sexual craving is entwined with violence and where literature and art are switched into the most broken and meaningless structures (p.7). The initial depiction of violence can be seen the state in which New York City is upon Evelyn's arrival. The rampant sexuality, the absence of emotions and connectivity on male's part, and the objectivity of the feminine body clearly find expression through Carter's depiction of New York. Carter juxtaposes and associates sexuality with a crude form of exercising violence, as the whole experience reduces Evelyn to a predator, an abuser who fantasizes, imagines and perceives the other sex as something degraded and less than human fit to be dominated and discarded. The chase-use-and-discard pattern of behavior in relation to men is sufficiently commented upon and is brought to the light by the author.

On the other end, Carter presents the enduring, sacrificial, and marginalized gender in women. Carter presents the strong motherly figures or myths adjacent to the unsettling power of the mother, only to collapse them, revealing how female individuality is not in fact dependent upon the recognizable eminence of motherhood. The mother's body is left outmoded, at least in its capacity to offer the female subject with a sheltered, independent identity. Carter is likely to assert a manifold, impressionable question competent of a never-ending degree of self-creation or will; gender roles forever stay incomplete to intellectual arrangements (Gamble, 1997, p. 200).

In Carter's narratives, the exquisiteness of unreal worlds is a commanding power, one not to be discharged by those who would modify civilization. Carter obtains a postmodernist scrutiny of narration as the diffusion of texts. Mythical and imaginative narratives are very greatly a fraction of this carcass of narration, both creations of their historical instant and fundamental to depicting that

instant. Frequently, Carter's effort has been shielded and molested on the basis of its presentation of brutality. Advocating Carter to U.S. readers, Walter Kendrick (1993) positions her chiefly as the successor of an elevated edifying institution of debauchery. He honours her capability to make stunning montages out of bloodshed, suggesting that the brutality she depicts would be purely nauseating, that in their very wastefulness they guarantee liberation from malevolence (Kendrick, 1993, p. 73).

In a typical, patriarchal society, gender norms are dual in nature, created and implanted for men, by men, where there is an unequal distribution of power: men are the centre while women are the Other, the marginalized alterity on the fringes of the societal spectrum. This uneven binary is structured on misogynistic ideas regarding women, and place a certain otherness on the experience of women. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter provides the reader a glimpse into the gendered experience of women. As it is shown through the experiences of the pre-transformed Eve, sexism is in the very roots of the patriarchal men. Evelyn is the representation of the typical gender-biased man, perceiving women through the male gaze, objectifying and victimizing the female body, possessing it and rejecting it at personal whims. Soon, Evelyn is forced through a bodily transformation, becoming a woman, literally and physically. And then, Eve is forced through the bodily violation that is a part and baggage of being a woman, although, Evelyn/Eve is the same person, but he/she is subjected to two different kinds of experiences under two different circumstances.

Through the androgynous transformation of Evelyn to Eve, Carter argues for a reform of the gender system, and the dystopian story of a man's bodily ruin is used to convey the necessity of abolition of the patriarchal gender norms. Carter creates awareness of the failing standards of the androcentric, patriarchal society, which looks over and transforms men into serial rapists without affecting them with any moral scruples. In the aim, she seems to go back to the ideal proposed by Woolf, of a woman with capacity equal to the one of man. Carter's novel, thus, can be read as a form of activism, a demonstration against the current, to bring about the change, indicating and

highlighting the numerous instances which point towards the alterity of women in the patriarchal society, and clarifies Carter's purpose behind the androgynous transformation of the central character, which is, a cry for equality.

Evelyn's violent sexual relationship with Leilah perfectly coincides with the equally violent atmosphere of New York. Carter justifies Leilah's wild and violent appearance in this backdrop: "The wasted slums of the city moon cast Leilah as a prey in Evelyn's eyes. The high heels which she was wearing altered her into something bird like being, or something in between elevated above the ground" (Carter 17). Transformation of what Leilah from what she is in reality into what she is not is indicative of the pattern of male perception regarding women. Evelyn sees, transforms, and translates Leilah's actions according to his own wild fantasies, coupled with regressive notion about femininity. The typical instance of the male gaze finding the female victim as an object to be punished for the supposedly provocative mannerism and dressing speaks volumes for the male perception regarding women in a male-centred society.

Carter, on the other hand, expresses deeper issues through Leilah. Her repressed innate desire is to be superior to others. But it is clear enough that she cannot gain respect in men's eyes, as the typical man of society is not expected to regard a woman as anything more than an inferior object. Unsurprisingly, Evelyn looks down upon her, and perceives her through an animalistic analogy, exactly describing her as a fox that is appearing to be a siren: "Under the dim pale dying moon, Leilah led him to a back alley where wasted people lay. She was wearing some kind of an animal perfume. All those were the sign of blatant enchantment" (Carter 17). Evelyn displays the typical "male egocentrism" (Perez-Gil, 2007, p. 224), and the scene carries various implications with regard to gendered experience. The desire for superiority conveys the absence of superiority. It is Evelyn, as a man, who holds authority, and is the judge. The woman, in the scene, is reduced to wishing for a societal position she is not capable of achieving. Moreover, the repeated association of Leilah with animals is a significant commentary on the place of women in the modern day, male-centred society.

In the beginning, Evelyn's desire to possess Leilah mirrors with the violence he uses as a tool to dominate her. Evelyn knows from the very beginning that Leilah is not ordinary, that she has some sort of power over him and he hates his own absurd notion of a female having control over a male. Indeed, Carter highlights the natural potential of dominance that women possess, and the way patriarchy has successfully kept women down, and suppresses their inner strengths. The marginalization of women translates into the victimization of one sex by the other. The gender dynamics, then, are a regressive display of power, a power-play for men to gain advantage over and dominate the other gender. This aspect provides further, deeper insight into workings of the men regarding women. The need for power is, at a deeper level, is psychological too. By adding a psychological layer to the action of men, Carter seems to expose the underlying insecurity in men, the desire to feel powerful by imposing power on women. Carter twists Evelyn's own sexual fantasy into violence to represent his innate need to dominate Leilah: "The charm, the bewitching aspect of femininity is another layer which lends power to women with potential for evoking hostile behaviour from men" (p. 24).

Trapped in the matriarchal society, Evelyn in retrospect experiences what it is truly like to be a woman in a male-dominant society. He experiences suppression and helplessness when he is sexually transformed into a woman forcefully. The predator becomes the prey, and just like that, the violator Evelyn becomes the sufferer Eve. Carter brings out the burden of femininity in clarity through the Evelyn/Eve transformation. Being a woman brings about the state of vulnerability, the exposure and the defencelessness in relation to men. Evelyn/Eve becomes an open target, for any man to impose himself on him/her and use her/him for the satiation of his baser desires. When Eve/Evelyn manages to escape from the hellish Beulah, he/she feels a kind of exotic freedom i.e. the freedom which is denied in the company of the other sex. In interaction between the two distinct genders, men have the advantageous position as the independent, free creatures. Women, on the other hand, are either dependent on men, or they are forcefully dominated by the male company. Carter highlights that this freedom is mirrored with the freedom of women from patriarchy. Though the freedom lasts for only an hour, but nevertheless it is a blessing. He/she could pretend to be his old self again in that

freedom, for only one hour. In a male-dominated society, especially, freedom is taken away from women just as Eve/Evelyn is stripped off her/his basic rights in the presence of the other sex.

Evelyn now Eve after her encounter with Zero's women comes to realize that those miserable creatures are accustomed to believe anything they are told. Zero treats his Harem of seven wives less than animals, even denying them the right to speak. He not only violates the women physically but psychologically too, making them believe that they deserve this kind of treatment. Despite of his violent attitude towards women, they love him utterly. Clearly, Carter argues the female victimization and the unhealthy after effects of such victimization. Therefore, being a woman entails psychological wounds, being scarred emotionally by men, for no apparent reason other than belonging to the opposite gender. Carter highlights that the acceptance of these women makes Zero obsess with dominating them even more. Encapsulating the male reaction to merciless victimization, Carter provides the painful commentary on the lack of empathy regarding female victimization by men. Despite treating the wives cruelly, roughly, degradingly, as well as scaring them emotionally for life, the predator feels no compassion or remorse for the conduct, rather, Zero imagines, desires, and fantasizes about dominating them further, for personal satisfaction. Here, then, woman becomes less than human to man. Carter presents the cruelty of the gender dynamics which render women to a status of animals, used and discarded for personal use. Seeing the poster of Tristessa in Zero's room, Eve regarded her as her guardian angel. Carter reflects that in this scenario Eve could perfectly relate herself to Tristessa when she exclaimed that "I might have known she would be there. She was there to welcome me to pain" (Carter 88).

Carter is quite sceptical in describing Zero's town. The sunlight throws a ghost light unnatural aura to the town: "The city seemed to be built on the far older rocks, having messed up roofs. It was nothing but a wreck and ruin. The men who built the town left it at time's mercy" (p.90). It is only in a town like this Zero can thrive and treat the women like he wants: "Zero allowed the freedom to his pigs which he denied his wives, and the pigs took full extent advantage of it by teasing them mercilessly. Pigs would trip the women in to dirt while they were feeding them food" (p. 92).

Eve and Tristessa are exemplary characters who fight not only with the sex-gender arrangement as a socio-artistic construct, but furthermore as a semiotic device. Eve is the example of the development of constructing female while Tristessa acts as the invention of this development. The development of gender is mutually the creation and progression of its demonstration. Unlike Eve, Tristessa actually plays the masquerade role throughout the novel. While Eve's is the gender metamorphosis, Tristessa deliberately deceives everyone by her gender. However, Carter explicitly defends Tristessa and his need to become a woman. Tristessa considers his manhood as an instrument of shame and disgust. Unlike Evelyn, Tristessa wants to suppress himself as a man. To Tristessa, his male side gives him nothing but sorrow and shame: "I thought that Mother would say he had become a woman because he had abhorred his most female part, that is, his instrument of mediation between himself and the other" (p.124).

Eve, after seeing Tristessa's true self does not want to believe that he actually is a man. As a former man, Evelyn practically has grown up watching a beautiful sorrowful heroine Tristessa as his sexual fantasy: "I could not think of him as a man; my confusion was perfect as the exemplary confusion of the proud, solitary heroine who now underwent the unimaginable ordeal of a confrontation" (p.125). By masquerading as a female, Tristessa makes himself an object of his own desires. That is why he is a perfect model of a man's woman; a sorrowful, silent and tear streaked woman who is made only to please men.

Carter takes extreme measures to illustrate the blurring boundaries between genders. After thoroughly violating Tristessa, Zero forces Eve to clothe like a male. Carter basically satirizes the gender hollowness of the modern era that no matter whatever the gender is, the one who has power will suppress and violate the other. Eve is forced yet again to become a man, though this time it is a masquerade and not a surgical transformation. When Zero dresses Eve in men's clothes, Carter again makes the use of the mirror symbol to illustrate the masquerade. The multiple mirrors reflecting Zero applauds at the transformation of Eve in to a man yet again. In Carter's novel mirrors are the only witnesses of violation, transformation, and masquerade.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, communal, gendered authority and obedience are likewise questioned, although in inverted way. Carter distorts the legendary rite sacrifice of Evelyn's genitals. Evelyn's masculinity is forfeited as he endures for the misdeeds of a man. Considerably, after two months of surgery and mental re-encoding, Eve ultimately sees the illustration of her new female carcass in a mirror, she observes herself as a sexual entity, an "inspired generalization of femaleness" (p.74). Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* proposes that a feminist re-evaluation of gender does not only subvert representative arrangements, but is also ingredient of a vast societal alteration.

The deconstruction of gendered myths permeates Angela Carter's sceptical narrative, *The Passion of New Eve*. The novel has multiple layers and is quite open to various categorizations. The narrative gives the surreal, magical and violent drawing at the same time. Carter does not portray the aggression in a grave and harsh tone. Nevertheless, it is imperative to distinguish that Carter did not basically rephrase former narratives or fantasies. Her own description of an approach in which she engaged fairy tales, implies how she used other manuscripts usually. Carter proposes that people exist in a fanciful and outraged space just like a book. The limitations connecting the world and imaginary tale are ever more distorted. Just like Carter's *New Eve*, the limits among the actuality and delusion become blotted and the characters do not comprehend the difference between the real and the sham.

Carter appears to be decisive not only towards the main characters, namely Zero, Mother and Evelyn; but also towards the so called victims, which include, Zero's harem, Leilah, Eve and Tristessa. Carter not only depicts violence noticeable in all those characters, but also to those who appear to be tormented under the violent acts of others. The spaces used by Carter are suggestive of the fact that the violent acts are not more effective without the use of given spaces such as dark and sinful New York City, Beulah, and merciless desert. Violence is not only a corporeal demonstration, but it is obviously originated in the discussions, conventions, and the reflections we are engrossed in. Importantly, violence is argued as the ever-present dynamic in the gender classification of the

traditional, male-centred society of the modern age. By conveying the sorrowful lament, the author argues for the necessary reform in the way genders are perceived in the modern age societies. Especially, the necessary reform requires for changing the way sexuality is perceived, and is handled with regard to women. In the novel, Carter presents and embodies brutality to the point of indecisive concurrence and approach of sexual impediment.

Carter's narrative is stuffed with sexual representations of females engaging themselves as products on exhibit. It is imperative to recognize the historical divergence within feminism because it exhibits Carter's insight about the course feminism is going to take, with its spotlight not on as transcribed by narratives, but on illustrations and textual areas.

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