



Anti-normative gender role in angela carter's *the passion of new eve*

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the age-old masculinity is subverted and interrogated by Angela Carter in her novel *The Passion of New Eve*. Carter rebels against patriarchy by transforming the sexual identity of the major protagonist (Evelyn), from male to female. Carter presents most of her female characters as strong and powerful where males are feeble and forced to sustain in the women's autonomy. Gender is constructed not natural which is verified through Tristessa's bogus presentation of femininity because, in fact, this character is a male. Depending on the theoretical acumens of, primarily, Foucault, Butler, Bakhtin and many other critics, the paper vindicates that gender is patriarchal product where the females are always given vulnerable positions. Teaching Evelyn a lesson means giving the novel on the hands of patriarchy by using the transgender narrative.

Keywords: gender, performance, power

Introduction

Angela Carter's novel *The Passion of New Eve* gives an ample blow to the face of so called patriarchy of her time. The protagonist, is not a hero, an anti-hero stands as a symbol to portray the whole figure of patriarchy. Carter uses him as her tool to blast her rage to so called phallogentrism. This research paper tries to justify her position as a post-feminist who blurs the boundary of every limits, either that is in the form of language or so called aged norms of society, to contest each ostensibly established male centric paradigm and law. Kérchy claims that, "*The Passion of New Eve*, in particular, is said to be an "in-between text" " (95). Carter reaches to that level where the edge of the ocean ends that means to say, she does not leave any chance to brutalize the protagonist through the hands of females. She uses transgender narrative to picturize the reality of women's condition with the transformation of Evelyn to Eve. Morrison argues:

In fictional texts from the 1970s such as Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* there is huge amount of playful experimentation with body construction and alteration . . . for Carter . . . it is important to consider the body not just as a given fact of life, but as a parchment on which dominant values are written. (42-48)

Carter uses grotesque figure of female, to show that female has to be devilish to grab the power, because without being horrible the patriarchy steps women under its feet, that is seen throughout the beginning of human generation. The giant figure, Mother, embodies the strong anger of the author to patriarchy. Carter imagens such world where females have clout without the existence of males. Carter's every creation and afflict to the male protagonist is guided by her real intention. To deliver the agency to women, Carter reverses the situation that differs from the real world. Therefore, *The Passion of New Eve* rejects all attempts to force ones vision of perfection on to the world; it refutes the ideal society and shows the results of utopia, chaos, violence, destruction (Sargisson 23). This research paper approaches

female agency through the grotesque, which will show a different, yet complementary, view of how women are excluded from positions of power, and whether there is a way to utilize this exclusion advantageously.

Pathetic transgender Protagonist, Evelyn

Evelyn, a sadistic sexist figure, operates females as tissue papers only to entertain himself through sex. He leaves every girl, as if she is a bitch of some alley, after consuming his crude passion of sex. He is a lady hunter and has an extreme ravenous and appetite for the sexual needs. He uses Lailah, impregnates her, pries her to abort the child and finally dumps her with poor condition as if she is the wicked bone of a dog. Evelyn who uses females as his commodity suffers pathetically when he becomes a female and this is a lesson to him, to whole patriarchy as well, what has to be a female in the patriarchal world.

The animalistic appetite of Evelyn is pictured even from the beginning sentences of the novel where he narrates, "The last night I spent in London, I took some girl or other to the movies and, through her mediation, I paid you a little tribute of spermatozoa, Tristessa." (5). His cupid longs and desires to sink into the world of sexuality reconnoiters his so called pride for to be a "Male." Without any shame he says that he honored his dam sperm to Tristessa, a renowned heroine whom he is insanely following to test his sexuality with her, having sex with other girls but imagining as if he was sleeping with Tristessa in real. What is displayed here is a system of compulsory heterosexuality with its unavoidably hierarchical gender binary, which is expressed through Evelyn's male gaze into Tristessa. Furthermore, emphasis is put on the fact that Evelyn had learned to like Tristessa, since his nanny had taken him to the cinemas when he was a child:

I always liked that particular quality in a woman for my nanny, although sentimental, had had a marked sadistic streak and I suppose I must have acquired an ambivalent attitude towards

women from her. Sometimes I'd amuse myself by tying a girl to the bed before I copulated with her. (9)

The underlying assumption is that Evelyn's behavior does not obey an innate sexual drive, but is a result of how he has been culturally taught to view femininity. His crude passion of sexuality victimizes every girl whom he uses to satiate his giant hunger. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants (Irigaray 25). Lailah falls in his false love affair and becomes pregnant. Evelyn coerces her to abort the child which goes wrong. He runs away leaving her in that dying condition.

Carter, from here, inverts the entire world to penalize him with hellish life. Everything is pre-designed, from his arrival to capture in the desert by Sophia, who hauls him to the place called Beulah and tortures him. She takes him to the Mother who deconstructs his body. Without the intrusion of the male partner, Mother metamorphoses his body. Evelyn becomes a marionette in this matriarchal world. In this regard, Michel Foucault views:

Sex and its effects are perhaps not so easily deciphered; on the other hand, their repression, thus reconstructed, is easily analyzed. And the sexual cause-the demand for sexual freedom, but also for the knowledge to be gained from sex and the right to speak about it-becomes legitimately associated with the honor of a political cause: sex too is placed on the agenda for the future. . . If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. (6)

Evelyn lacks resistance power and confidence to act against Beulah residence. Carter forwards her every step with much awareness to put Evelyn in such circumstance so that the patriarchy of her time would learn or be threatened from the nature of women with which still they are not encountered. It is because the power is centered to the matriarchal Beulah country and society has always control over the sex. The only thing that matters is, who has the authority. In this novel, Carter undermines the patriarchal biblical myth that situates woman as the dangerous other, threatening masculine self-control, and thus prompting a patriarchal order's urge towards repressing female desires as a means of protecting its own rationalizations (Andrés Ibarra Cordero 4). This is essentially a straight warning to the patriarchy to think hundred times before to maltreat women. Carter subverts the patriarchal myths of femininity and masculinity. It is because Evelyn, who is a womanizer of once and uses females as his pleasing property, gets horrified by the appearance of the Mother. His so called masculinity melts with intense fear and horror. That is why, Carter is being panned for contesting the long aged patriarchal notions as Andrés Ibarra Cordero argues that:

The corpus of the criticism on Carter highlights subversion of patriarchal myths in which the corpus of the criticism on Carter highlights subversion of patriarchal myths in which women have been deprived of meaning and autonomy. When giving a name to her own fiction, Carter herself coined the phrase "demythologizing business" that she describes metaphorically as "putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode". In other words, Carter aims to paraphrase the very patriarchal myths to invoke that fossilized ideology she aims to subvert. Carter's own use of myth is primarily concerned with deconstructing "the social fictions

that regulate our lives." Her fiction employs irony to subvert religious convictions and moral certainties that patriarchy has attempted to inscribe. (4)

The deconstruction of patriarchal myth is an allegory to picture chaos caused by civil war at that time. Carter is emblematically suggesting that man can do nothing except spreading horror and disaster. Here, Walker argues that, "Like *Handmaid Tales* *The Passion of New Eve* is set in an indeterminate future in a United States torn apart by social decay and internecine warfare, and the biblical allusion of both titles point to the fact that religious ideology is at the heart of the conflict" (79). Evelyn came to America which is ferociously suffering from the diseases of war. His endeavor to uplift his professional life symbolizes that a new chapter is awaiting for him to penalize his sin in the new world which has already become hell with war disease. Carter consciously chooses dystopic American land to castigate the terror of Evelyn to women.

The goddess Mother cuts Evelyn's penis and transplants the organs of female in his body. Evelyn is surgically turned into "New Eve." However, psychologically, she is still Evelyn. As Shima Sadat Mirmusa forwards:

Anatomically, she transforms each and every part of Evelyn's body into feminine physique so that he can even menstruate, ovulate and bear a child while mentally remaining a man. Since his culturally constructed gender identity is deconstructed by Mother, Evelyn, or the newly constructed Eve, eventually becomes neither a complete man, nor a complete woman. (7)

Eve is aware that though her male body is changed into a feminine one but she is still male in terms of her mind. The Mother also knows that the transformation of Evelyn into Eve cannot be completed by just bringing about a change in sex. Mother cuts off his genitals and left him 'with a wound that would, in future, bleed once a month, at the bidding of the moon' (71). But, this New Eve was yet to be 'gendered' female. The process of surgery starts by making Evelyn to listen the Hollywood nursery tales. The Mother wants him to feel and experience every pain that a woman has to experience. The psychosurgery lasts with the playing of three videotapes consisting reproduction of a virgin and child theme. There is a sound track of 'gurgling of babies and the murmuring of contented mothers', (72), thus, preparing the mind-set of New Eve to accept womanhood. She is shown cats with kittens, vixen with cubs and all kinds of non-phallic imagery. While transforming Evelyn into Eve, Mother gives the examples from other cultures in which how women have undergone from violence and this is her ironical lesson to Evelyn to suffer alike what he did to women before. Evelyn's terrific mental state is reflected in this narration:

She told me how the Ancient Chinese had crippled their women's feet; the Jews had chained the ankles of their women together; and the Indians ordered widows to immolate themselves on the pyres of their husbands . . . hour after hour was devoted to the relation of horrors my old sex perpetrated on my new one. (73)

It shows the repetition of violence where Evelyn infringes, earlier, other women including Lailah and now he is victimized by the equal violence by the hands of Mother and latter of Zero. This is called the game of fortune. He leaves Lailah making her life as the worm of the gutter in which she undergoes from the traumatic situation. In fact, Evelyn, himself, is the initiator of violence and later he endures the fruit of his own "Karma." His

inhuman responses to all those women he encountered earlier, including Lailah, get justice when he undergoes from the violent sex transformation surgery. Even after this roller coaster conversion, he is still a male as per his mind. After the operation, Evelyn looks into the mirror and says, "When I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman, who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me"(74). He is conflicted about the new changes in his body. Carter is trying to show that sex and gender are the different matter. The Mother is no different from the males of our real world whereas the taming of Eve after the sex transformation makes her purely feminine. Thus gender is a false illusion. Therefore, Evelyn's/Eve's transformation contributes, to a large degree, to the theme of juxtaposing the both sides of the man/woman binary opposition and reveals that "gender is a meaningless, socially imposed category" (Blodgett 51). We see the gender from the appearance, as patriarchy sets the norms for how to treat gender, and behavior acted according the societal norms of gender.

There is a saying in Nepali that "Sin cries from the roof" and the same happens to Evelyn. After retrieving to the City, Evelyn turned Eve meets Lailah, then Lilith, who is the leader of militia. Eve surprises when she comes to know that Lailah is the writer who has already written the whole chapter about the aftermath of Evelyn's life when he impregnates and left her in her miserable condition. She explains to Eve that she is the mastermind behind sending Evelyn to the Beulah country and all the events happened to him. Instead of caring Lailah when her abortion happens woeful Evelyn leaves her in such doleful condition and flees. Now Evelyn turned Eve is pregnant with his/her own sperm. It is the repetition of the story where Eve suffers the same what she once as "Evelyn" did to other women.

Mother, a threat to Patriarchy

Metaphorically, the rage that Mother shows indicates the rage of Carter. Her demonic dialogue, "The garden in which Adam was born lies between my thighs" (63) explodes the fury of Carter to patriarchy. Mother devalues the world of patriarchy and shows its place where it has to be. She storms with wrath and exclaims that the so called 'garden of Eden' is no more than a hair of her thighs. Her world of matriarchy does not like any male and thus Mother does the operation of Evelyn to transform him into a female. Rebecca Munford argues that "Carter's narratives enact an unremitting assault on traditional images of the mother and maternal lineage" (11). The Mother says "the boundaries of the body become the limits of the social per se" (131). Siegel argues in this case as, "To Carter, the placement of woman in the power position in the masochistic drama need not be a displacement, it can be replacement. The free circulation of socially gendered objects, like clothes, can "truly suggest an anarchy of the sexes" (11). Mother is so terrific figure and Carter uses her as a huge symbol to admonish the patriarchy "against narrative construction of woman and toward new forms of representation that disrupt these normative constructions" (Robinson 11). Mother is no more than Goddess 'Kali'¹. Her words and expression carry the ample ire of Carter for males. Evelyn

narrates that the Mother's voice thunders him from top to toe, "Her voice has its comings and goings, is blown to me as in rags on a high wind. The storm is here" (64). Women are measured as the appendage of men due to the myth of Eve who was said to be made from the spare rib of Adam. But, here Eve is constructed by a female. So here, this demythologizing is the main tool that Carter uses to rewrite the so called history.

Carter uses grotesque element to characterize the Mother. The reason behind this is to show that without being powerful and ferocious patriarchy never treats women as equal to it. The grotesque body is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (335). Bakhtin's vision of the grotesque is essentially a reaction against authority, and against all that is logical, official and formalistic. The swollen stomach and oversize buttocks are hideous but symbolizes the compulsion of Carter to satire the patriarchy that women need to possess giant look in order to combat against the domination of males. In this case, Stallybrass and White forward their opinion:

The grotesque tends to operate as a critique of dominant ideology which has already set the terms, designating what is high and low. This logic could unsettle "given" social positions and interrogate the rules of inclusion, exclusion and domination which structured the social ensemble. In the fair, the place of high and low, inside and outside, was never a simple given. (43)

Mother's hermaphrodite body is more than six feet tall, Negroid and has multiple breasts artificially constructed. Evelyn describes Mother as, "a self- designed goddess and 'she was so big she seemed, almost, to fill the round, red-painted, over-heated, red-lit cell" (2). In this context, according to Russo's study, grotesque is taken as "One or another in error. They are marked by specificities of age, body shape, class, ethnicity or sexuality: each performs with irony and courage in the face of danger, ridicule, disbelief" (13). The rage of the mother is so strong that she rapes Evelyn, cuts his genital, transplants female genitals on him and impregnates him by his own sperm. In other words, by turning Evelyn into a "perfect" woman, Mother is going to give her femininity in excess. Carter's playing with the notion of gender in the novel, in an optimum level, by making the Mother figure a grotesque one, is colossally critiquing the so called gender norms. There is no need of partner for Eve to beget the child in her womb because the father and mother of would be child are the same. What a man does to a woman in our world is done by a woman to a man in the novel.

Irony of performative Gender

Eve realizes how the women are living the pitiable life after experiencing her female-hood. Although Eve succeeds to escape from the Beulah world but again gets captured by Zero, a demon like figure having one leg and one eye who tortures and whips his seven wives and use them only for his sexual purpose. Eve narrates that "I was captured by Zero the poet and taken to his ranch house in the ghost town, where they made a slave of me" (85). He makes Eve his eighth wife and consistently rapes Eve which ultimately convert her into a pure feminine being. The pitiful narration of Eve pictures her vulnerable plight as she says:

¹The most indignant Goddess in Hindu who is the destroyer of evil forces

He raped me unceremoniously in the sand in front of his ranch-house after he dragged me from the helicopter, while his seven wives stood round in a circle, giggling and applauding. I was in no way prepared for the pain; his body was as anonymous instrument of torture, mine my own rack. (86)

In an interview Carter calls it: “a careful and elaborate discussion of femininity as a commodity, [as] an illusion” (Haffenden 83). What Lailah suffered before by his mistreatment, the same suffering his fate grants him. Eve turned Evelyn is learning how it feels to be a woman. Eve recounts her plight after being raped, “When the girls saw I was bleeding from my ruptured virginity, which had been no less real because it was synthetic, one of them brought me a bowl of cold water and a rag and they sat round me while I cleaned myself and asked me softly, under cover of the music, why I’d never had a man before (86).” Eve realizes how the women are living the pitiable life after experiencing her female-hood. She feels as if she is a criminal who is killing the days inside the prison. It is because Zero “did not allow them to speak in words. Merja Makinen notes that, “Carter’s fiction criticizes patriarchal systems but more significantly, especially her later fiction concentrates on “mocking and exploding the constrictive cultural stereotypes” (3). However, Zero’s every mistreatment reminds Eve her past misdeeds to many women.

The huge mock Carter creates by hiding the identity of Tristessa. The society considers Tristessa a woman but he is man in real. His false identity deceives every man. Evelyn was crazy about Tristessa, in the past, when he used to watch him as heroine in many movies. The awful thing is that she gets her fervent love with a wicked revelation of Tristessa as a male by whom Evelyn turned eve gets impregnated. However, Eve enjoys her past love only for a while because of Tristessa’s murder. This is a satire to the patriarchal society which considers gender as biological matter but it is ‘an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts’ (Butler 137). The author is trying to say that the gender is decided by its performance. As Butler argues:

Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or sub-versive repetition of that style. (520)

Tristessa is a male but his performance as a female with female attire makes others to consider him as a female. The same happens to Evelyn. When he becomes female, he has to do everything what a woman does and that makes rancorous lampoon to patriarchy that gender is the productivity of its mind. Thus, the passion and extreme expectation of a male is blindly subverted.

Carter gives no chance to Evelyn to get one of his desires. Actually Evelyn is dancing as a puppet in the spin of Carter. Although Eve is female at present, she stares at Tristessa with male mind. This is the severe situation in which a woman finds herself physically female but psychologically male. Andrés Ibarra Cordero argues that, “I this novel, Carter undermines the

patriarchal biblical myth that situates woman as the dangerous other, threatening masculine self-control, and thus prompting a patriarchal order’s urge towards repressing female desires as a means of protecting its own rationalizations” (4). Even an alley’s dog has better life than of Eve because at least it has its dignity and self-respect. Lots of feminist movements were running during Carter’s time and the plight of Eve shows as if he is acting in a movie (because of sudden changes Eve is puzzled to distinct the reality and the mystery) and a manifesto for those actions to spit on the face of patriarchy. Out of the rage, though Carter could not alter the real world, she transform everything in the fictional world to cut the so called “phallus” of paternity.

Conclusion

Making characters to play beyond the traditional norms, Carter tries to make women powerful. Here, patriarchy fails because gender is constructed. This constructive system is over dominating to women. Eve comes to know the result of her sins, which she did when she was a male, after visiting the Mother again, as Lilith derives her to the Beulah country. The final scene where Eve symbolically gets rebirth and rejects all the chauvinistic masochism of past, spreads the message how women can turn everything if they want. Carter problematizes this notion of phallocentrism with dapper notion that, “to be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case - that is, to be killed” (The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography 76). Lilith explains to Eve about the whole plan to teach him a lesson beginning from the Beulah world to encounter with Lilith. Carter makes Eve to dance in the fingers of women, whom she, once as Evelyn, used as tissue paper.

The Beulah world runs by a Mother because she behaves and acts like a male. Tristessa’s fake presentation of himself as a beautiful girl to the society further brings the gender into a problematic zone. What can be a more pathetic irony than making Eve impregnated by Tristessa. Thus, on the one hand, gender is a mask wore by the society and on the other side it is like a gene which runs into the blood of the sex.

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