



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Gender Anxiety and Identity Crisis

***The Significance of Metamorphosis in Angela Carter's The
Passion of New Eve***

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Erla María Davíðsdóttir

Maí 2009

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Enskuskor

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Kt.: 121281-4149

Leiðbeinandi: Anna Heiða Pálsdóttir

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Summary

This essay explores the postmodern science fiction novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), by contemporary novelist Angela Carter, within the context of metamorphosis in relation to gender anxiety and identity crisis. The novel can be defined as a highly political feminist debate on the social constructions of power, femininity and gender roles, questioning the general preconceptions society has concerning the correspondence between sex and gender. The author employs various literary tenets and elements to the narrative in order to deconstruct the characters and the gender roles assigned to them — such as mythology, religion, psychoanalysis, philosophy, symbolism, dualism and allegory. The essay is divided into two parts: the first part deals with how the ideology of metamorphosis is depicted through sex and symbolism, and the latter part deals with metamorphosis depicted through mythology.

In the former part of the essay, the character of the protagonist, Evelyn, is deconstructed, revealing his presupposed innate sense of power which derives from his biological sex (relating to gender roles and the patriarchal society); the function of mirrors is explored concerning self identification; the symbolic power of the Phallus is examined and questioned, by means of applying Lacanian theory concerning the “mirror-stage,” the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. The reversal of gender roles is made evident, as women are empowered – depicted as strong and aggressive – and the theme of duality is examined, through depictions of the womb vs. the desert, and how these concepts come to symbolise the internal character.

The latter part deals with the way metamorphosis is portrayed, mainly by means of mythology. Various socially constructed characters are examined, such as the phallic-fixated matriarch, the sadomachistic patriarch, the androgyneous icon, the *femme fatale* and the

merciful goddess. These characters are deconstructed and their individuality is put to question in relation to their assigned gender roles and the function assigned to them in the novel.

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Introduction

The purpose of the following essay is to examine the novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) within the context of metamorphosis relating to gender anxiety and identity crisis. The work is written by one of the more avant-garde of contemporary novelists, Angela Carter. By examining the social formation of femininity, the narrative reveals the cultural and social myths which limit and control modern day society. The title of the work refers to the main complication of the story, centered on a Biblical myth that Carter deconstructs and re-writes according to these premises – namely the myth of the creation of Eve. The work deals with shifting identities where sex- and gender-related issues are constantly put to question, corresponding with the most common themes of contemporary literature.

The main theme of the novel is the concept of shifting identities, metamorphosis and its various forms of representation in the text. The narrative follows the protagonist, Evelyn, on his journey through two binary oppositions: that of male and female. Subject and object, in terms of gender and sex, get reversed as Evelyn experiences a transformation from being a misogynistic powerful male, into a power-less oppressed female, Eve. On his journey he meets various colorful characters who have some bearing on his metamorphosis, and via these characters, the author examines the identity modification that Evelyn undergoes and the gender anxiety that he suffers as a result. Through Evelyn's metamorphosis, the author challenges the general preconceptions that society has concerning the correspondence between sex and gender. Carter lays a heavy emphasis on the proclamation generally associated with the 20th century feminist Simone de Beauvoir concerning the formation of gender identity: "one is not born woman, but rather becomes one" (qtd. in Butler 11) — accentuating that gender is a learned behaviour, "culturally constructed" (Butler 8) by dominant patriarchal society.

I have divided the essay into two chapters, each dealing with predominant themes in the novel, namely that of shifting identities through metamorphosis. In the former chapter, I intend to look at how metamorphosis is revealed through sexual identity and the symbolism related to the concept of “sex.” The masculine character of Evelyn will be examined, how his behaviour and gender identity appear to be socially constructed according to his biological sex, in relation to the patriarchal society that he belongs to. The significance of mirrors will be investigated, corresponding to their importance in the development of a character’s own sense of identity and self, following Jacques Lacan’s theory concerning the “mirror-stage.” The symbolic figure of the Phallus will be explored in relation to the significance of the Phallus in the patriarchal world on the one hand, and in the female world on the other. Carter puts the importance of the dominating Phallus into question as she explores the sexual, social and spiritual submission and domination that Eve/lyn undergoes, both as a man and as a woman. The power of women is heavily voiced throughout the narrative, where Carter turns the world on its head by creating an all-female world consisting of strong female warriors, correlating to Amazonian women who portray many of the general traits assigned to men; hence Carter empowers women and makes them the dominant sex, and men become the “other.” The last theme which will be examined in this chapter concerns the importance of the desert in the novel, as opposed to the womb, in relation to the character’s state of mind and development.

In the latter chapter, I will be delving into the theme of metamorphosis and how it relates to the mythology presented in the novel. Carter builds the storyline and the characters on Biblical accounts as well as mythology, as one may infer from the title of the story. Many of the major characters will be put under examination, particularly Evelyn the protagonist. His metamorphosis and development are affected by the various socially constructed personalities he meets. The first one of these who crosses his path is Leilah, who serves the

narrative as the stereotypical sexual plaything. The liaison between the two foreshadows Evelyn's destiny; i.e. he subjects women to rape and abuse, and in turn he gets abused and raped as a woman. Later in the story he meets Leilah again, but her identity has transformed into an alter-ego of her former self: a strong goddess by the name of Lillith, serving the storyline as a person who helps Eve (which is Evelyn's name after the transformation) in completing the transformation into womanhood. The character of Eve/lyn will be put to question and how well s/he manages to adopt a new gender identity correlating to the new biological sex imposed upon him. The reason behind his transformation will be looked into much more closely, as well as the identity crisis she finds herself in after the transformation. The first mythological deity Eve/lyn meets in the narrative is the person responsible for the transformation, the Castration Fixated Matriarch. Her persona will be delved into, as she is portrayed as Mother, the Creator who reigns over the female world of Beulah. After being transformed into a woman, Eve/lyn escapes Mother's world, only to land in the hands of the second mythological deity of the narrative which will be examined: Zero the poet. His dealings with women are much in accordance with Eve/lyn's treatment them before his transformation into a woman. The character which has the greatest impact on the development of Eve is the third mythological deity, namely the androgyneous starlet who goes by the name of Tristessa. Her character will be thoroughly examined in relation to the androgyneous elements attributed to her.

The theorists that I intend to draw upon to support my claims are various and come from different schools of thought. These theorists include Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Baudrillard, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. I will apply their theoretical approaches in my analysis, e.g. Beauvoir's theory on gender and sex, Baudrillard's hypothesis concerning the order of simulacra, Butler's thesis on gender

construction, Kristeva's theory on generative power, Freud's ideology concerning phallus-fixation and castration-anxiety, and Lacan's theory of the Phallus in relation to power.

In conclusion, I will discuss how effectively Carter deals with the themes she develops with the aim of deconstructing the oppositional sex roles brought about by patriarchy. Through the representation of Evelyn's metamorphosis from a culturally constructed powerful male to a female suffering from gender anxiety and identity crisis, Angela Carter reveals the various cultural and social myths and images which limit and control the social outlook concerning sex and gender related issues.

Metamorphosis: Sex and Symbolism

Sex and symbolism are themes which, in addition to feminism, religion and myth, build the foundation of the novel *The Passion of New Eve*. It is through these concepts which the metamorphosis of the narrative is developed, via the standpoint of the characters — particularly Evelyn's, whose views on symbolism relating to sex and gender identity is that:

Our external symbols must always express the life within us with absolute precision; how could they do otherwise, since that life has generated them? Therefore we must not blame our poor symbols if they take forms that seem trivial to us, or absurd, for the symbols themselves have no control over their own fleshy manifestations, however paltry they may be; the nature of our life alone has determined their forms. (Carter 6)

The narration opens with a description of the protagonist as “an archetypical male chauvinist of the worst kind” (Palmer 29), sadistic, conceited and egotistical. He is an individual whose gender identity has been socially constructed in accordance with his sex and the patriarchal principle of the phallocratic world he lives in and consequently, the “systematic mistreatment of his lovers is not an innate sexual drive but is instead the result of how he has been culturally taught to view femininity” (Makinen 156). His views on women are predominantly superficial, the only thing he wants from them is “the body, all body, to hell with the soul” (Carter 7), portraying his phallocentric male sensibility which exposes itself as “thriving on female degradation” (Daly 65). The author portrays this outlook by the manner in which Evelyn handles the various women he encounters throughout the narrative; they are insignificant in his eyes, mere playthings which he uses at his disposal for his erotic pleasure, and then discards them. He has been “raised on a diet of Hollywood films” (Makinen 156), many of them featuring his favourite actress, Tristessa, and through her vocation Evelyn “learns to denigrate women and regard them as victims” (156). For him, she embodies the “essence of idealized femininity” (156), the act of suffering being her primary

occupation. Being infatuated with Tristessa, Evelyn spends many nights admiring her, taking “some girl or another to the movies” (Carter 5) to pay tribute to his idol – whilst the unnamed girl gets down on her knees on the floor to give him a blowjob, amongst cigarette ends and refuse, showing the degradation the women he consorts with are exposed to. This performance which he subjects his lady friends to can be associated with *Phallicism*, which is defined as “the worship of or reverence for the generative principle in nature as symbolized especially by the ‘phallus’, [and] is in fact the ideology and practice consequent upon and reinforcing the belief that “God” is male and the male is “God.” It is the negation of female potency” (Daly 240). He is controlled by his phallus and the power assigned to it – making him superior and women inferior — considering himself being “nothing but cock” (Carter 25), as he was taught by his father to “stab with the phallus” (75).

Evelyn moves to New York to take the position of a lecturer at a university, which marks the beginning of the transformation he will eventually be subjected to. The development of his transformation is created by his encounters and confrontations with the diverse types of feminine icons created by the patriarchal principle. The first female he meets is a black dancer and prostitute named Leilah, who first appears as “a hallucinatory embodiment of the city and its labyrinthine corruptions” (Britzolakis 51). Leilah represents a type of femininity which Carter examines in the novel, ironically reproduced as “a mirror that reflects back on one of the stereotypical images of the feminine that men have created and then projected onto women” (Perez-Gil). In Evelyn’s eyes, Leilah represents sexuality, ecstasy and lust, and his behaviour towards her is expressed accordingly — their sexual encounters quickly turning into aggressive acts of rape as he gets tired of her. When Leilah gets pregnant by Evelyn, she demands of him to stay with her, which initiates fear in him, the fear of being “chained down by domestic life, thus retaining his male ego in the feminine unconscious” (Perez-Gil). Evelyn’s ultimate act of selfishness is when he leaves Leilah,

barren after a brutal abortion, and heads to the desert, where he would be purified by the “primordial light, unexhausted by eyes” (Carter 38). However, as he ventures into the desert, he does not realize that it will become the place of his re-birth – the place where his gender identity and sex will be altered – and he has to come to terms with re-discovering his true essence of self, disregarding all preconceptions or social constructions.

Power struggle and authority is heavily voiced and put to question in the narrative, as the struggle between the sexes becomes evident via Evelyn’s metamorphosis from a man with power, into a woman who is utterly and completely powerless. Adopting Lacanian theory, Carter turns the image of the Phallus into a tool of power, i.e. “to ‘be’ the Phallus is to be the signifier of the desire of the Other and to appear as this signifier” (Butler 59). This power, according to Lacan, varies between men and women:

For women to “be” the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to “embody” the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through “being” its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity. (Butler 59)

This signifies that only men can attain the Phallus, which gives them power and authority over women, who lack the Phallus, and thus women are expected to signify it by being its opposite and its lack. This ideology is very evident in Evelyn’s case, when he is in England and New York; he has the power and is in control of his destiny, simply because he “is” the Phallus. But as soon as he leaves the city for the desert, a realm unknown to him, his power diminishes and the symbol of the Phallus becomes insignificant. He is taken by a flock of warrior women and brought to the all-female subterranean world of Beulah. Thus, he ventures from a purely patriarchal world where the man is considered superior, to the strictly matriarchal world of Beulah where man is considered obsolete. The first symbol which gives away these altered circumstances is when the women capture him and bring him to Beulah,

he immediately notices a “structure, chipped out of granite dragged from god knows where, it was twenty or thirty feet tall . . . representing a stone cock with testicles all complete, in a state of massive tumescence. But the cock was broken off clean in the middle” (Carter 47), with a vulture sitting on its cracked surface. This phallic statue is symbolic for the gynocentric world he now finds himself in. Ironically, the broken phallus statue symbolises Evelyn’s fate: the end of his manhood — he is to be emasculated and made into a woman against his will. Thus he is deprived of his masculinity, the source of power assigned to his sex in the patriarchal society. The truncated column takes the form of “an emasculated phallus dominating the entrance to Beulah,” making the entrance in the desert sands “a symbol of a *vagina dentata*” (Perez-Gil).

The supremacy of women in *The Passion of New Eve* is evident throughout the narrative. Carter empowers the female sex and gives them agency, as she questions the socially constructed preconceived notions about female association with passivity, abasement and defencelessness. By creating the Amazonian-esque female guerilla, Carter reverses the previously assigned gender roles, employing it to “deconstruct and mediate the highly oppositional sex roles perpetuated in patriarchy” (Rubenstein 105). Carter takes the Amazonian myth from Greek mythology, which describes them as

descendants of the God of war, Ares, and the sea nymph, Harmonia. They worshipped Artemis, goddess of the hunt, [residing] exactly where the Amazon territory is. Amazon society was stringently matriarchal. Males were of no use other than for mating purposes and as slaves, doing work that was traditionally performed by women. Mens’ outer extremities were often mutilated to prevent them taking up arms against their captors or escaping. Male babies were either given away at birth to neighbouring tribes or killed. (Bexte)

The first indication of gynocracy and the Amazonian guerilla appears in the novel when Evelyn is newly arrived in New York. He spends his first night at a hotel where a fire breaks out, and consequently, a sense of disorder and confusion takes over the lobby. Despite the confusion, Evelyn detects an inscription on the wall, which is the mark of the feminine: “the female circle – thus: ♀ with, inside it, a set of bared teeth” (Carter 11). This incident sets the feminist tone for the following events, indicating that women are “angry” and people should thus be afraid of them. The same symbol appears for the second time when Evelyn comes into first hand contact with the Amazonians in the desert. He notices a scarlet arm-band they all are wearing, “but did not contain a snarl within the emended female circle; instead, it carried a symbol that looked ... like a broken arrow or truncated column” (Carter 45). The broken arrow Evelyn refers to, is the broken column in the opening of Beulah, symbolic for the intention of the Amazonians: the emasculation of men. Their purpose in the novel is to bring Evelyn in contact with the ruler of their underground world, their incarnated deity Mother – and depict women portraying all the characteristics typically attributed to men, that of strength, resilience, and aggression.

Dualism plays a significant part in Carter’s deconstruction of the sex roles propagated in the patriarchal society. The desert and the womb are one of the dualisms which, in their rawest form, symbolize insufficiency and abundance, sterility and fertility. In the desert, a vital action takes place, which leads to Evelyn’s metamorphosis. As soon as he leaves the city, and travels to the desert, he unknowingly abandons the realm of men, only to find himself in the realm of women. The landscape of the desert becomes symbolic for Evelyn’s inner turmoil: “I needed pure air and cleanness. I would go to the desert, There, the primordial light, unexhausted by eyes, would purify me” (Carter 38). In eco-criticism, the desert represents the first stage of the outdoor environment, as it moves from nature to culture. Peter Barry describes this stage as “the wilderness, e.g. deserts, oceans, uninhabited

continents” (255). It is a place of solitude and contemplation, “entered as if instinctively by those who would ‘find’ themselves – Moses ascends the mountain to receive the commandments, Christ goes into the wilderness to pray” (Barry 257). Comparable to Jesus and Moses, the desert becomes a place of Evelyn’s revelation and marks the beginning of his metamorphosis. Although he escapes to the desert to purify his thoughts, the area becomes a representation of his imminent lost identity. Within the desert, he feels that he has found “the landscape that matches the landscape of my heart,” he gets lost in the barren dried up desert, the “abode of enforced sterility, the dehydrated sea of infertility, the post-menopausal part of the earth” (Carter 40).

In the desert, Evelyn is captured by the Amazonian guerilla fighters, who bring him into the dominion of women, Beulah, “which can only be reached by crossing the desert, the traditional metaphor for wilderness and sterility” (Vallorani). The realm of Beulah is “rigidly homosexual and separatist female community, and consequently built on analogy to a womb” (Vallorani), a gynocratic world where “one woman is all women” (Carter 58). The realm of Beulah first appeared in John Bunyan’s book of Christian allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and is defined as “a place upon the border of Heaven, through which pilgrims pass on to eternal life” (qtd. in Vallorani). Hence, Beulah turns out to be the perfect location for Evelyn’s rebirth: “‘It will become,’ Evelyn states, ‘the place where I was born’” (Carter 47). The fact that Beulah is a subterranean world in the shape of a womb replicates the symbolic meaning of Evelyn’s eventual metamorphosis, seeing that “before the surgical operation, he is kept there and protected from the dangers of the outside world just like an unborn child in the womb of its mother” (Vallorani). Consequently, Evelyn is turned into the mythological “New Eve,” destined to “bring forth the Messiah of the Antithesis” (Carter 67). Afraid of fulfilling the providence laid upon him, Eve/lyn flees from the womb of Beulah and falls into the hands of Zero the poet, the ultimate masculine man, who lives on a ranch in the desert.

Comparable to the desert, mirrors and self identity are a vital aspect to the character's metamorphosis, in terms of recognition of the gendered self in relation to the biological sex. Carter uses the imagery and symbolism of mirrors to portray the way in which her characters view themselves, physically as well as psychologically. Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst in the 20th century, developed a theory about mirrors and identification of the self corresponding to the development of the individual. According to Lacan, all children are born into the Imaginary order, where "the self is not yet distinguished from what is other than the self" (Barry 130). Whilst in the Imaginary, the child goes through what Lacan calls "'the mirror-stage', when the child sees its own reflection in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself as a unified being, separate from the rest of the world ... [thus] the child enters into the language system, essentially a system which is concerned with lack and separation" (Barry 114). The stage of lack and separation is "associated with the figure of the father. The new order which the child now enters is called by Lacan the Symbolic" (114). Hence, the symbolic realm derives from the patriarchal principle: within it, laws, rules and language reside – giving authority and power to men. The Lacanian mirror-stage is very relevant to the story, especially when it comes to Leilah. According to Evelyn, she is a person whose mind seems completely disconnected with the body, which is made evident when she looks in the mirror and "became absorbed in the contemplation of the figure in the mirror but she did not seem to me to apprehend the person in the mirror as, in any degree, herself ... [she] became her own reflection" (Carter 28). To Evelyn, this revelation is inconsequential – he does not care about her personality — the only feelings he has for her are feelings of lust, and therefore she is nothing but a sexual object in his mind. Ironically, this incident with the mirror prefigures Evelyn's fate. When he is changed into a woman, he is left alone in front of a mirror to inspect his new body and become acquainted with it. But Evelyn's immediate thoughts on the subject are:

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, a tinted arrangement of curved lines. (Carter 74)

Hence, mirrors become one of the key elements to Evelyn's doubled self-identity; he gazes into the mirror of Leilah, who reflects him back, foreshadowing his eventual transformation into his own female version. Even though it is his reflection he perceives in the mirror, which has been turned into "the Playboy center fold" (Carter 75), he does not connect the female body with the male mind. Evelyn perceives his new body as something to be desired, as he has become his "own masturbatory fantasy," stating that "the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself" (Carter 75). According to Lacanian theory, Evelyn has returned back to the Imaginary stage, where he "has no sense of identity, no way of conceiving of [himself] as a unity, distinct from what is 'other,' exterior to it" (Daly 48). As a result, the mirror becomes a significant part of Evelyn's metamorphosis – by means of mirrors he becomes to identify with himself – merging his body image with his gendered selfhood. Thus, Carter reveals the premises of the novel pertaining to the connection between gender and sex: "gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler 8).

Metamorphosis: Mythology

Carter places mythology and religion as the central themes of the novel, by exploring and demythologising the “the social creation of femininity” (Perez-Gil). She uses “myth or parody to deconstruct the highly oppositional sex roles perpetuated in patriarchy” (Rubenstein 103). The work is more or less built on mythological and religious references, the most obvious one being the title of the work, *The Passion of New Eve*, i.e. referring to the Biblical account of the creation of Eve. Throughout the narrative, Evelyn meets four socially constructed female figures, who help Evelyn through the various stages of his metamorphosis.

Leilah is one of the first socially constructed female figures who crosses Evelyn’s path, and via their encounters, Carter questions the sexual, social and spiritual submission and domination of the patriarchal principle. Her social construction is founded on a “material projection sprung from the patriarchal collective unconscious, which identifies the feminine with darkness, nothingness, the void, the bottomless pit, and hell” (Neumann, qtd. in Perez-Gil). According to Evelyn, Leilah “has been doubly degraded, through her race and through her sex,” thus he feels she is inferior to him, not only because she is a woman, but also because she is of black origin. She works as a naked model and a prostitute, her femininity portrayed “as the expression of a decadent narcotic culture” (Britzolakis 51), as she frequently consumes hash candies. Shortly after their first encounter, Evelyn and Leilah start a liaison, but after a while, Evelyn gets bored with her, conceiving her as “only an irritation of the flesh, an itch that must be scratched; a response, not a pleasure” (Carter 31). Evelyn starts to grossly abuse Leilah by strapping her to an iron bed with his belt and raping her. The incident when Leilah looks in the mirror and does not recognize her own reflection (as mentioned before), foreshadows Evelyn’s fate – namely the fate of subjection to misogyny and rape, turning Evelyn into the powerless other and thus he becomes like all the women he

has disgraced, defiled and tormented in his life. As Leilah has no subjectivity to Evelyn, “he is embarrassed when he discovers Leilah is pregnant” (Makinen 157) and refuses to marry her. He orders her to have an abortion which she reluctantly complies to, and “abandons her in the hospital, leaving her mutilated and bleeding from a botched abortion” (157), heading for the barren desert to clear his head. However, according to Carter, Leilah “can never have objectively existed, all the time [she was] mostly the projection of the lusts and greed and self-loathing of a young man called Evelyn” (Wisker 127).

The first mythological deity, and the second socially constructed female figure Carter examines in the narrative, is the castration-fixated matriarch, also known as “Great Mother.” By naming her character Great Mother, Carter attempts to “fix women into foreground categories that block encounters with the inexhaustible Other, stopping the Metamorphic process” (Daly 403). Mother is a vital character in the narrative, and can be said to be Evelyn’s antagonist, as she is the one responsible for his initial metamorphosis. She goes by several names, including the Great Parricide and the Grand Emasculator, which symbolises her intent in life: to change the world into a utopian society of women and only women. “With the aid of organ transplant surgery, Mother has turned herself into a mythic four-breasted figure” (Makinen 160), by having “undergone a painful metamorphosis of the entire body and become the abstraction of a natural principle” (Carter 49). Eve/lyn is terrified of Mother, mainly because in his eyes, she represents power, as Julia Kristeva points out:

Fear of the archaic mother turns out essentially to be a fear of her generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that patriarchal filiation has the burden of subduing ... the mother remains for every subject – male and female – a terrifying source of generative power. (qtd. in Wisker 120)

Mother proves herself to be the suppressive maternal figure, as she subjects Eve/lyn to a violent rape, which makes Eve/lyn realise “how degrading it is to be the object of pity”

(Carter 65). Carter places Mother as Evelyn's ultimate avenger, making her ridicule Evelyn's genitalia and reprimand him for his misogyny in the past: "And you've abused women, Evelyn, with this delicate instrument that should have been used for nothing but pleasure. You made a weapon of it!" (Carter 65-6). Hence, Evelyn becomes "the first victim of her wild justice" (Carter 50). It is ironic that the object which Mother uses in order to emasculate Evelyn takes the shape of a phallus, as she exclaims: "Oh, the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol! (But what else, says Mother, could do the trick?)" (Carter 70). Hence, Carter uses a Freudian interpretation of "attributing sexual connotations to objects" (Barry 98), as she satirizes "the sanctified mythic religious sacrifice of genitalia to an all- dominant fertility goddess" (Rubenstein 110). By this act, she inflicts him with the pain he had inflicted upon others.

Two months after the surgery, Eve/lyn is ready to view his new self in the mirror, and when Mother asks him how he finds himself he answers, "I don't find myself at all" (Carter 75), hence implying that, like a newborn child, he has no sense of identity. Therefore, like with a newborn, Mother "unbuttoned the front of her white coat, took [Eve/lyn] to her breast and suckled [him]" (75). By this act, Carter disempowers Evelyn as she "offers a helpless, infant-eye view of an almost monstrously all-powerful maternal figure in the multi-nippled Mother ... whom the truncated Eve/lyn, newly born as a woman, is wholly unable to resist" (Sceats 102).

Following Eve/lyn's capture and subsequent arrival in Beulah, it becomes clear to him that he is completely powerless, under the command of women, and hence, the path which lies before him has been decided, for "our destinies choose us, choose us before we are born" (Carter 39). The trip to Beulah symbolises Eve/lyn's last "penetration," as he enters the "deepest cave of the unconscious" (Perez-Gil), the realm of woman, to meet with his fate. He surrenders himself to the power of Mother, who informs him of her plans for his future,

namely that he is going to “bring forth the Messiah of the Antithesis!”¹ as she is about to “make a start on the feminisation of Father Time” (Carter 67). Hence, Eve/lyn’s masculine identity and reality has been devoured by the Earth, “and from his body, Eve/lyn physically a woman and mentally a man, will have to make a clean start on another journey” (Vallorani) towards a new and unknown sexual identity. Her² gender no longer coincides with her sex, as she “perceives herself – and is equally perceived by people belonging to the opposite sex – as an empty body promising endless pleasure” (Vallorani). Subjecting her protagonist to an involuntary surgery, Carter transforms Eve into a Christ-like figure; Eve/lyn gets punished for the sins of mankind, or rather in her case, for the sins of man.

Being stripped of her masculine identity, Eve becomes “terrified of motherhood as any woman born” (Carter 80), and uncertain about her identity and existence:

I know nothing. I am a *tabula erasa*, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman although I possess a woman’s shape. Not a woman, no; both more and less than a real woman. Now I am a being as mythic and monstrous as Mother herself; but I cannot bring myself to think of that ... I had only one thought – I’m the most ludicrous mess in the world. (Carter 83)

Before Mother gets to inseminate Eve, she escapes Beulah and heads for the desert. Possessing a woman’s body and a man’s psyche, Eve becomes a “hybrid; “he/she does not belong to any community: he/she has no history, no tradition, no shared life and finally, no gender” (Vallorani).

The second mythological deity that Eve encounters is the figure of the sadomachistic patriarch, Zero the poet. Zero is the archetype of a male possessing all the destructive characteristics of the patriarchal society. He is a misogynistic, homophobic, phallic-fixated

¹ By using Evelyn’s sperm she collected from the rape.

² For convenience, I will hereafter refer to Evelyn as “she” and “Eve”.

man who holds the common patriarchal view that women are “fashioned of a different soul substance from men” (Carter 87), placing them as primitive, inferior beings. Zero, together with his harem of women, captures Eve in the desert after her escape from Beulah. He brings her to his desert ranch, and upon arrival, he rapes her “unceremoniously in the sand in front of his ranch-house” (Carter 86). For the first time in her life, Eve experiences the feeling of rape, and hence, “Eve herself becomes the object of male abuse” (Makinen 159). She observes:

I was in no way prepared for the pain; his body was an anonymous instrument of torture, mine my own rack. My nostrils were filled with the rank stench of his sweat and his come and, dominating even these odours, the sweetish, appalling smell of pig-shit, a smell which clung to the entire ranch and its environs in a foul miasma. (Carter 86)

Zero keeps a harem of 7 wives, who “loved Zero for his air of authority but only their submission had created that. By himself, he would have been nothing” (Carter 100). As a result, the women place themselves as inferior to his superiority. Through the depiction of the harem, Carter questions the society of women who are “frequently victims of male violence and exploitation” (Keenan 139).

According to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Zero would be classified as a person belonging to the “id-stage” of the human psyche – “roughly corresponding to, respectively, the unconscious” (Barry 97). People at the id-stage are controlled by their most basic, animalistic needs, which Zero clearly portrays as he disregards the women’s feelings and rapes them at his own leisure. In addition to being animalistic, Zero appears to suffer from a serious case of mother fixation, a Freudian term in which there is “an exaggerated reverence for the mother” (Barry 108):

Such people are attracted only to women who resemble the mother, but because of this the shadow of the incest taboo makes the expression of sexual feelings towards them difficult or impossible. Hence, their only way out is to seek sexual relationships with women who do not resemble the mother, and whom they therefore despise. So in order to generate sexual excitement such men have to degrade the love object, since if they are not so degraded they will resemble the mother, and hence, in the man's mind, not be available as a sexual partner. (Barry 108)

Subsequently, as Barry points out, these women are viewed either as idealised maternal figures, or prostitute figures. This outlook is clearly reflected in Zero's demeanour towards his harem, he takes great pleasure out of degrading the women in every way he can, and sometimes, "to illustrate the humility he demanded of his wives, he would smear his own excrement and that of the dog upon their breasts" (Carter 85). He is very phallogocentric in thought, and in addition to being mother fixated, he also suffers from castration-anxiety. This anxiety derives from his hatred of Tristessa, the beautiful screen actress that Evelyn (the man) was so ardently in love with. Zero affirms that Tristessa has "magicked the genius out of [his] jissom" (Carter 91) — in other words, she has emasculated him, and hence he wants to destroy her in order to reclaim his masculinity and sexual potency.

As time goes by at the desert ranch, where Eve is domesticated as Zero's eighth wife, made to do housework and fulfill her wifely duties, she finds that she had "become almost the thing I was" (Carter 107). Hence, through subjection, oppression and constant rapes, Eve begins to gain a sense of self as a woman – her gender identity slowly overtaking the socially constructed elements of her biological sex. Eve's thoughts about Tristessa slowly fade away until one day when Zero comes back from town, smiling triumphantly, stating that he has seen "The Witches' lair" (Carter 109), pulling out his pistols, emptying the barrels through

the roof. From that point on it becomes clear to Eve that Tristessa's life, his one and only love, is in grave danger.

The third mythological deity who influences and brings closure to Eve's metamorphosis to womanhood is the androgynous figure of Tristessa, the Hollywood icon. By introducing the character to the story, Carter stresses her argument that "passive femininity is nothing but male creation" (Makinen 157). In the fictional world Carter has created, the emphasis on the androgynous figure, who "crosses the accepted periphery lines of gender," serves as a "powerful ideological device for transforming the social construction of gender" (Brink et al. xii). Her character is based on Tiresias from Greek mythology: a blind prophet who was transformed into a woman by the goddess Hera. He remained a woman for seven years, and then he got changed back into a man (Heilbrun 11). Tiresias is an androgynous character from classic mythology, and through a distortion of this myth, the character of Tristessa is born. By developing the character of Tristessa, Carter "interrogates the construct of bisexuality, the 'union of opposites' in its severest context" (Siann 30). Tristessa captures the quintessence of the perfect female in Evelyn's mind (the male), hence she becomes the third socially constructed female the author examines in the novel.

Carter depicts Tristessa as the epitome of male desire, silent and passive, "the celluloid incarnation of male romantic and erotic fantasies of the eternal Feminine" (Rubenstein 106). Due to these personal character traits, Eve has loved Tristessa since s/he was a child, only because Tristessa "was not of this world" (Carter 8). She reigned the silver screen for years and was America's most loved actress, but then retired to "a hermit-like seclusion in Southern California, she put herself away tidily in a store-house for worn-out dreams" (8). Hence, Carter applies the feminist concept of the male gaze and female object to Eve and Tristessa's relationship, marginalizing Tristessa as the "other," turning her into an aesthetic thing of beauty.

Believing that Tristessa has “performed a spiritual vasectomy on him” (Carter 92), Zero, who is a fan like Eve used to be, tracks her down in order to kill her and regain his male potency. Following Zero’s discovery of her glass palace, he captures Tristessa and shouts out with a loud voice: “I am the avenging phallic fire ... I’ve come to fecundate your sterility, you dyke of dykes, you jamjar of infertility” (Carter 127). But as soon as he tears Tristessa’s clothes off, it becomes apparent that Tristessa is not a woman, but a man: “Out of the vestigial garment sprang the rude, red-purple insignia of maleness, the secret core of Tristessa’s sorrow, the source of her enigma, of her shame” (Carter 128). Hence, the character of Tristessa becomes “an illusion in the void” (Carter 110), an image that has no foundation in reality. By revealing Tristessa’s true identity, Carter questions the real and false gender images constructed by the demands of modern-day society. In order to examine this further, Carter employs Baudrillard’s postmodern theory of the simulacra, usually known as “the loss of the real” (Barry 87). According to Baudrillard’s theory, there are four stages of representations of simulations, produced by the harsh reality of a consumer-driven society. In his analysis, he states that “the world is remade in the image of our desires” (Baudrillard, “From the Precessions of Simulacra” 1730). If situated within Baudrillard’s theory, Tristessa would belong to the fourth stage of simulacrum, namely an image which “bears no relation to any reality whatever” (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 11), she is her own simulacrum, her own imitation of the idealized feminine.

With the unravelling of Tristessa’s enigma, Eve realizes why she has loved her for all of her life (no matter whether s/he was in the form of a man or a woman):

That’s why he had been the perfect man’s woman! He had made himself the shrine of his own desires, had made of himself the only woman he could have loved! If a woman is indeed beautiful only in so far as she incarnates most completely the secret

aspirations of man, no wonder Tristessa had been able to become the most beautiful woman in the world. (Carter 128-29)

By possessing both male and female characteristics, Tristessa is turned into a “mediator between the symbols of [social] formations ... a medium between the two gender formations of the male ‘Evelyn’ and the fully realized ‘Eve’” (Johnson 175). Together, Tristessa and Eve make up the “mythic figure of the platonic androgyne” (Britzolakis 51) derived from Plato’s Symposium (which explains the origin of love), defined as “a figure of origins, of fullness, and of presence” (Weil 63). Feeling complete and in touch with her femininity, Eve runs away with Tristessa into the unknown. They share a night together, which results in Eve getting pregnant. Ultimately, Eve rejects both matriarchal and patriarchal spaces of the world as she becomes more aware of herself, body and soul, through “interaction with an almost identical figure” (Johnson 180).

Towards the end of the narrative, another female figure crosses Evelyn’s path — a woman by the name of Lillith³. The figure of Lillith is taken from Biblical mythology, namely Hebrew. According to Raphael Patai in his work, *The Hebrew Goddess*, Lilith was created by God as an intrinsic part of Adam:

God originally created Adam and Lilith together in such a manner that the female creature was contained in the male. Lilith’s soul was originally lodged in the depths of the Great Abyss, whence she was called forth by God and joined to Adam. When Adam was created and his body completed, a thousand souls from the Left Side (i.e. Evil) tried to attach themselves to him. But God let out a shout and thus drove them off. All this while, Adam lay there, a body without a soul, greenish in color. Then a cloud descended, and God commanded the earth to produce a living soul. This God

³ The character of Lillith correlates with that of Hebrew mythology, i.e. Lilith, the first wife of Adam. In the narrative, Carter uses two l’s instead of one when referring to Lillith.

breathed into Adam, who now was able to stand up, and, behold, his female was attached to his side. But God sawed his creature into two, whereupon Lilith flew off to the Cities of the Sea, where she still lurks ready to harm mankind. (192-93)

Lillith serves the story as a mythical goddess, who helps Eve to complete the rite of passage into womanhood. Lillith is Leilah's alter-ego (the prostitute mentioned before), created as a "heroine who [is] no longer a puppet of male-controlled scripts but who uses theatricality and masquerade to invent and advance [herself]" (Britzolakis 51). Lillith sympathises with Eve for the situation she is in, and takes her on a journey which marks the completion of Eve's metamorphosis, "the destination of all journeys is their beginning (Carter 186)" – taking her back to the place of her birth. They travel to a cave by the sea, enter it, and climb through it together. On the way, Lilith "dived into her ruck-sack and produced a long, metal box about the size of an old-fashioned glove box" (Carter 187) and gives it to Eve, who accepts the box, which turns out to be a miniature portable refrigerator. Within it "on a bed of dry ice, lay the set of genitals which had once belonged to Evelyn" (Carter 187). Lillith offers Eve her masculinity back, but Eve, "now [having] experienced enough to know the full reality of being a woman, rejects the precious phallus" (Makinen 163), laughs and sends it "skimming over the waves" (Carter 187). By refusing to take back her former genitals, Eve has accepted her femininity and the future which lies before her, embracing the fate of motherhood. Thus, Eve is fully equipped to "set out into a future where her child – the fruit of a transsexual and a transvestite – will grow up with entirely new concepts of masculinity and femininity, since the old ones have proved redundant" (Makinen 163).

Conclusion

The Passion of New Eve is a novel which examines and deconstructs socially constructed gender roles within the terms of metamorphosis. It covers the journey of a young man, Evelyn, through two polar opposites: the metamorphosis from a powerful man into a powerless woman, and the gender anxiety and identity crisis which follows that transition. Carter employs various literary tenets and concepts in order to give her characters agency, some of them sacrilegious up to a certain extent. The main premise of the work is founded on a Biblical myth, i.e. of the creation of Eve, and with that myth as a basis, Carter constructs a society which is largely amoral. On his journey, Eve/lyn encounters various characters who all have some bearing on his metamorphosis, among those being three mythological deities, who mark Evelyn's journey and metamorphosis towards a new beginning, a re-birth into the world as a woman. By generating a merger between Eve/lyn's body and psyche in the beginning as well as in the end, Carter emphasises her main premise of the work, namely that of gender being a mere performance.

Carter manages very successfully to get her position across, e.g. by working various literary elements of pastiche and satire into the narrative, in order to give it a comic edge. By providing her characters with stereotypical characteristics, drastically dramatized, she depicts the state of contemporary society which has been drowned in consumerism and false images. And it is this consumer-driven society which has objectively altered the state of mind of the individual, providing him/her with a new awry view on sex and gender, which has no basis in reality.

From a surrealist perspective, the narrative successfully examines the sexual politics which are predominant in contemporary society, and comes to the conclusion that gender is a social construct, made up by the patriarchal principle in order to empower men and make a clear distinction between the sexes; that of the male "general" preferred sex, and the female

marginalized “Other.” When it comes to gender construction and its correlation with sex, Carter takes a clear standpoint with feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva; namely that to belong to a given sex is inevitable, but possessing a given gender is a learned behaviour, a social construction. Carter’s true strength as a novelist lies in the way she positions her characters within these circumstances she has created for them, how she uses symbolism in order to depict the characters’ state of mind, as well as in her representations of the social and cultural myths which control and limit how people view gender in relation to biological sex.

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