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## **Eve/Evelyn's transgender process in *The Passion of New Eve*: A masculine/feminine identity**

**Wiem Krifa**

Dr Wiem Krifa is an Assistant Professor of English Literature at the English Department of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Sousse, Tunisia. She has participated in many national and international conferences and published many articles. Her fields of interest include feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism and gender studies.

Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5841-2740>

### **Abstract:**

*Gender construction, a pivotal aspect of feminist discourse, has been a focal point in Angela Carter's works, particularly in exploring the ideological, social, and political underpinnings of gender divisions. This article delves into Carter's feminist postmodern agenda, focusing on the deconstruction of gender binarism. It further examines Carter's use of the transgender as a narrative technique to deconstruct fixed gender boundaries, critique patriarchal systems, and emphasize the flexibility of gender identities. Through an analysis of the novel, this study unveils Carter's project to illustrate the fluid nature of gender. Central to this exploration is the character of Eve, whose double-gendered body serves as a case study in challenging traditional gender roles. By portraying Eve's gender transitioning process and highlighting the fluidity of gender construction, Carter exposes the ideological dynamics underlying socially constructed gender categories. Nonetheless, a special focus is put on the failure of psychosurgical medical operations to control gender. Carter's subversion of patriarchal norms, symbolized by the castration of Evelyn and his subsequent transformation into a biological woman, though still keeping his inner masculine gender identity, underscores her critique of misogynist structures. This study reveals the nuanced portrayal of gender fluidity and the deconstruction of binary notions within Carter's narrative.*

## Introduction

The problematic nature of gender relations has triggered various contemporary gender theorists to embark on thorough and deep studies seeking to dissolve rigid gendered divisions and unveil the internalized ideological and cultural roots behind them. Although these initiatives have been rejected by anti-gender movements, basing their beliefs on religious and ethical grounds, proponents have sought to debunk this phantasm about gender: “In taking aim at gender, some proponents of the anti-gender movement claim to be defending not just family values but values themselves, not just a way of life but life itself” (Butler, 1993, p. 37). They tend to base their arguments on biological and ideological internalized ideas meant to sustain an archaic patriarchal system. Meanwhile, gender theorists view this topic differently, Julia Kristeva, for example, asserts that “strictly speaking ‘women’ cannot be said to exist” (1979, p. 6), while Luce Irigaray avers that “woman does not have a sex” (Butler, 1990, p. 8). In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir writes “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (De Beauvoir, 1989, p. 267). Most feminist theorists deny the biological root of womanhood which has been installed by patriarchal societies to keep gender unbalanced. However, “unlike de Beauvoir, Butler believes that there is no established sexual subject to gender being constructed through social conditioning, but that it is “like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access” (Butler, 2015, p. 16). The natural origin of gender is entirely denied by most feminist theorists who vary from extremists to more moderate ones and opt for social and gender constructions, comparable to linguistic acquisition at an early childhood stage. Because most of the gender debates have been focused on undermining female gender identity and stigmatizing its frail position, postmodern feminist deconstructive theories and narrative techniques urge to “de-essentialize and de-naturalize the concept of “woman”” (Kruks, 2018, p. 38). The roles of ideology and society in shaping fixed gender identities are highly stressed by most gender theorists.

Angela Carter is one prominent feminist writer whose works deal with the deconstruction of rigid gender binarism and tend to reveal gender fluidity and the ideological essence of gender. Her novel *The Passion of New Eve* stands as the epitome of the deconstruction of gender binarism by presenting a bigendered character who stands for both maleness and femaleness. The novel backs Judith Butler’s notion labelled as the “voluntarist theory of gender” that entails any person choosing his/her gender, including psychological, behavioural, sexual and physical features. “Voluntarist understandings of the sexual difference can be and have been defended by pointing to the different techniques of shaping the body:

body building, diets, lightening of the skin, plastic surgery, and sex-change operations” (Heinamaa, 1997, p. 21). Though the debate about gender tends to be controversial, Carter manages to confabulate all its different and contradictory aspects within her writing. In describing her novel, Carter prefers to call her writing “speculative fiction”, thus explaining thoroughly that “speculative fiction really means that, the fiction of speculation, the fiction of asking ‘what if’, but some ‘what ifs’ are more specific” (Heinamaa, 1997, p. 14). Her feminist writing speculates about the birth of new gender identities that pave the ground for the deconstruction of patriarchal ideologies and mostly foreground the ideological essence of gender divisions. In “Cyberfeminism with a Difference” (1997), Rossi Braidotti draws attention to the parodic style in *The Passion of New Eve*:

What I find empowering in the theoretical and political practice of ‘as if’ is its potential for opening up, through successive repetitions and mimetic strategies, strategies, spaces where forms of feminist agency can be engendered. In other words, parody can be politically empowering on the condition of being sustained by a critical consciousness that aims at the subversion of dominant codes. (Braidotti, 1999, p. 213)

Interestingly enough, Braidotti strengthens Carter’s parodic speculations about gender identity. Carter’s politically engaged parody helps to question various truths about them. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of sexual revolution which surely influenced Carter in writing a parody of sexual trans-boundaries and to critique the contradictory notions of gender and sexuality. A close intersection between Carter’s visit to Manhattan and her writing of *The Passion of New Eve* explains the enigmatic dystopian narrative. “At the time of her arrival, Manhattan was witnessing the burgeoning of the gay liberation movement, the S.C.U.M. manifesto, and, by 1968, drag queens, according to avant-garde artist Andy Warhol, had become ‘sexual radicals’” (qtd in Roberts, 2023, p. 14). The effect is clearly transmitted within the novel which is impregnated with various representations of transgendered groups. The novel is fused with parodic feminist deconstruction, giving rise to new gendered identities that question the established phallic world and patriarchal gender norms. In *The Passion of New Eve*, the deconstruction of binary gender divisions and the birth of new gender identities are meshed with a parodic investigation of transgender surgery, showing the medical limitations in controlling gender, notably through psychosurgery. Above all, it is crucial to mention that Carter heads towards diversity and gender fluidity while parodying extremist feminists who advocate for the guaranteed success of transgender surgery or those who aspire to gender separation.

What distinguishes Carter's work from other studies about gender is the minute medical process she foregrounds within her narrative and which aims to deconstruct gender divisions through physical and psychosurgery.<sup>1</sup> Referring back to contemporary gender theories and medical transgender physical and psychosurgery, Carter asserts the flexible nature of the sexual orientation of human beings and questions established gender identities while showing the medical limitations to entirely control them. In this context, as a first section, this article will study Carter's use of transgender physical and psychosurgery as a fictional plot to deconstruct fixed gender boundaries, critique patriarchal systems, and emphasize the flexibility of gender identities within a postmodern feminist framework. The second part of this article will study the ideological nature of gender and its distinctiveness from the sexual identity of human beings. At the centre of this analysis, the emphasis will be put on the limited success of transgender psychosurgery which proves the partial failure of medicine to control gender identity.

### **I. Physical and psychosurgery: A feminist postmodern deconstruction of the patriarchal myth**

To refer back to Judith Butler, "it would be tempting to say that 'gender' is an empty signifier because it no longer refers to anything we might understand as gender when it attracts and mobilizes fears from several orders in society, including the economic and ecological" (Butler, 2015, p. 17). Starting from this absurd definition of gender, Carter strives to incorporate all of the contradictory aspects surrounding the gender debate in her novel, ending up with a feminist magical realist narrative that foregrounds the postmodern gender debate. The fear of gender was mobilized by myriad hidden political, religious and ideological reasons during the 20th century. Whether implicitly or explicitly, Carter frames her study of gender within religious, political and ideological contexts while parodically incorporating the different perspectives regarding the gender debate within her narrative.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, the protagonist, Evelyn, embodies the writer's comprehensive gender study. What's more, through this particular character, Carter concretizes the difference between sex and gender.<sup>2</sup> Starting the novel as a patriarchal figure who maltreats females and exploits them sexually, Evelyn misuses his masculine power to degrade all the females he encounters and ends by being forcibly transgendered. The writer's parodic goal initiates its process by studying the patriarchal definition of gender, prior to deconstructing its ideological essence. For Evelyn, masculine gender identity is unquestionable and entails him

sexually exploiting all of the female characters he encounters, as he avers: “sometimes I’d amuse myself by tying a girl to the bed before I copulated with her” (Carter, 2012, p. 9). His sadistic misogynist demeanour emanates from his gendered patriarchal masculine identity.

The description of his patriarchal gendered identity precedes his forced transgendered metamorphosis into a woman which comes as a deconstruction of his original patriarchal identity. Lost within the imaginary confines of an American city, Evelyn who is supposed to embark on a new professional life, suddenly and due to a political turmoil, finds himself a jobless and homeless university teacher. Thanks to Leilah who takes him in charge, Evelyn survives his economic hardships within an abrupt political upheaval. “A soon as I saw her, [he says] I was determined to have her. She must have known I was staring at her, a woman always knows, though she never once glanced in my direction” (Carter, 2012, p. 9). The choice of vocabulary is very telling and denotes Evelyn’s objectification of the female body. As if Leilah is a commodity to be purchased, he decides to own her female body.

As is the case with several of Carter’s novels, the myth of the Fall is omnipresent within the narrative folds, though in *The Passion of New Eve*, the mythic dimension bears self-deconstructive and magical realist tendencies. Similar to the biblical figure of Adam who is enticed by Eve’s seductive transgression, Evelyn is tempted to sin through his sexual relation with Leilah. However, in contradistinction to the original myth, he provokes his own fall by abandoning Leilah and ends being parodically punished by Mother: The God figure. Carter ironically conveys his contradictory patriarchal character by both depicting his female hatred and economic dependence on Leilah. Hence, not only is the patriarchal myth parodically deconstructed in the text but also religion is debunked and questioned through Mother’s incarnation of the sacred God. Carter’s narration unfolds a multifarious feminist agenda, tackling the patriarchal, religious and ideological underpinnings of gender. While revealing Evelyn’s violent behaviour, the writer highlights his fake ideological gender identity as an economically independent male. His inability to sustain his economic life puts into doubt the claimed masculine independent economic status. The internalized ideology of female economic dependence on the powerful male partner is already debunked and reversed through the scrutiny of Leilah and Evelyn’s relationship. Hence, the “psychosocial phantasms inhabit the key arguments against gender, review some of the main legislative debates on the issue, and make note of the well-organized collaborations against gender across regions and hemispheres” (Butler, 2024, p. 54). Anti-gender proponents back their standpoints on males’ economic sovereignty over women, added to other family and religious considerations. Deep beneath their

arguments, a myriad of internalized ideologies has been set to regulate the political, social, economic and sexual life of members of society.

Through the use of irony and myths, Carter reverses the gender roles to show that nothing is natural relating to gender. The difference between sexual identities and gender ones is neatly discerned in *The Passion of New Eve* through Evelyn's transgender process. Actually, his transformation into a woman comes as a punishment following his bestial conduct towards Leilah, though she lodges him in her apartment and supports him economically. Based on this, he dares to inquire: "How do you earn a living, Leilah? She was a naked model, she said, and sometimes she danced, naked, or else decorated with bows and tassles; [...] so she earned enough for her rent; she did not eat much, anyway" (Carter, 2012, p. 22). Carter's depiction of Leilah's economic situation is very perplexing, being in charge of Evelyn's accommodation and food while she "danced, naked" to sustain her life. Leilah's depicted image asserts her economic independence regardless of Evelyn's male presence and her material resources. The social, economic and ideological controversies surrounding the gender debate are embedded within the narrative to reveal the groundless division of gender identities and norms. Leilah views Evelyn as a male partner notwithstanding any material interests though she is considered as a sexual object for other males. As a female character, Leilah is empowered economically over Evelyn to justify her feminist postmodern assertion that gender identities are grounded on fake doctrines constructed in particular cultural contexts.

Delving deeper into the gender debate, some religious assumptions "disregard the fact that social construction emphasizes the role of social norms in the making of gender. The idea that social construction means [we] can make ourselves however and whenever we wish forgets the constraints imposed by society" (Butler, 2024, p. 236). The novel debunks the religious claims regarding gender and spotlights the social and ideological roots of gender binarism. As such, Carter's feminist postmodern agenda unfolds the deconstruction of gender rigidity and the examination of the cultural, social, political and economic roots that have shaped the concept of gender. The narrative debunks the established gender binarism and opens horizons for new and varied gender identities, though displaying their limited medical success.

Leilah represents the independent new woman who fights for her survival within a violent patriarchal world symbolized by the character of Evelyn who treats her savagely. He admits: "I would, in my astonishment, remember the myth of the succubus, the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints. Then, to punish her for scaring me so, I would tie her to the iron bed with my belt. I always left her feet free, so she could kick away the rats"

(Carter, 2012, p. 23). His misogyny and sadism are figuratively conveyed through Leilah's comparison to the devil and his identification with the saints. The mythic aspect is highly emphasized in the novel, with Leila's demonization featuring all through the narrative. The myth of the Fall<sup>3</sup> is used in various contexts and studied from divergent perspectives. The undermined female position is implicitly transmitted in the narrative through her relegation to a mythic devilish figure who seduces the male into sin while the patriarchal violent figure of Evelyn is elevated to a sacred religious position. This comparison bears an ironic dimension, taking into consideration the dilemma surrounding the religious opposition to gender. Carter's parodic mythic deconstruction is always at play within her books, taking into account her demythologizing as one prominent feminist goal. The deconstruction of all myths, including the religious and patriarchal ones is amongst the principal tenets of Carter's feminist postmodern agenda. The masculine gender is backed by religious and ideological justifications whereas the female character is demonized and explained mythically. Gender inequality is revealed prior to being deconstructed within Carter's feminist postmodern deconstructive narrative.

The writer's choice of Leilah and Evelyn is worthy of attention, paying heed to their contradictory economic and social conditions. Carter alters the internalized gendered belief that asserts female economic dependence on males and, as such, shakes rigid gender definition. Another equally highlighted aspect is Evelyn's violent patriarchal conduct towards Leilah, which explains the whole process of his punishment, exercised on him by the mythic figure of Leilah's mother. Describing his disgust for Leilah, he propounds:

But soon I grew bored with her. I had enough of her, then more than enough. She became only an irritation of the flesh, an itch that must be scratched; a response, not a pleasure. The sickness ran its course and I was left only with the habit of her sensuality, an addiction of which I was ashamed. (Carter, 2012, p. 27)

The objectification of the female body is at stake and helps explain the writer's patriarchal deconstruction process, illustrated mainly through Evelyn's transgender surgeries. Evelyn views Leilah as a sexual object and refuses to marry her following her pregnancy. The unhealthy and brutal process of abortion he submits her to leads to her sterility. As if through some magical realist happening, Evelyn is punished for his irresponsible behaviour towards his child and Leilah.

How do I know it's my baby, Leilah? The oldest abuse, the most primitive evasion [...] weak and sick, she demanded in a hysterical falsetto that I marry her. She said it was my duty to marry her. She issued voodoo threats against my manhood; As soon as I knew she was carrying my child, any remaining desire for her vanished. She became only an embarrassment to me. She became a shocking inconvenience to me. (Carter, 2012, p. 30)

Evelyn divulges his misogyny through his abuse of Leilah. He mishandles his masculinity to degrade and dehumanize Leilah on account of her female gender. For his conduct, he is sentenced to transgender surgery that condemns him to be a woman against his will. The process of becoming a woman is very painful and degrading, more or less similar to Leilah's surgical abortion. "When people claim a gender or, indeed, a sex that was not the one originally assigned at birth, they exercise human powers of self-definition at the expense of a natural sex divinely created or established" (Butler, 2011, p. 280). What is more, this new sexual identity is imposed brutally on Evelyn. The hard process of Leila's abortion is symbolically echoed through Evelyn's torturous transgender operation. Though his sexual identity proves to be alterable and successfully acquired, Evelyn's gendered identity is beyond medical intervention because it is entirely ideological and represents his beliefs rather than his physical appearance and sexual organs. "The allegation that gender is an ideology mirrors the very phenomenon it decries, for 'gender' becomes not only a monolith but also one with enormous power – an ideological move par excellence" (Butler 2024, p. 238). Varying and contrasting ideologies are rooted within the gender apparatus and are unveiled all along the narrative. Leilah's skin colour is very symbolic, signifying the double marginalization of black women through the colonial claim of binary gender. Already, then, Carter hints to the double marginalization of black women by settling on an oriental name for her heroine. The origin of Leilah's name is purely oriental which alludes to Carter's embedded feminist colonial perspective towards the patriarchal colonization of women. In her *African Gender Studies* (2004) and *The Invention of Women* (1998) Oyeronke Oyewumi argues "that binary gender is imposed by colonialism and, in particular, its accepted doctrines of biological determinism. This 'bio-logic' [...] operates under a false claim of universality" (1997, pp. 121–56). Binary gender categories reflect colonial binarism, with the marginalization of the inferior part at its heart. Both justify their injustice towards the second binary part through biological reasons which, following deep scrutiny, prove to be entirely ideological. Hence, gender is based on typically ideological arguments meant to widen the gap



between men and women. The internalized gender binarism has been imposed by a dogmatic patriarchal society that has worked to downgrade women. This philosophy is clearly illustrated in *The Passion of New Eve*, through Evelyn's embodiment of the patriarchal role while exercising his metaphorical colonial violence on Leilah. The beginning of the novel displays the traditional ideological view of gender which professes the binary and inflexible essence of gender.

Abandoning Leilah to face her destiny, Evelyn embarks on a new journey to discover the desert where he is totally lost. "I am lost, quite lost in the middle of the desert [...] I have found a landscape that matches the landscape of my heart" (Carter 2012, p. 70). The desert symbolizes sterility and death which foreshadow the end of Evelyn's manhood. Even nature seems to conspire against Evelyn in order to take revenge upon him and pay tribute to Leilah. The natural setting is worthy of attention, taking into account its allegorical implications.

At the point in time when I set eyes on that broken pillar in the heart of the desert, the thread of my life snapped in two. I'd never be, again, as I was when I'd see it first. I'd find myself, once I'd seen it, at the mercy of a cruel and circular logic that did not operate in terms of this world. (Carter, 2012, p. 74)

Kidnapped by Mother in the land of Beulah, Evelyn feels remorse for his misdeeds. He senses the loss of his previous identity under the mythic and technological power of Mother. He notices his frail masculine position in front of the almighty force of his kidnapper. "Enforced feminisation is a punishment for Evelyn's misogyny and sexual abuse of women" (Roberts, 2023, p. 245). At this level, the powerful masculine gender is questioned vis a vis the mythic potential of Mother who presides over "Beulah, the place where contrarities exist together" (Carter, 2012, p. 45). As if through divine retribution, Evelyn's masculine position is minimized in front of Mother's monstrous female power. Studying both characters, the gender power reversal is conspicuous at this level of the narrative.

## **II. New Eve: A female body with a male gender identity**

Carter's reliance on myth, technology and medicine to deconstruct the binary gender and manifest its ideological roots is a typical postmodern feminist attempt to achieve gender equality. The character of Mother combines masculinity, femininity, myth, science and technology. As is the norm with most of Carter's novels, she designs an extraordinary female character who supersedes patriarchal power. Describing her, Evelyn says:

the woman who calls herself the Great Parricide, also glories in the title of Grand Emasculator; ecstasy their only anesthetic the priests of Cybele sheared off their parts to exalt her, ran bleeding, psalmodising, crazed through the streets. [...] Mother has made herself into an incarnated deity; she has quite transformed her flesh, she has undergone a painful metamorphosis of the entire body and become the abstraction of a natural principle. She is also a great scientist who makes extraordinary experiments and I was destined to become the subject of one of them. (Carter, 2012, p. 46)

In line with these statements, Mother represents the New Woman who breaks the chains of the patriarchal prison and debunks gender binarism. She personifies God, by managing a whole city where she forces Evelyn to undergo a transgender operation. She is a mixture of mythic characteristics, scientific progress and female and male traits. She stands as an emblem of the flexibility and fluidity of gender identities, stressing the success and limitations, as well, of medical physical and psychosurgery. Mother stands for the new woman who goes through the metamorphosis of female liberation movements and ends by acquiring her freedom and gender equality. The characterization of Mother debunks the powerful masculine image of Evelyn who ends up being imprisoned and controlled by a female figure. His masculine gender beliefs are shaken in front of Mother's mixed gender. She is both masculine and feminine at the same time, designed to transcend gender boundaries. Evelyn is imprisoned within Mother's highly technological advanced city where he forcibly undergoes transgender surgery to become a woman. Mother, as her name indicates, is Leilah's mother who takes revenge upon Evelyn for degrading women including her daughter. The writer provides another pertinent example of gender fluidity through the character of Mother who bears all the characteristics related to masculine gender. Evelyn acknowledges the unnatural aspect of his masculine gender, concluding that he is "not natural" (Carter 2012, p. 46). What Carter tends to foreground is the unnatural and ideological essence of gender. This postmodern feminist tenet is transmitted through the masculine character himself who admits the fake grandeur of his gender, upon realizing Mother's strength. Evelyn's submission to Mother's medical interventions ascertains the canonical definition of gender. "Carter plays with the notion of femininity being man-made [...] by demonstrating how Eve's new female body is actually woman-made, having been sculptured by a female surgeon, who turns out to be Mother" (Roberts, 223, p. 239). The surgeries prove to be successful and yield Eve, the female version of Evelyn. However, the

psychosurgeries that are meant to penetrate his mindset and soul fail to change his gender from masculine to feminine. The medical process he undergoes gives grounds to the dogmatic attribute of gender. The fact that he lives through a rebirth stage affirms the fluid nature of gender mainly following the absence of the social role in shaping gender identity. As is stated in the novel: “Except a Man Die and be born Again He May Not Enter the kingdom of heaven” (Carter, 2012, p. 28). The masculine rebirth represents the belief in gender equality and the fluid nature of the phenomenon of gender as a whole. With the help of medical surgeries and technological advancements, Mother aspires to stop patriarchal atrocity by moulding Evelyn into Eve, thereby liberating him from ideological gender construction. In this vein, she declares: “I am the great Parricide, I am the Castratrix of the Phallogentric Universe, I am Mama, Mama, Mama!” (ibid., p. 67). The New Mother is armed with technological and medical innovations that clearly discern the distinction between sex and gender. Though Evelyn’s transgender surgery comes as a punishment for his contempt for women, Carter employs his character as a prototype of a successful sexual surgery rather than an effective gendered psychosurgery.

Gender proves to be fluid, destabilizing and beyond the medical scope, in contradistinction to the sexual identity which could be altered successfully. “A change in the appearance will restructure the essence, [...] Psycho-surgery, Mother calls it. I moaned softly but Sophia heard me. She was angry with me because I did not want to be turned into a woman” (ibid., p. 65). To ensure the success of the transgender process, Sophia, one of Mother’s daughters in Beulah, subjects Evelyn to psychosurgery to alter his masculine gender identity, paving the way for his new female appearance. However, the psychosurgery fails to alter his gender identity, taking into consideration the latter’s intangible aspect. Evelyn loses self-physical control in the wake of Mother’s medical and technological power but secures his inner gender specification. Throughout the narrative, Carter discerns sexual identification from its gendered equivalent, endeavouring to reveal the inadequacy of medicine to control the latter on account of its ideological essence. Reminiscing on the process of psychosurgery, Evelyn avers: But the psychological aspect of the psycho-surgery did not use only Tristessa as its instrument. Now my cell was never silent; I recall particularly three video-tape sequences designed to assist me to adjust to my new shape. One consisted of reproductions of, I should think, every single Virgin and Child that had ever been painted in the entire history of Western European art. [...] There was also a video-tape intended, I think, to subliminally instil the maternal instinct itself. (ibid., p.72)

To ensure the medical success of the transgender surgery, Mother submits Evelyn to images of female reproduction and visions of motherhood paving the way for his new position as a woman. The psychological metamorphosis arrives short of Mother's expectations, since Evelyn dissents against appropriating the female gender and sticks to his masculine one in contrast with his new woman's physical appearance. Trestessa has been his adored star since his adolescence without knowing her original male identity. Mother deploys the case of Trestessa to convince Evelyn of the success of transgender surgery and to assist him in accepting his new gender identity. The different steps of psychosurgery aim to alleviate Evelyn's physical pain and to push him to internalize his newly-compelled gender identity. Following his transgender surgery, Evelyn starts contemplating his/her fluid status: "But 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" (ibid., p. 74). His speech bears profound philosophical meaning connoting the impenetrable gender identity that he still preserves, albeit his newly acquired female appearance. The fact of recognizing his inner masculine gender despite the outer female look is a confirmation that gender identity is beyond medical control. As such Evelyn concludes: "the psycho-programming had not been entirely successful" (ibid., p.72). Evelyn stands as the mouthpiece of the writer who ironically deconstructs the medical claim to be entirely in control of gender identification. The latter is constructed within specific social, political, cultural, religious and even ecological contexts which work all along the individual's life to intervene and combine to shape his/her identity. His response to his newly transformed female body is the following: "they had turned me into the *Playboy* center fold. I was the object of all the unfocused desires that ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy. And-how can I put it – the cock in my head, still twitched at the sight of myself" (ibid., p. 75). Evelyn's post-operative reaction is still a masculine one towards his newly created naked female body. His male sexual arousal is still the same, though this time towards his own female fetishised body. This is a proof of his deeply internalized male and misogynist gender identity which is beyond surgical intervention. "Evelyn/Eve's fetishistic post-operative reaction at the sight in a mirror of his/her newly created naked body as sex object is to experience the same erotic male impulse as that aroused by a pornographic image marketed for men" (Roberts, 2023, p. 246). Hence, the medical success is limited to the sexual and physical outward form rather than the inner gender identity. The partial failure of Evelyn's transgender mutation is a backlash against the medical field with its genetic engineering, avowing the ascendancy over human birth and gender identities. Evelyn asserts his newly imposed female sex and internalized masculine

gender at the same time, as he says: “I was literally in two minds; my transformation was both perfect and imperfect. All of New Eve’s experience came through two channels of sensation, her own fleshly ones and his mental ones” (Carter, 2012, p. 71). Hence, the physical transgender surgery is successful in yielding Eve while the inner mental mechanism is still dominated by Evelyn’s masculine gender. Evelyn’s transgender process is meant to punish his misogynist attitude towards Leilah. Experiencing womanhood obliges him to deeply reconsider his past mistreatment of women and to believe in gender equality. The use of “her” to denote the body and “his” for the mental world of Evelyn is very telling and corroborate the distinction between the sexual identity and the gendered one. Evelyn’s testimony, also, confirms medicine’s failure to command human gender identity as a whole. “I knew that, in spite of Sophia’s training in Beulah, I would often make a gesture with my hands that was out of Eve’s character or exclaim with a subtly male inflection that made them raise their eyebrows” (ibid., p.71). Though the process of becoming a woman needs constant psychosurgical therapy, Evelyn’s transgender surgery is considered unsuccessful, in view of his deeply rooted masculine gender identity. At this level, we can maintain the incomplete success of the psychosurgeries that have been exercised on Evelyn with a minute medical description that tends to challenge the medical sphere. Nevertheless, the success of the physical surgeries and Evelyn’s heading towards femaleness is a backlash against rigid patriarchal gender binarism and claim of the naturalness of gender identities. Referring back to Butler’s words: “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself” (Butler, 1990, p.137). Although, gender is imitative and culturally implemented, one cannot discard the fact that the process of psychotherapy has not been entirely achieved. Evelyn still feels his prior gender identity as male; even though his physical body is entirely that of a woman. As he concludes:

But 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 2012, p.74)

The physical female Eve contradicts the inner male Evelyn. This proves the fluidity of gender identities regardless of the rigid gender binarism set by the patriarchal system. Besides, Evelyn’s resistance to the psychosurgeries comes as Carter’s critique of the feminist claim of the utter victory of transgender surgery. Evelyn’s case proves that gender identity is by no

means restricted to physical outward form, since he preserves his socially and ideologically constructed masculine gender identity despite the excessive and intensified psychosurgeries. Carter's parodic portrayal of Mother's highly sophisticated clinic, where she exercises her first transgender surgery on Eve, is deconstructive of the patriarchal order and parodic, at the same time, of medicine's claim to manage gender identities.

Unlike Carter's previous novels, *The Passion of New Eve* foregrounds various feminist postmodern tenets. Carter's narrative is a mixture of a parodic representation of the multiplicity of gender identities, a deconstructive analysis of the patriarchal claim of gender binarism, and the book incorporates a thorough study of the ideological roots of gender identity. What the writer stresses within her postmodern gender study is the partial failure of the medical claim to determine human gender identity, as is conveyed through the unavailing psychosurgery. Above all, it is crucial to stress Carter's inclination towards diversity, variety and difference rather than rigidity and strict binary divisions.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* provides a profound critique of rigid gender binaries and the ideological constructs underpinning them. By presenting Evelyn's forced transformation into Eve, Carter not only challenges patriarchal norms but also underscores the fluidity and complexity of gender identity, which defies simplistic biological categorization. His transgender process results in his gender awareness, after experiencing womanhood and going through the pains he previously inflicted on Leilah.

Carter's speculative narrative envisions the limitations of medical and technological interventions in altering deeply ingrained gender ideologies. The failure of Evelyn's psychosurgery despite his successful physical surgery points out the deficiency of medicine in being able to manipulate gender identity, despite its claims to the contrary. Though the medical field can control sexual identity, it partially fails to dominate gender specification. Through the character of Mother and the symbolic landscape of Beulah, Carter visualizes a world where traditional gender roles are deconstructed, and new forms of identity can emerge. The fact of going through both manhood and womanhood forces Evelyn to believe in gender equality and to feel remorse for his previous misogynist treatment of Leilah. Nonetheless, we should not ignore Carter's parodic criticism of extremist feminism and dogmatic gender critics. This exploration contributes significantly to contemporary gender theory by highlighting the socio-cultural and political dimensions of gender, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced

understanding of identity beyond binary oppositions. As such, Carter's work remains a key reference in feminist literature and gender studies, encouraging ongoing discourse and critical examination of the forces that shape our perceptions of gender.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Psychosurgery, the treatment of psychosis or other mental disorders by means of brain surgery. The first such technique was developed by a Portuguese neurologist, António Egas Moniz, and was first performed by his colleague, Almeida Lima, in 1935. The procedure, called lobotomy or prefrontal. (<https://www.britannica.com/science/psychosurgery>)

<sup>2</sup> Sex and gender divide the human species into broadly two divisions. Whereas sex as it is understood biologically is an invariant dichotomy common to the entire human race, gender is the cultural conceptualization of sex which is largely understood as a symbolic category which contains within its gamut, the relationship between the sexes. Biologically or genetically sex differences are caused by a difference in chromosomal composition. [...] It is manifested in physical differences of the reproductive organs and some overt physical manifestations in shape and size of body, growth pattern of body hair etc [...] Gender constitutes what any human society understands as male and female. (Channa, 2013, p. 35)

<sup>3</sup> The Fall of Man, in Christian doctrine, the descent of humanity from a state of innocence lived in the presence of God to a sinful world of misery and death. After disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden and cursed in various ways. According to the Christian concept of original sin, Adam's guilt was transmitted to all of humanity; only the death and resurrection of Jesus could erase the stain of Adam's disobedience. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fall-of-Man>)

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*Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse*  
*English Department*  
*Sousse University*  
*Tunisia*  
*wimaksousse@yahoo.fr*