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**Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* is a novel that parodies primitive notions of gender, sexual difference, and identity from a post-feminist perspective.**

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Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) is a provocative postmodern novel that challenges and parodies essentialist notions of gender, sexual difference, and identity. The novel is set in a surreal dystopian America; the narrative follows Evelyn, a man who is forcibly transformed into a woman named Eve—a transformation that serves as a key device for Carter to challenge rigid gender binaries and reveal the artificial nature of identity. The protagonist's forced transformation from man to woman serves as a central device in Carter's deconstruction of gender. Evelyn is surgically altered by Mother, the leader of a matriarchal society, into the ideal woman. This act parodies both patriarchal fantasies and radical feminist essentialism. "Mother had had me reared as Eve, the new woman, the future" (Carter, 71). This transformation mocks both the patriarchal objectification of women and the radical feminist tendency to define women through mythic, universalist terms. By placing Evelyn in a female body and subjecting him to gendered violence and objectification, Carter compels the reader to confront the performative and imposed aspects of gender.

At the heart of the novel is the transformation of Evelyn into Eve—a grotesque and symbolic process that deconstructs gender as a fixed category. Evelyn, initially portrayed as a detached, misogynistic academic, undergoes a forced sex reassignment surgery orchestrated by a matriarchal figure known as Mother. The transformation is not framed as a liberating rebirth but rather as an ideological reprogramming. Carter uses this radical bodily intervention to suggest that gender is not an innate, biological essence but rather a performance imposed by cultural and ideological forces. As Eve reflects, "Although I was a woman, I was now also passing for a woman, but, then, many women born spend their whole lives in just such imitations" (101). This passage underscores Carter's alignment with post-feminist and proto-queer theory ideas, emphasizing how femininity itself is a performance, not an essence.

From the forced transformation of Evelyn into Eve to the satirical portrayal of Mother's all-female commune, Carter challenges the reader to reconsider the very foundations of gender identity. The novel suggests that gender is not innate or fixed but rather something constructed, performed, and often imposed. By doing so, *The Passion of New Eve* complicates both patriarchal and feminist narratives, offering instead a vision of identity as fluid, contingent, and shaped by power.



Throughout the novel, Carter emphasizes the fluid and performative nature of gender. Eve's journey is not one of transformation into a woman but of being forced to occupy various gendered roles—lover, object, mother, messiah. Each is shown to be socially constructed and unstable. This ambiguity reflects a post-feminist understanding of identity as constantly shifting, unfixed, and shaped by context. Carter denies the reader the comfort of a stable resolution—Eve does not become a "real" woman nor return to her former self. Instead, the novel ends in a state of liminality, resisting closure and binary categorization.

Carter's novel aligns with Judith Butler's later theory of gender performativity, suggesting that gender is not an innate identity but a series of culturally enforced performances. Eve, after her transformation, reflects, "I was tense and preoccupied; although I was a woman, I was now also passing for a woman, but, then, many women born spend their whole lives in just such imitations" (101).

Besides criticizing patriarchy, the novel also questions extreme feminist utopias. Mother's society, which seeks to construct a universal female identity, mirrors the authoritarianism it claims to oppose. Carter's portrayal of Mother and the all-female community in the desert serves as a sharp parody of radical feminist utopias. Mother represents a grotesque embodiment of the feminist desire to reclaim female autonomy from male domination. However, rather than creating a space of liberation, Mother's domain becomes one of control and surgical intervention, enforcing an idealized model of femininity. Carter critiques the dangers of essentialist feminism by showing that the enforcement of a "true womanhood" by women themselves can become as authoritarian as patriarchal control. In this way, *The Passion of New Eve* critiques ideological rigidity from all directions, emphasizing post-feminism's skepticism toward universalizing claims about gender. This disturbing statement emphasizes how even feminist ideologies can become oppressive when they rely on rigid definitions of identity. The novel also parodies sexual mythologies through characters like Leilah, the exoticized seductress, and Zero, the prophet of a violent, hyper-masculine cult. These figures are exaggerated symbols that critique the cultural narratives shaping gender and sexuality.

Throughout the novel, Carter highlights how identity is unstable and constantly shifting. Eve's journey is not a quest to become a "real woman," but rather an exploration of how all identities are constructed. Positioned in a liminal space, Eve embodies a form of identity that is fluid, open to change, and defies fixed labels.

The character of Tristessa adds another dimension to Carter's exploration of gender by illustrating the collapse of binary identities and exposing gender as a constructed illusion. Tristessa, a celebrated Hollywood star admired for her beauty and femininity, is later revealed to be biologically male—a twist presented not with shock but with irony. This moment underscores how femininity has always been a stylized, cinematic performance rather than an innate truth. Like Eve, Tristessa embodies an identity that is crafted, performative, and deeply symbolic. Through such reversals, Carter anticipates modern discussions of gender fluidity and queer identity.

Throughout *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter draws extensively on myth, biblical allusions, and archetypal figures to reveal how gender is mythologized and culturally constructed. Characters such as



Leilah (later revealed as Lilith), Mother (the Earth Goddess), and Eve (named after the biblical first woman) function less as individuals and more as exaggerated embodiments of cultural fantasies about femininity. By placing these figures in surreal, grotesque, and often absurd contexts, Carter parodies the traditional narratives that have historically shaped perceptions of womanhood.

Eve's symbolic rebirth in a cave, her journey through deserts and catacombs, and her eventual pregnancy evoke religious and mythological motifs. However, Carter deliberately strips these symbols of their redemptive or transcendent meaning. Instead, they highlight the cyclical and performative nature of identity—always in flux, never fixed or essential. Her use of allegory becomes a satirical tool to critique the patriarchal systems that perpetuate rigid gender roles.

Influenced by fairy tales, mythology, and gothic literature, Carter engages the darker, more subversive aspects of these genres to challenge conventional gender norms. In *The Passion of New Eve*, myth becomes a vehicle for irony and satire: creation stories, maternal archetypes, and romantic rituals are all reimagined through a grotesque and queered lens. One notable example is her inversion of the traditional wedding ceremony, through which Carter exposes and dismantles the binary logic at the core of Western constructions of gender and sexuality. These moments reinforce the novel's central commitment to destabilizing the narratives that falsely naturalize gender.

Gender and identity are central allegorical elements in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*. The protagonist, Evelyn, undergoes a forced sex-change operation and becomes Eve, a transformation that symbolizes the fluidity of gender and the potential to transcend rigid, traditional gender roles. This bodily metamorphosis underscores Carter's assertion that gender is a social construct rather than an innate truth tied to biological sex. The novel, written as a dark satire, parodies reductive and essentialist ideas of gender, sexual difference, and identity, engaging these issues from a distinctly postfeminist perspective.

In addition to exploring gender, *The Passion of New Eve* critiques broader systems of power and control, particularly those linked to race and patriarchy. Carter uses allegory to expose the inherent flaws and limitations within traditional societal structures while simultaneously imagining the possibility of a more fluid, inclusive, and transformative world.

Transformation—both physical and psychological—is one of the novel's most dominant themes. Evelyn's journey toward becoming Eve symbolizes not only personal change but also a deeper societal shift, where long-standing power dynamics and gender hierarchies are questioned and redefined. The character of Mother further embodies this theme, representing a radical vision of a new world order—one that seeks to eliminate male dominance and reshape the foundations of gender and power entirely.

Angela Carter resists idealizing womanhood or proposing a singular feminist doctrine in *The Passion of New Eve*. Instead, she critiques both patriarchal and feminist tendencies to essentialize gender, presenting identity as fragmented, performative, and ever-changing. Her narrative anticipates the insights of later feminist and queer theorists, particularly Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. Through irony, parody, and myth, Carter exposes how both masculinity and femininity



are socially constructed performances, encouraging readers to interrogate the ideological forces that shape identity.

Eve's surreal journey, marked by encounters with grotesque and mythological figures, becomes a vehicle for dismantling the cultural narratives that define and confine individuals. Carter's postfeminist critique not only targets patriarchal dominance but also questions rigid feminist utopias, positioning the novel as a prescient and forward-thinking work. It champions ambiguity, multiplicity, and transformation as necessary tools for liberation, warning against the dangers of fixed ideologies.

*The Passion of New Eve* remains strikingly relevant today. Its examination of gender, identity, and power dynamics resonates in contemporary debates surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, gender nonconformity, and systemic inequality. Carter's portrayal of a fractured, dystopian society in which competing ideologies clash mirrors the tensions present in today's sociopolitical climate. The novel's exploration of sadomasochism and the politics of domination also continues to speak to ongoing discussions about the structures of power in personal and societal relationships.

Most notably, the protagonist's forced gender transition offers a powerful lens through which to consider the complexities of gender identity and the experience of those who exist outside traditional gender norms. Carter's vision remains both provocative and vital, urging us to question, rather than accept, the stories we are told about who we are.

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