

## Quest For Self-Awareness In Angela Carter's Novel *Love*

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**Abstract:** The Proposed paper entitled Quest for self-awareness in Angela Carter's Novel *Love*, tends to bring out the notion that Angela carter's Protagonists in *Love* is a woman who undergoes various manifestations, basically concentrating on the three facets that a woman deals with in order to tread on the quest for self-awareness. The narrative centres on the intricate and detrimental relationships among the principal characters: a psychologically ill woman, her charismatic husband, and his unpredictable sibling. Carter frequently examines themes of familial relationships and the influence of authoritative parents in her writings. Although *Love* does not focus on a maternal figure, the emotional detachment and alienation faced by the protagonists may mirror their wider familial and societal connections. The role of a mother which proves her existence and the relationship of mother and child is important. Also, a final point is the relevance of gaze, which suggests that the gaze or stare of woman appears eventually by the narrative's concluding section. Additionally, they help to highlight how traditionally fairy tales portray men and women in a stereotyped manner, with the primary protagonist that is the female counterpart being a passive person with no agency or power whilst the main feature being her beauty.

**Keywords:** *Love*, sexuality, motherhood, gazing, Angela Carter, feminism.

### I. INTRODUCTION :

For a very long time, fairy tales have served as a part of daily existence and childhood. They act as a sort of manual for kids, teaching them how to behave like men and women. Throughout history, women have mostly been responsible for nurturing children, hence they have also been the ones who tell stories. But it's crucial to remember that for decades these designated "old wives' tales" were only told orally; it wasn't until much later that "Charles Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, and other compilers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transposed oral folk tales into fairy tales" (Mary Kaiser 1994, 30). The trend of telling the tales in a feminine mode was passed on from one generation to another and till date this hierarchy is in the hands of the females but the publishing sector has taken over this prowess in the authoritative regime of the male patriarchy where the tales have taken a different perspective.

### DISCUSSION

The publishing sector also highlights the stereotypical portrayal of women and men in conventional fairy tales, typically illustrating heroines as passive, devoid of genuine power or agency, whose primary attribute is their beauty, in contrast to vile women—evil stepparents and aged witches—who are, in reality, influential and possess authority, an attribute these narratives instruct girls to eschew. They also convey detrimental signals regarding sexuality, the dynamics among women, and the characteristics of an archetypal 'genuine' male. In accordance with

Jackie Morris, "stories that live for thousands of years, handed from storyteller to audience over time, mouth to ears to heart to head, should change to fit the modern world" (par. 8). Angela Carter's 1979 narrative collection, *The Bloody Chamber*, has ten reimagined fairy tales. Carter employs many strategies to reinterpret familiar narratives, whilst engaging with intertextuality. Similarly, in her work *Love* also justifies the narration in a very artistic manner which leaves a deep impression in the psyche of the readers. They also address topics that were traditionally overlooked or exclusively examined from a masculine perspective. According to Seda Arikan (2016), Carter was among the feminine authors who "started to decode the latent meanings in texts narrated by ruling sexist male ideology and to retell some earlier writings from the female point of view" (118). The paper explicitly examines how the evolution of the mother-daughter connection contributed to the heroine's path of self-discovery throughout the narrative. Furthermore, the paper tends to examine the depiction of sexuality and the evolution of the heroine's perspective on it throughout the narrative. Further, the paper tends to investigate the behavior of gazing and its accompanying power dynamics. At analysing all phases that comprise the heroine's journey, I assert that at the conclusion of the narrative, the heroine has cultivated a distinct female perspective that enables her to assume an identity of authority and transcend the stereotypes imposed on women by a culture that is patriarchal.

Angela Carter, a British author and feminist, often explored the concept of the male gaze in her work. The male gaze refers to the way women are perceived and represented through a masculine perspective, often objectifying and sexualizing them. Carter's writing challenged this notion by subverting traditional gender roles and power dynamics. In her fiction, she employed magical realism, fantasy, and horror elements to critique patriarchal norms and create new, empowered female characters. Some notable works by Carter that address the male gaze includes, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) which is a collection of dark, feminist retellings of classic fairy tales; *The Sadeian Woman* (1978) is a critical analysis of the Marquis de Sade's work and its implications for feminist thought, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) - a novel featuring a strong, winged female protagonist who defies conventional gender expectations. Carter's work continues to influence feminist literature and theory, offering powerful counter-narratives to the dominant male gaze. Angela Carter's novel *Love* (1971) is a complex exploration of the quest for self-awareness, particularly in the context of gender roles, relationships, and identity. Here are some key aspects like Fragmented narrative whereby the novel's non-linear structure reflects the fragmented nature of the protagonist's, Ann's, psyche, mirroring her search for self-awareness; Identity formation whereby Ann's journey is a struggle to define herself beyond societal expectations and her relationships with men, embodying the quest for self-awareness; Gender roles which means that Carter critiques traditional gender roles, highlighting the limitations and constraints they impose on individuals, especially women; further discussing about Ann's relationships with her husband, Lee, and her lover, John, serve as catalysts for her self-discovery, forcing her to confront her desires, needs, and sense of self; thereupon Ann's feelings of alienation and disconnection from herself, others, and society underscore the difficulties of achieving self-awareness in a world that often seeks to define and constrain individuals; Ann's downward spiral of self-destruction can be seen as a necessary step towards transformation and ultimately, self-awareness. Here are some quotes from Angela Carter's novel *Love* (1971) related to female self-discovery and self-awareness, "I was a mere appendage to his desire, a mere receptacle for his lust." (p. 23) Through her protagonist, Annabel, Angela Carter brilliantly examines the difficulties of self-awareness in *Love*. Some critics claim that Annabel's journey is sometimes fractured and without apparent ending, mirroring Carter's own ambivalence about the concept of a fixed self. "I was a ghost, a shadow, a mere reflection of his own ego." (p. 45). Others argue that Carter's mix of magical reality and the surrealist movement while original, can mask the transparency of Annabel's inner problems, making it difficult for readers to trust completely in her journey for self-awareness. "I was a woman, a thing, a chattel, a piece of property." (p. 89). Furthermore, some critics argue that Carter's depiction of Annabel's interactions with males, notably with her spouse Lee, reinforces rather than undermines patriarchal standards, potentially diminishing Annabel's agency in pursuing her discovering themselves. "I had become a shell, a husk, a mere simulacrum of a human being, and I knew it." (p. 67) And further reiterates that, "I was a woman, a thing, a chattel, a piece of property." (p. 89) Despite these critiques, many feel that Carter's book remains a fascinating investigation of identity fluidity and self-awareness fragmentation, providing a subtle and thought-provoking perspective on the human journey. "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my heart was moved with a species of self-pity." (p. 101) "I had to become myself, to find my own identity, my own self." (p. 201). The quotes capture the protagonist Ann's journey of self-discovery, as she navigates the complexities of love, relationships, and identity. Carter's inclusion of the mother's experience and the different stages connected to it is especially significant:

I tenderly imagined how, at this very moment, my mother would be moving slowly about the narrow bedroom I had left behind forever, folding up and putting away all my little relics, the tumbled garments I would not need any more, the scores for which there had been no room in my trunks, the concert programmes I'd abandoned; she would linger over this torn ribbon and that faded photograph with all the half-joyous, half-sorrowful emotions of a woman on her daughter's wedding day. (Carter 1993, 1)

The second aspect to consider when analysing the heroine's journey of self-discovery is how her relationship towards sexuality changes as the story progresses. Arikan (2016), in her essay entitled "*Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber: A Feminist Stylistic Approach*", discusses the importance of a female writer taking back control over the discourse about sexuality, especially female sexuality, that is inherent in traditional fairy tales. Even though these messages are usually disguised in the original versions, conveyed through metaphors or word associations, considering fairy tales "have the significant effect to reflect the background of a society, and also to contribute to the creation of a collective unconscious" (Arikan 2016, 118), meaning they and the values communicated through them are "known and even internalized by many people" (118), Carter's refreshing approach is very much needed to provide a different point of view. In this paper, my focus will be on how she uses language to question ideas about sexuality that our patriarchal society has accepted as the norm, as well as how female and male sexuality are presented in the story. "I was a mere spectator of my own life, a mere bystander." (p. 123) "I had to find my own way, my own voice, my own language." (p. 145)

In order to discuss about the male gaze from Angela Carter's works, in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), "He looked at me with a gaze that was both tender and predatory." (p. 51) and "I felt his eyes on me like a hand." (p. 123) and in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), "My father's eyes, those eyes that had always seen me as a mere reflection of himself." (p. 12) and "The Marquis's gaze, that gaze which undressed me, stripped me bare." (p. 35). In Carter's non-fictional work *The Sadeian Woman* (1978) the quotes are thus: "The male gaze is a gaze of desire, but also a gaze of domination." (p. 137) and "The woman is always the object, never the subject, of the gaze." (p. 142). To quote the work of *Nights at the Circus* (1984) the quotes are: "The gaze of the audience, that collective gaze, was like a weight on my skin." (p. 215) and "I felt his eyes on me, like a touch, a caress." (p. 278)

Carter also addresses the topic of female sexuality. Throughout history, female sexuality has always been seen as something demonic, something not to be discussed. Very early, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, women and female sexuality were associated with demons and the devil. An influential church father, Tertullian, claimed that women are "the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree" (qtd. in Miles 2008, 28). Later, in the Victorian period, the 'angel in the house' ideal was widespread, and women had to be seen and behave as saint-like, chaste women. In the words of John Ruskin (1865), for example, women were described as "enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise" (149). It was around the 1970s, at the time of the Second Wave of Feminism which, in part, focused on sexual liberation and "redefining women's sexuality" (Anne Enke 2003, 637), that these topics started to come to the forefront. Although some things have changed since the 1970s, I believe Carter's portrayal of female sexuality has many layers and is relevant even today, decades later.

First of all, she does not deny that the heroine is interested in experiencing "white-hot passion" (Carter 1993, 10) and that she is curious about sex: "I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him" (24). At the same time, she also manages to "break the ideological link between sex and romance" (Sheets 1991, 641). We learn early on that the heroine does not love the Marquis, yet she still experiences physical attraction: "my heightened, excited senses told me he was awake and gazing at me" (Carter 1993, 12). Granting women the opportunity to embrace their sexuality, and breaking away from the double standard that still exists between men and women when it comes to sex and desire is crucial in itself; however, in my opinion, there is another, perhaps more important aspect of this that one has to consider: how the heroine herself reacts to her feelings. The way I see it, she seems to have rather conflicted emotions about how her body reacts.

Annabel, in the novel *Love*, over the course of her journey of self-discovery, the heroine experiences her sexuality first according to the expectations held up to women, by learning to enjoy her objectification, but later, as she evolves as a person, she develops tools to deviate from this and take back control over her own body and what happens to it.

Besides tackling the controversial matter of female sexuality, Carter also calls attention to the problems of masculinity and male sexuality widely accepted by society. "I had to break free from the prison of his desire, from the prison of his gaze." (p. 189)

The third aspect important for the heroine's journey of self-discovery is gazing. An objectifying male gaze is ever-

present throughout the story. My argument is that, at the culmination of the heroine's journey presented in the story, she learns to 'look back', developing a female gaze that grants her agency and is crucial for the outcome of the story. Laura Mulvey (1999) wrote extensively about visual pleasure and the male gaze in her essay entitled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", claiming that "looking itself is a source of pleasure" (835), and it is "essentially active" (835). Traditionally, it is a man who is the gazer, the one who looks, and a woman is the one being looked at. Moreover, gazing usually comes with a sense of power and is often connected to sex and desire. The male as the onlooker is an active participant while the woman is seen as an object, "simultaneously looked at and displayed" (837) as a source of pleasure for the man. This type of gazing is very much present in *The Bloody Chamber*: "his eyes, dark and motionless as those eyes the ancient Egyptians painted upon their sarcophagi, fixed upon me. I felt a certain tension in the pit of my stomach, to be so watched, in such silence"

(Carter 1993, 12). This is reinforced by the roles inherent in the traditional direction of gazing:

"men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession" (Kaplan 1983, 42).

Nevertheless, the fact that it is the heroine's words, her description we read, suggests that she is aware of how she is perceived, and she seems to have a deep understanding of the reasons behind it. Since there is power in knowledge, I would argue that the fact that we read these objectifying descriptions from a female point of view serves to lessen their effect and the power position that these sentences are supposed to describe. Thus, by using the words and expressions we associate with how men think of and see women, the heroine takes away some of that power and attempts to create an equilibrium.

## CONCLUSION

Further, the novel *Love's* ambiguous ending, leaving Ann's fate uncertain, reflects the ongoing nature of the quest for self-awareness, suggesting that true understanding of oneself is always provisional and context-dependent. Through *Love*, Carter masterfully explores the complexities and challenges of the quest for self-awareness, inviting readers to reflect on their own identities, relationships, and place within society. Sexuality and sexual liberation were heavily debated topics at the time Carter wrote the short story collection. Besides openly discussing female desire and sexuality, she also points out how damaging traditional depictions and therefore expectations of sexuality can be, both when it comes to men and women. With the help of metaphors and the language she uses, she allows the heroine to gain some power in spite of her reduced role as someone to be objectified. Finally, while the traditional direction and power relation connected to the male gaze are, without a doubt, present in the story, my argument is that, with the help of mirrors and other sensory organs, Carter presents a kind of female gaze as well; a position of power for the woman that helps her 'look back', leave behind the societal constraints imposed on women, and continue her journey of self-discovery.

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