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Feminist Subversion in *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Passion of  
New Eve* by Angela Carter

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

From a world where the idea of gender has become increasingly problematic emerged writers who exposed gender as an artificial construct with arbitrary modes of behaviour assigned at one's moment of birth. These writers used fiction as a vehicle for gender subversion, placing their ideas and thought-experiments in utopian or dystopian alternative worlds, thus providing their commentary on the issues and problems in our own world.

In this thesis, two such novels will be analyzed – *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Passion of New Eve* by Angela Carter. Both novels deal with gender, sexuality and identity in their own way. *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Passion of New Eve* emerged from the context of the second-wave feminism, and although Le Guin was slow to react and align herself with the feminists, both writers produced novels which are undoubtedly important for the feminist movement. The first part of the thesis will closely examine Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, placing it in the context of the women in science fiction and observing how, through ignoring women writers and characters, it became an important genre for women writers to express their discontent with the patriarchal culture. The analysis of the novel itself will consist of a detailed approach to the storyline to see how Le Guin subverts gender constructs through her concept of androgyny. On the other hand, criticism of the book will also be provided to prove that Le Guin ultimately fails to utilise the full potential of gender subversion through androgyny. What might've resulted in the unearthing of pure "humanity" that lies beneath the artifice of femininity and masculinity in the end just results in reinforced patriarchy.

The second part of the thesis will deal with Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*. The first section will more closely examine the Gothic and grotesque elements which are prominent in the novel and important for further analysis because through the parodic use of

the Gothic and through shaping and carnivalizing grotesque bodies with blurred gender boundaries, Carter very effectively deals with question whether gender is a social construct or something that is innate. This is the main focus of the next section which provides a thorough analysis of Carter's storyline and the images of femininity, masculinity and the result of their mixing. However, this thesis will try to prove that, even though her novel explores much more radically the notion of gender than Le Guin does, Carter still does not give any answer beyond her conclusion that gender is indeed something that is performed. What lies beyond that or underneath that remains outside of Carter's reach. Therefore, Le Guin nor Carter provide an alternative for the problematic political dichotomy between male and female. They did, however, raise consciousness on issues of gender and sexual identity at the time when the novels were written, and they still do.

## 2. URSULA K. LE GUIN – THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

### 2.1. Women in Science Fiction

Science fiction serves as a platform for imagining social change. By creating alternative worlds set in alternative times where a human or an alien race is found in different social, political and historical conditions, authors are given the chance to provide commentary on what should be dealt with in our own world. It offers glimpses into perfect utopian societies but also dark dystopian ones, thus pointing to what society should strive for and/or get rid of. Pamela Annas, for this reason, considers SF to be “more useful than ‘mainstream’ fiction”:

(...) it allows idea to become flesh, abstraction to become concrete, imaginative extrapolation to become aesthetic reality. It allows the writer to

create and the reader to experience and recreate a new or transformed world based on a set of assumptions different from those we actually accept. It allows the reader, for a while, to be reborn into a reborn world. (145)

Sarah Lefanu adds to this by explaining that “SF offers a language for the narration of the dreams, for the dissolution of the self and for the interrogation of the cultural order” (23).

However, as a genre, science fiction is faced with certain difficulties concerning its definition, due to the fact that it has “mutated and shifted through definable evolutionary periods” (Bernardo and Murphy 13). Aldiss and Wingrove in *Trillion Year Spree* define it as “the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge” (27). Darko Suvin in his *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* relies on a position of distance that the reader assumes before venturing into reading while remaining conscious of the fact that he/she is still expected to make sense of that particular work of science fiction, which he defines as “literature of cognitive estrangement” (4). Le Guin agrees with this definition and states that “pulling back from ‘reality’ in order to see it better, is perhaps the essential gesture of science fiction. It is by distancing that science fiction achieves aesthetic joy, tragic tension, and moral cogency” (qtd. in Clarke 50) The key to reading science fiction novels and successfully achieving the distance is, according to Clarke, rational extrapolation “derived from the world as we know it; it should not break the laws of physics” (50). Samuel R. Delany in his essay “About Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Words” defines science fiction in the context of subjunctivity. Unlike journalism where the subjunctivity is “this happened”, or realist fiction where the subjunctivity is “this could have happened”, or fantasy where the subjunctivity is “this could not have happened”, the subjunctivity of science fiction is “this has not happened”, implying that it has not happened yet and that there is a possibility of it happening somewhere in the near or far future (qtd. in Bernardo and Murphy 14). Delany

speaks of the same thing as Joanna Russ does by calling science fiction “what if” literature: “[Science fiction] shows things not as they are but as they might be, and for this ‘might be’ the author must develop a rational, serious, consistent explanation, one that does not (in Samuel Delany’s phrase) offend against what is known to be known” (197).

Despite its progressive nature, science fiction was for a long time sealed off for women. Its audience was predominantly male as well as its writers and protagonists, while women in SF books were reduced to “props rather than characters when they appeared at all” (Annas 144-145). Annas further claims that the reason for this can be found, ironically, in the very revolutionary nature of science fiction. Women did not have a stable ground on which it would be possible to build “paradigms of an alternate vision of reality” (145). In order to do that, “she needs either a tradition into which she falls as a writer, or, more generally, as a member of a class, or she needs a community of some kind which shares enough of her basic assumptions” (Annas 145). Annas clarifies:

Either a tradition or a community is necessary in order to develop a dialectical awareness of oneself in relation to past and future. Clearly, if you feel you have no present alternatives and no future, you may put your stories into an ostensible future but you do not create significant alternative visions of reality. If what you see is that you are trapped with no way out, what you write is static fiction which explores and delineates the limited world in which you exist. (145)

In the 1940s and 50s, women indeed felt trapped inside a discourse of “feminine mystique” (Friedan) that defined them as not interested in anything but finding a husband, housework and raising children. Women tried to conform to the “ideal”, only to find themselves growing more and more dissatisfied with the requirements placed on them, or

rather, the lack of requirements. Their growing discontent was met with such “answers to the problem” that suggested love, inner help, more children, turning to religion and even a prohibition of admitting women to colleges and universities because “the education which girls could not use as housewives was more urgently needed than ever by boys to do the work of the atomic age” (Friedan 23). In the end, the “problem that has no name” was “dismissed by shrugging that there are no solutions: this is what being a woman means, and what is wrong with American women that they can’t accept their role gracefully?” (Friedan 24). Friedan goes on to remember how:

by the time I started writing for women’s magazines, in the fifties, it was simply taken for granted by editors (...) that women were not interested in politics, life outside the United States, national issues, art, science, ideas, adventure, education, or even their own communities, except where they could be sold through their emotions as wives and mothers. (50)

In short, women were discouraged from any intellectual activities, including writing science fiction.

Following that general sexist direction, the depiction of women in SF was that of “hapless victims, bimboids, wives patiently awaiting their husbands, breeders or witless crewmembers who caused disastrous problems” (Clarke 51). Le Guin remarks upon this:

In most science fiction until quite recently, women wither didn’t exist, or if they existed, they were these little stereotyped figures that squeaked...The society usually presented in stock classic science fiction is an extrapolation of great enterprise capitalism, or an extrapolation of the British Empire of the 1880s, and nothing further. There’s no Marxism; often there’s not even any democracy. This is American science fiction I’m talking about (...) American

imagination thinking about getting to another world. When they get there, they find a feudal society, they find an intergalactic empire exactly like the British Empire, or they find the Rotary Club. (315-316)

In such depicted worlds of the early science fiction, there was so room for any other female characters besides wives, victims and bimboids, and often there was no room at all. Sargent provides a commentary of this:

One can wonder why a literature that prides itself on exploring alternatives or assumptions counter to what we normally believe has not been more concerned with the roles of women in the future (...) Either science fiction is not as daring or original as some of its practitioners would like to believe (...) or this literature, designed to question our assumptions, cannot help reflecting how very deeply certain prejudices are engrained. (xv-xvi)

However, women's discontent started a spark of change that became more visible only by the beginning of the sixties. In the postwar world, women turned to science fiction because the new technoculture "hinged on what were then new understandings and representations of sex and gender", while SF in general "enabled people to explore their hopes and fears about the emergence of a technocultural world order" (Yaszek 4). SF author Judith Merrill states that, in the postwar atmosphere, science fiction was the "virtually the only vehicle of political dissent" (74).

## 2.2. Androgyny

Ursula Le Guin emerged in the sixties and revitalized the genre in the context of a new movement in science fiction – the New Wave, which was a British response to the American SF. In that period, Le Guin published *Rocannon's World* (1966), *Planet of Exile* (1966) and *City of Illusions*, which all paved the way for her Hainish cycle books, among which *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974) stand out the most and speak of her “mastery of the genre” (Clarke 57). Along with winning both the Nebula Award (1969) and the Hugo Award (1970), *The Left Hand of Darkness* was published at the height of second-wave feminist discourse in the 1970s, and embodied a lot of the problematic questions raised by feminist activists of the time, even though Le Guin admits her “late awakening”:

Briefly, I was slow and kind of stupid in some ways. This present wave of feminism started in the mid-60s. It was partly fuelled by the misogyny of the New Left. There's no doubt about that. Women found themselves pushed aside. The men were going to end the war and run everything. A lot of anger came out of that. I was slow to get in, but there began to be questions: What are men? What are women? Are there essential differences? (...) The book was a thought experiment. What if? What if there is no difference between men and women? Let's remove all possible biological and psychological differences and see what we've got". (Walsh and Le Guin 204)

Many feminist writers argued that Le Guin's thought experiment failed, in a sense that she only reiterated patriarchal values (Barr 113). Yet one element in *The Left Hand of Darkness* provides the most fertile ground to examine that assumption: the subversion of gender via androgyny.

In her 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf poses a question “whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness?” (147) She goes on explaining how “in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man’s brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman’s brain the woman predominates over the man” thus concluding that “the normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating” (147). A prevalent utopian image of the androgyne in the nineteenth century, according to Busst:

symbolized confidence in the future, if discontent with the present, and continuous progress towards the ideal, absolute perfection. It symbolised above all human solidarity, the brotherhood of man, the unity and continuity of generations and civilizations; and consequently charity, the sense of social justice, sympathy for the downtrodden, for all those who are oppressed, whether women or men. It represented too the original and fundamental goodness and purity of mankind, the transitoriness of sin and of all forms of evil, individual or social; and if not always sufficiently religious, in the accepted sense of the term, to symbolize the future restoration of a transfigured mankind to the presence of God, it nevertheless constantly represented man’s arrival in some sort of Paradise, sometime even the Paradise of universal industrialization or absolute social equality. (qtd. in Van Leeuwen 58-59)

The reason for this positive conception of androgyny in the nineteenth century lies in the fact that utopian thinkers believed in the inherent androgyny of the primal man, which was eventually lost due to Christianity, patriarchy and scientific rationalism (Van Leeuwen 59).

Carolyn G. Heilbrun paints androgyny in a similarly positive light. For her, androgyny is a “metaphor for gender liberation” (Van Leeuwen 59) and “a physical fact of life that highlights the performative nature of gender identity and symbolizes sexual emancipation” (qtd. in Van Leeuwen 60). She goes on to define it as:

a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes and the human impulses expressed by men and women are not rigidly assigned (...) Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender. (qtd. in Annas 146)

Androgyny was also defined as “a psychic unity, either potential or actual, conceived as existing in all individuals” (qtd. in Annas 146)

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula Le Guin takes advantage of the potential of science fiction as a “what if” literature, imagining a world where the androgyne is a fact of life, where “male” and “female” are united in the embodiment of a yin-yang harmony. Androgyny serves as a vehicle to explore sex roles, stereotypes and to examine if there exists a layer of simply “being human” beneath the socially constructed layers of femininity and masculinity that serve as oppressive tools, in greater part, for women. Le Guin herself wrote in her essay “Is Gender Necessary?” that she considered her book a “thought experiment”, one that would by eliminating gender show “what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human. It would define the area that is shared by men and women alike” (10).

*Left Hand* depicts a wintery world of Gethen, where Genly Ai finds himself as an Envoy, on a mission to convince the rulers of Gethen to join Ekumen, whose goal is to serve as intergalactic “glue”, connecting different worlds to ensure the trade of knowledge,

information and cultural and scientific goods. The novel's most prominent feature is its depiction of gender. The world of Gethen is different from Earth in a sense that its inhabitants can biologically be both female and male. Parts of their oestrus cycle are called *kemmer* and *somer*. Fully sexuality occurs during *kemmer*, and at that time a Gethenian has no control over which sexual organs will be prominent in the body. Therefore, she/he can both bear children and father them. Only during *kemmer* is a Gethenian sexually active, while the rest of the time she/he has no sexual impulse or desire whatsoever: "What is very hard for us to understand is that, four-fifths of the time, these people are not sexually motivated at all. Room is made for sex, plenty of room; but a room, as it were, apart. The society of Gethen, in its daily functioning and in its continuity, is without sex" (Le Guin 93). Therefore, gender on Gethen is "provisional, temporary and arbitrary" (Call 92). Before continuing to examine the social consequences of such androgyny, a closer look at the category of gender is required.

Gender is built around certain cultural notions or "proper" behaviour and social contracts. It is a cultural product, a set of ideas that are appropriated by individuals through cultural "training" reinforced by media, political structures, fashion industry, etc. These sets of ideas define what it should look like to be masculine or feminine (Strathern 5). However, they make little sense. In her book *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*, Cynthia Enloe discusses how the concept of gender as a systematic social construction is far from being "natural" or innate: "Those like myself who believe that militarism is separable from masculinity are especially interested in conscription. If all cultures constructed ideas about manliness such that soldiering was part and parcel of any man's proving his manliness, then governments' conscription efforts would be a lot easier" (53). Enloe also strongly suggests that "it takes tremendous amounts of power to shape and constrain artificial notions of masculinity and femininity" (qtd. in Welling Hall 254). These artificial notions bring about a very stratified society, where gender notions are legitimized by

and constructed around biological differences, resulting in false dichotomies and social injustice. Through the perspective of biological determinism, which is often the basis upon which the gendering of all areas of life is conducted, women and men are assigned their cultural roles based on their physical constitution, hormones or some other component of physiology. In this sense “nature’ is often used as a political tool to justify social stratification between men and women” (Bernardo and Murphy 32). Judith Roof proposes that if “we consider gender a cultural rather than natural phenomenon, and in addition see it as multiple rather than singular, widely varied instead of typological and oppositional, then we might alter the institutional and cultural formations that depend upon the naturalized alignments of gender, heterosexuality, and patriarchy” (53). By considering gender a cultural phenomenon, Le Guin challenges this gendering of society based on biological determinism, deconstructs “nature” and strips down the layers of femininity and masculinity to see what hides beneath them.

For Gethenians, gender is “no absolute category, but rather something that must be viewed as flexible and fluid” (Call 92). This fluidity and flexibility in Le Guin’s thought-experiment result in a plethora of social and cultural ramifications. To begin with, as there is no fixed gender, there are also no fixed gender roles. One can be both a mother and a father at different periods in their lives which means that bearing and rearing of children is a shared responsibility rather than being just the responsibility of a woman: “No physiological habit is established, and the mother of several children may be the father of several more” (*Left Hand* 91). At one point, Genly Ai has difficulties in comprehending this extent of Gethen’s androgyny: “He was so feminine in looks and manner that I once asked him how many children he had. He looked glum. He had never borne any. He had, however, sired four” (*Left Hand* 48). Also, the sexual cycle of *kemmer* and *somer* is conceptualized as a menstrual cycle, so Le Guin “uses a significant female experience to explain the sexuality of her

characters” (Pekşen-Yanikoğlu 108). She makes other slight emphases on the female principle, such as remarking on how “the descent is reckoned from the mother, the ‘parent in flesh’” (*Left Hand* 92). The feminine principle is also visible in the construction of one of Gethen’s religion, the religion of Meshe. Throughout the book, various characters often exclaim “By the breasts of Meshe!” (116), “By Meshe’s tits!” (146) or “By the milk of Meshe!” (139), giving the whole religion a feminine overtone.

Furthermore, the absence of a fixed gender renders obsolete other psychological implications in the upbringing of a child: “A child has no psycho-sexual relationship to his mother and father. There is no myth of Oedipus on Winter” (*Left Hand* 94). Oedipus complex is structurally impossible because it lacks its most basic condition – the law of the father. Having in mind, for a brief moment, the Freudian theory of the murder of the primal father and the prohibition of incest that lies in the very foundation of the Oedipus complex, it is easy to see how on Gethen, no such thing would ever come into existence. The lack of the prohibition of incest results in it being acceptable: “Incest is permitted, with various restrictions, between siblings, even the full siblings of a vowed-kemmering pair” (*Left Hand* 92). Without the repressive law of the father, there is nothing to taint their sexuality, hence there are no rapes or wars on Gethen. Here Le Guin diverts the reader’s attention to the problematic question of consent that Call regards as a crucial aspect of both the feminist and anarchic traditions (93), calling Gethenians “practicing anarcho-feminists”: “Feminists use consent to draw clear ethical boundaries around sexual practices. Anarchist use consent more broadly, to distinguish ethical political actions from unethical ones” (93). The absence of unconsenting sex can be found in their physiology; it is simply not possible to have sex without explicit consent and “mutual invitation” (*Left Hand* 94).

The absence of war can also be ascribed to their gender fluidity. Even though “they kill one another readily by ones and twos; seldom by tens and twenties; never by hundreds

and thousands”, the people of Gethen are not familiar with the concept of war. If one is to think of war as a quintessential men’s activity, fuelled by hormones and repression of sexual desire (Pekşen-Yanikoğlu 106), then the Gethenians lack both of those conditions. Even though they experience the rise in their hormone levels at the height of the *kemmer* stage, it does not last long enough for them to engage in any long-term aggression. As for the sexual repression, there is no such thing on Winter: “ (...) there is less coding, channelling, and repressing of sex there than in any bisexual society I know of. Abstinence is entirely voluntary; indulgence is entirely acceptable. Sexual fear and sexual frustration are both extremely rare” (*Left Hand* 177). Adding to this, in a society where everyone is biologically the same, there are no women who are valued for their ability to give birth and prolong the species, or men who are considered expendable for wars. In fact, there is no division of any kind at all: “There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on Winter” (*Left Hand* 94).

War, as well as unconsenting rape, are structurally impossible on Gethen because there are no conditions to bring them about. The reason for this lies in the subversion of their sexuality and a much more prominent “articulation of an alternative feminine principle” (Call 93) that Le Guin considers to be anarchic: “The ‘female principle’ has historically been anarchic; that is, anarchy has historically been identified as female. The domain allotted to women – ‘the family’, for example – is the area of order without coercion, rule by custom not by force” (Le Guin 11-12). This anarchic feminine principle is, by definition, more orderly, and does not, by its nature, seek warfare.

To destabilize our concept of fixed gender identities even further, Le Guin introduces the concept of perversion. What is for the Gethenians a “permanent hormonal imbalance

toward the male or the female” (Left Hand 64) is for Genly Ai “normal”. By presenting the readers with a radically different perspective, Le Guin defamiliarizes that which is taken for granted and brings about a sense of Suvin’s “cognitive estrangement”. Gethenians are disgusted by and scared of the idea of being in a state of permanent *kemmer*, only because it is so different from their own state of “normal”. Calls regards them as “heterophobs” that have a “profound fear and distrust of fixed, binary gender identities” which is irrational in the same degree as our own world’s homophobia (94), and being different in general. In a conversation with Genly, the king of Karhide vividly expresses such heterophobia:

’So all of them, out on these other planets, are in permanent kemmer? A society of perverts? So Lord Tibe put it; I thought he was joking. Well, it may be the fact, but it’s a disgusting idea, Mr. Ai, and I don’t see why human beings here on earth should want or tolerate any dealings with creatures so monstrously different’. (*Left Hand* 36)

A small percentage of Gethenians have this kind of hormonal imbalance and they are treated the same as minority groups on Earth are treated: “They are not excluded from society, but they are tolerated with some disdain, as homosexuals are in many bisexual societies, the Karhidish slang for them is *halfdeads*. They are sterile” (*Left Hand* 64). By exposing her readers to such a radical shift in perspective, Le Guin manages to challenge not only fixed gender identities, but the concept of “normality” in general.

Genly’s own personal journey through forming meaningful relationships to others as well as himself in the course of the novel is also very important in showing his change in perspective regarding the fluidity of gender on Gethen. In the beginning of the novel, he has many difficulties with keeping in mind that the Gethenians are not strictly male or strictly female. His deep-rooted heterosexist views prevent him from acknowledging them as

androgynous: “Though I had been nearly two years on Winter I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own” (*Left Hand* 12). However, through his friendship with Estraven, Genly is increasingly able to notice the plurality of identities inherent to a Gethenian’s nature: “And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man” (*Left Hand* 248).

When Genly shares mindspeech with Estraven, he once and for all eradicates the last remnant of his heterosexist views, and discovers in himself a potential for bisexuality that, Le Guin suggests, is possibly inherent to everyone as human beings (Pekşen-Yanikoğlu 112). Of the moment of Genly revelation Le Guin writes:

But it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that that love came; and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge, across what divided us. For us to meet sexually would be for us to meet once more as aliens. We had touched, in the only way we could touch. We left it at that. I do not know if we were right. (248-249)

It is in this moment that Genly gets a glimpse of what “humanity” looks like beneath the artificial notions of femininity and masculinity. From that moment on his change is permanent and visible in his anxiety upon seeing his friends from Earth after a long time: “But they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them. Their voices sounded strange: too deep, too shrill. They were like a troupe of great, strange animals, of two different species; great apes with intelligent eyes, all of them in rut, in kemmer...” (*Left*

*Hand* 296). Genly in the end, through his journey of self-awareness, comes a step closer to the pure “human” identity that lies beneath the layers of social constructions.

### 2.3. Feminist Criticism

Even though *The Left Hand of Darkness* was revolutionary in its subversion of gender, it also received a lot of criticism that raised a question whether the novel does it successfully. What is most often criticized in this regard is Le Guin’s use of the male pronoun in depicting the Gethenians who are supposed to be both male and female. She was also obviously fully aware of the possible implications as she was in the process of writing the book because she deals with that early on in the book itself: “Lacking the Karhidish ‘human pronoun’ used for persons in somer, I must say ‘he’, for the same reasons as we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god: it is less defined, less specific, than the neuter or the feminine” (94-95).

After the backlash of the feminist critics, Le Guin reiterated her argument in her text “Is Gender Necessary?” in which she writes: “I call Gethenians ‘he’ because I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for ‘he/she’” (14-15). Both of Le Guin’s arguments are problematic and lead to a male-coloured reading of the novel: “But the very use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the Karhider I am with is not a man, but a manwoman” (*Left Hand* 95). Le Guin addresses this even in her first version of the essay: “One does not see Estraven as a mother, with his children, in any role that we automatically perceive as ‘female’: and therefore, we tend to see him as a man. This is a real flaw in the book” (15). In her apologetic rewritten version of the same essay, “Is Gender Necessary? Redux”, she regrets deciding upon using the masculine pronoun, and not

a genderless invented one: “If I had realized how the pronouns I used shaped, directed, controlled my own thinking, I might have been ‘cleverer’” (15).

By seeing the masculine pronoun as “generic” points to the lack of will to question the patriarchal order or “rock the boat”. Looking back on it in her twenty-fifth anniversary edition of the book, in which she switched in some chapters from “he” to a neutral version of “e, es, enself”, she remarks: “I’ve never seen so clearly how I was controlled, when I wrote the book, by the hidden force, the real dominance, of that false-generic he” (292). Instead of advocating the women’s language, Le Guin turns to the language of the oppressor (Barr 113), and by the time she builds stronger and clearer feminist positions than at the time when *The Left Hand of Darkness* was published, she is left to “writhe in deserved misery as the feminists told me off and the masculinists patted my head” (qtd. in Hammond Rashley 24). This patting on the head becomes clear in the writings of some male critics, like James W. Bittner, agreeing with Le Guin’s decision to use a male protagonist:

Although feminists have criticized Le Guin for choosing a male protagonist, she was, I think, right to do so, for the dialectic of the romance (and science fiction estrangement) almost make it imperative. She chooses a male, she says, ‘because I thought men would loathe the book, would be unsettled and unnerved by it (...) Since the larger percentage of science fiction readers are male (...) I thought it would be easier for them if they had a man (...)’. (25)

In the eyes of feminist advocates, states Barr, this is all wrong because “women should learn the Truth about themselves and their world by moving towards the female self; Le Guin arrives at this Truth by moving away from herself” (113).

Furthermore, the whole story of the novel is told through Genly Ai’s male perspective, “tainted” with explicit notions of how masculinity and femininity should look

like, acquired through social conditioning of his own dichotomized world. What this masculinising of the gaze does is this: in his interactions with the people of Gethen, Genly always first sees the male. This, in turn, connects to the concept of “androgyny as misogyny” that points to the fact that androgyny is usually proposed and validated by men for men, a “masculine ideal” (Weil 151) that constructs “feminised men, never masculine women” (qtd. in Van Leeuwen 62), which is also the case in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Van Leeuwen also argues that “within the dominant androcentric social structure woman functions as the *Other*, as object against which the masculine subject defines itself and as that human quality which the masculine psyche needs to incorporate into itself to become whole” (63).

In *The Left Hand*, the female principle functions precisely as such *Other* and is the object of, what Van Leeuwen calls, gender cannibalization (64) – the consuming of the female principle solely for the purpose of becoming a whole being. Genly Ai approaches to each Gethenian as a male and then paints their femininity, upon seeing glimpses of it, in a negative light. For him, the femaleness of the Gethenians is always something vague, irrational and not to be trusted, a part of the character that even repulses him:

Thus as I sipped my smoking sour beer I thought that at table Estraven’s performance had been womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance, specious and adroit. Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him? For it was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture: in him, or in my own attitude towards him? (*Left Hand* 12)

By saying that he cannot think of Estraven as a woman because of his “powerful presence”, Genly implies that women do not possess such a thing. Also, in his sensing of a certain “falseness” when thinking of Estraven as a man, Genly is referring to the female principle.

At other times, Genly’s remarks on the femaleness of the Gethenians goes to the very sexist extremes: “There was in this attitude something feminine, a refusal of the abstract, the ideal, a submissiveness to the given, which rather displeased me” (*Left Hand* 212). To Estraven’s question “Are they mentally inferior?” regarding women on Genly’s homeworld, he replies with “I don’t know” (235). In a world so advanced, which is a part of the intergalactic brain trust, it is difficult to believe that such deep-rooted sexism still exists.

The feminine traits are described in such a negative light through Genly’s eyes that they serve as a principle against which the rational and superior nature of the male principle is defined. Each time they are brought up, the atmosphere is disturbed by their anarchic and destabilizing nature, therefore requiring the male principle to stabilize them once again. Even though she tries to depict a society where dichotomies are eradicated, Le Guin still finds it hard to let go of the concept of the *Other* that works against women. This is evident in a conversation between Genly and Estraven: “Ai brooded, and after some time he said, ‘You’re isolated, and undivided. Perhaps you are as obsessed with wholeness as we are with dualism.’ ‘We are dualists too. Duality is an essential, isn’t it? So long as there is *myself* and *the other*’” (*Left Hand* 234).

Lastly, another Le Guin’s oversight lies in the *kemmering*, during which the Gethenians form physical relations that are almost exclusively heterosexual. Homosexuality exists on Gethen, but is a rarity and is frowned upon. However, in “Is Gender Necessary? Redux”, Le Guin regrets this decision:

I quite unnecessarily locked the Gethenians into heterosexuality. It is a naively pragmatic view of sex that insists that sexual partners must be of the opposite sex! In any kemmer-house homosexual practices would, of course, be possible and acceptable and welcomed – but I never thought to explore this option; and the omission, alas, implies that sexuality is heterosexuality. I regret this very much. (14)

### 3. ANGELA CARTER – THE PASSION OF NEW EVE

#### 3.1. The Gothic and the Grotesque

Angela Carter's *Passion of the New Eve* is a novel that, in a true postmodern sense, resists definition. It fits quite easily into futuristic dystopias, fantasy, satire, the Gothic and the picaresque, along with elements of the Bakhtinian grotesque, carnivalization and intertextuality. In its core, it is a postmodern novel that utilises all of these genres and modes, but in order to most successfully analyze the problematic of gender, this thesis will base its emphasis on the Gothic and the grotesque.

Carter's novel employs many elements of the grotesque which is a literary genre that can be traced back to Rabelais' *Gargantua*, published in 1532. However, the term took shape with Bakhtin's interpretation of Rabelais in his book *Rabelais and his World* (1965). The grotesque relies on the exaggerated depiction of the body, usually playing up the elements of disgust, excessiveness and exaggeration and emphasizing the "grotesque body as open, protruding, secreting" (Johnson 43). Bakhtin also states about the grotesque body as a body that is "constantly active, exceeding its margins: a body in the act of becoming. It is never

finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body (19). To Bakhtin, it has a positive value:

In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and the bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretence to renunciation of the earthy or independence of the earth and the body (...) all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character. The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance (...) The material bodily principle is a triumphant, festive principle, it is a 'banquet for all the world'. (19)

On the other hand, Johnson states that it can also have a second, post-Romantic, more modern but also more negative meaning that refers to the “descriptions of alienation, hostility and inhumanity” since “its meaning is preoccupied with issues of rejection and revulsion” (43). Carter uses the grotesque in precisely this way, creating not only bodies but also a narrative as a whole that is exaggerated, pointing to modern anxieties of the politics of the body, sex and gender, more specifically, to the desire for their stability, as Davis Rogan asserts in her essay “Alien Sex Acts in Feminist Science Fiction”. This desire for stability, in the end, produces “alien, alienating bodies” (451). To return to Bakhtin, he also makes this connection between the body and the world:

(...) the grotesque body is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the

world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breast, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body. (26)

Carter's bodies are equally unfinished and ever creating. The constant flux that brings about their growing "otherness" separates and alienates them from the familiarity of the social conventions. Those bodies, as Davis Rogan describes, "both exceed their imitations and undergo transformations that estrange human desire from its notional basis in biologically configured sexual identity" (452).

The Gothic also employs the element of excess, as well as transgression, as explained by Fred Botting in his book *Gothic* (1996). What he means by excess is the "over-abundance of imaginative frenzy" (3) that results in exaggerated descriptions of characters and feelings. Gothic fiction's primary goal is to provoke feelings of horror and terror (Botting 10), and it does so through transgression and the concept of 'the sublime'. For Donna Heiland "the sublime experience is at the heart of the gothic" (5) as it describes the "disruptive, irregular, transgressive energies" (5). Sublime toys with the notion of the loss of the self that happens during a process when there is an encounter between a "perceiving subject and an overwhelmingly powerful object" (Heiland 33).

By employing transgression, "the Gothic literature goes beyond the limits of what is commonly accepted" (Olson 6). This can refer to the simple use of the supernatural in order to produce the feelings of horror and terror; however, transgression holds the potential to do

much more than just that. By stepping on and going beyond social conventions, it can become “a powerful means to reassert the values of society (...) transgression, by crossing the social (...) limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits” (Botting 7). In this sense, the Gothic was, in its beginnings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an important vehicle for women to express their opinions on the matters on which they were, in other areas of life, silenced (Olson 11). From that it grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be entangled in postmodern writing, mixing of the genres and providing criticism to the political and social aspects of the patriarchal culture. Horner and Zlosnik explains this:

In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of women novelists (...) found in the traditions of Gothic the potential for writing transgressions that changed patriarchal assumptions and expectations in the late twentieth-century context. In Gothic’s hybridity they discovered ways of opening up parodic spaces to comic and liberating effect. Through self-reflexive and parodic writing they challenged the scripts of femininity as they manifested themselves through religion, culture and fiction itself. (116)

Angela Carter’s *The Passion of the New Eve* fits into this kind of postmodern parodic Gothic writing that is a “double play, a postmodern mimicking of Gothic horror which is itself theatrical” (Pi-tai Peng 101). Carter inflates the Gothic and grotesque elements to the point where they burst into the reader’s face, forcing them to take a step back and acknowledge that the world depicted in the novel is fully carnivalized and distorted. The carnival “creates a cathartic alternative to established values and meanings” (Wisker 120) thus enabling Carter to engage in an indirect discussion of some of the burning issues in society like sexuality, gender identity and its performativity.

### 3.2. Gender as Performance

Throughout *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter deals with the question of gender performativity – whether the construct of gender is something “natural” or merely acquired through culture and then performed. Published in 1977, it reflects Carter’s radical feminism for which she was nicknamed “the avant-garde literary terrorist of feminism” (Makinen 20). It also interconnects greatly with the works and theories of Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous and Toril Moi. The deconstruction of patriarchal ideologies and the restrictions it poses on women Carter boils down even further from the question of gender performativity to the question that Susan Rubin Suleiman articulates as: “Is there such a thing woman’s body, woman’s sexuality? Is there such a thing as woman, or, for that matter, man?” (44). Furthermore, it also expands on the rejection of a natural gender identity made by Simone de Beauvoir who writes in *Second Sex* that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (273). Through various gender metamorphoses in *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter describes the process of gender acquisition and how one can learn how to become a woman, thus rejecting the idea of an innate gender identity. She also challenges the very notion of “Woman” as a norm, because “to her, the idea of Norm is a nonsense in itself” (Botescu-Sireteanu 133).

According to Suleiman, Carter’s fiction goes against “the logic of ‘phallic discourse’” that is characterized by “linearity, self-possession, the affirmation of mastery, authority, and above all of unity” and, as such, fall into the category of feminine discourse (49). What characterizes such a text are two elements:

First, it is a text that celebrates love between women (...) lovers are not ‘enigmas’ for each other – do not represent ‘the other’ for each other, which is always the case between a man and a woman – but are, rather, in a relation of

absolute reciprocity in which the notions of ‘giving’ and ‘receiving’ have no place (...) In the perfect reciprocity of this relation, there is no place for an economy of exchange, or of opposition between contraries. The lovers are neither two nor one, neither different nor the same, but un-different. Second, this text celebrates a state of being, and a form of communication, in which binary oppositions become nonpertinent. (49-50)

*New Eve* embodies both of these elements and speaks in a language that is rid of patriarchal binary oppositions between male and female. Hélène Cixous also advocates this moving beyond oppositions such as culture/nature, head/heart, father/mother, activity/passivity that have its foundations in the basic opposition between male and female through which patriarchy creates its meanings (Brosch 9). Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics* exposes the underlying problem with these oppositions: “For one of the terms to acquire meaning (...) it must destroy the other. (...) In the end, victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity; (...) the male is always the victor” (105). The reason for this lies in the fact that male experiences and male roles are usually linked to positions of power, for which there only exist cultural oppressive reasons. Hence, the term “gender” same to existence to refer to “the psychological and sociological categories of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, as opposed to biological ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’” (qtd. in Brosch 9). One refers to biological sex one is born with, the other to an artificial cultural training, or in other words: “The ‘gendering’ of a person is an arbitrary process which transforms genital fact into cultural fiction” (qtd. in Brosch 9).

Judith Butler in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” writes about gender performativity. According to Butler, gender is not a fixed construct, but in constant movement: “Gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be (...)

reproduces as reality once again” (526). However, Joanne Trevenna makes a distinction between Carter’s theatrical gender acquisition to that of Butler’s performativity in that “Carter, unlike Butler, stresses that the acquisition and performance of gender identity is overt and self-conscious” (269), which brings her closer to the statement by de Beauvoir how one becomes a woman, rather than being born as one. Carter chooses her battleground to be the woman’s body, challenging notions of an innate predetermined femininity, or masculinity for that matter, and she does so through the characters of Eve and Tristessa, as will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.3. Images of Femininity

*The Passion of New Eve* starts off with firmly setting a misogynistic undertone to the narrative. Before setting off for New York to teach at a university, Evelyn takes a girl to the cinema to see a movie by his favourite Hollywood actress, Tristessa. When the girl performs oral sex on him in the darkness of the cinema, Evelyn can only see her as being nothing more than an object like the rest of the trash on the floor: “When she perceived how Tristessa’s crucifixion by brain fever moved me, the girl who was with me got to her knees in the dark on the dirty floor of the cinema, among the cigarette ends and empty potato crisp bags and trodden orangeade containers, and sucked me off” (*New Eve* 5). Evelyn does not even remember her name, and the reader is forced to see her only as a nameless and faceless gaping mouth. Carter firmly entrenches Evelyn right from the first sentence of the novel in the position of an “arch-misogynist” character (Peach 118). This position further deepens when he meets Leilah in New York, a city engulfed by violent anarchy where murder, rape and every other imaginable monstrosity is quite usual. Here again, Evelyn’s male gaze is that of objectification as he describes the women he sees: “ (...) and a special kind of crisp-edged

girl with apple-crunching incisors and long, gleaming legs like lascivious scissors ...” (*New Eve* 6). New York is, therefore, “conceived as a phallo-centric world where woman is subjugated to violation” (Zirange 2). However, New York is also a site of woman’s revolt that is portrayed as equally violent. A group of female activists that go by the name of “Women” patrol the city and bring terror to its male inhabitants:

As the summer grew yet more intolerable, the Women also furthered their depredations. Female sharp-shooters took to sniping from concealed windows at men who lingered too long in front of posters outside blue movie theatres. They were supposed to have infiltrated the hookers who paraded round Times Square in their uniforms of white boots and mini-skirts; there were rumours of a kamikaze squad of syphilitic whores who donated spirochetal enlightenment for free to their customers out of dedication to the cause. They blew up wedding shops and scoured the newspapers for marriage announcements so that they could send brides gifts of well-honed razors. (*New Eve* 13)

From this city full of both male and female violence emerges Leilah, the “profane essence of the death of cities, the beautiful garbage eater” (*New Eve* 14). Again Evelyn’s male gaze doesn’t allow him to see anything beyond what is skin-deep. He sees her as a grotesque conglomerate of bodily parts, heels, fur, legs and purple lipstick. She is the black “Other” for Evelyn who denies her speech and even humanity, constantly endowing her with animalistic descriptions: “(...) her speech contained more expostulations than sentences for she rarely had the patience or the energy to put together subject, verb, object and extension in a ordered and logical fashion, so sometimes she sounded more like a demented bird than a woman, warbling arias of invocation or demand” (*New Eve* 15).

Leilah embodies the theme of the “masquerade of femininity” that can be understood as “a set of conventions relating to appearance, behaviour and roles that women adopt in patriarchal society to comply with the expectations and desires of men” (Šnircová 10). The grotesque aspect of the masquerade of femininity lies in the dichotomy that is presented through Leilah’s ritual of “putting on her face” – a discrepancy between a woman’s real face and the mask she puts on:

(...) the transformation of the grubby little bud who slumbered all day in her filth; she was a night-blooming flower. But, unlike a flower, she did not grow beautiful by a simple process of becoming. Her beauty was an accession. She arrived at it by a conscious effort. She 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. The reflected Leilah had a concrete form and, although this form was perfectly tangible, we all knew, all three of us in the room, it was another Leilah (...) she brought into being a Leilah who lived only in the not-world of the mirror and then became her own reflection.

*(New Eve 24)*

Her transformation from the garbage eater to a beautiful, but artificial, creature of the night forces the readers to acknowledge a problematic aspect of patriarchal culture – that a woman’s body is considered more worthy when decorated through a time-consuming ritual. Moreover, Evelyn’s gaze is not on Leilah, but on her reflection in the cracked mirror, alienating her even further. The mirror signifies a woman’s self being “split into two. A woman must continually watch herself (...) Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another” (Berger 46).

Evelyn's egocentrism and disregard for Leilah reaches its height when he decides to leave her after her disastrous abortion. He sets off for the desert, to "find that most elusive of all chimeras, myself" (*New Eve* 34). What he finds there is the city of Beulah, the matriarchal womb-like city whose creator is Mother, the Great Parricide, the Grand Emasculator and the Castratrix of the Phallogentric Universe (*New Eve* 46). Mother is a grotesque embodiment of womanhood, a living prehistoric Venus figurine, a deity of femininity with an exaggerated belly, exaggerated genitals and multiple breasts: "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" (*New Eve* 46). She has become "a powerful matriarch frighteningly outside the control of the male gaze and hence the Lacanian law of the father" (Welby 10). With the grotesque figure of Mother, Carter delivers criticism to radical feminism, essentially saying that there is no difference between a matriarchy, sprung from the liberating tendencies from the patriarchal culture, and a patriarchy. Ironically, Mother's ultimate goal, to remove the masculine from the reproductive equation, "derives its logic from the very thing she is attempting to overturn" (Jennings).

Mother has only one thing in mind for Evelyn – to transform him into a woman and impregnate him with his own seed. He becomes Eve, "a Playboy center fold" (*New Eve* 71), a realisation of all his male sexual fantasies: "I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had 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" (*New Eve* 71). Eve is now a woman, but only biologically. Psychologically, she is still Evelyn, a man with a masculine sexual gaze trapped inside a female body. To bring about her complete transformation, Mother starts educating Eve in the role of a woman through playing tapes with the virgin and child theme, listening to nursery tales, showing images of cats and kittens and so on. The process is reminiscent of Beauvoir's statement how one is not born, but rather,

becomes a woman: “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (273). However, it proves unsuccessful.

Eve’s psychological transformation into a woman is not completed until she is captured and held prisoner by Zero, a savage autocrat with seven wives, embodying the parody of radical patriarchy in the same way Mother embodies the parody of matriarchy. Through the raping of Zero and his wives’ lessons on how to be a woman, Eve becomes one: “The mediation of Zero turned me into a woman. More. His peremptory prick turned me into a savage woman” (*New Eve* 104). Eve learns her lessons on womanhood, but precisely on those aspects of womanhood that Carter deems negative – the passivity strengthened by the patriarchal culture and the anger that comes from it which results in equally discriminating positions that ultimately consume themselves. Eve also continuously experiences the alienation of the female identity as she feels a deep-rooted loss of self, as if she is watching her own former self raping her current self, internalizing both the oppressive view and the view of the oppressed:

And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part of my being was ravaged by him for, when he mounted me (...) I felt myself to be, not myself but he; and the experience of the crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection, forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation. (*New Eve* 98)

After this, Eve encounters Tristessa, the object of her male fantasies, when she is brought along on Zero’s hunt for the missing Hollywood actress. Tristessa embodies the concept of the perfect woman for Eve(lyn), so it contributes even more to the issue of gender

performativity when it is revealed that she is in fact a man in drag. Judith Butler stresses the importance of drag in *Gender Trouble* stating that drag makes us “see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (138). Tristessa’s femininity is, like Eve’s, not innate but rather performed and learned, which reveals gender as being a social and cultural construct and an illusion. By creating the character of Tristessa, Carter explores how society produces what is considered to be feminine. Upon finding out Tristessa’s true identity, Eve says:

That was 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, an unbegotten woman who made no concessions to humanity. (*New Eve* 125)

The reason why Tristessa’s cover-up was so successful for so long is that he internalized and projected his deepest desires and, literally, became them, which “reveals a latent male subjectivity” (Trevenna 273). Tristessa shows the possibility for any individual to perform other genders than the one that has been prescribed by the society at the moment of birth. In a true Foucaultian sense, identity and therefore, gender identity is fluid and adheres to the individual choice.

After the mock wedding of Eve and Tristessa, they consummate their “marriage”, which depicts a unification of bodies that are beyond gender and results in a grotesque merging and, consequently, dissolution of identities:

(...) yet we peopled this immemorial loneliness with all we had been, or might be, or had dreamed of being, or had thought we were – every modulation of the selves we now projected upon each other’s flesh, selves – aspects of being, ideas – that seemed, during our embraces, to be the very essence of our selves; the concentrated essence of being, as if, out of these fathomless kisses and our interpenetrating, undifferentiated sex, we had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite together, the whole and perfect being to which he, with an absurd and touching heroism, had, in his own single self, aspired; we brought into being the being who stops time in the self-created eternity of lovers. (*New Eve* 144-145)

Even though it is tempting to read this as a complete dissolution of identity in which it is impossible to tell where one gender or sex ends and the other begins and even though this passage “attests to the monstrous potentialities of the hybrid body for feminism” (Davis Rogan 454), the blurring of the boundaries between male and female is never entirely possible in *The Passion of New Eve*. From the ambiguity of Eve’s and Tristessa’s bodies and identities emerges the fact that “the conflict between genders can by no means be settled” (Vallorani 368). Hybridization is possible, but it is still a hybridization of a dichotomy, and *The Passion of New Eve* does not delve deep enough to explore the possibility of a neutral identity not tainted by social constructs of gender but rather settles on the fact that gender is performative. Eve(lyn) comments on this: “Masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another. (...) But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female (...) that I do not know. Though I have been both man and woman, still I do not know the answer to these questions. Still they bewilder me” (*New Eve* 146).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

During the period of the second-wave feminism, a number of female writers emerged who produced works of science fiction and fantasy that allowed them to use alternative settings to which they translated all of the issues that the patriarchal society produced. In these alternative settings, they dealt with those problems, providing commentary to some of the burning issues regarding gender, sexuality and female identity. In this thesis, I've decided to take a closer look on Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, both of which, each in its own way, deal primarily with the issue of gender and sexual identity. Le Guin explored the concept of androgyny in her work of science fiction, from which women were for a long time excluded, either as writers or characters. Even though she was slow to fully accept feminist tendencies in the seventies, Le Guin nevertheless utilizes the potential of science fiction as "what if" literature to flirt with androgyny as a vehicle for gender subversion. She devised her book as a "thought-experiment", in order to see if there is a pure identity, a "humanity" and a context shared by men and women alike, that lies underneath the social constructs of feminine and masculine. Her experiment proved to be more unsuccessful than not, failing to show that underlying humanity and remaining stuck in the reiterated patriarchal constructs due to her own standpoints at the time. Carter, on the other hand, was much more radical than Le Guin and aligned herself much more with the feminist strands of thought in the time *The Passion of New Eve* was written. It is a postmodern work of Gothic fiction that employs many elements such as the Bakhtinian carnivalization, intertextuality and the grotesque. Through exaggerations and overt theatricality, her Gothic mode is deeply carnivalized and forces the readers to take a step back and take nothing at face value. This allows her to deal with the issue of gender performativity that is central to *The Passion of New Eve*. Through exaggerated undefined bodies in constant movement, Carter points to modern anxieties of the

politics of sexuality and gender. She rejects the idea of a natural gender identity, but rather expands on the idea that gender is something that is performed and not fixed. However, as is the case with Le Guin, Carter's own thought-experiment is not entirely successful. Although she shows us the potential for the dissolution and merging of the genders, she does not go deep enough to see what lies beyond the performativity of gender. Much has been written about both *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Passion of New Eve*, and although they may not be entirely successful in conveying their messages, they nevertheless remain important pieces of feminist fiction.

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## 6. ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Passion of New Eve* by Angela Carter. After introductory discussions on women in science fiction and the Gothic and the grotesque, it takes a closer look on the concepts of androgyny and gender performativity. It utilises gender theories of female writers such as of Simone de Beauvoir,

Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous and Toril Moi for the analysis of the two novels. The thesis asserts that gender is not a “natural” construct but a socio-cultural artifice constructed around biological differences and, therefore, results in false dichotomies and social injustice. In these two novels, gender is subverted through androgyny in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and transgressive bodies in *The Passion of New Eve*. The conclusion, however, shows that the subversion of gender is not entirely successful in either of the novels, but nevertheless raises consciousness on the issues of gender, sexuality and identity.

Keywords: feminism, androgyny, gender performativity