

THE ETHICAL JUSTINE AND THE VIOLENT JULIETTE IN ANGELA CARTER'S "THE SADEIAN WOMAN: AN EXERCISE IN CULTURAL HISTORY"

Wiem Krifa, PhD

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Sousse, Tunisia

wimaksousse@yahoo.fr

Abstract. "The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History" is Angela Carter's non-fictional work¹. It consists of a historical and cultural analysis of Le Marquis de Sade's *Justine or The Misfortunes of Virtue*, and *Juliette or The Prosperities of Vice*². The book exhibits the lives of two antithetical sisters: the virtuous Justine *versus* the vicious Juliette.

The ethical Justine strives to preserve her virtue, after the death of her parents. As a reward, she submits to violence, torture, rape, and accusations. Even though the law has been unjust to Justine, she refuses to commit a transgression. With regards to Juliette, she inflicts suffering and commits violence against humanity in order to make her own fortune. She is a libertine who follows her sexual and material gain at the expense of ethics.

Contrary to Justine, who is a martyred female, Juliette is the source of all criminal acts. She does not submit to the law. She is in dishonest complicity with the lawmakers, who provide her with unjustified lawful protection. Justine's attachment to her moral virtue ends with her death, while Juliette's corrupt mind provides her with a successful career within a discriminatory world in which violence supersedes ethics.

Keywords: ethics, violence, new woman, libertine, Justine, Juliette, heart, rationality

INTRODUCTION

The Sadeian Woman is a cultural critique of Le Marquis de Sade's *Justine or The Misfortunes of Virtue* and *Juliette or The Prosperity of Vice*². Both books tackle the different violent sexual relations which result in the victimization of females. Actually, Carter's work is a study of

de Sade's gender perspective and an interpretation of the different relations between males and females, virtue and vice. Carter's work proved to be an assessment of pornography, rather than a support of it, as it has been claimed by copious critics. Various feminists have condemned her ostensibly pornographic literary inclination without getting into depth with her anti-patriarchal endeavor:

He [de Sade] creates, not an artificial paradise of gratified sexuality but a model of hell, in which the gratification of sexuality involves the infliction and tolerance of extreme pain. He describes sexual relations in the context of an unfree society – the expression of pure tyranny, usually by men upon women, sometimes by women upon men and other women. The one constant to all Sade's monstrous orgies is that the whip hand is always the hand with the real political power and the victim is a person who has little or no power at all, or has had it stripped from him. In this schema, male means tyrannous and female means martyred, no matter what the official genders of the male and female beings are. (Carter 1979, 27)

The relationship between sexual violence and political tyranny is conspicuous in de Sade. His libertine characters are the most politically powerful ones. They deploy their sexual corruption to attain political refuge. In contradistinction, his virtuous heroine female, Justine, is denied any legal rights and undergoes all types of torture and humiliations.

Carter objects to de Sade's binary division of human attributes as entirely brutal or purely righteous. Her designed female character should escape de Sade's binarism³ and the splitting of the culturally inscribed gender peculiarities. Through her cultural analysis, Carter aims to achieve a synthesis that matches human behaviour. She prepares the ground for a new person who should be neither a wholly tyrannical one, nor a long-suffering victim. Being a postmodern feminist writer, she stands against the principle of binary oppositions and the strict divisions of human characteristics, as are advanced by de Sade. The latter presents two antithetical sisters, each of them choosing a different path. After the death of their parents, the two sisters are forced to leave the convent where they spent their bourgeois childhood. They are obliged to face the

cruel outside world at an early age, poor, helpless and parentless. Neither Juliette nor Justine chooses the right path that can lead them to salvation and procure them with a decent life. Justine abides by her heart and emotions while Juliette clings to her rationality and overlooks morality.

1. THE ETHICAL JUSTINE

The innocent Justine complies with her ethical values and moral principles, while her sister Juliette sticks to vice, sexual and material pursuit. Both embark on two opposing ways that bring each of them to contrasting ends. Justine's moral pilgrimage and the preservation of her honour victimize her under the hands of violent libertines. Throughout the stages of her life, Justine has been at pains to preserve her virginity: the proof of her female virtue. This intent precipitates her torture and suffering.

Justine begins her miserable career with the idea she never quite rids herself of, that her beauty and virtue are in themselves qualities which demand respect. (...) She is compensated for her defencelessness by a convention of respect which is largely false. Herself mystified by herself, narcissistically enamoured of the idea of herself as a blessed virgin, she has no notion at all of who she is except in fantasy. (Carter 1979, 83)

Her false internalized convictions are no longer respected in a materialist and corrupted world that overlooks virtue and ethics to attain sexual and material gain. Justine embodies the character of a fairytale princess who embraces her morality and fair beauty as a safeguard against the violent and wicked outside world. However, she evades the fact that these very same qualities are the chief causes behind her desecration. Despite her good demeanour, Justine is usually recompensed by torture, false charges, beatings and sexual abuse. She is the incarnation of the traditional literary image of the virtuous female character that refuses to react in an immoral way, though she has undergone violence, immorality and torture.

After being arrested for the first time, Justine makes the acquaintance of the brigand chieftainess - La Dubois. The latter “suggests that the callousness of the rich justifies the crimes of the poor and asks Justine to join the robber band, but Justine, though almost persuaded by La Dubois’s arguments, decides she will never fall from virtue” (Carter 46).

Despite her poverty and unbearable sufferings, Justine adheres strongly to her moral standards and preserves her chastity, which she tightly relates to virtue and scruples. Despite the fact that she was raped by Saint Florent in the forest after she helped him to escape the robber band, Justine is strongly convinced of her chastity. Since she was violently raped, she repressed her human sensations in order to find moral justification for her picks of consciousness. She is assured of her intact virginity as long as she does not feel pleasure.

The question of her virtue is itself an interesting one. As the brigand, Coeur-de-fer, says to her; why does such an intelligent girl so persistently locate virtue in the region of her genitals? For Justine’s conception of virtue is a specifically feminine one in that sexual abstinence plays a large part in it. (Carter 1979, 54)

Her abstinence and complete denial of any sensual experience lead her to encounter all types of humiliation and vicious treatment, whether at the hands of the legal, social or religious sadist male members, who shroud their ravenous sexuality beneath their almighty political sovereignty.

She is conveyed as a martyred female with no place in the enlightenment rational world. Actually, she is the embodiment of the traditional literary female behaviour which symbolizes the heart and feelings, regardless of reason and rationality. “The moral of Justine, Carter asserts, is this: ‘to be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case-that is, to be killed’” (Carter qtd. in Tonkin 2012, 158). Her excessive morality conveys her to passivity and forbids her to react in a negative way, though she has the means to do so.

Justine's unreasonable devotion to her ethics brings about her unfortunate downfall since she is victimized, emotionally and physically abused by all males she has encountered during her dolorous pilgrimage. Even though she is falsely charged for murder and theft, the virtuous Justine refuses to react or commit any transgression against the law.

Within a rational world, conducted by profit and self-interest, Justine epitomizes the inert female object, on whom the active male subject exercises infinite physical abuse, sexual perversion and unjust legal, social and religious accusations. Besides, she symbolizes the unjust legal institutions that empower the victimizers and privilege the rich at the expense of the poor and victim.

[The] libertines are great aristocrats, landowners, bankers, judges, archbishops, popes and certain women who have become very rich through prostitution, speculation, murder and usury. They have the tragic style and the infernal loquacity of the damned; and they have no inner life, no introspection. Their actions sum them up completely. They are in exile from the world in their abominable privilege, at the same time as they control the world. (Carter 1979, 28-29)

The world of Justine is a cruel one, that overlooks morality and justice and champions violence and libertinage. For de Sade, Women's virtue is a myth that should be shuttered in order to assert their place within a violent and ruthless masculine world. Justine pertains to the passive category and wholeheartedly accepts her destiny as an inferior and acquiescent human being, without any attempt from her behalf to break the chains of any patriarchal inflicted myths.

The self and the other in Sade are, for Carter, mutually confirming opposites. Both sides, locked into a framework of rigid dualisms-reason and unreason, aggressor and victim, annihilator and annihilated-confirm egoism and a lack of humanity and communality. (Day 1998, 98)

Justine adheres to the passive category that can be defined only in relation to its powerful counterpart. She follows her heart but never

her reason, and lives a virtuous life without resorting to violence and vice. Her rigid attitude in the choice of her human behaviour guides her to a psychological disturbance and misunderstanding of the inner wickedness of the corrupt and libertine males that she has encountered during her miserable life.

Because she views the law with reverence, Justine finds no lawful protection as a reward. On the contrary, she is accused of numerous false indictments, of which she is totally innocent. The legal system preserves the rights of the rich and vicious without searching for justice and fairness. What is appealing, as far as the character of Justine is concerned, is her irrational defencelessness in front of the law. Her heart has overwhelmed her rationality, to the extent that she embraces her passive situation without any attempt to revolt against the sadist oppressors.

The poor righteous female finds it immoral to react in an unjust manner that can transgress the governmental regulations, though it is the sole way for her salvation and survival. Consequently, she becomes enslaved by her egocentric feelings that totally exclude rationality from her life.

Justine's organ of perception is the heart that forbids her to engage in certain activities she feels to be immoral and her autobiography illustrates the moral limitations of a life conducted solely according to the virtuous promptings of the heart (...). Through its own unreason, the heart finds itself in complicity with the morality of cruelty it abhors (...) The unreason of the heart, the false logic of feeling, forbid her to exert mastery for even one moment.(Carter 1979, 58-61)

Justine is the incarnation of moral values and ethic qualities. Her human feelings imprison her in an ideal world, dwelled only by her person and violently surpassed by the ruthless libertines. The moral that can be extracted from Justine's misfortunate fate is that virtue alone leads to a wretched life, misery and exploitation by the rational, cruel male world. Her submissiveness makes her accomplice with her oppressors since she excludes her reason and relies heavily on her heart which cripples her rational thoughts.

Through the analysis of Justine's character, Carter aims to criticize de Sade's binary division of human behaviour. Justine's shunning of rationality is the source of her unhappy end. She chooses a correct moral path, regardless of reason which precipitates her persecution and abuse. Carter criticizes the typical female model. She advances a new picture of femaleness, one that overcomes de Sade's division. She views female passivity as a cultural myth, created by the patriarchal realm to achieve gender inequality.

The repression of her instincts and violent side has not physically preserved her chastity and virtue. She has undergone all kinds of violence and sexual abuse without any attempt on her behalf to protect herself or take revenge. Notwithstanding the fact that de Sade clearly depicts Justine's morality and virtue, he does not present her as the perfect female model because he strongly believes in the violent side of the female power.

For de Sade, women can escape sacrificial lamb hood (The 'natural' condition of women, as exemplified by Justine and defined by men) only by adopting tigerhood (The role of the predatory aggressor, the 'natural' role of men, as exemplified by Juliette and also defined by men). (Atwood 1994, 119)

He stands against the weak female position, which is attached to women as a typical characteristic of femaleness and incites them to surpass their submissiveness by adopting the male aggressive conduct. For de Sade, there is no middle female position: women should either be aggressed or aggressors. He complies with the principle of binary oppositions and applies it to his characters. He overlooks the specificities of humanity, which evade the invariable classifications of binary opposites.

2. THE VIOLENT JULIETTE

Contrary to Justine, Juliette embodies all negative human characteristics. She is a thief, a liar, a libertine and a criminal. She initiates her sadist career by committing murder, which helps her to

get rid of any sense of humanity and indulge in criminality. She chooses to follow the track of the abbess - Delbéne, who teaches her sexual perversity and sadistic violence as the ultimate solution for her survival after the death of her parents.

Delbéne has had the means and the opportunity to cultivate her intellect; she reads Spinoza and lectures Juliette on the nature of justice and on the sexual autonomy of women. She has a cold heart, and she murders for pleasure. The voice of reason, always subversive, must issue from a monster; Sade must censor Delbéne, as he creates her. She is rational, therefore wicked. (Carter 1979, 94)

Juliette's natural predisposition to violence has prompted her loss sensitivity. Justine is defined in female and emotional terms while her antithetical sister embodies the traditional image of cruel masculinity and pure rationality. Juliette, with her vicious male behaviour, is considered as the adored female archetype of Le Marquis de Sade. He rejects female inferiority and encourages women to adopt the masculine mode of living to escape passivity.

This fact is critically analyzed by Carter, who searches for reciprocity and interchangeability of female conduct. For her, human beings should be both Justine and Juliette in order to attain balanced physical and psychological states. The story of Justine is narrated by the heroine herself on her way to be executed. Ironically enough, she reports her miserable life to a woman who proves to be her sister, Juliette. Being accomplice with the law-makers, Juliette saves her from execution and tries to help her forget her miseries.

After liberation, Justine lives together with Juliette, symbolizing the inseparable coexistence of heart and reason. Allegorically; Justine is saved only through vice and rationality, which she has excluded. The life of the virtuous Justine has been too short after her salvation. As it comes in the narrative, while she closes the windows to protect her sister from thunder, she is struck by a thunderbolt.

While Justine is undergoing torture and suffering, her antithesis, Juliette, is inflicting all kinds of pains. She looks for material profit

and sexual gratification. Juliette infringes the law without being punished, for she sleeps with the law-makers who provide her with unjust lawful protection. In this context, Carter describes her as:

(...) rationality personified [she] leaves no single cell of her brain unused. She will never obey the fallacious promptings of her heart. Her mind functions like a computer programmed to produce two results for herself-financial profit and libidinal gratification. By the use of her reason, an intellectual apparatus, women themselves are still inclined to undervalue, she rids herself of some of the more crippling aspects of femininity. (Carter 1979, 90)

Juliette typifies rational masculinity, precluding human feelings and heart. She is the opposite of her sister at all levels. As a matter of fact, she commits all the crimes of which her sister has been unjustly impeached. However, instead of being punished, she is rewarded by the government representatives, who wholeheartedly offer her “their mafia-like protection” (Carter 1979, 91). Virtue is innate in Justine as it is vice in Juliette, who dares even to kill her daughter without repentance or feelings of regret.

When she hurls her daughter into fire...she is, at last absolutely free from any lingering traces of the human responses that can only be learned through the society of others who are not accomplices, who are not aspects of the self that confirm the omnipotence of the self. She has indeed attained the lonely freedom of the libertine, which is the freedom of the outlaw. (Carter 1979, 99)

Her egocentric individualism blinds her to human relations and good feelings. Juliette embodies the masculine enlightenment thought which obscures the heart and emotional life. She follows only her reason with the denial of humanism. She is usually in the position of the powerful male subject who dominates the other inert acquiescent object.

In fact, she is the female idol of de Sade, who posits her as a model of the new woman. Besides, she allegorizes the enlightenment egocentric individualism and inhuman rationality. Juliette is modelled to abide by her reason and repress her emotions.

We are informed that she has acquired her life credo from the statesman Noirceuil.

[He] teaches her how nature made the weak to be the slaves of the strong. She learns her lesson at once; to escape slavery, she must embrace tyranny (...) in the cultivation and practice of egoism and self-interest alone may be found true happiness (Carter 1979, 84).

She has internalized Noirceuil's beliefs and acts in accordance with them in every aspect of her life. Juliette clings to self-interest and self-mastery, hence she never feels passive as it is the case with regards to her sister. Her greatest individual egoism bridles her feelings and moral obligations towards the other human beings. Her evil and wicked nature is the source of her immoral prosperity.

Through the character of Juliette, De Sade "digs deep to expose the erotic component of the will to power the link between the instinctual and the political and the power relationships that underpin eroticism. He is tireless in tearing down every romantic illusion, be it social, logocentric, or ethnocentric". (Mazur 1996, 183)

Juliette is de Sade's token to convey political injustice, libertinage and the most profound enlightenment individualism. Through her character, he criticizes the criminal social life, the corrupt political system and the vicious Catholic monks who hide their sexual perversity beneath their seemingly religious devotion. He presents two opposing female types, both of them negative since they adhere to the principle of binarism. Actually, Carter opposes both types of womanhood and looks for reciprocity between both of them, rather than their dualistic division. She also objects to Guillaume Apollinaire's view, who claims:

Justine is woman as she has been until now, enslaved miserable and less than human; her opposite, Juliette, represents the woman whose advent [is] anticipated, a figure of whom minds have as yet no conception, who is rising out of mankind who will have wings and will renew the world. (Carter, 96)

Carter is convinced that the heroine represents one type of womanhood but certainly not the perfect model of the new woman.

She underscores the character of Juliette in order to unveil its shortcomings and weaknesses. For Carter, Juliette is “a new woman in the mode of irony” (*Ibidem*, 90). Carter has been severely attacked by various feminists for embarking on the analysis of de Sade’s pornographic works. However, through her cultural critique, she aims to accomplish a synthesis of both heroines as the perfect prototype of the new woman.

Justine was originally conceived as a satire, attacking the corruption of contemporary institutions, including the judiciary, banking, the bourgeois-dominated world of finances in general and, above all, the Catholic Church with divine providence being the principal religious target. (Phillips 2001, 94)

Though she symbolizes the figure of the traditional martyred female, Justine has submitted to all types of injustice committed by the above-mentioned institutions. She finds no lawful and just protection. Even when she runs to Saint-Marie monastery in the woods, she faces all types of sexual perversion and violence, exercised on her, as well as the other imprisoned girls, by the monks.

The monastery of St. Mary-in-the-Wood is (...) a microcosm in which a small group of privileged men operate a system of government by terror upon a seraglio of kidnapped women. As in all the Sadeian places of confinement, intimidation alone prevails and the only reward of virtue is to escape punishment. (...) Brought here by force, their girls are released from the pavilion only by death. It is as if the place of terror and of privilege in a model of the world; we don’t ask to come here and may leave it only once. Our entrance and our exit are alike violent and involuntary. (...) The task of the girls is to minister to the pleasures of their masters, the monks. Complete submissiveness is their only lot. (...) The monks rule their little world with the whim of oligarchs, of fate or of God. (Carter 1979, 48-49)

The description of the monastery reveals the tyrannical religious authority with its unscrupulous and capricious monks who hide their sexual depravity underneath their claimed religious piety. In de Sade’s world, political corruption and religious deception are rigidly connected to sexual debauchery. As it is the case with Justine, the female is usually the victim who submits to all types of atrocity. De

Sade views femaleness in a negative point of view. His plain misogyny is critically undertaken by Carter, who repudiates his compliant female image and proffers her perception of the new woman.

3. CARTER'S MODEL OF THE NEW WOMAN

Carter condemns de Sade's binary division of human behaviour. She looks for a synthesis of both the virtuous Justine and the wicked Juliette. Though the latter succeeds to prosper, Carter protests about her deportment, for she lacks the human side. Besides, she opposes Justine's long-suffering and lack of rationality. She is "the holy virgin and Juliette the profane whore. The sisters embody de Sade's dialectic of the feminine: sexual victim and sexual terrorist, thesis and antithesis" (Tonkin 156).

At variance with de Sade, Carter's visionary new woman should be both ethical and violent, passive and active, aggressor and victim. She considers De Sade's work as:

(...) represented by 'a sort of Siamese twin, both halves entirely constructed by men: the traditional-role female victim, Justine, and de Sade's "new woman", Juliette, who is instead a victimiser' (...) what [Carter] is, in fact, searching for is a fusion of the two. (Gamble 2001, 121)

The reciprocity and flexibility of human behaviour is an essential feature for having a balanced human being. Justine brings about her torture because she has not acted in a violent and callous manner when it is necessary to do so. Juliette, as well, is not the utopian example of the new woman, for she excludes her heart and emotions. Carter calls for a mixture of both conducts to attain a successful new woman. Through her cultural analysis of the relations between males and females, Carter anticipates her following book of short stories: *The Bloody Chamber*. The latter work depicts Carter's ideal of the new woman, who is simultaneously ethical and violent, passive and active. Carter's new female can never

be a political, religious, social or sexual victim. In contradistinction, she is proportionate to the newly-female constructed masculinity.

Carter scorns all myths and particularly those related to females. The mythical internalized conviction of the woman as a weak creature, compared to the man, is surpassed by Carter's design of the strong new woman. She strongly challenges de Sade's strict classification of femaleness. She discloses his entrapment within the mythical passive vision of femaleness. For Carter, as a feminist postmodern writer, "myths deal in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances. In no area is this more true than in that of relations between the sexes" (Carter qtd. in Schmid 1996, 145).

The myth of Justine as a static, vulnerable and overwhelmed creature and the myth of Juliette as a permanently libertine and violent should be deconstructed. For Carter, these myths are man-made rather than naturally-given; therefore, they imply some hidden male interests. The new woman should acquire the female characteristics, as well as the ones previously reserved for males.

In this respect, Carter's arrangements are much more subject to mutability than are de Sade's. He postulates the permanence and 'decreed' nature of virtue and vice: Juliette is born evil, Justine good, and so they remain. Carter, however, celebrates relativity and metamorphosis and 'the complexity of human relations'. (Gamble 2001, 122-123)

She unriddles de Sade's division of the nature of woman. For de Sade, in order to escape being martyred, women have to endorse Juliette's archetype. Carter opposes this dualistic division and offers, instead, a fusion of both. She denies the existence of a unique unchangeable demeanour to which women have to stick.

In this context, she asserts: "the notion of a universality of human experience (...) is a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick" (Carter qtd. in Gamble 2001, 123). Justine dies virtuous and ethical, while Juliette starts to feel regret and picks of consciousness after the death of her chaste and innocent sister. Actually, this is the suitable end, written by Carter instead of the one presented by de Sade. By submitting

the female character of Juliette to mutation, Carter triumphs to advance a woman who is both vicious and benign. Juliette's tears, which are the result of her sympathetic attitude towards Justine's fate, are proofs of her heart's revival after a long despotic reign of her rationality.

CONCLUSION

Through her cultural analysis of de Sade's works, the writer seeks to find a better end, together with solutions for his vile characters. Instead of being permanently libertine and vicious, Carter suggests for them to embrace the feeling of love as a solution to remedy their troubled psyches. The libertines repress their feelings; consequently, they become stone-hearted. By recuperating love, they would consider their human sides, similarly to rationality. Hence, they can attain a natural equilibrated state of being.

Justine is the thesis, Juliette the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling (Carter 1979, 91).

This is Carter's objective, which is to have both ethics and violence, hoping to design the new woman who should endorse tigerhood and lambhood to assert her place within a male world guided by self-interest. Neither the heart nor rationality has to be denied; rather both of them should be present in order to have a better female world as distinct from the one constructed by de Sade, who plays the representative role of the patriarchal order.

NOTES

1. "Angela Carter, born Angela Stalker, published novels, short stories and essays, as well as a body of as yet uncollected journalism. She lived in Japan for two years, as well as in America and Australia, and finally settled in London, where she died in 1992. Carter took up Simone de Beauvoir's

axiom that women are made not born, and explored the way cultural norms inhibit women. Gender definitions are exposed as mere cultural prejudices imposed on obedient women and men. Carter described her surrealist, baroque, fantastic, grotesque and picaresque writing as ‘magic realism’” (Wheeler 207-208).

2. “Le Marquis de Sade was born in 1740, a real nobleman, and died in 1814 in a lunatic asylum, a poor man. His life spans the entire period of the French Revolution and he died the same year that Napoleon abdicated and the monarchy was restored to France. He stands on the threshold of the modern period, looking both backward and forwards, at a time when the nature of human nature and social institutions was debated as freely as it is in our own. Sade’s work concerns the nature of sexual freedom and is of particular significance to women because of his refusal to see female sexuality in relation to its reproductive function” (Carter 1979, 1).
3. Binarism/binary oppositions: “the term ‘binary’ denotes ‘composed of two’, ‘twofold’. (...) Language has countless binary oppositions: up/down; slow/fast; sense/nonsense; truth/falsehood; black/white; man/woman (...). As a structuralist concept it derives especially from Lévi-Strauss’s studies of mythology. Linguistics and structuralist analysis use the notion of binary opposition not only in terms of words or concepts but in terms of the conventions or codes of a text. (...) The very idea of a binary opposition implies a centering or imposition of order: such binary signification is stable and systematic to structuralists, and unstable and decentered to poststructuralists. Deconstructive practice seeks to undermine, loosen, such analogical oppositions” (Cuddon 1976, 82-83).

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