

“The Perfection of Social Intercourse”: Androgyny and Cross-dressing in *The Heavenly Twins*

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1. Introduction

Towards the end of the nineteenth century in England, there emerged a group of women called the “New Woman.” There have been many arguments considering who the new woman was and what the new woman was. The first usage of the term was by Sarah Grand, who used the phrase “the new woman” to raise the issue about the Woman Question. She encouraged women to “[awaken] from their long apathy” and proclaim “what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere and [prescribe] the remedy” (Grand, “New Aspect” 142). After that, there appeared many journalistic articles which argued about the “New Woman,” and soon the image of New Woman was established as a fictional construction rather than as a representation of real women. One of the media which contributed in constructing the image of New Woman was the novel, which features female characters who articulate the Woman Question overtly. One of the representatives of New Woman novelists was above mentioned Sarah Grand.

The New Woman also represents the culture of the *fin de siècle*, when the category of gender was shaken by the emergence of both the New Woman and the decadents. At this time, according to Carolyn Christensen Nelson, “the fear of deviance that was created by the perception that both groups were crossing gender lines and rejecting what was supposedly natural created an anxiety” (Nelson ix-x), which culminated at the trial of Oscar Wilde.

In this essay, I will take Sarah Grand’s best selling novel, *The Heavenly Twins*, which was regarded as one of the archetypal New Woman novels, in

order to consider how Sarah Grand thought about the Women Question while she, consciously or unconsciously, explored the unstableness of gender roles.

2. Twins as Androgyny

“The heavenly twins” of the title are Angelica and Diavolo Hamilton-Wells, through whom the author raises a question about women’s social position at the time and traditional gender roles. When Angelica was a child, she was always described as “the dark one, the elder, the taller, stronger, and wickeder of the two, the organizer and commander of every expedition” (7). Here we see that the traditional gender role is reversed. Angelica seems to be more active, and therefore, more boyish than Diavolo, who is fair and always follows Angelica. Elaine Showalter comments regarding this situation that “Grand meant to show through them the false division of sex roles into ‘angelic’ female and ‘devilish’ male” (Showalter 205-6).

Angelica thus seems to be superior to Diavolo in every way, but at times she faces her society’s unequal treatment of men and women. For example, she knows that though she is the eldest, Diavolo is to inherit the property because of the entail (28). Also when Mr Hamilton-Wells decided to give their children a proper education, he decided that Angelica should have a governess, while Diavolo should have a tutor although Angelica soon proved to outstrip Diavolo even in terms of intellect, and thus could have shared Diavolo’s tutor. This episode shows that even if a girl has superior talent, she is forced to be placed in an inferior position just because she is a girl.

Thus these twins, to some extent, embody the author’s ideas about women’s situation in male-dominant society, but they also embody another interesting aspect. When Angelica begs Diavolo’s tutor to let them have the same education, she declares “there must have been some mistake. Diavolo and I find that we were mixed somehow wrong, and I got his mind and he got mine.... With us, you know, the fact of the matter is that *I* am Diavolo, and *he* is me” (124). This statement expresses the problematic issue regarding the gender role and the identity of these twins. From their childhood, they were always acting together, and they seemed to be inseparable. For example, the

author repetitively describes that when they were together, their hair or their heads are almost touching, which indicates that they are intimate and inseparable in their relationship. With this intimacy and Angelica's declaration, it may be natural to think that the twins are united so strongly that they seem to be undifferentiated.

In other words, they seem to be almost androgynous as one united pair, and thus, they could easily assume each other's gender role. An interesting example is shown at the episode of the wedding of Evadne Fralving, one of the heroines of this novel and an acquaintance of the Hamilton-Wells. At this wedding, Angelica is supposed to be Evadne's bridesmaid, and Diavolo the bride's page, but to other adults' surprise, they change their clothes so that Angelica becomes a page while Diavolo narrowly escapes being a bridesmaid (61). This episode illustrates that as children, their femininity and masculinity are not fully developed, that is, in a sense, they are neither female nor male, so they could playfully change their gender role. Carolyn G. Heilburn states in her discussion on androgyny that "androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes" (x-xi), and includes the case of the opposite-sex twins as an example of androgyny: "Unique among all androgynous symbols for its persistence through the ages is the 'identity' of opposite-sex twins." She further argues that "throughout opposite-sex twin lore, the two are always seen as an original unit which has split, a unit destined to be reunited by sexual love, the ultimate symbol of human conjoining" (Heilburn 34). Her discussion casts a hint on the role of Angelica and Diavolo. From this point of view, it is assumed that they are "split" now and that when they are "reunited," they can be "the ultimate symbol of human conjoining," which is implied in their binary oppositional names.

As they grow up, however, they gradually differentiate themselves from each other, and develop into female and male. Firstly, they begin to realise that there arise physical differences between Angelica and Diavolo. Angelica begins to feel it at the wedding of Edith Beele, a friend of Evadne. Unlike Evadne's wedding, they did not enjoy this occasion, for "they were not as they had been" (243). Angelica and Diavolo feel that something is changing:

[Diavolo] was still a boy, but [Angelica] was verging on womanhood, and

already had thoughts which did not appeal to him, and moods which he could not comprehend, the consequence being continual quarrels between them, —those quarrels in which people are hottest and bitterest, not because of their hate, but because of their love for each other.... The shadow of approaching maturity, which would separate them inevitably for the next few years, already touched Angelica perceptibly; and, although to the onlookers they seemed to treat each other as usual, both children felt that there was something wrong. (243)

It is now obvious that their androgynous childhood is coming to an end, and they begin to act independently. What they are feeling here may be the fear of being separated from each other.

Regarding the issue of gender identity, what must be noted here is the importance of clothes. In this novel, clothes work importantly in the construction of gender identity, as seen in Evadne's wedding scene. Clothes also work effectively in Angelica's self-construction, that is, her gender identity is constructed and manufactured performatively with clothes. When the twins organize a playful tea party, Angelica coils up her hair, and wears a long black dress, which she borrowed from her aunt. After this, Angelica thinks about this dress and feels "a vague desire to have her own lengthened" (273), and then, she goes to buy long dresses, and wears one of them. Judith Butler exposed that gender identity is "performatively constituted by the 'very expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 33). Considering an emphasis put on clothes in this novel, the "very expression" in this case is represented as clothes. In Angelica's case, her gender identity is constructed not only by society's inflictions and expectations on her, but also by her clothes.

Angelica seems to be embarrassed with her own femininity or womanhood as she grows up. Soon after she begins to feel a vague desire for a dress, she pricks her hand with the thorns of a rose and complains about its pain. She says that "It *does* hurt, ... and pain is pain, whether the seat of it be your head, heart or hindquarters" (271). As she herself broods, this episode may be very implicative if we turn our eyes on the issue of sexuality. Pain, especially pain in hindquarter, has a sexual meaning in it, and what embarrasses her is not

only pain, but also the idea of sexuality, or maturity which she is about to face.

As she becomes mature as a woman, restrictions and injustice imposed on her become more and more obvious and serious as seen in the “Condemned Cell” episode. The twins plan to have a play, which is written by Angelica. She writes it to show that her abilities are superior to Diavolo. However, when their father sees the placard of this play, he makes them cancel the play, and instead, he orders Angelica to be presented at the Court while Diavolo should be sent to Sandhurst. As Ann Heilmann points out, the title of the play, “Condemned Cell” itself is “an apt metaphor for ... the cell of femininity in which Angelica is now condemned to live whether it suits her or not” (Heilmann, *Fiction*131). She is deprived of the opportunity to show her ability and condemned by her father to lead a woman-like life. Twins could no longer be united as ideal androgyny, and therefore, they need to separate from each other partly because of their own maturity and partly because of external force imposed on them.

3. Disturbing Gender Roles: Cross-dressing and “Confidential Relations”

Angelica thus faces her own womanhood and feels irritated with the restriction imposed on women, which leads her to the marriage with Mr. Kilroy. She requires him to marry her and let her do as she likes. Then comes the most disturbing and interesting part of this novel, the episode of “The Tenor and the Boy – Interlude.” In this episode, Angelica disguises herself as a boy and meets the tenor of the cathedral of Morningquest, where Angelica lives with Mr. Kilroy, and forms a close relationship with him.

Firstly, there would arise a question why she needs to disguise herself as a boy. She later explains in length that she wants to be “free to go and come as [she] would,” and thus, she prepared this disguise (451). It is worth noting that she here states “go and come,” not “come and go.” It implies that although she can go wherever she likes under the disguise, she realises that she must come back finally to her home, as if she thought that “Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere.” However, suffice it to say that here again the importance of

clothes is mentioned. She confesses that “my dress was an obstacle.... But isn't it surprising the difference dress makes? I should hardly have thought it possible to convert a substantial young woman into such a slender, delicate-looking boy as I make. But it just shows how important dress is” (451-2). When she wears boys' clothes, she can do whatever she likes to do, for “the freedom from the restraint...of [their] tight uncomfortable clothing, was delicious” (456). As seen before, the difference of gender role is symbolised in clothes, and it can be said that clothes construct one's sexual identity. Here the freedom from the restraint of the clothes represents the freedom from the restraint of society.

Yet if we think how she spent her childhood days with Diavolo, it seems that there is more meaning in her disguise. What she is doing here seems to be a return to her androgynous childhood. On one occasion, the Tenor says that the Boy, Angelica in disguise, has genius and he is like the creature in “Witch of Atlas,” a poem written by Shelly, and quotes the phrases:

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
It seemed to have developed no defect
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both. (403)

Then the Boy corrects what the Tenor says adding that true genius is “the attributes of both minds, masculine and feminine, perfectly united in one person of either sex” (403). Angelica once lost her androgynous quality when she parted from Diavolo, but now she is regaining it by disguising herself as a boy.

While Angelica thus assumes the quality of androgyny, the Tenor seems to be effeminated. Sally Ledger refers to his virginity and states that in Victorian terms, virginity was a feminine gender attribute (Ledger 116). Also in response to the Tenor's reference that the Boy's curiosity is womanish, the Boy retorts that the Tenor's curiosity is also quite womanish (410). The Boy is actually a woman, so it may be natural that “his” curiosity seems to be quite womanish, but the Tenor is not. This seems to be one of the gender confusions about the Tenor.

Also the Tenor once becomes a model of the painting entitled “Music.” To be a model itself is a very feminine act, and besides, the Boy says that the

Tenor has "a regular Rossetti-Burn-Jones-Dante's-Dream-and-Damosel kind of mouth, with full lips" (412). This description should not be attributed to the male, but to the female, and especially those who were modelled in Pre-Raphaelite paintings. On another occasion, the Boy says that the Tenor will be one of the beauties when he comes out and "They will photograph you and put you into the shop windows, cabinet size two-and-sixpence" (433). Here the conventional gender role which defined the man as the seer and the woman as the seen is reversed. The Tenor, who is under the male gaze of the painter and of the Boy, is quite a feminine-like figure.

Therefore, in their relationship, the gender role is reversed or is confused. The Boy seems to be androgynous while the Tenor is effeminised. Thus assuming confused gender role, the Boy and the Tenor establish, as in the Boy's phrase, "confidential relations" (383). "Confidential relations" means, according to the Boy's definition, a very close platonic relationship. The Boy once overtly states that "he" hates to think about sexual things: "If there be one thing I deprecate more than another it is the impertinent intrusion of *sex* into everything" (423). Then he goes on to say that he is satisfied with "the calm human fellowship, the brotherly love undisturbed by a single violent emotion, which is the perfection of social intercourse to me. I say the scene is hallowed, and I'll have no sex in my paradise" (423). Here again it is obvious that Angelica still feels revulsion and even fear against sexuality. This relationship resembles the relations she once formed with Diavolo. For example, when the Boy and the Tenor are talking with each other and the Tenor touches his hair, the Boy objects to his hair being touched. Then the Tenor apologises, but continues as follows: "But why on earth do you come so close? You put that remarkable head of yours under my hand, and then growl at me for touching it" (408). To touch hair indicates, in this story, a very sincere and intimate relationship, as seen in Angelica and Diavolo's relationship. Now that she has lost the "confidential relations," or "brotherly love" with Diavolo, she seems to try to recover it now with the Tenor unconsciously.

However, if we consider that the Boy is not a slender boy, but in fact, a "substantial" woman, and the Tenor is, though effeminised, a stranger to her,

not her twin, it is a natural consequence that their relationship differs from the one that she once had with Diavolo because of “the impertinent intrusion of *sex*.” Indeed, some critics read homosexual implication into their relationship. For example, Heilmann discusses that when they go on a rowing excursion, there is obviously homoerotic tension between the Boy and the Tenor, and as the Boy feels it, he tries to escape from the Tenor (Heilmann, *Fiction* 132-3). This scene goes as follows:

Air perfumed with flowers; music, motion, warmth, and stillness; moonlit meadows, shadowy woods, the river, and the boat; it had been a time of delight too late begun and too soon ended. But exaltation cannot last beyond a certain time at that height, and then comes the inevitable reaction. It came upon the Tenor and the Boy quite suddenly, and for no apparent reason. It was the Boy who felt it first, and left off playing, then the song ceased, and the Tenor rowed on diligently. (441)

“The inevitable reaction” seems to imply sexual impulses, and therefore, it can be easily guessed that they begin to have sexual desire. Then Heilmann argues that the Tenor projects his feelings towards the Boy onto Angelica, whom he believes to be a sister of the Boy and idealises and idolises.

It is true that when the Tenor feels that between the Boy and himself, there is “a something of that something which he knew he needed but could not name” (382), this “something” so resembles “love that dare not speak its name.”¹ Therefore, it may be easily assumed that there is homoerotic emotion between the Tenor and the Boy. However, there remains a question of whether it is really homosexual desire if the Tenor’s love for Angelica is considered. The tenor does not realise that the Boy is, in fact, Angelica, and it is ambiguous whether he projects his feelings towards the boy onto Angelica or he projects his feelings towards Angelica onto the Boy. In fact, he is attracted to both the Boy and Angelica, as his thoughts are “pretty equally divided between [the Boy] and the lady whose brilliant glance had had such a magical effect upon him the first time he encountered it” (380). Taking the Tenor’s femininity into consideration, it may be assumed that there exist more complicated feelings between the Boy–Angelica and the Tenor.

Also in the rowing scene quoted above, what must be taken into

consideration is Angelica's revulsion against sexuality. Before she jumps from the boat, the Tenor makes a comment on the Boy's song. He says "there is madness in your music, Boy,... It puts me beside myself." The Boy laughs at this remark, but "in the pause that followed he shivered a little, and laid aside his instrument" (437). It is obvious that the Boy feels some alarm towards the Tenor's attitude of being "beside myself". If it is not homosexual feeling, it is certainly something sexual. When the Boy feels it, he tries to escape from it, for his ideal is to have "confidential relations" without "the impertinent intrusion of sex."

However, these "confidential relations" without "the impertinent intrusion of sex" may be formed only in an unrealistic closed space, which is kept far away from the real world. Aptly the Tenor's house is called "the Close." In this space, they can remain nameless, as "the Boy" and "the Tenor." Although the Boy once mentions that his name is Claude and his family name is Wells, it is under a false disguise and false name, and though the Boy calls the Tenor Israfil, it is only a nickname. That they are anonymous means they do not have social identity, and thus they are free from any kind of social restriction including conventional gender roles.

Besides, their relation is only temporal, as symbolised in the fact that the Boy must go back to his house when the cathedral chime strikes three. This would remind the reader of the tale of Cinderella. As in the Cinderella story, their relationship is based on fantasy and not on reality.

After all, their unnatural fantasy relationship comes to an end when they go on to the river rowing. The Boy falls from the boat and his disguise is revealed. Tragically the Tenor catches a cold at this incident, which leads him to death. The cause of the Tenor's death is pneumonia, but there seems to be another cause. When he is suffering from the delirium which comes from pneumonia, he just keeps on thinking about Angelica and the Boy. At last, he dies in thirst for water. He desperately desires water, which he cannot obtain. Literally it is the thirst for water, but metaphorically it may be the thirst of his love for the Boy – Angelica, for at the very last moment, he sees the Boy in his delirium.

The Tenor is in thirst for love for the Boy, or Angelica, because he needs

to repress his love for Angelica. It is partly because she is already married and needs to be kept away from any social disgrace, and partly because his feelings towards Angelica is, in a sense, perverted feeling, as his love is for both the Boy and Angelica. Also what must be noted is Angelica's revulsion against sexuality. She refuses to let any kind of sexual feeling enter their relations. Thus the Tenor must repress both his love and sexual feelings towards Angelica, which thus consumes him.

The rowing scene suggests that although it is possible for *the Boy* and the Tenor to have platonic relationship, it is almost impossible for *Angelica* and the Tenor to have that relationship. Heilmann regards his death as punishment to both of them for "their transgression" (Heilmann, *Strategies* 65). It may be apt to think in that way if we look at its consequence. In her regret Angelica hears the chime, which tells her that "her hour" is over:

It rang at last with a new significance for Angelica. The hour was over which had been her hour; a chapter of her life had closed with it for ever; and when she looked up then, she found herself in another world, wherein she would walk henceforth with other eyes to better purpose.
(540)

It is her androgynous childhood, which she once had with Diavolo, and which she then tried to replicate with the Tenor that was over.

She then goes back to her husband, whom she calls "Daddy," saying "Don't let me go again, Daddy, keep me close. I am—I am grateful for the blessing of a good man's love" (551). Their relationship seems to be that of father and daughter rather than that of husband and wife. Angelica calls him Daddy while he calls her "my dear child." Also, though she used to come so close to Diavolo or the Tenor that they could almost touch her hair and *vice versa*, Mr. Kilroy does not like "to have his hair ruffled" by Angelica (484). This implies that the relationship between Angelica and Mr. Kilroy would be completely different from that of Angelica and Diavolo, or Angelica and the Tenor. In other words, she can no more be androgynous, and must now be a female, with a responsibility to fulfil as a wife. Also this reaction of his may suggest that it is not she who holds the leadership in their relationship, especially in their sexual relationship. It should be he who leads her, and

Angelica needs to follow and obey him. Therefore, it is apt that the chapter after "The Tenor and the Boy-Interlude" is entitled "Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe," which is her new identity.

This ending seems to accord with the author's thoughts on marriage. Grand believes that "marriage is the most sacred institution in the world, and it is better not to interfere with it" (Grand, "Woman's Question" 167), and that woman's "ideal husband is a man whom she can reverence and respect from end to end of his career, especially in regard to his relations with her own sex" (Grand, "Man of the Moment" 146). This "ideal husband" is exactly what Mr. Kilroy is like. Though Angelica visualises women's repressed situation and articulate her desire for equal treatment with men, especially with regard to the issue of education, she settles herself in conventional married life. From this point of view, Angelica's rendezvous with the Tenor seems to work only to tame her and lead her to a happy marriage.

However, if we interpret this story only from that viewpoint, there remains a doubt on the description about the characters disturbing the traditional gender roles, such as, androgynous twins and the Boy and the Tenor. A detailed analysis of this novel reveals the author's attempt, whether intended or not, to seek a possibility of having "the perfection of social intercourse" between the male and the female, which is represented in the chapter "The Boy and the Tenor." By crossing the gender boundaries, they try to construct a new relationship between men and women, which elevates them to the status of androgyny. However, that relationship is only possible among the children, or between a man and a woman who are free from traditional gender roles; furthermore, even for them, it is almost impossible to sustain that relationship. This novel ironically reveals both a possibility of new relationship and its limitation.

Note

¹ This is the phrase Oscar Wilde used during the trial where he was accused of homosexuality. Sally Ledger discusses this issue in length in her work.

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